

correspondent trans*mutations

Practices of Relational Becoming

Diploma thesis

Master of Cross-Disciplinary Strategies

1st Supervisor: Mag.phil. M.Phil. Christian Höller

2nd Supervisor: Mag.phil. Anne Faucheret

3rd Supervisor: Mag. Andrea Lumplecker

Institute of Arts and Society

University of Applied Arts Vienna

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By

Mag. art. Momo E. Hontebeyrie

Matriculation number: 12042189

hontebeyrie.e@gmail.com

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Foreword: 24 Days In-Between

Dear S.,

This time of rest was also a time of movement – small and large shifts, from air and water molecules to metro stations.

The belly of the cellar was cold. Too cold for you. You were at “risk,” if one may so say. Mold was the threat. But mold is a beautiful agent. Only human bodies and mold bodies are sometimes not kin. One body may hurt another.

So, to prevent your bodies from becoming a new kind of ecosystem that might harm your caretakers’ body – a human one – one, together with others, took you away from the cold womb.

From the belly, you and them together cross a city-body, carried by a metal box – another body which moves through the city like an ironic blood cell cutting its way through veins and lymph.

They met a friend, on a roof kissed thoroughly by the sun at the end of June. You already knew this friend. In the cold womb, he took care of you, and you took care of him.

Together, they laid you down beneath the gaze of the sky and the birds, so the sun could warm you and take away the rest (or most, not all) of the water in your body.

A bit more than an hour later, you completed your metamorphosis – you had said goodbye to your old body and welcomed a new one.

In the following days, you kept one company in the lukewarm belly of one’s room. Your doughy and sweet smell infused this new body, quietly leaving traces of your visit.

Then with them you traveled – one with the box in hand, you held by your box – through the metal transport back to the belly where you were born. And you both waited, patiently, for the visitors to join you again.

They joined and they trans*mutated again into something new.

Something which still and ongoingly trans*mutating.

Coldy,

One among many, crossing bodies

Introducing *correspondent trans*mutations*

Mutations are processes which have profoundly shaped the world. Synonyms of change, they have forged relations on different scales, from the genetic, epigenetic, cellular, interpersonal, up to the collective ones. These relations ultimately extend to the superstructures – understood as the legal, political, cultural, and institutional forms that arise from and are shaped by the economic base of society, following the Marxist definition of the term (Marx, 1859/1970, p. 262). They have also shifted dynamics across various entities – organisms, languages, technologies, bodies, cultures, and institutions – all of which are involved in ongoing processes of variation and reinvention. However, within intersectional and colonial capitalism, static and dualistic narratives of production and consumption displace relational processes of becoming, in which bodies might take time, matter, and transform.

*correspondent trans*mutations* is a research in which praxis and theory are entangled, investigating how practices of becoming – such as fermenting, spending time, and corresponding – function as sites of relational transmutation. In this thesis, becoming operates as a processual term bridging material-discursive forms of mattering, in which matter and meaning are inseparably fused and enacted through practice (Barad, 2007, p. 3) – while also extending beyond them toward temporal, relational, and trans*mutational processes. This use of becoming operates through the same inseparability of theory and practice that both structures and grounds the research.

*correspondent trans*mutations* aims to facilitate a space where these processes can unfold despite dominant (his)stories and “(cis)tems” told and taught under capitalist imperialist and extractive logics. These logics foster separation and consolidate binaries between subject and object, between concept and matter, between mind and body, and assign fixed identities, relationalities, and socialities. Workshops were organised where participants spent time together, corresponding through writing and letter exchanges, while engaging in the fermentation process of making bioleather from kombucha SCOBY (Symbiotic Culture of Bacteria and Yeast). The work brings together voices and perspectives from diverse backgrounds who collectively cared for the kombucha and for one another, attuning to the body through various sensory modalities and following somatic and material scores for writing and sensing.

The research aims at cutting through what is understood as "normative (human) body" and commonly accepted relationships between different bodies. Rather, it cuts through bodies, emphasizing kinship, companionship and moreover,

interdependent and intra-active threads enmeshing all vibrant matter – which stretches the understanding of material vitality and the agencies at play in the large network of relation they compose (Bennett, 2010, pp. 11-38). These threads are raveled and unraveled through diverse practices, through diverse bodies, through diverse intentionalities: through the SCOBY fermenting and developing, through the hands writing and touching, through the voices reading and exchanging, through the lungs breathing into human and more-than-human bodies and exhaling into the body of space, through bodies moving and being moved.

Ultimately, the letters and the bioleather came together as they were composed, decomposed, recomposed, and then assembled onto the dried SCOBY's, adding another layer to the layers of the SCOBY itself. These complex processes of human and more-than-human mattering, decomposing, selecting, cutting, layering, in which all entities and beings – at different scales and in different temporalities – gather and are gathered, move and are moved, affect and are affected, modify and are modified, take care and are taken care of, act in never ending reciprocity. These processes are what I propose to call “trans*mutations.”

Feedback from participants emphasized how caring for the kombucha had been “carrying them through time,” “kept them grounded,” and brought them “joy,” as they witnessed the SCOBY growing and the drink fermenting in their daily lives – “almost like tending to a pet.” In this respect, the work aims to allow one's senses to open to what matters, allowing change to be and become, unfolding through processes of relational correspondence and trans*mutation. Presented as an installation where letters and bioleather pieces merge into suspended assemblages, the work invites visitors into this ongoing process of (re)creation.

In this paper, I intend to document the elaboration of a research process. But first and foremost, I will dive into the (subject) matter and (collective) practices developed through various entries.

Chapter 1

Situating the Research

An Open Letter to a Mutational Process

Journal Excerpts

Note: On the different kinds of writing you will find

*from, *to, *through

Report on a fermentation process

This chapter situates the research of “correspondent trans*mutations” through autobiographical, material, and relational entry points. Moving between an open letter, journal excerpts, and process notes, the chapter traces how islands, fermentation, and correspondence emerged as interconnected practices of thinking, sensing, and becoming-with. Rather than presenting a linear origin, it foregrounds situatedness, partiality, and relation as the conditions through which the research takes shape.

An Open Letter to a Mutational Process

Dear,

To mutate, I first need to situate,

To say where from, from whom, with whom and how, I came to do what I do.

I need to talk about some of the strings which hold the web together.

I need to talk about my own story in order to talk about others.

Because,

“It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.” (Haraway, 2016, p. 12)

And when I tell, I retell a story, I describe and translate something that I ate.

And like this it mutates.

It transforms, reforms, deforms, trans*mutates.

As nothing is created, everything (re)invents itself (Carlier, Reymond, Scali Ringwald, 2024 p. 4).

Warmly,

M.

Journal Excerpts

Autumn, 2022 – Archipelago: islands and lands, *land.is.land*

After spending a few weeks on the Aegean archipelago, I began my studies at University of Applied Arts Vienna with a keen interest in the multiple understandings and metaphors connected to “the island” – such as its configurations (its topological and geographical separation from the mainland), its geopolitics, and its shifting binary understandings of “water versus land”, “connection versus separation”. These understandings are protected and threatened by biopolitics and necropolitics grounded in immunity logics – separating immunized bodies, and “de-munized” bodies who needs to bring their *munus* (the duties or contributions they owe to society). On the other hand, another thought emerged: the island is intricately connected to the land through its underwater topography. Informed by its configurations, the island highlights its network of connections – and of *relation*. The island “is land” and “land is land¹”: “We are all islands – isolated, yet ultra-connected.²” Ultimately, it led me to draw new connections: if one consider a state of being as isolated, yet interconnected, does that imply that connection lies in the *in-between* – in the gap, the border, or the separation itself? Could this mean that a splitting line is not a boundary, but a connection between two points? Or, borrowing this concept from ecology, would it be an “ecotone”: the transition space between two ecosystems – which the shore of an island exemplifies, for instance?

Spring, 2023 – Kombucha: marking time and space

Spring brought with it a growing interest in fermentation, especially in kombucha and the materiality of its SCOBY (Symbiotic Culture of Bacteria and Yeast). I will go deeper into the process later, but here is a short

¹ Following a group project titled *land.is.land*, made together with Paula Bracker and Daniel H. Pineda.

² Quote from the description of the class titled “Insularity, Immunity, Community”, taught by Anne Faucheret and Antoine Turillon in Winter Semester 2022 at the University for Applied Arts Vienna.

overview on what kombucha is and how its fermentation happens. Kombucha is a fermented drink made of tea and sugar. After preparing the tea and sugar mix, one needs to add a piece of SCOBY, some active kombucha liquid to the brew, and cover the jar with a cloth that prevents contamination while still allowing air circulation. After a few days, a thin jelly-like layer will appear on top of the fermenting drink, which can then be consumed. The longer the drink ferments, the more acidic it becomes and the larger the SCOBY grows. In fact, the skin-like yeast grows layer upon layer as it ages - becoming a marker of time. It also has the property of taking the shape of the vessel in which it is fermenting, from small jars to a larger container to a basin - a marker of a process. Finally, particular conditions of the space - air temperature, pressure, dust, moisture, light, altitude, etc. - influence the fermentation and leave their trace - becoming a marker of place.

It is precisely this inscription of time and space into the SCOBY that caught my attention at first: the possible site-specificity of such bodies (among many others). Adding to this is its visceral appearance - resembling insides, flesh, or skin - and the reactions it provokes (surprise, fascination, disgust). Its smell should also be mentioned: acidic and vinegary, growing increasingly intense the longer it ferments. Yet all these factors have a direct impact on the space where the kombucha is placed, it influences other bodies just as much as the space inscribes itself into the material: space *moves* the material and the material *is moved* by the space. One could paraphrase this as "having both an active and passive characteristic". I find this an interesting metaphor, one that reflects what Jane Bennett calls the "thing-power," which situates nonhuman things - often considered passive objects - as energetic, affective, and agentic forces and bodies that influence and participate in various material and relational events (Bennett, 2010, p. 18).

Summer, 2024 - Correspondence: letters and ways of writing

Keeping a journal and collecting notes along with drawings has been a practice I have developed over the years. This has especially helped me through difficult phases and periods of change. The summer of 2024 was particularly marked by such challenges, yet I found the strength to take part in a residency titled "*Narrate the Mountain: Limits, Thresholds, Confines*" held by CasaWalser in the Italian Alps. Throughout the week, journaling and drawing became essential practices for centering myself and navigating difficult moments. I then met the transdisciplinary artist and researcher Lucia Palladino, who introduced her method of "entering the forest" (a metaphor for "unlearning" and opening up to different realms of ontology) through practices of correspondences. Her practice deeply moved me and raised the question of how correspondences weave relations, and which transformations unfold through it. It resonated with me as a practice of the "in-between" - of becoming - drawing me back to the "island", and to kombucha. Yet, I knew I would eventually weave these threads together in an upcoming project.

Note: On the different kinds of writing you will find

There will be different kinds of writings among the upcoming pages. The research spanned over several months of reflection, driven by meetings and discussions with various entities, taking analogue notes, transcribing them digitally, journaling, reading, holding workshop rounds involving writing letters and exchanging them, taking notes again, and – as the title of this thesis implies – correspondences. Along your reading, you will find a condensed version of what was investigated during these past months. Each different kind of writing corresponds to a specific font. First, **letters**, which are speculative and do not adhere strictly to scientific standards, but are based on open-ended contemplation, observation and ideas. They can also be past invitations, or letters exchanged during the process of research. Secondly, you will find **journal excerpts**. These are more factual and aim to recall the research process – what happened, what it led to. Finally, you will find **notes**, these are intended to bring rigor to the thesis by organizing the theoretical part of the research.

***from, *to, *through**

Dear,

You are now acquainted with my background and with what moved me to undertake this research and write this thesis.

*from

island, kombucha, and letters,

*to

*correspondent trans*mutations.*

Which become through:

transformation, mutation, transsss

trans*ecologies, relation

Poetics of the Relation, the island, i*land, the sea, the shore, the shoal, the archipelago

opacity and chaos, the ecotone;

correspondence, cor-respon-dance, and the forest;

mourning in between,

composing, decomposing, inscripting, describing, mosaics and assemblages;

vibrant matter, fermentation, intra-actions and think-time;

harvested in a carrier bag...

The story of correspondent trans*mutation is one that must be told as an ongoing process of (re)creation.

M.

Report on a fermentation process

December 12th, 2024: Beginning to build a research concept

I research the theme of mutation as an ongoing process of becoming. For this, I aim to develop a practice with correspondence and fermentation at its core, unfolding through workshops as collective practices of being together.

The research facilitates workshops where people can spend time, correspond and tend to kombucha SCOBYs. Following a score inspired by material and performance practices, we (workshop participants) write letters, drink kombucha.

The SCOBY becomes a living metaphor and material expression of relations between bodies and space in a specific moment. It speaks as the material it is, just as the letters do. They compose an assemblage in which different bodies correspond, spend time, matter and ferment: a moving mosaic of trans*mutations.

At first, I titled this research:

“(with) care [(,) relation] - (of) becoming - [trans] mutations*

or translating the islands in archipelagos”

January 15th, 2025: Follow-up

The research and master thesis investigates processes of correspondence and trans*mutations by investigating how relations constantly mutate - understanding them as sites for spending time, being together, and mattering.

By tending to the kombucha SCOBYs, through a series of three workshops, we create bioleather. Each participant receives a piece of SCOBY to grow a new culture and repeat the process at home, letting the kombucha continue to transform through new interactions. The process multiplies across material, relational, and temporal levels.

March 28th, 2025: Motivations and potentials

My motivations within this research lie in spending time with others, in collective creation and transformation, in working closely with kombucha and fermentation, in investigating the possibilities of bioleather-making, and in unfolding assemblages of correspondence and relation.

I see potential for experiencing forms of being-together beyond productivity, learning from fermentation and correspondence to remain open to what mutates, and embracing relation as an ever-changing field. This practice invites a shift away from fixed meanings and toward processes of correspondent trans*mutations.

Chapter 2

correspondent trans*mutations – A Temporary Glossary

to mutate, mutation

trans-, trans, trans*

to trans*mutate, trans*mutations

to correspond, corresponding, correspondent

correspondent trans*mutations

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework of the thesis through a situated glossary of key terms and concepts. Drawing from biology, linguistics, feminist and queer theory, philosophy, and materialist thought, it traces how mutation, trans*, transformation, correspondence, and fermentation operate as relational processes – trans*mutations – rather than stable dynamics. As opposed to offering stable definitions, the chapter proposes these terms as open, provisional tools for thinking, changing, relating, and becoming – laying the conceptual ground for the research that follows.

to mutate, mutation

Mutations are processes that profoundly shape the world.

To mutate – that is, to undergo a change that alters form, structure, or function – is the process by which mutations manifest. Coming from the Latin word *mutatio*, “a changing” or “alteration”, the word is derived from the verb *mutare*, “to change” or “move”. Over time, it developed a range of specific meanings across different fields, including music and linguistics, before becoming primarily associated with biology by the mid-20th century (Marshall, 2002, p. 1). In biology, it designates an alteration in the genetic code that transforms an organism. If mutation is a synonym for change, it nevertheless, does not always imply a visible or significant variation. Mutations can be “silent” which implies that the changes which happen in the DNA code leads to no change in the phenotype – so the organism traits remain the same. Mutations can also occur in non-coding DNA, regions of the genome that do not code for active genes, etc. Viewed through biological and evolutionary lenses, mutations unfold at different scales – from replication errors at the molecular level to population-wide variations – and may occur independently across organisms and lineages under the influence of mutagens or environmental stress. Moreover, mutations are decentralized and stochastic: they emerge locally without a central organizing principle or agency, and occur randomly, meaning that they can be predictable or unpredictable.

In linguistics, mutation refers to changes and shifts within words, often influenced by phonetic and morphological patterns. Here as well, mutations can alter the sounds of words within a sentence without implying a noticeable or significant change in the meaning or structure of the language itself. Likewise, these sound changes often originate as decentralized and stochastic: they emerge as dispersed, context-driven shifts in speech which vary according to time and space. For example, dialects can emerge and evolve through phonetic mutation: at first, these can appear as subtle sound shifts that may not be perceived by the larger population. Over time, the mutation may become more noticeable and gradually differentiate one speech community from another while remaining connected to the original language. However, once stabilized, mutations in language usually become systematic and rule-governed features of a language’s grammar usually regulated by linguistic institutions.

Linguists borrowed the term from biology as it captures the idea of variation and innovation within a system. In both disciplines, mutations emerge from within a system, although external factors can influence them, and they can induce change in “external” structures or transform other systems. Thus, the term “mutation” can be transposed to other social and cultural phenomena to describe processes that begin in a decentralized and stochastic manner, emerging from within a system. Mutations are processes of transformation, they don’t designate a set outcome. They unfold on different scales while shifting genetic sequences, affect epigenetic processes, modulate cellular activity, influence interpersonal encounter, reflecting in collectives, up to legal, political, cultural and institutional structures. They reshape how bodies – those entangled formation of matter, affects, technologies, histories and relation – come into contact, influencing one another as an ongoing process of variation.

To better understand mutation, it helps to contrast it with transformation. Unlike mutation, which often implies localized or gradual change, transformation typically conveys a more comprehensive or systemic shift, one that redefines the thing being transformed while potentially affecting its surroundings. The agency behind transformation may be spontaneous or prompted by external forces, and the concept is often employed metaphorically to describe social, cultural, or performative dynamics. (Guerra-Lyons, Matthiessen, Veloso, 2024)

Every mutation is a transformation, as it operates within a system, inducing change from one state to another – within different scales and intensities, as explained above. However, not all transformations are mutations – some transformations are continuous, reversible, or relational, and they may not produce a lasting systemic effect.

Staying with biology and linguistics as examples: in the first realm, genetic mutation is a change that occurs within the DNA sequence during cell division (which later alters genes and traits). Genetic transformation, in contrast, is a process by which an organism's genetic material – for instance, a bacterium – incorporates external DNA from its surroundings into its own genome, which can also lead to new genetic traits. The key difference is that mutation is an internal alteration of existing DNA within a system, whereas transformation involves the external acquisition and integration of new genetic material, the direction of agency operates from “outside” to “within” a system (Hudson Lab Automation, n.d.). In the case of linguistics, mutation can be seen in the internal alteration of gendered word forms. Taking an example from French: beyond the traditional language grammar (*copain / copine*), speakers experiment with more inclusive forms such as “*copaine*” or with extended

strategies like *travailleur·euse·s* or the use of *x* as a gender-neutral marker. In this example, changes emerge stochastically and circulate among communities of practice, gradually mutating the language from within its own structure. Transformation, by contrast, would occur at a later stage, once such mutations begin to stabilize : when an institution such as the *Académie française* – usually resistant in its role of “protecting” the language – eventually incorporates these changes into dictionaries, education, and official usage. At that point, gendering becomes not just an individual or community practice but a codified rule – decentralized in origin, yet formalized from within – and learned and enforced at the institutional level.

trans-, trans, trans*

“Trans-”, trans, and trans* can be defined at several levels – semantic, grammatical, conceptual, and theoretical. Rather than fixing meaning, these operations displace it, foregrounding movement, passage, and relational transformation.

The prefix “trans-” derives from the Latin preposition meaning “across,” “beyond,” “through,” “to cross” or “on the other side of”. When attached to a word, it does not simply add a direction but intervenes in the meaning of the root it modifies. It introduces movement into the term itself. For example, while “to form” implies shaping something into a stable configuration, “to transform” emphasizes a process in which form is crossed, exceeded, and rendered porous rather than finalized.

In this sense, the prefix “trans-” reorganizes the conditions of meaning-making: it loosens the boundaries of the host word and opens it to the possibility of becoming otherwise (Hayward, 2024, p. 48).

As a standalone term, “trans” most commonly operates as a gender category, designating people whose gender does not correspond to the one assigned to them at birth. In this usage, the term is often structured by opposition – trans/cis, before/after, one side/another – implicitly organising gender along a binary axis. Here, “trans” is frequently understood through the sense of the prefix meaning “on the other side of,” framing trans experience as movement between two stabilized poles. Rather than undoing gender norms, this logic risks reproducing them by presuming a trajectory toward coherence, arrival, or a final form.

Léa Rivière offers a critical reframing by describing “trans” as “the name of a gap, a ditch, a distance” – a term that exists only in relation to a norm that produces it (Rivière, 2023, pp. 39-42). From this perspective, “trans” works as a relational position generated by normative structures themselves. If the norm disappears, Rivière argues, so does the term: no gap, no outside, nothing left to name (ibid.).

This understanding exposes the limits of “trans” when it functions as a standalone category. Defined through opposition, it continues to operate within the binary frameworks it seeks to resist. As a result, rather than naming a mode of becoming, it risks stabilising difference by anchoring it in dualistic logics of “before/after, “inside/outside”. It is precisely this impasse that opens the need for further syntactic and conceptual operations to unsettle “trans” from fixed opposition, destabilizing its categorical closure and orienting it toward excess, indefiniteness, and relational transformation.

One operation that further destabilizes the categorical closure of “trans” is the addition of the asterisk (*), producing “trans*.” In linguistics, the asterisk marks an ungrammatical or impossible construction, while in computing and database syntax, it functions as a wildcard. In both cases, it signals openness and excess. Jack Halberstam emphasizes that the asterisk “holds open the certainty of diagnosis,” refusing to determine in advance what “trans*” might mean or become (2018, p. 4). Rather than defining an identity, the asterisk foregrounds the right to self-determination and the refusal of closure.

When extended to the prefix – trans* – the asterisk performs a syntactic intervention. As Eva S. Hayward argues, terms such as “trans*(s)ex” or “trans*ecology” remain deliberately unfinished: meaning is added, rerouted, and unsettled through contact (Hayward, 2024). Emma Bigé describes this gesture as one that “makes things touch that are not supposed to touch,” generating unstable but fertile semantic spaces (2024, p. 45). Here, “trans*” operates not as a category but as a process of relationality – a space of transit that cannot be fully bound or translated.

Taken together, these linguistic and conceptual operations can open “trans*” toward a field of relations and transformations. If trans is always already relational – never self-contained, never closed – then it names not only gendered passages but modes of becoming that traverse bodies, materials, ecologies, and temporalities. This understanding prepares the ground for thinking trans*mutation not as a shift between stable states, but as a field of ongoing crossings and transformations.

to trans*mutate, trans*mutations

Therefore, what happens when one adds “trans” to “mutation” and writes “trans*mutation”?

Understood as “always already” relational and operating parasitically at the level of language and concepts, “trans*” – amplified by the asterisk’s capacity to repurpose, displace, rename, and intensify terms (Hayward and Weinstein, 2015, p. 198) – reframes mutation. Rather than a condition of lack or deviation, mutation becomes a condition of abundance.

Following the exercise above, adding “trans*–” to “mutate” implies the idea that what is altering is always already in motion, emphasizing movement across and between states, scales, and entities. If “to mutate” is defined as undergoing a change that alters form, structure, or function, then to trans*mutate suggests that form, structure, and function are themselves already mutating and will continue beyond any singular transformation. To trans*mutate implies changing while crossing and crossing while changing. It evokes processes that are nonlinear and cannot be contained within categorical or binary frameworks such as beginning/end or origin/outcome.

The mobilization of this notion produces a disturbance in established ways of understanding reality and conceptual certainties: it makes them tremble. Trans*mutations can be compared to the glitch in order to further grasp this mechanism. Legacy Russell defines the glitch as a process that is “all about traversing along edges and stepping to the limits, those we occupy and those we push through” (2020, p. 22). While the glitch moves along limits, trans*mutations cut through them and exceed them. If reality is held in place by specific definitions, trans*mutations cut through the very conditions that sustain it, exceeding those definitions rather than operating within their boundaries. What appears stable does so only by momentarily holding together processes of mutation – processes that are entangled, relational, and porous.

Using transformation as an example, Czech philosopher Miroslav Petříček stresses that transformation is not a state but a verb – a process whose product is change rather than form. For Petříček, transformation resists the human desire for stability: “hardly have we got to know something and it is already different and we have to start all over again.” (Petříček, 2010) Reality, he argues, is a transforming reality, composed of “mixtures of forms within a process of deforming formation, “while the idea of an ideal, immutable form functions as a fiction – a veil drawn over a world in continuous variation” (ibid.).

This is precisely the field upon which trans*mutation operates, with one crucial displacement: it does not take form as the starting point of transformation, but understands form itself as a temporary articulation within ongoing mutation. Mutation is thus reframed not as an exception or deviation from stability, but as the condition of appearance itself – relational, porous, and perpetually exceeding its own momentary configurations. Trans*mutation, as that which trans*mutates, names not what something is, but what it does: what it crosses, what it disturbs, what it becomes.

to correspond, corresponding, correspondent

To correspond is to enter a relation through the act of exchange. It signifies not only the content shared but the process by which two or more entities become responsive to one another – it names a mutual response. To correspond comes from the latin *correspondere* with *con-/com-* together, with and *respondere* to answer, to reply – literally “to answer together”. To correspond is thus a modality of relation – one that emphasizes the collective, reciprocity, attunement, and the capacity to be affected.

Correspondence shares the same root as *to correspond*. As a noun, it emphasizes not the act itself but the structure of mutual response that takes shape between entities.

Lucia Palladino articulates “cor-respond-dances” as “dances for more than one” (Palladino, 2024, p. 13). Indeed, there is an interesting twist that emerges when the word is phonetically cut. It forms “cor-respon-dance”, associating “cor-” with *le corp*, *les corps* (body/bodies), “-respon-” with responding, or being in response with, and “-dance” with movement, with dancing. I mobilize here this phonetic cutting to emphasize the collective dimension (as in *con-/com-*, together), while grounding the corporeality of *corpus* – body as matter – and situating response as something through movement (what is implied in an interaction, in dancing). Similarly, Tim Ingold argues that the rigors of correspondence demand a practice of care and attentiveness in an ongoing relation between conscious awareness and matter, using dance as an example: [Dancers] are precise rather than accurate in the observations that allow them to attune their movements to one another. Here, precision rests on the capacity to flex in response to others’ movements.” (Ingold, 2021, p. 14) These perspectives emphasize correspondence not as an exchange of fixed meanings, but as a collective, embodied practice emerging through responsiveness and attunement of motions, to what changes.

Moreover, correspondences may occur intentionally or unintentionally. In the former case, they can manifest as in the exchange of letters, signals, or messages where response is expected and oriented. In the latter, correspondence can be how materials, organisms, or processes answer to one another through proximity, contact, or shared conditions – such as microbes reacting to shifts in temperature, substances fermenting through exposure, or bodies attuning to one another’s rhythms. Correspondence can also be atmospheric, unfolding between bodies and the spaces they inhabit. Here, relation operates through shared conditions – air, humidity, temperature – rather than through direct exchange or communication, as

bodies adjust to fluctuations in the surrounding milieu, often without awareness or agency. In every case, correspondence counters isolation and suggests, as Ingold argues, that all living, and all knowing and is intrinsically social and that social life is one big correspondence (Ingold, 2021, p. 11). More specifically, Ingold identifies three key properties of correspondence: correspondence as process, correspondence as open-ended, and correspondence as dialogical (ibid.). These properties situate correspondence as a living, unfolding relation – one that becomes materially intensified in processes such as fermentation.

Indeed fermentation operated as correspondence: an exchange of signals, molecules, and transformations that unfolds through touching, ingesting, and altering. It is a relational metabolism, a *becoming-with*, in which correspondence and material transformation are inseparable. Both correspondence and fermentation are processes of mattering: they enact the materialization of relation itself, where matter, time, and affect converge to produce forms, effects, and transformations. In this sense, relation does not precede or follow materiality but emerges through it, as the very act of exchange brings something into being, shaping the doing of its becoming.

correspondent trans*mutations

Moving on from this temporary glossary: if “mutation” describes internal change and “trans*mutation” emphasizes crossing and relational motion, then adding correspondent stresses the underlying assemblage -- words, letters, matter, conditions, fermentation – through which change occurs.

“correspondent trans*mutations”, which give this research a title, narrate mutations unfolding through exchange – across bodies, materials, environments, processes, and concepts – where transformation emerges in co-affection, response, and touch. Here, change is not linear or externally imposed; it is generative, processual, relational, materially enacted, and continuously unfolding.

Chapter 3

Vibrant Matter, Assemblages, and Milieu

Kombucha SCOBY – Living, Mattering, Correspondent Material
Body

A Basement & A Roof

composing, recomposing, decomposing SCOBYs

This chapter examines the SCOBY as vibrant, mattering, and correspondent material, drawing on Jane Bennett's notion of vibrant matter to understand its capacity to grow, transform, and respond to specific environmental conditions beyond human agency. Tracing the SCOBY's movement across different spaces, the chapter emphasizes how these places (*milieux* in the Deleuzian sense) actively co-produce its becoming, and how the SCOBY continues to transform beyond intentional handling through processes of absorption, drying, and recombination. This chapter highlights material agency, relationality, and trans*mutation, setting the stage for the next chapter, which will expand on the questions of address – who and what is being addressed – and the collective, human and more-than-human, and the atmosphere this produces.

Kombucha SCOBY – Living, Mattering, and Correspondent Material Body

Kombucha is a fermented sweet tea drink that originated from China and spread to Europe through Russia during the 20th century. Kombucha is sometimes called “kombucha tea” to refer to the actual drink rather than to the brew while it is in its fermentation process. In Asian countries such as China, Japan and Korea, the drink is sometimes referred to as “tea mushroom” in reference to its mushroom-like, jelly-textured appearance – the SCOBY.

“SCOBY” stands for Symbiotic Culture of Bacteria and Yeast. It is not yet a fungus but a living culture of bacteria and yeast – the “mother” that initiates the fermentation of the kombucha. When added to sweet tea, the SCOBY forms a dynamic microbial colony that transforms the liquid into kombucha over time.

The fermentation of kombucha is aerobic, meaning that it requires oxygen in order to ferment, allowing the bacteria and yeast to convert the sugar into energy. The process usually unfolds from 5 to 21 days, during which the fermentation retains most of its vitality. When the kombucha is not fed, the fermentation slows down. The longer one leaves the drink to ferment, the more acidic it becomes.

A new brew starts when the kombucha is fed – that is, when fresh sweet tea and sugar are added to the mixture. At this point, a new culture forms on top of the liquid, where the drink connects to the surrounding air. A gelatinous, cellulose-based biofilm develops on the surface of the liquid during fermentation: the new kombucha SCOBY, born from its ‘mother’ culture. It takes the shape of the container in which it grows.

The new SCOBY floats on the surface to maximize access to oxygen. As fermentation progresses, it thickens, and with each feeding, new layers form – making its microbial activity visible through time and revealing its material transformation.

Once lifted from the liquid and exposed to open air, the SCOBY enters another phase of transformation: drying. It does not die instantly but shifts into a state of dormancy, where microbial activity slows while the cellulose matrix continues to reorganize itself. As water evaporates, the material gradually changes from wet, soft, and gelatinous to fibrous, tensile, and increasingly leathery. Drying is therefore not a neutral or passive step, but another moment in which the SCOBY remains responsive to its environment – temperature, airflow, humidity, light, and the textures

of the surfaces it rests upon. It may contract, smooth, wrinkle, thicken, or become translucent according to these conditions. Even in dormancy, the SCOBY registers the atmosphere around it, retaining material traces of its process. This shift from wet microbial skin to dried bioleather marks a continuation of its becoming, showing how the material remains sensitive and relational even after fermentation has ceased.

No two fermentations – or drying processes – are alike; while the final flavor and composition of kombucha depend on variables such as the kind of tea used, temperature, sugar concentration, and microbial diversity, the drying of the SCOBY is likewise shaped by its own environmental conditions, such as airflow, humidity, light, and surface contact. As Brendel (2025) notes, “[b]esides their close surroundings, kombucha microbes ferment in collaboration with the humans that tend to it. Through the air, kombucha is nourished and provided with site-specific information” (p. 13). This underscores that making kombucha and cultivating its SCOBY are an intrinsically site-specific process, shaped by the local air and attuned to the conditions of its environment – recording material traces of its own becoming along the way – an “aerobic topology”, to borrow the title of Brendel and MacFadzean’s project (Brendel & MacFadzean, 2022).

One can take the “agentic” argument further by mobilizing Jane Bennett’s concept of vibrant matter. As mentioned in the introduction, vibrant matter expands the definition of material vitality and emphasizes how materials function within the webs of relations they compose (2010, pp. 11-38). The SCOBY is not a passive material but a participant in its own transformation and those of others. It ferments, layers, and responds to the chemical, thermal, and affective conditions of its environment. It grows because it is directly affected by its surroundings – as it needs to be in contact with air – and by the bodies that inhabit or pass through these spaces. First, human and more-than-human bodies potentially move the air, breathe in the vapors of the SCOBY’s fermentation, and breathe out their own particles and bacteria. Second, the spatial feature of a place that shapes its fermentation and growth. The SCOBY exemplifies vibrant matter in trans*mutation, showing how living materials and environments co-produce one another in dynamic and site-specific ways.

Furthermore, one could argue that the SCOBY can be understood as a vibrant assemblage within a milieu (in the Deleuzian sense): a relational, agentic, and dynamic system in which matter, humans, and environment co-produce its ongoing trans*mutation. This is what I will develop in the next section.

A Basement & A Roof

In this research, a basement and a roof acted not merely as locations, but as active bodies interacting with, affecting, and mattering others – including the SCOBY – as assemblages within a milieu.

Helena MacFadzean and Caroline Melina Brendel talk about air as an active infrastructure and kombucha SCOBY fermentation as a site-specific response to environmental conditions in their project *Aerobic Topologies I-XVII*, as the SCOBY bacteria interact with space, forming organic layers that reflect the air they inhabit (2022). In this context, I approached the spaces I worked in as *milieux* – active, relational environments that co-constitute the material (or assemblages), shaping and being shaped by its growth and transformation.

This became clear while working in a basement studio, where high humidity demanded continuous adaptation of the working process. Therefore, the workshop dates initially planned had to be rescheduled and as well the fermentation time had to be extended beyond standard durations due to the cold and humid conditions. Similarly, drying processes had to be adapted, as the high humidity and lack of direct sunlight prevented the SCOBY from drying in the basement.

The SCOBYs were therefore moved to a roof to dry. Accessing the roof involved passing through an attic archival space, adding another layer to the spatial milieu in which the material was displaced and transformed. On the roof, the SCOBYs were laid out to dry with glycerine applied to prevent cracking. Under strong early-summer sunlight, aided by reflective backing, they rapidly transformed into bioleather.

The wet and humid SCOBYs, marked by mold and dust from the basement, carried their own history as they transformed into bioleather across different sites. Throughout this process, they were moved by various bodies, which were in turn affected by the care, time, and effort invested in facilitating this transformation. In doing so, the SCOBYs traversed a network of milieux, each contributing to their becoming.

Each place the SCOBYs passed through functioned as a milieu in Gilles Deleuze's sense: an active field of relations, forces, and interactions that co-produce the material's transformations (Deleuze, n.d.). The high humidity of the basement, the archival attic space, the airflow and sunlight on the roof, the form of the kombucha container, and the human presence involved in carrying and caring for the SCOBYs

all shaped – and were shaped by – their growth, drying, and transformation into bioleather. These chemical and affective conditions are collectively entangled in the matter and space's processes of becoming.

Thinking through the milieu thus means attending to these active conditions as generative rather than merely contextual, understanding transformation as emerging from relations among bodies, materials, spaces, and forces. This orientation complements the concept of assemblages (agencement) developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, and later taken up by Jane Bennett to describe shifting constellations of human and nonhuman elements that come together without a single center or fixed order, producing collective effects greater than any individual component (Bennett, 2010, p. 24).

Together they operate as a collective process of in becoming: assemblages being heterogeneous constellations of elements (bodies, materials, forces, affects, humans, objects, spaces) which come together temporally, producing effects, while the milieu constitutes the relational field in which assemblages exist and act. They are co-constitutive: the milieu shapes the assemblage and its components, and in return is shaped by them. In other words, these are processes of trans*mutations: all in a state of becoming, an open-ended (trans*) process that cannot be fully named, as it is always in motion and exceeds any fixed state, (mutating) while being simultaneously impacted by what constitutes it, which in return also affects the bodies with which it interacts.

composing, recomposing, decomposing SCOBYs

Note on what happened to the dry leather

After the first workshop series I stored bioleathers by stacking them on top of one another, with baking paper between each sheet. On them were the remains of the letter fragments we had assembled during the last workshop, where we "harvested" the bioleather and engaged in a process of composing, decomposing, and recomposing by cutting the written letters into fragments and arranging them onto each dried SCOBY. I intended to leave it the way it was when we ended the workshop so I left the pieces as they were and let them be for a month while I was on holiday.

When I came back, the SCOBY had trans*mutated again in an unexpected way: some of the leather had developed a sort of internal mold, spreading within the dried layer itself. It manifested as black spots visible on the surface, yet without any shimmery growth suggesting a presence embedded inside the material rather than on it. But most importantly, the pieces of paper left on top of the SCOBY had started to dissolve into the material - the SCOBY had absorbed (eaten) the paper.

I took this as a cue to further engage with the SCOBY's ongoing processes of decomposition and recomposition. I documented each culture through photographs and by mapping the position and text of the letter fragments onto A3 sheets. Then I carefully removed the paper, sometimes with tweezers, as certain pieces resisted separation - occasionally pulling off a thin layer of SCOBY or tearing them into smaller parts that I had to reassemble and re-puzzle them into place. In the end, some pieces of paper definitely remained on the SCOBY. Even when I tried to wipe them with a tissue or paper, they would not come off, and so they became part of the leather - an agency I could not control.

After the second workshop series (in the Autumn 2025), I stored the bioleather in the same way as before. This batch,

however, developed a very different "skin": noticeably drier and slightly thicker than the one produced in spring and summer. The change appeared to result from the altered drying conditions. In November, each sheet required about a week to dry in a closed room - unlike the July batch that dried within an hour on a hot rooftop. Because the material absorbed the glycerin mixture more slowly, it developed a more rigid, almost crust-like surface. As a result, the leather needed additional hydration later aiming to reach the flexibility sought in the process.

Chapter 4

Addressing the Collective

Journal Excerpts

The score

“You” and Bodies

This chapter focuses on the notion of addressing a collective for an open-ended process of co-creation, through the composition of correspondence practiced within the workshop. It questions how participants learn to address and interact with a collective – human and more-than-human bodies – and how the score articulated for this purpose mediates these relations. It emphasizes the collective and its enactment, as participants, materials, and space come together in a shared process of trans*mutation. It also highlights that collective and individual practices are inseparable – as the individual is already collective. The chapter looks how boundaries dissolve, agencies intertwine, and relational multiplicities emerge within the atmosphere and milieu of the workshop. It looks at how boundaries between humans and more-than-human bodies are negotiated, enacted, and shifted; how agencies intertwine; and how relational multiplicities emerge within the workshop’s atmosphere and milieu.

Journal Excerpts

12th of January 2025: try-out workshop and foundations of a concept

This first workshop was a try-out to investigate how correspondence, letters, kombucha, and its SCOBYs could be woven together, while questioning how to address the different bodies - human and more-than-human - present in the space and with which we, as human participants, interact.

We started the workshop by performing a gesture that linked words to the material, displaying letters around the kombucha. We then created a second SCOBY culture and drank from the brew, connecting human bodies to the kombucha and its SCOBY as it crossed and cut through our bodies, becoming part of us. The session alternated between collective writing and reading, with letters exchanged as a form of correspondence.

The workshop laid the foundations for the concept later developed, highlighting the potential of letters as a form of address to multiple entities and as a way for the bodies inhabiting a space to remain in ongoing correspondence.

End of March 2025: finalising the workshop concept

At this point, the structure of the workshops became clear. They aim at "being together" and "spending time" through attunement to the care involved in making bioleather from kombucha SCOBYs. The process - brewing, drying, and harvesting - sets the basis for conceptualising each of the three workshops, one for each stage. Alongside the material practice, we engage in writing and exchanging letters to reflect on how bodies move through, with, and by the process. This reflection has been guided by a score based on Astrida Neimanis' method *Weather Writing: A feminist materialist approach for (getting outside) the classroom* (2015).

The score

The score for the workshop draws primarily on Neimanis' "weather writing" method, which proposes guidelines grounded in a material and somatic approach to sensing how the "outside" world – understood through the weather – affects one's body and experience. In summary, Neimanis' score can be articulated as a set of guidelines, as follows: "1. Begin with open-ended questions"; "2. Expose yourself to the weather world"; "3. Start writing. Think with a pen"; "4. Activate all bodily modalities"; "5. Linger. Repeat"; "6. Reflect. Discuss." (Neimanis, 2015, pp. 141-157)

I translated and adapted these main pillars into my own version of the score, responding to the specific material, spatial, and relational context of the workshops. Its core structure is as follows:

1. **Tuning in.**

Start with open-ended questions to reflect on the space between you, the jar, and what's brewing.

2. **Investigating the layers.**

Expose yourself to the space, the kombucha, and the bodies around you – without trying to control the encounter. Feel the connections between your body, the environment, and the others present.

3. **Corresponding.**

Follow the notes you took, write a letter to "You" [...].

4. **Inscribing Words, Bodies, and Space.**

Activate all bodily modalities (ways of sensing and moving as perception, mobility, affect, cognition, viscerality, transcorporeality) as you engage with the kombucha, the space, and the bodies around you (the surrounding entities).

5. **Corresponding.**

Follow the notes you took, write a letter to "You," responding to the letter you just received [...].

6. **Closing the reflection round.**

What happened for each participant during this workshop? What worked, what didn't, and what remained uncertain?

The score practically and conceptually guides each workshop and is read collectively out loud. It encourages participants to attend to the shifts that occur through collective engagement in making the bioleather and caring for the SCOBYs, and to reflect on how these shifts affect their own porous bodies, their sensing, the space, and their relations with others.

Through the material – kombucha, SCOBY, letters, space, bodies – the score enacts an ecosomatic practice that reflects on the relations the human body shares with other bodies and with its surroundings, emphasizing interdependent and intra-active connections. Just as the SCOBY carries aerobic topologies, bodies are themselves “topologies” of what surrounds oneself and moves through us. These practices of sensing, attending, moving, and being moved through material relations foreground bonds between human and more-than-human bodies (Bigé, 2023, p. 27).

The practice further encourages reflection on how movement unfolds through relational agency. If interconnected bodies are topologies of what surrounds them, then bodies do not simply traverse space but are continually shaped and shifted by the material processes and entities that compose them. As Emma Bigé proposes in *Mouvementements* (2023), this involves unlearning the proprietary assumption that “in my movements, I’m the only one who moves” (p. 38). Following Erin Manning, movement is reframed not as something a body does, but as something through which bodies come into being. As Manning writes: “[...] movement is not of a body. It cuts across, co-composing with different velocities of movement-moving. It *bodies*. The body is a misnomer. Nothing so stable, so certain of itself ever survives the complexity of worlding.” (2013, pp. 14-16)

“You” and Bodies

In the score, I invited participants to address their letters to “You”:

“Following your notes, answer the letter you received by writing a letter to “You” – a letter to the entity of your choice.

Note that the entity – even when it appears singular – is never truly individual, but always a multiplicity. It might be one person, yet this one person [this one body] is themselves a constellation of cells, bacteria, eyes, hands, feelings, thoughts, relations, and more.

So this letter might be addressed to yourself, your genes, your blood, your veins, your guts, your middle finger – but also to me, us, them, the stone, the tree, a bear in hibernation, your teddy bear, the unseen, the present, the sexy lady in the red coat, a poppy, the absent, someone now gone, future ghosts, or those yet to come.

You can use “You” to address this letter, or choose any other name you like.”

“You” was intended to represent the multiplicity of what constitutes a body – always in relation and correspondence with others – while still addressing the letter to a specific receiver, who may or may not identify with it. This multiplicity is expressed through movement and relational interaction: bodies are moving and being moved; they act and are acted upon within porous ecologies of becoming. Like the score itself, “You” invites participants to loosen boundaries and certainties, and to attend to the interconnectedness of the workshop moment and the layers of agency at play.

This implies that what is called a body is inherently composed of other bodies; there are no singular bodies, only collective and relational ones. Such bodies do not possess fixed boundaries, but depend on arrangements, space, and context – existing as assemblages within a milieu. “The body – I don’t know what that is. At best, there are bodies, or corporealities, ways of being bodies, but ‘the body’: that’s a poorly cut word to describe the complex system of infra- and trans-corporeal realities that weave together my embodied experience.” (Bigé, 2023, p. 33 – my translation)

“You,” the letters, the SCOBY, and the participants are thus approached not as isolated entities, but as co-constituted and relational shifting multiplicities.

Chapter 5

Practicing correspondent trans*mutations

Notes on the workshop series

Drinking, Reading, and Writing Together

Mourning in between

This chapter traces how correspondence – through drinking, reading, writing, and working with kombucha SCOBYs – operates as a trans*mutational practice across two series of workshops. It shows how embodied, material, and relational processes gradually transformed into a reflective framework with introducing mourning as a practice and assemblages of composing, decomposing, and recomposing – cycles of matter passing through bodies. Rather than separating practice from theory, the chapter follows how conceptual thinking emerged from within the work itself: through repetition, refinement of the score, and continuous attention to the practice of leather-making. Introducing the concept of *mourning in between* from Emma Bigé & Clovis Maillet, I aim to situate correspondence as a collective, political, and more-than-human practice – one that holds memory, enables transition, the entanglement of destruction and creation within the practice of trans*mutations.

Notes on the workshop series

The research was centered on six workshops divided into two series: one in spring and the other in autumn 2025. These workshops moved through the stages of kombucha leather-making - titled *brewing*, *drying*, and *harvesting* - while corresponding through practices of sensing, reading, writing, and exchanging. Humans and nonhumans collaborated in moments of co-presence, forming a shared web of relations composed of multiple layers, stories, and temporalities. The score guided the workshops, moving from arrival and sensing, through scanning the space and writing letters, to engaging with the kombucha, gradually attuning to the material together.

The spring series focused on practical engagement with the kombucha SCOBY and material correspondences. It took place in the basement and studio of a friend and functioned as a "doing" phase, emphasising embodiment and somatic practice, as well as collective bioleather-making. This phase served as a moment of experimentation, allowing me to understand how bodies - material, and spatial - co-act in this setting. The autumn series, which took place in a different location (a room within the university facilities), was shaped by a more developed process of work, allowing conceptual ideas to surface more clearly alongside material practice. During this second series, the score was refined, theoretical engagement became more present, and letter exchanges grew more structured.

In fact, the second series emerged through reflection on the first, supported by theoretical research and accumulated experience - it layered itself above what had already formed over time, much like a SCOBY does. Revisiting the workshop concept allowed the score to be rewritten, strengthening what was missing and adjusting elements that had not yet fully worked. The change of location also introduced new layers to the process, influencing the fermentation and shaping how material transformation, correspondence, and collective dynamics unfolded.

Drinking, Reading, and Writing Together

Drinking kombucha, reading, and writing were collective practices that repeated themselves from workshop to workshop. They were part of a process that gradually brought the group closer together, softening the initial tension that can occur when meeting strangers in a shared framework. This section – along with “brewing”, “drying” and “harvesting” – exemplifies further what has been developed in “Chapter 3: Vibrant Matter, Assemblages, and Milieu” and “Chapter 4: Addressing the Collective”.

Letter-writing was performed collectively before being exchanged. At times, letters were written outside the sessions, when participants were asked to bring one with them. They were then exchanged in a non-reciprocal manner. Rather than forming direct conversations between two people responding to one another, participants did not reply to the person from whom they had received a letter but instead wrote to someone else, following an order that was not predetermined. This structure aimed to cultivate an indirect and collective conversation: a shared relational correspondence that expanded and layered itself over the course of the workshops³.

Guided by the score, the letters primarily reflected on bodily sensations, spatial relations, and shifting attentions as they unfolded during the sessions. The last round of letters of the last workshop was written collectively: each person wrote before folding the paper and passing it to the next, who continued the text, until a full circle was completed and each letter had passed through every participant. These letters were then read aloud as a closing gesture.

Letters were often described by the participants as functioning analogously to the SCOBY: as sites where ideas and experiences layer, ferment, and become part of a collective body. Like the SCOBY, the letters recorded a process, holding the memory of a moment – the bodies, materials, and spatial conditions that composed their environment. They formed an assemblage in a milieu, in which correspondence was not only expressive but relational, marking how bodies – material, human, and spatial – are connected to one another.

³ Inspired by Lucia Palladino’s correspondence-based workshop practices

Mourning in between

Mourning in between, as articulated by Emma Bigé and Clovis Maillat, is a practice of attending to states of transition: moments in which something is no longer what it was, yet not fully what it will become. While mourning is often understood to be a responsive state that “happens to oneself” following the loss of someone or something, they suggest rethinking mourning not merely as a responsive relation, but as an active, situated practice – a political act of staying with what changes, disappears, or refuses to remain the same. It resists productivist imperatives by revaluing collective pauses, rests, and festivals that celebrate the dead and passages. In other words, capitalist logics of production urge withdrawal from the very occasions that make remembering possible by spending time, mourning and grieving. And that is what contains the practice of collective mourning: to celebrate what is no longer, to accept that some things may well cease to be (Bigé & Maillat, 2025, p. 161).

As a practice of remembering, “mourning in between” opens the possibility of reappropriating history – not as a fixed narrative, but as something that can be revisited, complicated, and transformed. One site of this reappropriation and political practice is the celebration of Samhain, the Celtic pagan celebration which honors the dead and is dedicated to the professional mourner – the weepers – who cry for them. In many European pagan cultures, the bear – which buries itself in the ground to hibernate – symbolizes this seasonal change, as a reminder to honor the composting processes of the earth where ancestors rest beneath the soil, nurturing it for the next growing season (Bigé, 2024, p.138). Samhain also recognizes the movement with and between life and death, human and more-than-human, that sustains the creation of what is yet to come.

Bigé exemplifies the collective and non-proprietary quality embodied by the practice of mourning by building on *PRO_MOURNING*, a performance-ceremony by Léa Rivière created on the occasion of Samhain. *PRO_MOURNING* draws on the figure of the weepers to practice grieving “before, with, and for” loss, without waiting for someone to pass away in order to be *authorized* to mourn. Because mourning is a practice, it does not simply “fall onto” someone; rather, it is something one actively enacts, and exercises.

In French, *le deuil* (grief) does not easily become a verb; one can only *faire le deuil* – to “do” grief. Bigé therefore proposes the neologism *deuiller* as a verb to insist on mourning as an agentive, embodied and processual practice – learned, and repeatable – rather than a noun that frames mourning as a reactive and affective

event. Samhain and *PRO_MOURNING* thus become occasions to remember that mourning is not merely private, but collective and relational: “Because it is not one’s grief; it is *the* grief we remember. A non-proprietary relation to mourning.” (Bigé, 2024, p. 140 – my translation)

Therefore, rather than merely being agentive, mourning is a collective and relational practice. It cuts through the bodies it touches not as an end point, but as a state of *in-between* (*deuiller au travers*): a trans*mutative practice. It proposes mourning as something one can learn from rather than fear. As Bigé and Maillet suggest, it can become a gift one offers to another – a way of reminding ourselves of all that is changing, and even of all that could still change (2025, p. 161).

The workshop about drying was moved by this concept and collective practice. As we gathered and tended the SCOBYS, we enacted gestures of remembering (through letters and farewells), transition (moving and preparing the SCOBYS for their new bodies), and transmission (sharing knowledge, care, and methods).

Chapter 6

Becoming, Temporality, an Artwork

Material Becoming as Temporal Artwork

Collective Assemblage: Working Through Patchwork and Tapestry

Skin as Porous Interface: Practices of Eco-Political Inscribing

Forces of Negotiation: Gravity, Suspension, and Translucency

Sound as Relational Field & Listening as Co-Presence

Activating the Work: Score and Collective Continuation

This chapter examines *correspondent trans*mutation* as a temporal artwork shaped by ongoing processes of becoming rather than fixed form. The installation is composed of: suspended bioleather assemblages, together with a soundscape and a score, and operate as modulable and relational structures co-constituted through collective encounters. Drawing on patchwork and tapestry traditions, the work emphasizes fragmentation, porosity, and heterogeneity, resisting linear narration and monumentality. Skin functions as a porous interface for eco-political inscription, where letters, voices, and microbial processes merge as traces of relation. Gravity, suspension, translucency, and sound act as connective forces negotiating bodies – human and more-than-human – through subtle movement, resonance, and co-presence. The score activates correspondence, sustaining collective authorship and continuous trans*mutation.

Material Becoming as Temporal Artwork

The passage of correspondent trans*mutation becomes, temporarily and as an ongoing process, an artwork. The piece takes the form of a suspended assemblage of bioleather skins – referencing patchwork and tapestry traditions – which resists fixity and does not have a final form, marked by material becoming, alteration, and instability that may continue beyond the artist(s)' agency.

In its first occurrence, the installation consists of two facing assemblages. Each piece is pierced at its four corners and attached to the others through metal rings; some are tattooed with excerpts from letters written during workshops and later cut and reassembled. The assemblages are accompanied by a soundscape of kombucha fermentation layered with voices reading letter excerpts, and a score inviting visitors to correspond with the work. Together, these elements actively co-constitute the becoming of the artwork.

As the artwork is conceived to resist a definitive composition, its configuration may therefore evolve over time. The bioleather pieces are designed to be modifiable: the assemblages can merge into a single, larger structure or separate into multiple, smaller ones – expanding or retracting accordingly. The artwork remain open to transformation and trans*mutation through encounters with different entities and milieu that ongoingly co-constitute its assemblage(s).

Collective Assemblage: Working Through Patchwork and Tapestry

If the suspended assemblage of correspondent trans*mutations refers to patchwork tradition, it is primarily to emphasize heterogeneous configurations. Patchwork often involves assembling separate pieces of fabric, often from diverse origins, into a composite surface with visible seams. It can carry political significance, emerging from collective, gendered, and domestic labor, and act as a site of memory and remembrance, preserving stories through fragments that bear traces of specific lives. The AIDS Memorial Quilt (ACT UP and the NAMES Project in the 1980s) used individual panels, inscribed with names, fabrics, and symbols, to form an expandable collective memorial resisting anonymity and monumentality. Similarly, the suspended bioleather assemblages are composed of separable pieces, inscribed and joined rather than fused, remaining modulable and open to transformation.

The assemblage also engages with tapestry traditions while contrasting them, treating the material as a porous membrane carrying open-ended stories rather than a linear, monumental narrative. Unlike medieval tapestries, which were hung with a clear front and back and conveyed unified images or heroic tales, the bioleather skins are translucent, hung to be approached from multiple sides, allowing air, light, bodies, and sound to go around and through. The result is a narrative that is fragmented, shifting, and responsive, where language leaks through tattooed words rather than enclosing stories within a fixed structure.

Here, the suspended assemblage contrasts these two aspects. First, the work – with its translucent material feature – is hung in space allowing it to be approached from multiple sides emphasizing porosity. Moreover, instead of one continuous woven surface, the separated bioleather skins appear as joined rather than fused, producing a narrative that is no longer linear, unified, or monumental, but fragmented, layered, shifting, and relational. Air, sound, bodies, and light pass through the material, where language leaks through tattooed words, opening storytelling rather than enclosing it within a closed narrative.

In this sense, the assemblage aligns with Ursula K. Le Guin's *Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (1986), which gathers fragments and holds many small stories rather than culminating in conquest. The bioleather skins act as carriers of traces, letters, and narratives, resisting singular, unified stories. This approach resonates with Laure Prouvost's language-based installations, in which meaning drifts through mishearing, fragments, and movement, unfolding in relation to encounter rather than

through fixed interpretation. The tattooed fragments function as linguistic traces whose shifting meanings invite continuation, recomposition, and misreading, reinforcing the work's ongoing, open-ended process of trans*mutation.

Skin as Porous Interface: Practices of Eco-Political Inscribing

If the bioleather skins function as carriers of stories, then inscription becomes the material practice through which these stories are held, marked, and transmitted not as ornament, but as an ecological-political act that marks skin as a living interface shaped by power, memory, and relation. Tattooing, alongside practices such as piercing and scarification, has operated within Indigenous contexts as a relational and cosmological practice, and within subcultural and queer communities as a form of embodied resistance and counter-archiving. While distinct in their genealogies, these practices coexist with histories in which bodily marking has also functioned as a technique of control – through branding, numbering, and medical inscription imposed upon marginalised bodies.

In this sense, skin operates as a porous and relational interface onto which memory and identity are inscribed, leaving traces that unfold through time and remain open to transformation. Tattooing in the suspended assemblage extends inscription toward collective, vibrant matter surfaces, where letters, voices, and material processes converge. Skin here functions as a sensorial membrane, continuously negotiating exchanges between “inside” and “outside” and operating as a site of correspondence among the bodies – human and more-than-human – that have encountered it.

Anne-Marie Maes’ work *OIKOS* (2025) supports this understanding through her notion of ecological correspondence, in which the Ancient Greek term *oikos* – meaning “house” or “home,” and root of the word ecology – is reconfigured. Rather than a closed or conservative home, *oikos* becomes a space of protection, experimentation, and symbiosis, articulated through microbially grown woven tapestries that enact processes of inscription in which boundaries between inside and outside, biology and matter, and past and present are continuously blurred and negotiated (Maes, 2025). Similarly, the suspended bioleather skins operate as sites of relation and correspondence, carrying traces of past encounters while remaining open to narrative unfolding. As porous interfaces, they do not stabilize meaning or memory but invite ongoing trans*mutation through material, bodily, and more-than-human exchange.

Forces of Negotiation: Gravity, Suspension, and Translucency

The collective relation between bodies – human and more-than-human – emerges through a force shared by all who encounter the installation: gravity. As Bigé suggests, gravity emphasizes relationality by revealing how Earth’s mass inhabits both bodies and the stories that surround them (Bigé, 2023, p. 8). Rather than functioning as a static ground, gravity stabilizes while simultaneously setting bodies into motion, generating responsiveness and shaping conditions of existence, atmosphere, and milieu. In this way, gravity does not simply act upon the suspended assemblage but actively constitutes it as a relational field.

Suspension activates this gravitational dynamic within the bioleather assemblages. While hanging, the pieces gain relational openness: they rotate, drift, and respond to air currents, light, and the movements of visitors. Gravity continuously acts upon them, anchoring their mass while producing subtle, tensioned motion. Through this interplay, the assemblages remain neither fixed nor weightless but held in ongoing negotiation with environmental and material forces.

This negotiation unfolds not through dramatic motion but through minute adjustments and barely perceptible shifts. Attending to such micro-movements foregrounds gravity as a lived condition rather than an abstract force. This attentiveness resonates with what Steve Paxton describes as the “small dance”: a practice of sensing the body’s subtle, involuntary shifts of weight in response to gravity. Here, gravity emerges as a shared planetary condition that continuously connects bodies – human and more-than-human – through ongoing material negotiation (Bigé, 2023, p. 79). The suspended bioleather assemblages similarly operate through this quiet responsiveness, maintaining balance through slight rotations, tensions, and drifts.

Sound as Relational Field & Listening as Co-Presence

The soundscape consists of a sonic assemblage composed of collective voices reading fragments of letters alongside the sounds of kombucha fermentation. Rather than functioning as a background, sound operates as an ambient and relational field, unfolding in time and weaving together bodies, materials, and processes. Implying relation, proximity, and implication. Listening happens from within bodies producing relational knowledge. The soundscape acts as an immersive asset reinforcing the porous membrane of the suspended assemblages, the whole passing through and connecting matter.

Just like gravity, sound acts as a connective force: it cuts across bodies, reverberates in space, and enters the listener, placing human and more-than-human bodies into relation. This echoes Alanna Lynch's works *Gut Feelings* (2017-2019) and *Dissident Matter* (2021) in which sonic and olfactory elements operate as a form of sensory contamination, emphasizing shared embodiment and collective sensation rather than distant observation. As such, moving through and around the suspended assemblages, visitors are immersed in a temporal unfolding shaped by vibration, resonance, and duration.

Additionally, the soundscape strengthens the storytelling aspect of the piece, as voices and narratives layer over one another in modes that are spatial, temporal, and participatory. Composed of fragmented voices and microbial processes, it resists linear narration. Fragments of the letters are read aloud, emphasizing presence and address rather than conveying a fixed narrative. Here, voice precedes language and meaning, operating as singular yet relational within the collective whole. More than a carrier of content, the voices function as embodied relations. As the feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero theorizes in *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (2005), the presence of the singular voice in a collective agencement acts as a relational and exposing force, rather than merely a vehicle for information. In the soundscape, meaning emerges through listening, overlap, and attenuation, actively participating in the ongoing becoming and collective trans*mutation of the work.

Activating the Work: Score and Collective Continuation

As in the workshops where the bioleather was produced, a score invites active engagement rather than observation, extending the workshop's ecosomatic and relational methodology into the installation context. It invites visitors to reflect on how the installation's milieu acts upon them, while emphasizing that neither the bioleather nor the work itself reaches a final or stabilized form through drying or suspension.

Within the installation, the score invites visitors to enter a practice of correspondence: writing letters in response to their experience and interacting with material and textual fragments that echo the workshop process. This activation maintains the work in a state of ongoing transformation, refusing fixed authorship, resolved meaning, or archival closure. In continuity with the soundscape – which produces a shared social space through resonance and co-presence – the score functions as a relational framework that enables collective inscription. Visitors become co-creators whose gestures of writing, listening, and moving reconfigure the material, narrative, and temporal dimensions of the work.

Rather than stabilizing meaning, the score sustains an open-ended process of trans*mutation in which bodies, materials, and texts remain porous and interdependent. By resisting completion, the work positions collective authorship and continuous transformation not as outcomes to be achieved, but as its operative condition – foregrounding collective making, correspondence, and becoming as both method and form.

Attempting a Conclusion

I intended this thesis itself to behave like a fermentation process where matter, ideas, references collectively settle, thicken, layer on top of one another, expanding through time. In that framework, fermenting, corresponding, and spending time with vibrant matter – at times collaborator, at times material – in the different milieu that constituted its becoming enable the research to grow. As new layers developed, we⁴ – as a temporary collective – kept on expanding, opening new possibilities of becoming, new meanings of taking shape while remaining unfinished: as correspondent trans*mutations.

The work operated as a trans*species and trans*individual collective. Collaboration, constituted through intra-action, became both a method and a material condition of the research: an ongoing co-fermentation in which each participant altered the texture of the work simply by being in relation to it. What makes collaboration possible is a contact point –

touch – which is not the meeting of separate entities, but an intra-active event in which bodies are reconfigured through touching. “So much happens in a touch: an infinity of others – other beings, other spaces, other times – are aroused.” (Barad, 2012, p. 1) That contact of relation constitutes bodies for which being in relation is already a site of transformation.

Together, we formed shifting constellations of assemblages that moved and affected one another without a fixed order, creating a collective force greater than any single component (Bennett, 2010, p. 24). These encounters shared that knowledge does not stabilize through consensus, but through circulation; it thickens through contact, through frictions, through the unpredictable crossings that emerge when practices meet. In that sense the collective research exceeds intention, exceeds authorship, and generates forms that no one could have circulated alone.

The research attests to knowledge circulation as a capacity for learning, in which what is learned sediments, ferments, and recombines within a vast, porous assemblage of vibrant matter in continuous transformation. Knowledge, in this sense, is not acquired but metabolized: it thickens through contact, shifts through relation, and returns in forms that exceed anticipation.

This understanding of knowledge as circulating, fermenting, and exceeding singular authorship also shapes how this research positions itself across disciplinary fields.

⁴ The use of “we” refers to a temporary collective constituted through the research process, of which the author is a part. This choice is intentional and reflects an ontological, artistic, and aesthetic position aligned with the project’s emphasis on relationality, intra-action, and distributed agency.

*correspondent trans*mutations* positions itself across multiple fields as cross-disciplinary through its methods, rather than within a single disciplinary framework. It draws on social sciences, feminist and queer theory, applied arts, and fermentation science, bringing these approaches into dialogue. Social science methods inform how relational processes are observed and mapped; artistic practice provides material ways to investigate them; and fermentation science offers both a conceptual and practical site for understanding transformation and correspondence. In combining these approaches, the project generates insights that could not emerge from a single disciplinary lens. While this work engages debates often associated with interdisciplinarity and is grounded in cross-disciplinary methods, its materials, processes, and concepts do not simply coexist but interact and transform one another – producing effects that move beyond cross-disciplinarity and open toward a transdisciplinary mode of practice, without claiming it as a fixed category.

Yet, this brings me to what I understand a central challenge of this thesis: does writing about trans*mutations risk to fix or delimit a process that resists definition and stability?

On the contrary, writing operates here as a form of correspondence – an intra-active practice that is itself shaped by the texts, grammars, bodies, and material histories that pass through it. Writing does not stand outside trans*mutations: as language is already in transit, words arrive fermented by previous uses; syntax has touched other mouths, other pages, other times. For this reason, this thesis does not aim to resolve, stabilize, or enclose its subject. Its repetitions, gaps, digressions, and partial connections are not failures of clarity, but methodological choices aligned with a practice that resists conclusion. Rather than fixing *correspondent trans*mutations*, writing allows itself to be altered by it – remaining porous, unfinished, and open to further circulation. This conclusion, then, does not mark an end, but a temporary settling point within an ongoing process of becoming.

Afterword: Carrying and Retelling Stories in the In-Between

Dear you,

Let me (re)tell you a story – a story of relation, of correspondence, of transformation, and mutation – a story of correspondent trans*mutations.

This story is an assemblage: a mosaic that inscribes and de-scribes itself as it moves. Like the meshwork of letters and SCOBYS that compose and decompose one another, it folds and unfolds through correspondence – weaving again and again webs of (re)invention, (re)creation, and (r)evolution.

****It is a story of the whole, of the fertile chaos of the Relation.***

This story unfolds within what Édouard Glissant names the *Poetics of the Relation* – a whole that does not close upon itself but opens to multiplicity: island, sea, archipelago, ecotone, thick time, vibrant matter, all porous and ever-open borders.

It has no beginning and no end. It is a pulse – a mark in space-time that draws other things into motion and relation.

“When we say that, henceforth, this poetics of Relation interweaves and no longer projects, that it inscribes itself in a circularity, we are not referring to a circuit, a line of energy curved back onto itself. Trajectory, even bent or inflected, no longer applies. [...] And then, in a circularity with volume, we imagine the discloseable aesthetics of a Chaos, with every least detail as complex as the whole that cannot be reduced, simplified, or normalized. Each of its parts patterns activity implicated in the activity of every other.”
(Glissant, 2009, p. 32-33)

Within the whole of the Relation, bodies exist as what Glissant calls “details”: singular and plural at once, constellations of gestures, materials, mechanisms, and moments. They move and are moved by one another, refusing fixed origins and one-directional causality. Speaking the language of Relation, they resist the philosophy of the root.

Because movement is constant within the Relation, so too is change. Transformation – forming, deforming, reforming – unfolds across bodies and scales. Yet within chaos, change resists imposed direction. Agency becomes decentralized, stochastic. Here, transformation exceeds itself and enters mutation.

****It is a story of bodies trans*mutating in Relation.***

To trans*mutate is to move with and through the forces of the Relation – to be shaped by contact, correspondence, and exchange. It refuses singular origins and leans toward the rhizomatic: multiplicity without center or hierarchy.

****It is a story of vibrant matter trans*mutating in Relation***

In this story, bodies are vibrant matter. As Jane Bennett writes, matter is not inert but carries a capacity to affect and be affected – a thing-power. The story thus unfolds not only in words, but in materials: SCOBYs, letters, spaces, gestures. Theorising becomes a material practice – through the slow exchanges between bodies, their correspondences, and the living membranes that hold them together.

“One moral of the story is that we are also nonhuman and that things, too, are vital players in the world. The hope is that the story will enhance receptivity to the impersonal life that surrounds and infuses us, will generate a more subtle awareness of the complicated web of dissonant connections between bodies, [...] the extent to which all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations” (Bennett, 2010, pp. 29-38)

****It is a story of fermenting vibrant matter trans*mutating in Relation***

In the story, a slow thickening – a ferment – happens across different scales and among different actors. Fermentation arises as a layer of time through which things grow, bubble, and expand. When cared for and nourished, it thrives; when it can feed itself, it multiplies in thick layers, expanding through relation.

Fermentation enacts thick time: through the intra-actions of SCOBYs, letters, participants, space, time, and matter co-emerge, producing phenomena that are always relational, contingent, and ongoing. This process is of Karen Barad’s notion of *spacetime mattering*, where temporal unfolding is inseparable from material and relational becoming.

“The "time of now" is not an infinitely thin slice of time called the present moment, but rather a thick-now that is a crystallization of the past diffracted through the present.” (Barad, 2017, p. 25)

In the story, fermentation as a process of spacetime mattering is entangled across scales and agents – a material practice shaped by its surroundings and moving them in turn. It is vibrant matter whose processes emerge from within and expand outward, affecting bodies across time. Fermentation, like correspondence, is both

practice and metaphor, extending beyond immediate material interactions into conceptual and relational realms.

“Fermentation is extremely versatile as a metaphor. Inside our minds, frequently, ideas ferment as we think about them and imagine how they play out. Feelings too can ferment as we process them and they move through us. Sometimes this interior ferment transcends our individual experience and grows into a broader social process.” (Katz, 2020, p. 7)

****It is a story of correspondent and fermenting vibrant matter trans*mutating in Relation.***

In this unfolding, correspondence, emerges as the gestures that trans*mutating bodies compose – the in-between spaces they hold open.

“Corresponding with people and things – as we used to do in letter-writing – opens paths for lives to carry on, each in its own way but nevertheless with regard for others.” (Ingold, 2021, p. 3)

Vibrant, mutating bodies – becoming through multiple relational perspectives within the Whole-World – form through their relations with one another. These are not interactions between closed entities, but states of in-between-ness: what Tim Ingold calls correspondence. A correspondence practices a living in-between – a way of going-along-with, co-constituting through movement, attention, and exchange.

In our story, correspondences are the gestures these bodies compose – movements that go along and across, inside and out. Thinking with Glissant’s philosophy of Relation, this movement abolishes the very notion of center and periphery: pluralities of being, perspective, and temporality emerge within the interconnected web of relations.

“In a third stage the trajectory is abolished; the arrowlike projection becomes curved. The poet’s word leads from periphery to periphery, and, yes, it reproduces the track of circular nomadism; that is, it makes every periphery into a center; furthermore, it abolishes the very notion of center and periphery.” (Glissant, 2009, p. 55)

Correspondence thus does not simply connect entities; it traces curved, rhizomatic pathways within the relational web, moving with and alongside others rather than from point to point. Through this ongoing movement, the in-between-ness of bodies and things comes to the fore, opening space for multiple relational trajectories.

“Interaction is thus a between relation. Correspondence, however, goes along. This shift from interaction to correspondence entails a fundamental reorientation, from the between-ness of beings and things to their in-between-ness.” (Ingold, 2021, p. 9)

****This story inscribes itself in the realm of trans*ecologies.***

This story unfolds within the realm of trans*ecologies, where living and vibrant matter participates in processes of trans*mutation, always relational and in flux. Trans*ecologies understands ecology as multiple, shifting ways in which human and more-than-human beings exist and co-become.

“The variety of the living – human and more-than-human – ones capacities for variation and proliferation: this is what we defend in our ecologies.” (Bigé & Maillet, 2025, p. 47 – my translation)

Alongside trans*ecologies, trans*poetics enacts a transitive mode of being, speaking from and through crossing bodies, and composing through matter, sound, and affect.

“These trans poetics – poetic gestures that use trans operations of crossing lines between bodies, species, and environments–call on viewers to intervene in the violence being done to other species, for the survival of all the species who depend on these ecosystems, our own and others.” (Cárdenas, 2022, p. 212)

****Atlast, this story is not a story of revelation and truth.***

It is the story that makes the difference. [...] It sometimes seems that the story is approaching its end. Lest there be no more telling of stories at all, some of us out here in the wild oats, amid the alien corn, think we’d better start telling another one, which maybe people can go on with when the old one’s finished. [...] Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.” (Le Guin, 2019, p. 33)

As Ursula K. Le Guin writes in *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, not all stories move toward revelation or truth. Some stories, like carrier bags, hold – gathering fragments, voices, and relations without seeking to conquer or conclude. This story belongs to that kind.

It is a story of thoughts and wonders – on the processes of becoming, mattering, spending time and corresponding, and how they can function as sites of relational trans*mutation.

And so, dear you, as this story turns upon itself, it does not close – it circles, it breathes, it expands. It continues where it began: within the Relation, within the Whole-World, among the vibrating, trans*mutating bodies that ferment with all that lives and becomes.

“It ends with love, exchange, fellowship. It ends as it begins, in motion, in between various modes of being and belonging, and on the way to new economies of giving, taking, being with and for [.]” (Halberstam, 2013, p. 5)

This story is still unfolding, and you are already inside it,
you.

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