

# Re-turning

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## **Abstract**

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**This Visual Essay is based on my master thesis Re-turning – diffractive fabrications with site (Krohn, 2018) wherein the question "How can site be approached with diffractive ways of knowledge-making?" is discussed and opened up. My academic work has its starting point in calls for knowing that goes beyond human exceptionalism, to knowledge-making that takes our entanglement with the more-than-human world seriously. The question is not if we are entangled but rather how that entanglement plays itself out.**

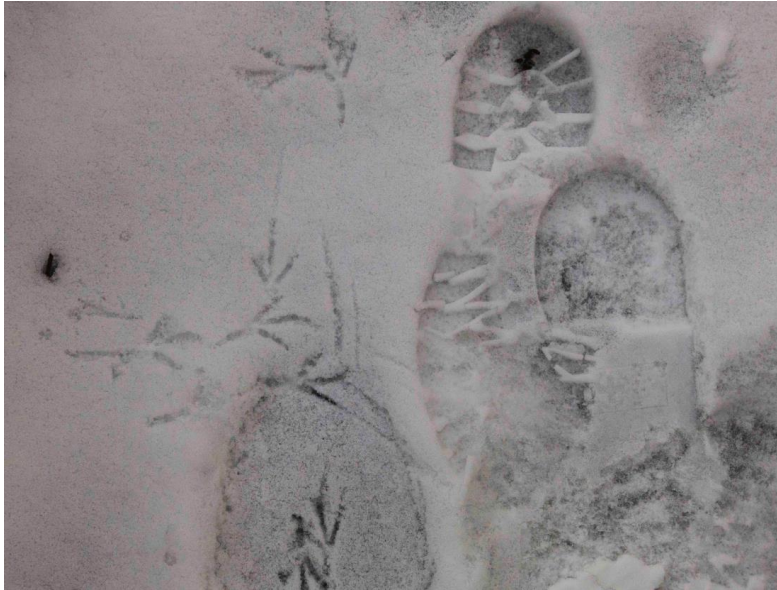
**In this essay and in the thesis, I employ this entangled thinking to approach site differently, not as a static, discrete entity, but as a doing; "Space, place and landscape are best approached as 'verbs' rather than as 'nouns'". (Merriman & Cresswell, 2011, p. 6) One way of getting hold of these co-enactments of site is by employing symplectics (Haraway, 2016) and diffraction (Barad, 2007: 2014). These are concepts that are attuned to the creative possibilities that emerges as we work with site rather than on or about site.**

**The essay is based on the empirical material gathered during field visits, it consists of both analogue and digital photography as well as field notes. The**

**aim is to re-turn (Barad, 2014) some of the diffractive moments that occurred, to provoke discussion on how to visit site but also how we present research in a way that leaves room for processes of becoming. This essay is a try at unpacking such concepts as sympoiesis and diffraction through thinking-with material.**

### **Keywords**

**Diffraction, posthuman performativity, site, sympoiesis.**



*Critters interpenetrate one another, loop around and through one another, eat each other, get indigestion, and partially digest partially assimilate one another, and thereby establish sympoietic arrangements that are otherwise known as cells, organisms and ecological assemblages. (Haraway, 2016, p. 68)*

#### **Introduction**

I have spent this winter and spring visiting, walking and wandering at a site. Both through documents and on foot. This particular site is an allotment garden area, surrounded by fences and ditches and divided in plots. My reason for being there was to experiment with how to visit and understand a site through an onto-epistemology of entanglement.

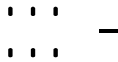
Barad's posthuman performativity (2007) presents an understanding of the world as not made up of pre-existing entities but rather phenomena, intra-acting relationalities through which actors are differently enacted, differentiated. Merriman and Cresswell states that "Space, place and landscape are best approached as verbs rather than as nouns" (2011, p. 6), but who do we include in that doing? As I visit a site and take up various field recordings, who do I walk with? Are my modes of investigation attuned to seeing ongoing difference-in-the-making? This visual essay aims to be an example of one way of visiting site that is attuned to site as an ongoing enactment of more-than-human and human forces.

### Sympoiesis

Sympoiesis refers to collectively producing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries, in contrast to *autopoiesis* - a self-producing, self-defining and predictable system. (Haraway, 2016, p.34-35.) It is a framework that is *un*/proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company. Sympoiesis enfolds auto-poiesis and generatively unfurls and extends it.+(ibid. p. 58)

Haraway picks up sympoiesis and presents it as a framework for developmental biology in the 21st century (ibid. p.66). Human exceptionalism and bounded individualism with the models individual+context, organism+environment etc. will only get you so far. Instead, sympoiesis is *un*/always partnered all the way down, with no starting and subsequently interacting *un*its+; a making-with.(ibid. p.30)

Even though it is deeply rooted in how critters make up each other in understandings of genome, evolution and bacteria (ibid. p. 58) I pick it up as a productive concept for working and thinking *with* site. What I pick up is sym(-)biosys - living together, in company and *-poiesis* meaning poetry, composition, making: which makes up *sympoiesis*-a making-with, worlding-with, composing-with. This composing-with, partial digestion and looping through opens up for seeing intimate and intricate entanglements of enacting site(s).



### Diffraction - re-turning

Non-anthropocentric theories such as posthumanism and new materialism starts of in a call for new ways of knowing that follows from global warming, biological mass extinction and rising sea levels. (Braidotti, 2013, cited in Ceder, 2015, p.58) This is a call for knowing that goes beyond human exceptionalism, to knowledge-making that takes our entanglement with the more-than-human world seriously. The question is not *if* we are entangled but rather *how* these entanglements play themselves out. One of those ways of knowledge-making, I believe, is through a diffractive methodology.

Diffraction presents a move from points to waves, from an atomistic understanding with preexisting, separated entities such as individuals, to waves. If we consider a wave it is already in becoming, never  $\phi @ \cdot \text{æ} \wedge q$  but rather ongoing difference that makes a difference. In a research setting this means reading material, concepts and theory through each other and being attentive to the creative entanglements that emerge through their relating. What differences emerge? What worlds become intelligible? A diffractive field study means paying attention to the inseparability of observer/observed, subject/object, researcher/material and first and foremost being attentive to how the world is intra-actively enacted at every turn. Another way of figuring diffraction is as re-turning, as in turning over soil, aerating it and breathing new air into it. Theories, concepts, fieldmaterial and I does not sit still, we re-turn and are returned by and through intra-action. This essay is a re-turning, a telling of stories and unpacking of concepts *with* material in order to unhinge reading.

( fig. 2-5: following a cat trail - photo documentation from the field 13/2 2018)



(fig. 6)

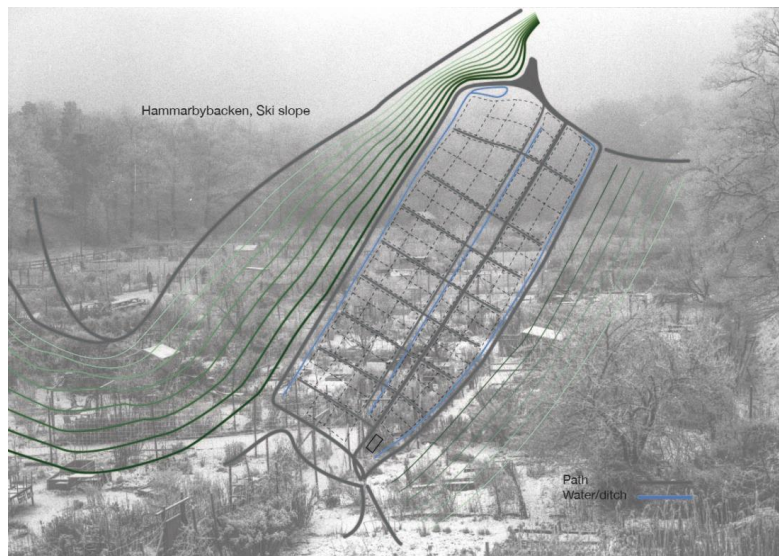
*It was winter and winter-spring: Researcher visited the site he had set out to investigate with. It was an allotment garden a short walk from his apartment. Before going out he had visited the history of allotment gardens together with Bergquists historical account; how the rise of the associations was both an egalitarian and disciplinary project, how modernist ideals of urban planning and the idea of a rationally planned society had influenced the planning and constructing of allotments.*

*Although reading all of this, he expected to visit a field, an open landscape wherein he could wander freely. To meet and greet the inhabitants and visitors present at this (freezing) time of year. What Researcher met was something quite different. He found himself walking in a grid-like manner, following straight paths going outside individual plots.*

Forward I through  
Left I right  
Your keys do not fit any of my locks  
Turn back  
to main road  
Go I through

*The desire to document, photograph and jot down field notes did not feel comfortable. The fences intimidated him, he became Intruder as he resisted the pace that the grid demanded him to follow. The camera and note-taking application burned in his pocket. Maybe he could become Researcher again if he only stayed and held on to the fence? Could he choose to become unwanted debris that floated with the stream of Commuters and got stuck in the grid?*

(story 1)



(fig. 7)

This was a re-turning and re-visiting of field notes through fabulation, with a focus on my movement and fences. It is a combining and manipulating of notes to get hold of and make certain things intelligible. By employing narrative, poetics and a third-person perspective, I enact a cut where such things as Researcher, Intruder, fences and the history of allotment gardens become meaningful. (story 1) This, however, is not a distancing act, the aim is not to look from above but rather to compose from within the material, to re-turn, aerating material by storytelling.

The two contradictory expectations of the Researcher articulates an important onto-epistemological discussion, that has to do with how the notions of diffraction and visiting shifts normative readings of site. As Researcher visits Bergquists (1996) account, allotments emerge as a site of control, rationality. (see story 1) A disciplinary project where much of the budget was spent on fencing in and out. At the same time Researcher expects to be able to wander freely. Why can this be? Perhaps it has to do with the methods of investigation. To read an account of what allotments are and how they function grants access to a position from above. The book becomes a map and the Researcher its reader. The book/map present parts where Researcher cannot go, a story of strong borders and fences. (see fig. 7, displaying a map of the allotment garden with its fences and borders) On the other hand, through the distancing act of looking from above, he has already gained access to wander freely in this world of allotment gardens. (fig. 6)

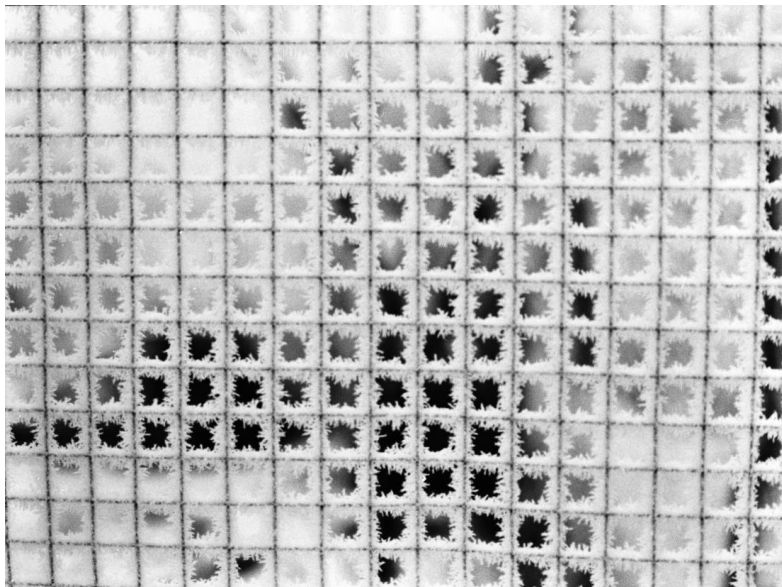
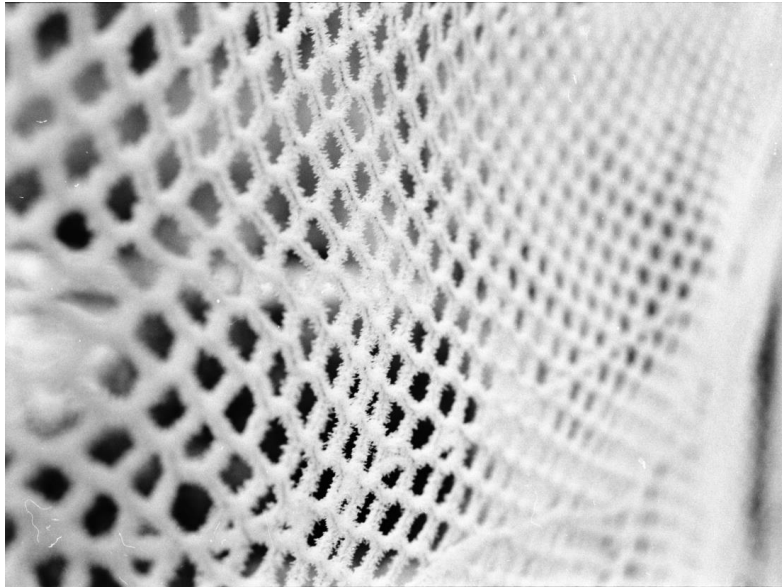
The instance of finding oneself intimidated, constricted, walking in a grid-like pattern, is finding oneself becoming differently. Finding oneself being interpellated (van der Tuin, 2018. p.100) by intra-acting forces in the worlds iterative materialization. This radical change in movement and expectation also come to show how there is no outside, detached position, following the book/map is just as much a situated and bodily practice as walking the site. Researcher emerges with and of the site, both the textual and the physical. To turn from entities to phenomena - points to waves - means moving from pre-existing difference to difference within. Intra-actions posits this understanding of relations: there are no actors or properties  $\neq \text{relations}$ .





(fig. 8)

*There is a certain kind of mist that only exist in very cold and damp winter.  
It is nothing like regular fog  
it is heavier, and stickier.  
The touch is warm yet cold, body heat and ice crystals I pouff  
too warm for ice crystals, just the right temperature for mist.*



*Far from all of us are too warm  
most of us form a special bond with the mist, making crystals together.  
The fences seems to be particularly good at it  
In black and white photos the grids stand out as furry, white nets.  
If the crystals keep on forming the nets will be walls  
a vertical blanket of snow*

(story 2)

(fig. 9-10)

It is hard to tell, when looking out at the landscape, if the mist have descended from above or come from the ground. It is neither falling nor ascending, it is floating in the air, yet also sticking to things it finds suitable to bond with. The bonding process is a process of making-crystals-with, a sympoiesis of twig and water. Mesh-wire fences seems to be particularly good for making crystals-with. (see fig. 9-10)

As the stretchy boundary between in and out are clad with frost, meaning shifts. In the grey/brown colour scheme of winter, the frost-fences stand out even more as it grows thicker and thicker. (see story 2 and fig. 8) In some places it hides what is  $\text{⌘} \cdot \text{⌘}^{\wedge} \text{⌘}$  But something else also happens, in the material-discursive practice of  $\text{⌘} \cdot \text{⌘} \text{⌘} \text{⌘} \cdot \text{⌘}$  the phenomena frost-fence enacts a territory. (fig. 9-10) Properties, relations and identity are differently enacted through and within intra-actions. A fence clad with frost becomes a habitat, a possibility to re-think and re-turn to Barads words %Boundaries do not sit  $\cdot \text{⌘} \text{⌘} \text{⌘}$  (Barad, 2003, p. 817) The territory is enacted in the / of in/out, troubling binary relations.

### Ending words

To do a diffractive field study means paying attention to the inseparability of observer/observed, subject/object, researcher/material and first and foremost, being attentive to how difference emerge. That is, how the world emerges, and is intra-actively enacted at every turn.

My movement and notes activates and brings the subject- and object-making dance of visiting to the fore. This movement refers to both bipedal motion outside and around the lots (such as fig. 2-5) as well as the textual visiting and moving, walking the articulations of stories and accounts. Walking and visiting is a knowledge-making practice, how one are able to walk, finding boundaries and possibilities for walking are an ongoing patterning. Fences and paths forms a grid and score for movement, (fig. 7) a material-discursive guidance of how to move properly. Sympoiesis shows how these guidances is never a finished story, it is made up as we go, or emerge together. As we go through, stay, wander, probe and look through. What I have done in this short essay has been to re-visit some moments of being at and with a site, to provoke questions and ideas for doing field work differently. But it is not only about learning about a site, or analysing material, it is also investigating my becoming as a Researcher/Intruder and concepts. (story. 1) Diffraction belongs to a flat ontology of knowing, where concepts, theories and material are treated as equally important. The research situation then becomes a negotiation, a composing (and perhaps composting?) where new ideas and concepts emerge from both theories and material findings.

Sym-together, in company-poiesis-making, composing, passes over tools for understanding the ongoing storytelling of sites as not always verbal, or as text written

on paper, but also as crystals forming on fences and twigs, (fig. 8-10) tracks made in snow, (fig. 1, 2-5) movement forming in-company-with.

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