

Journeys of social change

by
Ronit Jinich

Supervised by
Leesa Fawcett

"A Major Portfolio Project submitted to the Faculty of Environmental Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Environmental Studies, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada."

Monday December fourth, 2017

Abstract:

The portfolio you are about to immerse yourself in is based on the study and travel experiences realized between the Fall of 2015 and 2017 under the auspicious umbrella of the Masters of Environmental Studies, within the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University.

The work is an exploration of the theme of self as social transformation within the enclave of Tools and Technologies. It combines three separate yet relatable pieces: A photographic series, an essay and an epistolary which as a whole act as a visual and written reflection on the effects that the tools and technologies in which humankind find themselves inevitably embedded have on the 'real' world of bodies, as well as in the aspects of meaning-making for which we must be held accountable.

The intention behind the portfolio was threefold. On the one hand I wanted to deepen my own understanding of the house in which I live –a house built by different kinds of technologies with its secret entry doors, passage ways and escape routes. On the other, I was hoping that in the intricacies of its assemblage I would be able to find the inflections where intervening in the ongoing patterns of objectification of human, animal, plant and mineral worlds would be possible. At last, I was also wishing to find a bigger house and more nuanced language from which to communicate my experience of the last decade and a half with Buddhist thought and practice and the way it has transformed my way of being and thinking.

Acknowledgements:

This portfolio was conceived in Tkaronto / Gichi Kiiwenging /Toronto on the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the New Credit and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. I am grateful to have the opportunity to love, revel, delight and make community on this territory.

I want to thank Mr. Michael Burt and the series of unfortunate events that led into our chance encounter and the incredible conversation that landed me at FES.

To the communities that have seeded and nurtured my Dharma practice. Centre of Gravity, The Village Zendo in New York, True Peace Toronto and The Living Room Practice Community – *The practice of months and years accumulates and let's go of the practice of months and years* (Dogen 1995) .

To the FES community, Teachers and Administrative staff that keep this place going – *There is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual work of our students.* (Hooks 1994)

To Chris Cavanagh, for being one with his teaching.

To Ray Rogers, for allowing all my journeys and showing me that “we” are the lettuce.

To Leesa Fawcett, for tea, encouragement and trust.

To Liette Gilbert, Josephine Campanelly, Teresa Masucci and Joseph Cesario for letting me know there was someone on the other side of my emails, in record time!

To my Cuban brothers and sisters for their hospitality.

To the thinkers in who's path I walk for their good company.

To my family and friends for carefully constructing and holding the ground in which I play.

To my mother Ceci and father Abe, for their boundless love and

To Betty and Alex for reminding me that I would get there.

To Jessie Cowe, Rami Schandal and Leemor Valin for reminding me that friendship is a better way to be.

To Jorge – My love, for the seizures of happiness and holding my hand at night.

To my Bobe, origin and destiny. Hinde Fishbein Sarafavov a few weeks short of her great leap into the unknown – *Look what happens with a love like that. It lights the whole sky.* (Hāfiz 2005)

Foreword:

I arrived into the MES program with a very specific question. I wanted to know if Buddhism, but more specifically Dharma practice (for which you'll find my interpretation in the pages ahead) could actually help us wake up from the dream of anthropocentrism into the reality of interdependence. Looking back, I can now say that I was not looking to find the answer to this question (for I had already experienced this possibility within my own life) but to expand my understanding of it, and look for companion theories that would help me both situate my own experience within a broader context, as well as a nuanced language to articulate and share with others. While the path is long I am trailing along!

Having said this, there is a general sense of congruency and fulfillment when I look at my work from start to finish. The three major components of my POS where (1) Understanding Oppression & Pedagogies of Being – which allowed me the exploration of Indigenous, Black and Feminist knowledges as companion theories to trail along and less lonesomely. (2) Community as Practice – which led me to life changing experience on the fields of Cuba and Veracruz-Mexico, and endowed me with embodied exposure to otherwise present and future possibilities. And (3) Popular Education for Social change – which allowed me to beguine thinking about Dharma practice as a praxis and eventually as a technology.

In essence and while the nature of my exploration is still wide, it has been interesting for me to reflect back on my journey of discovery and find the nuanced major threads of my MRP landing even a little more distilled into each of my portfolio pieces under the enclave of

Tools and Technologies while at the same time having found an appropriate theory in which to anchor my thoughts and keep them going.

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Introduction:

The title of this portfolio is Journeys of Social Change and it is inspired by the idea of self as the location for social transformation hence its main exploration is first about my own coming to consciousness with regards to the state of the world, and more specifically about situating myself and my knowledge critically within it. Understanding the internalized oppressions that have come with being me, and the tools and technologies that on the one hand engender and –on the other, have helped me recognize and transform these very same inheritances. What propellers this work forward, is a need to ask whether the tools and technologies that have helped me individually, could help others as well; adding in turn a voice to the ongoing river of human transformation in the world.

The central thread running through my work is on the one hand, a broad understanding of tools and technologies viewed as a multifaceted entity. A system and a mindset, as well as an agent of power and control that includes tools and techniques, a body of knowledge and, a structure and structuring that can help both foster caring and reciprocal or neglectful and utilitarian attitudes towards the human, animal, plant and mineral worlds. And on the other, what I have ventured into calling Dharma Praxis; an action and reflection upon the world, in order to transform the world, informed by dharma tools such as interdependence, interbeing, not-knowing and no-self as a possible avenues to counteract the patterns of objectification of the world.

My hope is to be able to articulate against the backdrop of these threads the capacity we have as human beings to both contest the monoculture of mind and live otherwise, as well as to begin articulating what seems like a lifelong work of interpreting and sharing *the dharma* I have practiced for the last decade and a half as a technology of self that can support the emergence of cultures of resistance and simultaneously celebrates the myriad present and possible future worlds ahead.

This portfolio combines theoretical and empirical components consisting of three separate yet relatable pieces. A photographic Essay entitled "El Paquete", an essay entitled "Cuba: Imagining ourselves anew" and a series of Letters called "Hives" and "Humanbeans", for which you will find a more detailed description in the chapters ahead.

I hope you take the time to sit with, absorb and enjoy each piece.

Chapter 1: Methodology and Portfolio

The methodology employed in this portfolio is mainly informed by: 1) dharma praxis (Hanh 2005; Suzuki 2011; Batchelor 1998; Freire 2000; Hooks 1994), a multifaceted concept, which you will find explained, explored and deepened throughout the pieces of my portfolio; and 2) situated knowledges (Haraway 1991). Please find the underpinnings of my understanding of these disciplines, as well as the reason why I chose to use them, explained in the following pages.

Silent would be one good word to describe how the experience of walking towards the subway this morning en-route to work at the Toronto Reference Library felt like. Yet present would be a better and less confusing way to describe my state – in presence there is a quality of availability that tastes like silence but is not necessarily characterized by the absence of sound or thought. In the midst of this presence, availability to the stimuli coming from within and without -is- and I became aware of the thinking going on in my mind as a preamble to writing, aware of the sound of the wind rushing through the remaining Autumn leaves, aware of the faces and bodies of the people around me, aware of the taste and temperature of the cherry-red brewed pu-her tea I was drinking and, aware of that distinct cold sent carried by the air this time of the year.

At last and in the midst of this arena I was also aware of the different tones with which the discourses occurring within me were imprinted; some felt grounded and reassuring of the work I was about to begin writing, and others doubting and critiquing those very same strings of thought. And yet; I was not swayed by any of these. I did not give into the cheering

thoughts as a certainty, nor experienced the manifestation of doubt and critic as harmful. I was not deceived by my mind and its activity, by my mind being a mind. Instead, there was space, enough space within this embodied ground called Ronit to hold this ongoing dance. While what I just described could seem to be nothing out of the ordinary and available to everyone at any given time, this capacity to be present to what's available with nuance, as well not be automatically swayed by its appearance can be intentionally cultivated and -in my experience- is what characterizes the offshoot of dharma practice.

Broadly speaking, "dharma" refers to the teachings of the Buddha as well as to those aspects of reality and experience with which his teachings are concerned. "Dharma practice" refers to the way of life undertaken by someone who is inspired by such teachings.(Batchelor 1998, xi)

Upon encountering the word Buddhism, many would immediately think of one of the world's major religions, and they would be right to do so. However, in my own encounter with dharma practice, the way of life undertaken by someone who is inspired by the teachings of the Buddha, I have come to understand Buddhism as a set of tools and technologies of self (Foucault 1988, 1) that when put into 'practice' become a trans-formative praxis. Dharma practice is also the result of an ongoing historical process that, at some point, turned those very same tools and technologies of self, which sprang from the experiences of Siddhartha Gautama, also known as the Buddha, into propositions to be believed in as matter of fact, rather than practices to be experimented with.

At precisely this juncture, Buddhism becomes a religion. [...] In leveling out these [practices to be acted upon] into propositions that claim to be true, Buddhist are distinguished from Christians, Muslims, and Hindus, who believe different sets of propositions. (Batchelor 1998, 4–5)

It is the tools and technologies of what from now on I will call a dharma praxis that interests me the most. I chose the term dharma praxis over Buddhist praxis to deliberately distinguish the everyday tools and technologies I am concerned with, from the principles of the belief system called Buddhism. In this light, Paulo Freire's praxis understood as: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it, gets reoriented as the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it, informed by dharma as technology, technology as practice (Franklin 1989, I) and practice as ongoing praxis. It would be important to mention that this transformation of the world, informed by dharma as praxis starts with the transformation of the self and that the understanding of self through the lens of the dharma is best expressed through the following quote by Dogen Zenji (1200-1253) Japanese Buddhist monk, writer and founder of the Soto School of Zen.

To study the Buddha Way is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the body and mind of others drop away. No trace of realization remains and this no trace continues endlessly. (Dogen 1995)

At last I have come to the awareness that since the tools and technologies of dharma praxis have become the basis of my life, its methodology -to my own surprise- became too, the main methodology employed in the exercise of this portfolio, in fact of the entirety of my Masters. Having practiced for most of my adult life with the notions of nonself, interbeing, impermanence and not-knowing as ways of being, a level of practice/realization has occurred. This practice/realization manifests itself with the capacity to see how I see, therefore it has allowed me to discover how meaning is constructed and subsequently can be deconstructed. Please find a brief explanation of the basic practices of No-self, Interdependence, Impermanence and Not-Knowing, followed by a grounding of these same practices in the soil of situated knowledges. For as the Buddha well explained these notions were offered as instruments of practice, not as doctrines to worship, fight or die for.

My dear friends the dharma I offer you is only a raft to help you to cross over to the other shore. The raft is not to be held onto as an object of worship. It is an instrument for crossing over to the shore of well-being. If you are caught in the dharma it is no longer the dharma." (Nhat Hanh 1999, 136)

No-self is the practice of coming to see that, this self that I take to be separate from everything else is actually entirely made out of no-self elements. From elemental particles of water, carbon and hydrogen to the socially constructed ideas of who I might be; when looked at through this tool it becomes clear that there is no separate entity that could be claimed as a self but rather that this self is entirely dependant on everything else for its

existence. What does it mean when elemental water particles and I are not separate? How does this affect the way I understand my self and behave in the world?

Interdependence is the practice of seeing that 'this is because that is, and when that is not this is neither'. In other words, interdependence is the amplification of the notion of no-self to the social and natural realm and the practice-realization that there was no separation to beguine with. Interdependence is also the practice/realization of the impact our existence has on everything else. What does it mean when every single action I take matters? How does this affect the way I understand my self and behave in the world?

Impermanence is interdependence and therefore no-self, using time rather than space as the dimension in reference. In other words, impermanence is the awareness that nothing lasts forever for everything is perpetually transforming. From stars to bodies to political regimes, though we might not live to see them extinguish, perish or fall they will. It is also the practice/realization of our own finitude in this shape and form. What does it mean when I realize my time here will come to an end? How does this affect the way I understand myself and behave in the world?

Not-Knowing is the practice of entering into any experience as if for the first time. Because in fact, seen through this lens, it is. Not knowing is akin to Heraclitus "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man." Yet it includes

women and everything else. Not-Knowing is also the practice of awe and astonishment at being alive, as well as the practice of humbleness and reverence upon this realization. "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few" (Suzuki 2011). What does it mean when I realize that everything that is happening is happening for the first time? How does this affect the way I understand my self and behave in the world?

Engaging this knowledge as practice, births an otherwise place from which to understand the world. And yet, it has been only through my exposure to popular education, feminist, black and indigenous knowledges in combination with being supported to spend substantive parts of my program studying/traveling that I have began to understand dharma praxis and its outcomes as "situated knowledge" that enriches the already existing discourses and practices on the subject of self and social transformation and not, as I used to believe, a universal law that if only available and practiced by more people would stir the boat of human destinies in more benevolent biophilic directions¹. The perspectives available in the disciplines mentioned above, lent me language to beguine articulating what before I could only hint at. Namely that the gift of Dharma Praxis is the gift of seeing with your own eyes.

As Donna Haraway expresses well in the essay *The Science Question in Feminism* "We are not immediately present to ourselves. Self-knowledge requires a semiotic-material

¹ While my romantic self would like this to be true and in my heart of hearts I believe it to be so, I won't claim such idea in this portfolio but hint at the way my world view has benefited from this praxis.

technology linking meanings to bodies.” (Haraway 1991, 192) In the Dharma I had found the semiotic-material technology; the interdisciplinary nature of the MES program allowed me to link this technology to my own body. In Bell Hooks (1994) words:

When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice.

Indeed, what such experience makes more evident is the bond between the two – that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other.

Hence, implicit in each piece of my portfolio, is the use of dharma praxis as a methodology to engage the world critically and beguine its transformation through the resulting capacity to see the cracks in the fabric of self and society where sovereignty and self-determination could lodge themselves in and beguine to sprout. At last, since “Struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over how to see.” (Haraway 1991, 194) The attainment of Dharma eyes is not the attainment of merely another way of blindly looking or being. That would be to leave one cage to fall right into another (Nhat Hanh 1999) but a methodology of visualizing how each and every one of us does the visualization of self, other and world, from our very own unique locations.

It is in the intricacies of these visualization technologies in which we are embedded that we will find metaphors and means for understanding and intervening in the patterns of objectification in the world, that is the patterns of reality for which we must be accountable. In these metaphors, we find means for appreciating

simultaneously both the concrete. 'real' aspect and the aspect of semiosis and production in what we call scientific knowledge. (Haraway 1991, 195)

My portfolio is comprised of three pieces: 1) The photographic series entitled "*El Paquete*"; 2) The essay "*Cuba: Imagining Ourselves Anew*"; and 3) a letter exchange practice, entitled "*Hives*" and "*Humanbeans*". In each of the pieces, you will find the implicit use of the Dharma tools of no-self, interdependence, impermanence and not-knowing as a praxis that could be explained under the umbrella of technologies of self (Foucault 1988) used as a methodology to counteract the monoculture (Shiva 1993) of internal compliance and external control embedded in the real world of technology (Franklin 1989) we live in. Please find a more nuanced introduction to each piece in the pages ahead.

"El Paquete" – Photographic Series

On the 10th year anniversary to the introduction of the Smartphone, El Paquete, roughly translated into English from Spanish as "The Package" reflects on a constellation of questions regarding the introduction of public internet access sites in Cuba, which only took place on the month of February 2015, exactly a year before my travel studies to the Island Nation.

The title El Paquete echoes the name of the only existing off-line media access, and the primary way in which Cubans receive news and entertainment outside the Cuban Television, through the once a week illegal purchase of a hard drive loaded with the latest in mainstream television, music, movies, apps and magazines.

Borrowing from Ursula Franklin's (1989) ideas from her Massey Lectures on "The Real World of Technology"; *El Paquete* explores on the one hand, the impossibility of introducing technology, in this case western technology, without also introducing its logic, imparting cultural values and in time suffocating other forms of social knowledge. And on the other, how the ownership of certain technologies, soon after they have been standardized, becomes not a joy nor a luxury but a demanding necessity that changes both intra and interpersonal relationships as well as nature-human ones.

El Paquete reflects on my personal conversations with young and old locals on the subject of Cuba's future; and my realization through these conversations of Cuba's limited understanding with regards to what it means to live on "The Real World of Technology" or even beguine imagine the socio-cultural mortgage it entails. Having been left outside of the "Development Train"(Sachs 2009) through the USA imposed commercial, economic, and financial 'Trade Embargo', known as 'The Blockade' to the Cubans (Rosset et al. 2011), and the subsequent fall of the Soviet Block back in 1989. While the older generation believe that the government can control the rate at which development and technology can be introduced; youth already undergoing a quiet acculturation, have become increasingly excited about commodities and the neoliberal dream without considering the personal, communal and environmental cost this dream entails.

At last, El Paquete represents my own nostalgia for a world devoid of internet and encroaching technology, where present centered awareness and physical togetherness was at once the natural state of being as well as the most valuable resource. El Paquete heralds the arrival of public internet as well as the technologies and infrastructures it depends upon in order to operate, such as the smartphone, as a kind of Pandora's box filled with invisible prescriptions for a culture of external control and internal compliance, while also making visible the slowly extinguishing otherwise possibilities the Island Nation -only 90miles away from the costs of Florida- harbors still. In this photographic essay, you will find two different series with three frames each intervened by a piece of western technology that wouldn't have been there in the first place thus changing the meaning of the original shot (see Appendix A).

"Cuba Imagining Ourselves Anew" – Essay

Cuba Imagining Ourselves Anew was created through my exposure to the Food, Land and Culture MES course and my study-travel to the island nation during the month of February 2016.

In this piece, you will see me trying to wrap my head around the ideas of neoclassic economics, as well as the tools, technologies, and consequences of a system that fails completely to see its obligate dependency (Schrecker 1994) to the processes of nature, using the lens of Dharma praxis notions of interdependence, impermanence and no-self as visualization technologies.

While traversing the Island from its north-west point to its south east one, stopping at numerous agroecology and permaculture sites and working alongside young and old *hermanos y hermanas* Cubanos, I became aware of the possibilities that lay beyond capitalism its tools and technologies, and the values they implicitly impart. I began to see Cuba's example not only as one roadmap out of Capitalism and into hospitality (O'Donovan and Esteva 2015a) but more importantly as the bastion of otherwise possibilities that exist outside of it.

In living capitalism as merely one among many mindsets and sampling life –a good life– beyond it, I became aware that the problem with the dominant paradigm is not the paradigm per-se (though there is much to contend with) but the fact that, it has position itself as the destiny of every other one through the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere (Haraway 1991, 189) and succeeding in spreading its gospel. Through this realization, I was able to see that for futures to be possible I did not need to think my way through the dismantling of this mindset but to support and learn as much as I could from other paradigms that produce otherwise possibilities (see Appendix B).

"Hives and Humanbeans" – Letters

The *Hives* and *Humanbeans* letters (see Appendix C) were conceived to bring the exploration of tools and technologies to the level of the self. Their intention was twofold: on the one hand the letter would allow me to contend with the themes I had been dealing with throughout the MES program in my own life, supported by ongoing dialogue with friends,

rather than alone. While on the other, the methodology of the epistolary itself considered a technology of the self by Michelle Foucault (1997, 207–21) would allow me to gain practical understanding of its uses as a means through which:

Individuals effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault 1988, pt. 1)

In the promise of this technology I saw a way to regain autonomy and self-determination, which I consider essential pre-conditions by which societal change through self-transformation can come to fruition, and obviously I wanted to put it to test. Little did I know that the technology actually works! For through the writing of these letters, I was able to locate some inflections or cracks in consent (Marino et al. 1998) on the fabric of my internalized paradigm were opportunity for watering the seeds of other ways of being and thinking is found.

At last, in the letters it is possible to trace the evolution of my thinking from considering that dharma practice was the one solution to the multilevel crisis facing us, to my coming to consciousness (Lugones 1987) of this lifelong praxis as one of the technologies of self-available to us to explore. Given that the experiences described in this letters were not easy for me to digest, the technology of the letter allowed me to bring playfulness (Lugones 1987)

and comradery to the otherwise lonesome endeavor of thinking and writing, strengthening my belief in friendship as a better way to think (O'Donovan and Esteva 2015b, pt. II) and community as a better way to be. (Please refer to Appendix D to read a response to the Humanbeans letter).

Chapter 2: Threads of Thought

During the first term of the MES program I had a dream. I dreamt a dream with two very distinct, almost polar feeling, tones and imagery. In the first part of the dream I witnessed what looked like a wild, chaotic, purple, violet, plum, with magenta veins creation of a world. I saw earth churning, filled with mineral stars radiating a shimmering light into the depth of a dark and moist soil, from which throbbing flowers of all sizes grew, and jade, teal, emerald plants bloomed and withered only to bloom again. I felt the iridescent skin of frogs extend through time and space till it reached the old pond and disappeared, PLOP! Deer antlers grew upside down spreading roots like trees that I followed spiraling into the black of night where I found myself cradling by the fire, in the depths of a cave, the white remains of an ancient member of our species. In the background of my repetitive movements I heard a voice—a female voice, exhaling a sound so fine, it felt like it held the threads of the web of the universe in perfect tension. Was it a human or spider song? I do not know for certain, yet gratitude filled my heart and left my body in beginning-less rivers of tears. My cries were silent, but they seemed to flow in all directions whispering –Thank you, thank you, and thank

you again and again like a prayer. Images of human endeavors of care danced before my eyes. From labor to birth, to cradle, to field, to grave, I saw human hands doing together, nurturing with nature, and as nature. So, naturally I feel in love with us.

In the second part of the dream a dry sandy cold cut through the air with sealed silence. Sharp angles, metal blades, plows, diggers, bulldozers and excavators filled the land as far as the eye could reach – a soundless land where a mechanized, patterned pattern grassed on all that once grew. Pentagons began to close in from the corners of my eyes; my sight began to blur as my body stiffened. I tried to wake myself repeatedly to escape the mechanized aggression encroaching. I tried calling for help but my voice was first frozen by fear, then suffocated by lack of air. All became swollen, fast and slow at once. I felt the last touch of human hands whither. All was pain and loss yet without it, for not even mourning could find its voice without warm bodies, who would vibrate them?

The following is what I wrote when I woke up:

Machines do not remember
mothers.
They don't know
tears,
so tireless.

Machines do not remember
soil and the warmth of the sun.
They don't sigh when the stars are out
nor hear the foam of the ocean
at the very moment, it pops.

Machines don't have
veins nor warm bodies

artificial is their heat.
Poor machines they are so
cold.

Machines don't know
togetherness or kin
Poor machines they are so
alone.

And then, a side note that read "machines are the creation of frightened humans who cannot allow themselves to feel vulnerable. Nothing is left human in the wake of machines, off machines."

Little did I know that at the end of my Master's program I would find myself looking back at this dream to realize it held within it, the metaphors of the themes I was to explore in the last section of the program, reshaping and giving depth to the themes I came to explore in the first place. Having little to no interest on tools and technologies precisely because I understood them as lacking body temperature, I did not feel drawn to, nor noticed my unconscious desire to get as far as possible from them until I found Ivan Illich's writing (1973):

For a hundred years we have tried to make machines work for men and to school men for life in their service. Now it turns out machines do not "work" and people cannot be schooled for a life at the service of machines. The hypothesis on which the experiment was build must now be discarded. The hypothesis was that machines can replace slaves. The evidence shows that, used for this purpose, machine enslave men.
(Illich 1973, 10)

The appearance of the words *slave* and *enslavement*, beside the words *school* and *schooling* reminded me of Paulo Freire's (2000, 72) comparison of the student's alienation to that of the slave in Hegelian dialectic. This, alongside (perhaps this once accurate- omission of the word *women* since women have been schooled for slavery for far longer than the last hundred years), and the use of the universal *we*, connected my interest in oppression, self and social transformation with the arena of tools and technologies. It made evident that I needed to look at these themes not only from an individual's own disposition to dominate, or even that of a particular culture to do so, but from the far more eluding frontier of technology as practice. (Franklin 1989; Foucault 1988). That is, with an eye, not to the material byproducts these tools and technologies generate at daybreak, but to the lingering effects that their practice as a daily activity have, much like Dharma practice has on the minds, consciousness and bodies of its practitioners.

In *The Real World of Technology*, Ursula Franklin (1989, pt. I) distinguishes between holistic technologies and prescriptive ones. Holistic technologies characterized by their ability to leave the doer in total control of the process, capable of making unexpected decisions all along the way, thus producing one of a kind results. Prescriptive technologies require the making to be broken down in clearly identifiable steps, carried out repetitively by an individual or group of individuals that need only be familiar with that particular step, thus producing identical results each time. However, a doing-force that enters into an atmosphere characterized by high levels of planning, command, discipline and a very

specific division of labor becomes inadvertently acculturated to it. In literary terminology, this kind of manipulation of our attention is aptly named “misdirection” and it is a way of showing us how we learn –for better or worse- by looking in the wrong place.

The term describes a technique of prestidigitation, or sleight of hand: a skillful pickpocket might distract a victim by knocking against her shoulder, directing her attention there and away from the pants pocket. A magician draws attention to his sleeves –*Look! Nothing up my sleeves!*- so the audience doesn’t look at the real hiding place of his next prop. (Shukman 2013, 73)

While the focus is placed on the production of say woman’s garments, car parts or frozen foods indistinctly, the daily practice entailed in their reproduction - not by what is produced but by how it is produced- yields both a material product for which the doers are remunerated; *“Look! Nothing up my sleeve!”* while also changing their disposition through their slow regularization into the experience of external control and internal compliance. All along, without our even noticing, another more pressing series of events and, according to Franklin, the most important step towards understanding the world of technology in which we live, have been unfolding right under our eyes. That is the understanding of prescriptive technologies not only as modes of production but as social innovations designed for discipline, order and obedience.

While what I just described narrates the transformation of people into a mechanized production line, Franklin (1989, pt. IV) also reviews the pattern of introduction of technology, from the perspective of the experience of the people who will become the users of these technologies suggesting that the stages follow a rather repetitive pattern of events that yields, regardless of the technology implied, a rather predictable pattern of experiential results. While at first, the interaction between people and a new technology is filled with wonder and curiosity, creativity and innovation, hope for the ways in which this technology will serve the given population and a social coming together to tweak, pull, twist, pluck and tease this technology into shape and function, once the implementation and standardization come to an end, a new phase with greater control and loss of liberty for the users sets in. Take for example the smartphone, introduced only a decade ago, and marketed as a tool to liberate our time and mobility from the constraints of working from one location, as well as grant us access to information 24/7 while also providing unlimited access to entertainment. Now it turns out that work follows us everywhere and have become reachable and the target of endless media schemes 24/7. Rather than liberate our time to be, our attention has been captured by all the rings, dings, tweets, likes and dislikes to which we respond to in a Pavlov manner, dividing our attention and presence in to little more than a perplexed, multitasking, hologram trained for a life that is everywhere but in the here and now. There have been instances when I have been the only person on my bus ride to York University without her head buried on the screen until the destination has been reached. Almost unnoticeably, the

roles of people and their technology are reverted. No longer are the people being served by the technology and its infrastructure but it is the technology and its infrastructure that demands being served by the people. Once again, while looking at the magician's sleeves – enthralled by the colors and movement of the screen, otherwise modes of doing were and are being eroded, forgotten, deemed primitive or actually suffocated by the energy and attention required to sustain the introduction of the new.

To recapitulate, so far we have seen how prescriptive technologies as social innovations prime us for compliance and how while certain technologies promise liberation from toil they inevitably end up generating a dependency that yields loss of autonomy, self-determination and sovereignty. However, If this was not enough Ivan Illich adds yet another layer of information that is especially intriguing to me; namely that, there is a clear and identifiable threshold at which this reversal occurs and a technocracy sets in. However, because the vested interest in the development of an industrial infrastructure demands the escalation of energy, it has blinded the social imagination of both rich and medium rich countries to the fact that social breakdown is due "neither to a shortage of fuel nor to the wasteful, polluting, and irrational use of available wattage, but to the attempts of industries to gorge society with energy quanta that inevitably degrade, deprive and frustrate most people."(2013, 77) Finally drawing the connection between the emergence of a technocracy to the amount of energy required to power the very same tools and technologies that were designed to liberate people from life's drudgeries in the first place.

Even if nonpolluting power were feasible and abundant, the use of energy on a massive scale acts on society like a drug that is physically harmless but psychically enslaving. A community can choose between Methadone and 'cold turkey' – between maintaining its addiction to alien energy and kicking it in painful cramps – but no society can have a population that is hooked on progressively larger numbers of energy slaves and whose members are also autonomously active (Illich and Brown 2013, 75)

For “What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that the narrowest perimeters of change are possible and allowable”. (Lorde 2007, 110) And so, since Audre Lorde’s publication of the essay entitled *The Masters Tools will Never Dismantle the Masters House* back in 1979; Ivan Illich’s publication of *Tools for Conviviality* back in 1973 and Ursula Franklin’s 1989 Massey lectures on *The Real World of Technology*, elusive yet ravenous forms of oppression and slavery have been produced and reproduced, as trying to replace slaves, (without holding accountable the very mindset that keeps needing them in the first place), can only yield the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and [the technologies of] their oppression. (Lorde, 112) It’s a revolving door that has proven reliable for far too long, and an illusion of transformation that needs to be di-spelled. Just because we are moving does not mean we are changing. Movement does not imply transformation and if we are indeed transforming, we need to ask in which direction.

If tools are not controlled politically, they will be managed in a belated technocratic response to disaster. Freedom and dignity will continue to dissolve into an unprecedented enslavement of man and his tools. (Illich 1973, 12)

Ursula Franklin's Ideas on prescriptive technologies and the stages of technological implementation together with Ivan Illich's description of the threshold at which a technocracy sets in, shook my understanding of social transformation because of the invisibilized acculturation that goes on at an ontological level when individuals, communities and countries push for greater industrialization without a deeper understanding of what they are bargaining for. At the same time, the sheer reach of the technological scale and the infrastructure and energy needed for its upkeep, brought home the co-arising scale of the social control it must breed in order to stay in place. So, while at the beginning of my exploration of social transformation I was conceiving my ideas within a human scale. A scale, that is, person to person, family to family and community to community; the inclusion of tools and technologies, not only as the sum of the artifacts, infrastructures and fuels it entails but as a system, a mindset and an agent of power and control needed to be included if any possible sense was to be made of my exploration. With the help of thinkers such as the ones mentioned above but also, Val Plumwood and Michele Foucault I was able to beguine re-thinking my way through social transformation thinkers like Paulo Freire, Audre Lorde, Bell Hook, Diane Marino, Thich Nhat Hanh and Stephen Batchelor, to name a few. I began to see the multifaceted entity technology is and understood, that beyond the techniques, the

structure and structuring and the body of knowledge it has produced. Technology –In Ursula Franklin’s words- has built, re-built and shaped the house where we all live in (Franklin 1989, pt. I). I think of this house not only as the constructed notions of world, culture, society and community we each have grown in, but also as the constructed understanding of ourselves as embodied beings. Without the understanding of how this house that I inhabit came to be, how could I even begin to think my way towards dismantling it?

In this light Dharma praxis would resemble in many but not all forms Paulo Freire’s problem posing education or Bell Hooks theory as liberatory practice (1994, 59). Therefore could be further explored as yet another tool and even a technology to counter-spell the culture of internal compliance and external control produced by the packaged values embedded in the practices of the real world of technology.

According to Foucault there are:

four major types of these "technologies," each a matrix of practical reason: (1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform I themselves in

order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

(Foucault 1988, pt. 1)

Personally, the attainment of, purity, wisdom, perfection and especially of immortality in Foucault's technologies of the self, is uninteresting. What I am drawn to is his description of technologies of self—that which permits individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves. I see in this self-transformation technology, a way to regain autonomy and self-determination, and these two qualities as the essential ones by which social change comes to be.

The crisis can be solved only if we learn to invert the present deep structure of tools. [...] People need new tools to work with rather than tools that work for them. They need technology to make the most of the energy and imagination each has, rather than more well-programmed energy slaves. [...] This reversal would permit the evolution of a life style and of a political system which give priority to the protection, the maximum use, and the enjoyment of the one resource that is almost equally distributed among people: personal energy under personal control. (Illich 1973, 12)

Michelle Foucault's definition of technologies of the self together with Ivan Illich's thinking on "*Tools for Conviviality*" allowed me to acquire a new understanding and category by which to call the dharma activity I have been invested in for the last decade and a half, and

cast it not only as a praxis but also as a technology of self by which individuals become aware of meaning as constructed, personal energy under personal control as their greatest resource and can begin to use this awareness, in and of itself a crack in consent (Marino et al. 1998), to mobilize others and counteract the effects of the real world of technology.

So in the different pieces of my portfolio in the pages ahead you will see me implicitly grappling with the themes of technological dependency and dharma practice from various angles but mostly, now I realize, with the intention to find the cracks in the fabric of our culture where autonomy and self-determination could lodge themselves and begin to sprout at the level of communities, individuals and nations. My first portfolio piece is the photographic series entitled "*El Paquete*"; my second piece is the essay called "*Cuba: Imagining Ourselves Anew*" and my third piece is the letter exchange practice, entitled "*Hives*" and "*Humanbeans*".

The photographic series entitled "*El Paquete*" (see Appendix A) is a visual reflection designed to initiate a conversation about the effects of the introduction of western, capitalist tools and technologies to places yet untouched by them. I am concerned with the possibility of safeguarding those yet untouched by these technologies and values; communities and regions as the treasures of otherwise possibilities they are, and asking whether we could use what we already know to spare or at the very least alert them of what we have witnessed.

(This should not be confused with an attempt to keep them out, but for contending with western ideas of inclusion/exclusion critically).

In the essay "*Cuba: Imagining ourselves anew*" (see Appendix B), I discuss what Cubans were capable of accomplishing when due to political circumstances they were forced out of the technology train, and set out to reimagine themselves anew relying on community, low wattage consumption, and sociopolitical reform that gave people tools that "guarantee their right to work with high, independent efficiency, thus simultaneously eliminating the need for either slaves or masters and enhancing each person's range of freedom." (Illich 1973, 11)

Through my exposure to a Cuba rarely seen by tourism, and the establishment of ongoing friendships with young and old Cubans heading the *Campesino-a-Campesino*, Peasant-to-Peasant permaculture and agroecology movement and influenced by Ivan Illich's thinking in this last portion of my program, I came to realize that perhaps another way to support the resurgence and life of diverse mindsets and otherwise possibilities at the level of communities and nations, lies not only in the reigning down of a system that has gotten too big, nor in the quest for renewable, nonpolluting energy; but rather in the regulation of this same energy intake at a per-capita level. Given that according to Ivan (2013, 74) and what I witnessed in post-development Cuba, a low energy policy allows for a wide choice of lifestyles, cultural diversity and more transparent political processes (Franklin 1989, pt. III), while opting for high energy consumption, demands that social relations be dictated by a

technocracy whether labeled capitalist or socialist, as experienced by the island Nation during its Soviet Bloc era.

The Letters entitled *Hives and Humanbeans* (see Appendix C), are my own individual reflections and conversations about how the tools and technologies that forged the world we live in –for better or worse, have affected my life and the lives of those around me. I am interested in “the hidden cracks in our consent to oppression and the forging of the often difficult but necessary transition from consent to resistance” (Marino et al. 1998, 3), made visible by dharma praxis and the possible futures where this technology may playfully (Lugones 1987, 14) lead us.

For example, in the *Hives* letter, you will find me describing what I consider would be an average day at the ER Centre of one of the major hospitals in our city, and you will also find me paralyzed, unable to be of any help to a man in utter distress as an example of the consequences of interposing technical arrangements between people and therefore eliminating reciprocity by design. (Franklin 1989, pt. II) While in the *Humanbeans* letter you will see me contend through a fortunate typo with the semiotic material technology of language itself, to highlight the importance of linking meanings to bodies as the only way to make knowledge claims that bare more complex and reliable renderings of reality. (Haraway 1991, 192)

At last and to go back to the beginning of this chapter, to fall on either side of the feeling tones of my dream; either the complete technicalization of a world, or a world without technology, would be to fall prey to the dualistic thinking, pertinent to the very mind-set that breaths these alternatives to life (Plumwood 2002) and continue the simplification of reality. When what we need is better renderings of our human experience on the planet that can help us determine the direction in which certain tools and technologies lead us and whether this path is worth our while.

To close, there is an instruction in certain dharma schools that has sprung endless debates and commentaries on its meaning: Practice is enlightenment! What we practice on a daily basis is what we become, is the way I have come to understand this simple yet profound instruction, therefore it is only natural to sit down to catch our breath for a while.

Zen Teacher Baoche of Mt. Mayu was fanning himself. A monk approached and said, "Teacher, the nature of wind is constant and there is no place it does not reach. Why, then, do you fan yourself? Although you understand that the nature of wind is constant, Baoche replied, you do not understand the meaning of its reaching everywhere. What is the meaning of its reaching everywhere?" Asked the monk again. The teacher just kept fanning himself. The monk bowed deeply. (Dogen 2013, 27)

While the nature of social transformation is constant I think we all could do a better job at refining our understanding of its reaching everywhere. For it is our practice of fanning that

determines its reaching, and our fans its quality. There are fans to be held accountable, fans to be let go of and fans that need more fan-ers to help -by their fanning activity- reveal the world in the treasury of otherwise possibilities it actually is.

More Questions

How might we go about doing this? How can we make this awakening to the way we are both the victims and instruments of the tools and technologies in which we find ourselves inevitably embedded, more readily available to larger portions of our society? How can we move towards policies that limit energy intake and support the emergence of diverse lifestyles and cultures? How can we reformulate what it means to be austere? How can we revalorize the gift of personal energy under personal control? How can we foster critical engagement as humankind default position in the world? How can we stop ourselves from running away from the very labor that is life? How can we cast it as delight rather than toil? How can we take responsibility for the effort, work and care that sustaining life in its myriad forms requires? How can we foster a culture where this effort, work and care are understood as humankind activity and legacy? How can we support peoples in making things among which they can live, to give shape to them according to their own tastes and to put them to use in caring for and about others?

~*~

“The more you sense the rareness and value of your own life, the more you realize that how you use it, how you manifest it, is all your responsibility. We face such a big task, so naturally we sit down for a while.”(Otogawa 2016, 45)

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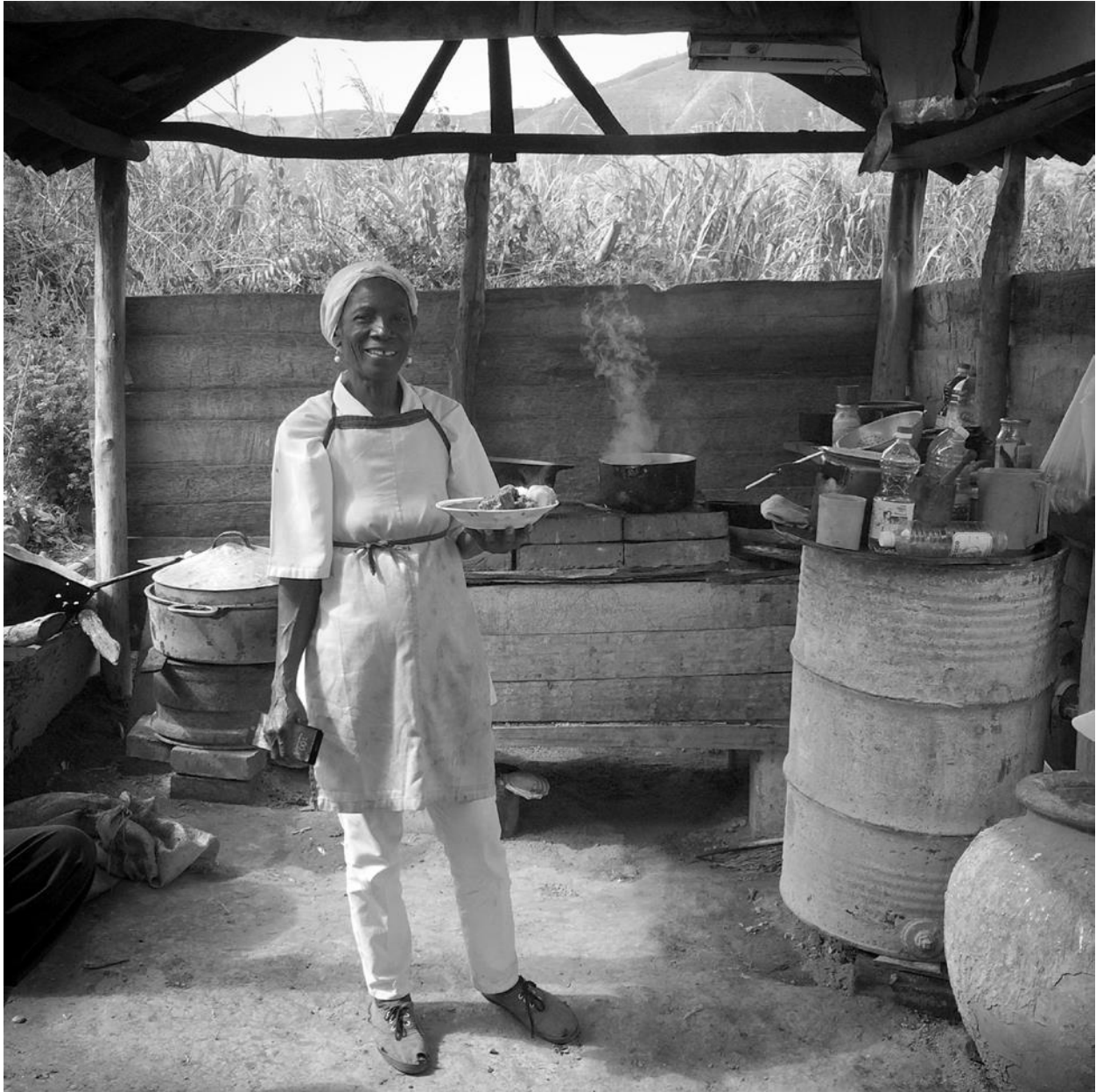
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Appendix A: El Paquete – Photographic Series

Series I



La Cocinera



Muchacho y Perros



Pescadero

Series II



Mama e Hija



Carniceros



Abuela y Niteta

Appendix B: Cuba – Imagining Ourselves Anew

The first paragraph on the first walk of the *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1980) in the midst of intense isolation during the last period of his life begins with the following line “So here am I. Alone on earth, no longer having any brother, neighbour, friend, or society other than myself” and ends by posing the following question “But I, detached from them and from everything, what am I? That is what remains for me to seek.” (Rousseau 1980, 27) I choose to use Rousseau’s claim and questions to begin this essay on exploring the possibilities of imagining otherwise through Cuba’s example, because the sentiment of this sentence helps me convey on the one hand, how I imagine the Cuban Nation must have felt on the eve of the fall of the socialist bloc back in 1989. But more urgently, to use his query, “What am I, detached from them?” as a springboard to contemplate what Cuba’s response to this question has been when like Rousseau, exiled by church and state for his radical thinking, Cuba found itself harshly disciplined for its successful rebellion and left largely to its own devices.

After the triumph of the legendary 1959 Cuban Revolution against the U.S. backed authoritarian government of President Fulgencio Batista, the United States proceeded to punish the rebellious act of the small neighbouring island -only 90 miles away from the coasts of Florida by imposing a commercial, economic, and financial ‘Trade Embargo’, known as ‘The Blockade’ to the Cubans (Rosset et al. 2011, 166). By 1962, all diplomatic relations

were severed and Cuba was expelled from the Organization of American States². Being Mexican, as well as Canadian, I have always felt a little relieved to know that both the countries, to which my identity is closely tied, abstained from this vote and kept a cautious yet ongoing relationship with Cuba. And yet, in spite of these friendly gestures, the severe political and economic isolation led the Cuban Nation to forge a strong relationship with one of its only allies, the Soviet Union. Though functional for many years, this alliance turned out to generate great dependency and loss of self-determination in the long run (Rosset et al. 2011, 165; Pérez 2008, 88). Agriculture and food production is one of the areas in which this is best exemplified and the subject of my exploration in this essay.

In the period between 1959 and 1989, supported by Soviet technology, and in spite of the great efforts of the Revolution to instil agrarian reforms that empowered the -up till then-marginalized peasantry, and move away from monocrop and food exports, Cuban agriculture had remained and even gone further towards the food dependency model prevalent in the region, thus becoming a world-class case of modernization and a poster child for the Green Revolution (Rosset et al. 2011; Machin et al. 2010). According to The Journal of Peasant Studies, at the end of the eighties, "Cuba had the most tractors per person and per unit area, and had the second highest average grain yields in all of Latin America"(Rosset et al. 2011, 165)

² The **OAS** or **OEA**, is an inter-continental organization founded on 30 April 1948, for the purposes of regional solidarity and cooperation among its member states.

On the surface, this may sound great, until you factor in what the Cuban Nation realized soon after the soviet block collapsed; namely, the dangers of foreign dependency and the difference between food security and food sovereignty.

Imagine that 48% of the fertilizers and 82% of the pesticides used as the building blocks of the food system of your country -whose entire landmass on top of being surrounded by water, is slightly smaller than the state of Pennsylvania- were to be imported (Rosset et al. 2011, 165–66). Then ask yourself, how would you feel knowing that everyday items meant to house, clothe, transport and feed you and your family depended on those imports; furthermore, that mostly all of them, came from one sole vendor 6,500 nautical miles away? And last, that because of a long and entrenched history of colonialism, you have lost traditional ways of working the land that for generations helped to provide nourishment for yourself and your loved ones.

Alone on earth, no longer having any brother, neighbour, friend, or society other than myself becomes not only fitting but describes in a more humane, yet also political way, how it must have felt for the Cuban people to wake up from the dream of food security into the reality of food sovereignty or in this case –the lack of it. Then the question ‘What am I detached from them?’ became and I believe still remains Cuba’s ongoing pursuit and gift.

Throughout the month of February 2016, I was fortunate enough to traverse the narrow island of Cuba. Starting at Varadero and moving south all the way to Baracoa, studying the resurgence of traditional ways of working the land, agroecology, permaculture, as well as,

the birth of the Campesino-a-Campesino, Peasant-to-Peasant Movement in the island nation. A reflection also coming from *The Reveries of The Solitary Walker* has been reverberating in my mind ever since: "Adversity is undoubtedly a great teacher, but it charges dearly for its lessons"(Rousseau 1980, 27). Such, I believe was the case for Cuba when having lost '85% of its trade relationships and no longer able to import sufficient food, or the machinery, inputs and petroleum to grow it under the conventional production model' (Rosset et al. 2011, 166), it had to rely solely on its own wealth and become once again -or perhaps since its colonization back in 1948- an island onto itself.

To realize this, in 1990 the Cuban State declared the 'Special Period in Peacetime' a war-style economic policy based on austerity measures to survive the crisis. "Though the average Cuban lost 20 pounds during this transition" (Rosset et al. 2011, 167), rather than succumbing to despair or brutality, Cubans harnessed their intellectual and scientific wealth, as well as the power of a socialist state, and together with policy makers and land reforms, they set out to re-imagine their food system from one day to the next – and so they did!

According to the same journal I mention above, in a decade, not only had the intensity of the food crisis been eased, and inputs and equipment previously imported to produce food drastically reduced, but also, Cuba rebounded to show the best performance in per-capita food production in all of Latin America and the Caribbean: from a -5.1% food growth for the period of 1986-1995 to a remarkable rate of 4.2% annual growth from 1996-2005 (FAO 2006).

How they did this, becomes a question of uttermost importance in our lives today, and one that has been following me ever since I came back from this study trip. Why? For starters, I have come to comprehend that a person, a family, a community or a nation that has lost its ability to feed, clothe and house itself has lost its ability to self determine and thus falls pray to the will of others. In the current incarnation of our food system and, quoting Vandana Shiva (Specter 2014, 1), these others would be:

Multinational corporations such as Monsanto, with considerable assistance from the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the United States government, and even philanthropies like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation who for nearly three decades: by engineering, patenting and transforming seeds into costly packets of intellectual property, are attempting to impose 'food totalitarianism' on the world.

And to follow, because though many of us in so called developed economies, or among the elites in developing ones, go about our lives blissfully unaware of it, we are already facing what Cuba had to face back then. Namely, the unsustainable nature, and thus inevitable collapse of our current food system.

One may well ask, so where does the abundance I see every day at the supermarket come from? This indeed is a great question and one that we should all be asking ourselves every time we consume –from the grains in our bread to the materials on our smartphones. I will attempt to answer this question by sharing a few ideas I learned from an article called "Growth, Trade and Environmental Values." (Schrecker and Dalglish 1994)

On the one hand, the article talks about how Humankind -despite all its efforts- remains in a state of 'obligate dependency' on the products and processes of the natural world. To be precise these include: material resources, assimilation of wastes, life-supporting functions such as maintaining atmospheric composition, stabilizing climate, and regulating ozone layer, as well as, space used for outdoor recreation, aesthetic enjoyment and spiritual fulfilment (Schrecker and Dalgleish 1994, 34). On the other hand, the article talks about neoclassical economics which, much to my surprise describe the economy as a self-regulating and self-sustaining, independent and isolated system whose productivity and growth are unconstrained by the environment. In other words, the circular flow of exchange value commonly known as 'the money circle' and the conceptual starting point of economic analysis, fail completely to represent economy's connectivity to the ecosphere (Schrecker and Dalgleish 1994). As unbelievable as this may sound; In effect –quoting Schrecker and Dalgleish - economists and society in general –have come to confuse money, a mere symbol of wealth, with concrete wealth itself. (Schrecker and Dalgleish 1994, 31)

Under this paradigm, depletion of resources is not seen as a problem to economic growth because up until very recently, with the help of colonialism, imperialism and now neoliberalism, when the resources of a given place were depleted, the ruling class would find ways to extend production via technological innovation –at one time called slavery- that usually had devastating effects on the health of a particular eco and ethnosystem. When that wasn't enough, economic regimes such as trade in its myriad forms –noble and violent-

became a solution. At last, when trading was not in the best interest of one of the parties at stake, theft, invasion and war waged by the strongest one became the norm. In short, the reason why, at least in the countries -whose produce I know best- we can find an assortment of off season produce available at your nearest grocery store year-round, as well as how the prices of, say for example, the gas used for our transportation are kept low, all go back to what the article calls "Appropriation of Carrying Capacity."

Ecologists describe Carrying Capacity, "as the capacity of a certain habitat to support the population of a given species without permanently damaging the ecosystem upon which it is dependant" (Schrecker and Dalglish 1994, 38). Carrying capacity theory asks, whether the ecosphere has the capacity to continue supplying the material and energy demands of the economy unimpeded. Of course, the answer in our case is -No-. This reality obscured by corporations who invest millions of dollars towards keeping the path from primary resources to end products, but more pertinent to our conversation here from seed to plate invisible, make it really difficult for the general public to understand that what may seem like abundance is actually resource depletion and taking what is not rightfully ours, while stealing from human and non-human others to the point of famine, starvation and extinction.

Ecological analysis shows that the average first World resident requires the productive output of 4 to 6 hectares of land to maintain his consumer lifestyle. However, there are only 1.7 hectares of productive land per capita on earth. This means that industrialized countries 'appropriate' a disproportionate share of global

carrying capacity, much of it through commercial trade, effectively pre-empting developing economies from using their fair share. (Schrecker and Dalglish 1994, 30)

While this idea of fair share is one that I would like to contend in a future essay, what this article is pointing out is that under the current economic paradigm –for which the food system I participate in- is a fractal reflection, one quarter of humanity in the developed world has already appropriated the entire long-term carrying capacity of the ecosphere.

In essence, the difference today is, in contrast to Cristobal Colon 1492 arrival to Turtle Island/The Americas, that the earth itself is physically unable to sustain the rate of development and is succumbing to the pressure. Having run out of places to invade, what we are now witnessing and many times blindly participating in is, on the one hand, a highly sophisticated and systematized form of cannibalism. And, on the other, as we would say in Spanish “Las patadas de ahogado” which roughly translated into English as “The last gasps” of the fossil fuel era and its actors, which against all odds want to prolong its lifetime, oblivious to the well-known fact that doing so translates into game over for the planet as we know it.

A story from the Buddha’s teaching on ‘edible foods’ the first out of the Four Kinds of Nutriments Teaching found in the Samyukta Agama and translated into English by Thich Nhat Han, Vietnamese Zen Buddhist Monk, Poet and Nobel Peace Prize nominee, followed by some ideas on the latest incarnations of the fossil fuel industry, will help me better portray this very difficult to digest reality.

A young couple and their three-year-old son had to cross the desert to move to another country. Halfway through the desert they ran out of food, and knew they would die if they failed to find it. Out of desperation they decided to kill their little boy and eat his flesh. They ate small pieces of his flesh and preserved the rest by carrying it on their shoulders letting it dry in the sun. Every time they ate a piece of their son's flesh they cried in despair, "where is our little son now?" They beat their chests and pulled their hair [...] Finally they were able to cross the desert and enter the other land, but they continued to suffer, mourning their little boy. After he told this story, the Buddha asked -Dear friends, do you think the young man and woman enjoyed eating their son's flesh? -. -No, Lord, it would not be possible for them to enjoy eating their son's flesh-. Then the Buddha said, Yet many people eat the flesh of their children, and their grandchildren and do not know it. (Nhat Hanh 1999, 47)

It has taken me more than a decade to understand that consuming products coming from Mexico does not necessary aid the emergence of my home-land economy but rather –in this food system scenario- it acts as a vote to keep exhausting its soil and prime-arable lands into dust-bowls³, while forcing the mass migration of entire communities who for centuries took care of these lands into the most miserable conditions in urban centres (Patel 2012). Likewise, while the frenetic climate of the neoliberal free trade frenzy we both participate in and suffer from today, is quite the opposite to the U.S trade embargo to Cuba; we could

³ An area of land where vegetation has been lost and soil reduced to dust and eroded, especially as a consequence of chemical-intensive industrial monoculture practices such as the ones large corporations employ.

argue that its practice, produces a different kind of embargo. One in which the vast majority of peoples around the world are banned from practicing their ancestral ways of living and are forced to carry in the precarious shoulders of displacement, disposition, isolation and constructed scarcity the wealth and affluence of the privileged few in our society. As blunt as this may sound, if you are a consumer of the dominant economy, you are eating your own family, you are eating your future descendants!

In our lifetime, The Global North, which is more a mind-set than only a geographic location, has singlehandedly eaten our future generations entire capacity to feed themselves -under the current model-. Tough scary, this might just be the kind of acute adversity necessary to push beyond the current monoculture of land and mind, into fostering a pluriculture that can foster co-existing collaborative paradigms at once. Having said this, while it is true that the constellation of events surrounding Cuba's revolution, subsequent ties with the Soviet Union and economic collapse after its dissolution are -indeed- unique, a closer analysis reveals that the geopolitical backdrop that pushed Cuba in this direction; from antiauthoritarian revolt, to addiction to inaccessible primary resources such as petrochemicals, reflects the backdrop upon which the dominant system -held in place by patterns and habits of consumption in developed and emerging economies- feeds upon today, making Cuba's example all the more relevant.

At last, having just explored the starting point of neoclassical economic analysis and its lethal failure to represent its obligate dependency on the products and processes of the earth, and

how appropriation of carrying capacity has kept this vessel going for much longer than it should have, the fact that we find ourselves –like Cuba did then- in a systemic food crisis is hardly debatable. In this scenario, rather than waste time focusing on what many sceptics point as Cuba’s exceptionalism; disregarding the transferable lessons by implying they “do not relate to other countries who have not had social revolutions, or who do not face food crises as severe as that faced by them during the Special Period, which we do anyway” (Rosset et al. 2011, 186), I believe it would serve us best to give serious consideration to the similarities between our queries and pay close attention to the evolving responses that Cuba has found since forced to explore other possibilities. Yet before we move onto that, it is important to illuminate, even if briefly, the current intricacies between food, oil and climate as they will give us a clearer picture of where we, participants of the economies on rich and medium rich countries with high energy demands stand today, and help us better understand Cuba’s teachings.

The common assumption these days is that we muster our weapons to secure oil, not food. There is a little joke in this. Ever since we ran out of arable land, food is oil.

(Manning 2004)

“The Oil We Eat”, an article tracing the food chain back to the roots of our current addiction to fossil fuels explains that by the 1960’s the world hit the supply limits of unfarmed, arable lands. At this intersection, the Green Revolution with its petro-agriculture became the way forward thus tightly interlocking the future of food production with that of oil. Yet there is a

second joke in this scheme since somewhere between 1970 and 2007 (theorist differ in their predictions) we also reached the supply limits of "conventional oil" that is oil that can be extracted from the ground using traditional drilling methods. Since then as the article explains, every single calorie we eat is backed by at least a calorie of oil, more like ten.

At the same time there is more oil in our food, there is less oil in our oil. A couple of generations ago we spent a lot less energy drilling, pumping, and distributing than we do now. In the 1940s we got about 100 barrels of oil back for every barrel of oil we spent getting it. Today, each barrel invested in the process returns only ten.

(Manning 2004, 51)

The devastating impacts of conventional oil extraction at both the eco and ethnosphere cannot be understated nor denied and should have been reason enough to take Cuba's example seriously back in the 1990's; undo the food as oil combo and move towards finding energy solutions elsewhere. While there is some movement in that direction, infrastructure funded by the fossil fuel industrial complex and the boys-club of petro-capitalism have us now facing what could be looked at as a second advent to the Green Revolution where "tight petroleum deposits" extracted from sandstone or shale, technically unavailable 40 years ago are now being targeted.

Tight oil is difficult, resource intensive, and dangerous to extract. U.S. oil production has recently reached levels not seen since the 1970s and this increase is largely due

to the rise of oil fracking: in 2015 tight oil accounted for more than half of U.S. oil production. (Mazer et al. 2017, 10)

This now technically viable yet previously untapped deposits have become the centre of great upheaval between people, government and industry since, as clearly flagged by the International Energy Agency (IEA) back in 2011, the centrality of energy infrastructure is tightly bound to the fate of the climate:

Investing in new fossil fuel infrastructure (buildings, plants, pipelines, etc.) risks locking us into a future of expanded fossil fuel production beyond what the planet can bear. The IEA's analysis indicated that 80 percent of the total carbon dioxide (emissions permissible through 2035) under the 450 Scenario— the IEA's widely used but conservative scenario in which the rise in average global temperature is limited to 2°C—was already "locked-in" by infrastructure currently in place or under construction in 2011. (Mazer et al. 2017, 19)

Having said this, it's not coincidental that over the last decade we have witnessed both governments and world organizations struggle to limit carbon emissions while at the same time callously support petro capitalist projects such as the tar sands in Alberta, as well as the, many headed pipeline projects sprigging all over the North American territory. This lethal contradiction has been meet with incredible organized resistance springing from the heart of indigenous nations and rural movements around the globe with growing support and solidarity spreading both geographically and across social struggles.

This state of affairs turns Cuba's example into a master class of how a future of fuel restraint –weather fossil, wind or solar- could be undertaken with the intention not only to prioritize the survival of the planet and all the life in it over the market economy; but also to ensure that social relations, are dictated by people and political processes and not by a technocracy. For "Even if non-polluting power were feasible and abundant, the use of energy on a massive scale acts on society like a drug that is physically harmless but psychically enslaving." (Illich and Brown 2013, 75)

The energy policies adopted during the current decade will determine the range and character of the social relations a society will be able to enjoy by the year 2000. A low energy policy allows for a wide choice of life-styles and cultures. If on the other hand, a society opts for high energy consumption, its social relations must be dictated by a technocracy and will be equally degrading whether labelled capitalist or socialist. (Illich and Brown 2013, 74)

Hence, we need nothing short of a revolution to pull us out of the situation we find ourselves in and though the task seems daunting, Cuba stands as a real example showing us that: (1) More and better technology won't save the day. (2) A paradigm shift towards self-restraint and energy use de-escalation is possible and, is the only way to ensure diverse lifestyles and socio-political processes dictated by people. (3) This revolution will emerge from the ground up, yet it needs government and industry to follow suit. (4) Social methodologies like popular education and putting the land in the hands of peasants through genuine agrarian reform

are the means to not only widespread the ideas behind this paradigm shift but also the means to scale it up. (5) Traditional ways of working the land together with Agroecology, permaculture can be as productive as conventional agriculture, plus they are sustainable and more resistant to climate change than Green Revolution and current practices. If this was not enough, the resurgence of these practices, has also proven to out root patriarchal colonialism from the ground up. (Rosset et al. 2011, 84–88)

In conventional monoculture, the crop belongs to the man. He drives the tractor, plants, applies chemicals, harvests and sells the crop. All the money goes to him'. But as the farm is diversified through Agroecology and Peasant-to-Peasant methodology, 'the roles and income earning opportunities for the different members of the nuclear and extended family are also diversified'(Rosset et al. 2011, 183)

Which is probably the major reason why these alternatives are not easily embraced, let alone showcased by the system as viable avenues into an otherwise future, as no ruling class plans for its own demise (Franklin 1989, pt. II).

I would like to add that joining forces with indigenous peoples and the peasantry, by acknowledging their multigenerational relationship and rights to land, the wisdom that comes with it, and working towards policies that honour this reality, it's a first step towards restoring the carrying capacity (Schrecker and Dalgleish 1994) not only of the ecosphere but also the caring capacity (Rees 1994) of the ethnosphere as well. In this regard, the Cuban state keeps leading by example - In 2009 they initiated a new phase of agrarian reform, in

which former sugar cane lands were being given in usufruct to 'returning peasants' and 'present peasants' who need additional land. By mid-2010 this policy alone had helped support the resurgence of 75,000 peasants who received training and support from the Campesino-a-Campesino Agroecological Movement in the island (Machin et al. 2010, 175)

To begin the conclusion of this essay, if the Cubans have demonstrated that this kind of transformation is possible in less than a decade there is no reason other than consciousness and will, why countries such as Canada or Mexico couldn't do the same. A good starting point for consumers everywhere would be to demand the throw down of the curtain that stands between consumers and goods, thus making the movements of the current food system -including its energy demands- transparent in all corners of the world. This together with prices that accurately reflect the cultivation, distribution and preparation of our food, will begin to awaken peoples' awareness toward the impacts of each individual purchase and the power of our choices. Reacquainting ourselves with the actual natural resources and carrying capacity available in our own countries would serve this transition too – perhaps then we can start harnessing our intellectual and scientific knowledge away from a global architecture of wealth extraction and into one of wealth restoration while, awakening people in rich and medium-rich countries from their energy induced coma and preventing courtiers untouched by this system to buy into it (Illich and Brown 2013, 75). At last, acknowledging the erroneous premises on top of which neoclassic economics were founded and then reformulating them based on a planet of finite resources might help us begin to remember

how to live according to our means, and stir the boat of economic growth in a more ecological direction highlighting the preservation of all life on the planet as well as peoples well-being as our greatest wealth. (Victor 2008)

At last, because I take kindness and our potential to create and regenerate, as rigorously as I take despair and our potential to destroy and denigrate; 57 years after the U.S harsh trade policies against the tiny island, and 28 years after the formal dissolution of The Soviet Union, I have come to understand Cuba as a bastion of practical, robust and muscular hope. It's example, though far from being prefect, is a real account of what we are capable of doing when at our best! And should not be invisibilized by a gaze that measures everything through the lens of economic and market value.

I saw dumpsters turn into edible gardens and roofs that feed entire families, I saw land that had been previously deadened by agrochemicals come back to life and heard reports of species that had disappeared from certain areas returning. I saw families using old ways of working the land and innovating outside the agribusiness model, I saw success being shared among neighbors and what progress means when people are not pinned against each other in competition nor enslaved to their energy intake. I saw the impact that government and policies organized for -and not against- people can have in the social and emotional health of an entire country, more importantly I saw pride, joy and a vigorous sense of hope in the faces of those returning to the land, providing for their families and feeding their country.

I would like to finish this essay by asking you -my reader- not to let its contents bring you down or feed cynicism. Hope is a far more courageous choice and action. Cynicism, which is what we are constantly fed by the media, is really easy – ‘it is never surprised or disappointed, and doesn’t lift a finger to change anything’(Pico Iyer, 2015). If Cubans had succumbed to cynicism they wouldn’t have been able to perform what is nothing short of a miracle. Namely, to re-imagine otherness at the heart of autocracy, and stand as an alternative not only to the monoculture of the land but also, perhaps without being aware of it, the monoculture of the mind.

Appendix C: "Hives" and "Humanbeans" Letters

Hives

Dear Jess

It is 3:41 AM ON Tuesday May 30th, I can't sleep.

As you know I had an intense allergic reaction to eating nettles that has sent me on a whirlwind of what seems like an aimless exploration. Over the last 2 years of our Masters in Environmental Studies Program I have been spending so much time in my head; thinking, analyzing, trying to understand the highly complex problems our society finds itself in when suddenly, covered in hives all the way from my neck to my toes including genitalia, there is no place else to be but in my body. I have to be honest and, while this is partially true –it doesn't feel good to be here.

I have started noticing that each time my body starts itching and I want to scratch, my escape route is thinking, confirming thus the Buddha's suggestion that we escape the here and now of our lives via this route. Because of the subject matters I have been immersing myself in over the last 3 months... Today I was with Hannah Arendt and Robin Wall Kimmerer, yesterday it was David Abram and Paulo Freire, the day before that was Val Plumwood and Ursula Franklin. Around 2:30 AM no matter how late I went to bed, I am woken up by intense itching all over my body and after tossing and turning away in my bed, the endless stream

of thinking begins. Totalitarianism is organised loneliness, and the banality of evil is not being able to listen to one another, globalization is all about accumulation of wealth, expansion for the sake of expansion and not about equality, consietización requires a risk of love on behalf of the oppressor, not all dualisms are hierarchical.

Just a few minutes ago I was on my bed begging for clarity, begging for help, for direction... I said please, please give me something to share with the world, please help me find direction in this endless crossroads in which I, and we -the members of our species- in connection with the rest of the world find ourselves. I have been walking about in saddens and in loneliness in the last couple of months, the realities and the narratives that through the MES program we have gotten in touch with, give me perspective on some of the most perplexing issues of our time, and at the same time make me feel further and further away from the culture that I find myself living in. I look around and see everyone going about their day, worried about their daily lives and their families, and the groceries and making ends meet and I think... They don't know!

They don't know what's going on, they don't know that the prognosis is dark, they don't know that we are being controlled right now. That our minds in this culture have been programed since the day of our birth by designed technologies (Foucault 1988) that change the way we are in the world. Jorge's parents are now wearing a bracelet that counts their

steps, monitors their sleeping habits and overall activity throughout day and night. Betty said that she does not like to wear it at night -as she is not used to sleeping with anything on her wrists; however, she is pushing herself to get used to it as otherwise the prediction of the bracelet which is connected to her phone, which in turn is connected to her computer won't be accurate. Now, she does not even need to consider if she is tired or not; if she hasn't accomplished her goal of 9,000 steps a day, the bracelet will tell her so and she can then put herself in to motion inspired by a machine that is attached to her body telling her to do so. Of course, she can refuse, she can ignore, she can disconnect. But the question that comes to mind for me is who is in charge here? I look at her and think, she does not know that beyond what sounds like, and is sold as a beautiful gadget to help yourself self-monitor, and asses your "progress"(Sachs 2009) and I use that word deliberately, lies a gadget that trains our minds to be compliant with a program, a system an order that for now tells you how many steps you are missing to reach your goal, but that is only were the story begins.

To be honest I do not know how to finish this Masters degree, the task seems daunting especially do to the loneliness I feel in facing these realities, in dealing with them at the mental sphere only, as if I too was a machine processing information, as if I didn't have feelings, as if my body was not affected by the subject matters, ignoring the fear ridden

places that some of the realities we explore through our studies take us. They don't know what I am seeing.

Not once throughout the MES program have I been invited to sit with my grief for the world with others, Robin Wall Kimmerer (2015) says that our grief for the world is also our love of it... seems like everything dear, everything that brings us joy and nourishment and healing and re-creation is being threatened or destroyed by our sole presence, and not once have we been invited to grieve together, to cry together. Like the machines we have been modeled from, we leave our classrooms and go our separate ways trying to digest all the information transmitted. The master slave dynamic, the oppressor and oppressed realities, institutionalized violence, the disappearance of languages all around the globe that took millennia in the making (Abram 1997), and with them entire worlds, cultures and also the ecosystems that birthed, nurtured and sustained them since before they were born (Davis 2009; Macfarlane 2015). The cruelty our species is capable of for the sake of domination, for the sake of power, for the sake of money and the way we are inevitably implicated. And the way all seems to be assimilated into this one gigantic mouth of bottomless capitalism swallowing everything whole. We are eating each other up – I walk down the hallways of my mind and the street of our city looking around thinking 'they don't know'.

Joanna Friday, one of my meditations teachers and a 73 year old woman living now with stage 4 cancer for the past 8-years shared in the last retreat I attended this past April that

one of her students, who had been medicated at an early age do to her restlessness and what we now call any of the ADD, ADHD, OCD acronym variants, went off her medication recently and Joanne kept receiving calls from her at different times of the day with the most incredible insights coming from the mind of someone who was never allowed to experience her emotional life fully – sedated as she was for most of her life. She said that one evening this young woman called and said to her over the phone –Joanne I suddenly realized that death pertains to me personally- and finished the call by saying, I have walked around all day looking at people and thinking, they don't know!. This too is exactly how I feel...

Today I ended up at the ER, after 4 days of prednisone 50mg which is a potent steroid to help my immune system calm down after my stinging nettle delicatessen meal, my hives and eyes where pretty swollen still. I tried to go to my family doctor but he wouldn't even pick up the phone. So, I had to go through the fortress of nurses trying to divert the large numbers of patient calls that he receives every day and take the most urgent ones of which I was not one. He cannot do anything for you anymore – Said Natasha- please go to ER to be reassess –Doctor says that he would have expected better results after the use of prednisone. So, I went to the Branson Urgent Care Centre Facility, kind of knowing that I was in the wrong place. The place was clean and efficient and five minutes after my arrival, I was already registered and waiting to be called by the nurse when I started hearing intense moaning and groaning approaching from the distance and getting louder and closer. The

doors open and in enters a bald middle eastern looking man barely able to walk, let alone stand on his feet, he was wearing a pair of gray pants, lose white t-shirt and flip flops, he looked swollen, red and sweaty as if he had been sun burnt. My first thought was –he is totally drunk but that was not the case-. I felt the impulse to help but I thought better leave it to the professionals here (Illich, Zola, and McKnight 2000), also I have to say I felt a little scared. A couple of minutes go by and no one is there to receive him, to help him out and none of us sitting in the waiting area know how or what to do. He looks around with lost eyes, goes into the men’s washroom and out come sounds that I had a hard time recognizing as human ones, I can hear him barfing and vomiting and asking for help in between and I’m paralyzed on my seat. I start getting angry that there is no one taking care of him, when finally, a nurse comes out and starts talking to him pretty roughly and stoically, not a sound of compassion let alone concern coming out of her mouth, her tone was more akin to the military. I’m called to go into the ER where I’m brought into a little room with a bed covered in blue sheets, two chairs a toilet and a curtain and asked to take off my clothes and wear a gown while I wait for someone to see me.

Through the door, I can still hear the callings of this man, asking for help, they have now set him up in the hall way, he is lying down on a bed just like the one on my room, clearly he needs this room more than I do and yet he is out there, he stands up walks in to the washroom again and keep vomiting. Then he comes in the direction of my room and our eyes cross, I do not now that he can actually see me submerged under what looks like thick

layers of pain and suffering, and I feel so impotent, I want to do something but I don't know what. A nurse asks him where is he going and he responds -I can't lie down now, I can't lie down- and then -I'm going to get my jacket it's so darn cold in here-. It's actually not cold at all, he is boiling in fever. He comes back again, lies down on the bed and starts asking good to please save his life, he repeats the word Elohim over and over again which is one of the names of god in Hebrew and then he says -Doctors, please help me, please... please help me- But no one comes. A few moments go by and I hear a voice asking for his date of birth, and I catch only the end of his answer 1980, he is a year younger than me and he looks like he could be 20 years older.

Bereshit bara Elohim et hashamayim ve'et ha'aretz. Veha'artetz hayetah tohu va-vohu, vechoshech al-peney tehom, veruhach Elohim merachefet al-peney hamayim, is the first verse of the old testament and the first verse I learn by heart, I was probably 5 years old and the stories of the bible told to us on Friday before lighting the Shabbat candles at school, where my favourite. Then he said water! Please I need water! I sprung out of my chair thinking here is something I can do for him. I look around, in the little waiting room, there was an oxygen machine, there were many plugs and thermometers, defibrillator, plastic gloves, a sink and an empty water cup dispenser. I started opening all the drawers on the salmon colored built in cabinet, only to find tapes and band aids, and what looks like straws, and more blue and white plastic gloves and mouth masks and ointments and gels but no fucking nothing to be able to bring this man a glass of water. Frustrated I look out the room,

there seems to be no one in the hallways but the now facedown lying man and I, wearing but my blue gown. I seat down again and decide to be fully present in the midst of not being able to do anything for this suffering person. And I breath with him from a far and listen wholeheartedly to the abhorrent and hidden away sounds that our species is capable of making when in pain. Why have we bureaucratized our pain (Illich 1783), why do we seal it away in institutions, asylums, hospitals. Why do we talk about it in privacy with so called specialist? Do you know that there now exist yet another specialist called, the bereavement therapist (O'Donovan and Esteva 2015) who's job is to guide you through the stages of grief, point out the duration of each stage as well as what is normal and what is not? Do you know that the origin of the word normal comes from the Latin normal which means a carpenters square. Pease fit your grief right here → • ← and be sure you don't spill anything out of the designated area.

After describing this scene to you I think of Ursula Franking and her Massey talks about The Real World of Technology (1989) in which she explains, in her bad ass metallurgist gone grandmother German accent that the introduction of certain technologies of which one example would be the television has had profound effects on our ability to respond, as the TV does not allow space for reciprocity, it is a one way conversation in which no one is interested in your reaction. She says she would find it strange in a situation of face to face violence or in the midst of an accident if someone did not respond or called for help, but

that the TV has actually trained us to watch violence knowing that our response is not needed, invited nor even necessary, we now watch violence as entertainment, while eating popcorn. We have been trained not to feel too much but more so we have been trained to believe there is not much we can do for each other... better leave it to the professionals, to the experts, to the doctors. Now I think of Ivan Illich and how he thinks this century will be remembered among many other things and if we manage to survive it as the age of disabling professions as well as the two watersheds of all technological breakthroughs (Illich 1973) in which great advances mesmerize us during the first stage justifying the superiority of certain practices over others only to find out during the second stage that the chosen path only generated more ill-being than there was in the first place. Not so long ago caring for the sick and the elder and the children was the work of families, and communities and mostly women, and while there are many aspects to revise about his last point, the project of bureaucratizing the most essential of human activities (humanitarianism) has failed and now I don't know how to care for my ageing parents and I don't know how to birth my unborn children and I can't react to the calling of a suffering man on the ER. I peer out once again to see if someone is taking care of him but there is no one there.

Jorge's mom who is nothing but helpful and kind waited for me outside the ER and took me to eat a sup. She talked for about 45 minutes about the saga going on in her building around the decoration in the hallways. How the management is not responsive to the tenants, how

decision-making processes are very slow, how she and Alex (Jorge's dad) took initiative and decided to buy something nice for the hallway and just leave it there, how some other resident complained and how some objects that belonged in the party room were found on the 5th floor... then she finished off by saying -I know living in community is like this, one has to make compromises- and I thought, is this really living in community? I tried to make myself present for her story which by the way at some points was actually very funny; however, the undercurrent of my thoughts kept being -she doesn't know that we are living in the midst of a refugee crisis, and nuclear threat and that many species that have lived and evolved in this world since the dawn of time are disappearing from the face of the earth for ever.

Now my lower lip has started bleeding, it does this every once in a while. I was told the prednisone dries you up and you need to be drinking lots of water... when my lips get too dry they bleed. I thought of writing to you, as a cry for help. I thought of writing to you as a call for friendship, I thought of writing to you because even the most helpful teachers on the MES program seem to not notice the lack of space for grief within it.

I can hear the warblers in their nightly courtship calls outside my window. Apparently, the male warbler makes a distinctive sound to call the attention of the female warbler -it sounds like a short muffled honk from an old bus. Once he gets her attention, he springs up flying

for -I don't know how many feet in the night sky- and then plummets down at an incredible speed making these beautiful spirals to impress the female. If he is successful at doing this, he has a chance to court her, mate and then leave an offspring which in nature is the next best thing to eternity. They too don't know what is going on, they too don't know how threatened they are.

I don't have original ideas Jess, I do not even fully understand the ideas I am trying to convey in my final project but I see what is going on and I need a friend, who can see what I am seeing and tell me they see it too... then I wouldn't have to keep going around pretending a saneness that actually makes me feel insane.

It is 5:31 now... and the itchiness has subsided enough for me to try to catch some rest.

I would love if you could answer back to me in writing.

Humanbeans

VLADIMIR: Say something!

ESTRAGON: I'm trying.

Waiting for Godot – Samuel Becket

My dear Rami,

I received your response to my invitation to letter, I read it carefully and... I would like to start right at the end. Did you notice the fortunate typo found in the last sentence of your

correspondence? In the section where you are referring to the caveats you suggest for working together and the awareness of disappointing me due to your imperfect availability to engage in this project, you beautifully write: 'I suppose that is always true in relationship — imperfectly available, or inconsistently available. As it should be, human beans who are not perfect.' (I added the coma)

While there is much to say about imperfect availability, and I hope to get to it throughout our correspondence, the thought of a human bean made me smile and so... my thoughts followed the joy. Human-beans must be humans whose diets are heavily reliant on beans. Much like you and I, or any vegetarian out there. Where exactly does the bean end and I begin? Is it right at the moment I take a bite and mush it between my teeth activating the digestive juices, or when it rolls down my esophagus and reaches my stomach? Could it be the moment its nutrients enter my blood stream or when unused parts are discarded at the tale end of the digestive tract? Hard to say, right?

"Eating confirms my selfness with what I consume" writes Derek Rasmussen (2009) quoting historian C. L. Martin in the essay I sent your way, I am glad you enjoyed it. This confirming of selfness via that which is consumed by the body in order to be kept alive —as contradictory as it may sound, could be the equivalent of the Buddhist notion of no-self. No-self, is not the negation of the self as an existing entity —like many have come to believe— but only the view that suggests that, this self that in most dominant cultures is taken to be

independent, self-sufficient, therefore separate and above the rest of creation, is actually made entirely out of non-self-elements. In other words, all those others that are invisible.

A personal tale illustrates this in a funny way. When little, my cousin Liat and I used to find much joy in the sound of a fart. Bear with me as I grapple to connect this back to our subject matter. When one of us did incur in the aforementioned act, the other one would cease any activity, stand up, and ceremoniously sing the following Haiku – *'El pedo, alma liberada de un frijol'*, which translates into English as, 'The liberated soul of a bean, a fart' - then continue with whatever she was doing as if nothing had happened. A real yet fleeting moment of solemnity would emerge until one of us would crack up in laughter. This could go on forever depending on how well cooked the beans were, how much we had eaten or, how tired we were.

In your typo, I found not only a sense of accuracy with regards to the human condition, but also a successful use of language in its capacity to reveal the world through relationship, much like the innocent ritual practiced by the five or six-year old girls my cousin and I once were. For even if quickly dissipated by laughter, in the repetition of this Haiku spell, I see our attempt to understand that we were made out of, and kept alive by many living and non-living others. Children's attention should be cherished for its direct encounter with experience, and their use of language as a clear lens reflecting the world not yet too encumbered by schools of thought or heavy traces of dominant paradigms. Taking a

moment to consider the lives that keep us alive, has the potential to transform commodities into relationships, entitlement into gratitude, isolation into reciprocity, and boredom into astonished curiosity and joy.

Having said this, what I'm trying to suggest here is that, being trilingual -English being the last language I have learned after Spanish and Hebrew-I have noticed how some languages are built to reveal more readily than others the web of relationships that we actually are – and since language helps us make sense of the world, I see a direct correlation between them and our actions. Given the grim state of the environment, it would be fair to ask what language are we speaking? Perhaps, the heart of the matter lies in that it is hard to ask this question in the plural.

According to the Tucson Biodiversity Institute, "about 50% of all humans speak and think in one of ten globally dominant languages. That means 0.2% of languages hold sway over 50% of the human species and likely upwards of 85% of the globe's land surface". The institute's director, Kieran Suckling, points out that "these are the language cultures primarily responsible for the global extinction crisis and the eradication/assimilation/marginalization of Indigenous cultures. One percent of the human race, meanwhile, speaks 50– 60% of all human languages. This one percent and all its wealth of knowledge is being driven to extinction at an unprecedented rate" (McKenzie et al. 2009)

I fell in love with language when I learned to speak Hebrew. I think this happened because in Hebrew, each word revealed relationship and relationality as the driving forces of the world and, words seemed to be constructed in a way that pointed beyond themselves. That is, back to the live relationship from which they came about. Take for example the word Dog which is a bringing together of the word *Kol*, which translate into All, and *Lev*, which translates into Heart. All-Heart! Then, consider who it is said to be human beings best friend? *Kelev*! All-Heart!-. A more complex example of this would be *Emet* -the word for Truth in Hebrew- which is comprised by the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet *Alef*, considered as one of the sacred names of god, yet in this case it more accurately speaks to divine breath and the act of inhaling, and the word *Met* which translates into English as death or the act of becoming dead. When breath ceases, we die– there is no contending with this truth, right? It's kind of supreme!

In this sense, when Robin Wall Kimmerer (2016) referring to indigenous languages on a podcast I listened to recently said, "Intelligence is vocabulary" my heart sang in agreement! I suddenly felt like I had a friend I could talk to about the importance of words in revealing the cosmovision of the people who utter them, but also in informing (as internally forming) our behaviors. A beautiful example of this would be the word *Inuit* which translates into English as living beings (McKenzie et al. 2009). Right at the heart of the meaning of the word to name themselves, the very sign that acts to separate themselves from other forms of life via language –I see also- an act to connect and reestablish their relationship with every other

living form on earth. Yes, Inuit people are living beings that are unique in their own right, but also living beings among many other unique living beings -no exceptionalism, no superiority- instead, a clear reminder of interdependence.

At the risk of sounding silly, your typo *humanbean* holds the intelligence of the words *Inuit*, *Emet* and *Kelev*. I believe this is so because encoded in their meaning all these words, point back to the world that in collaboration with humanbeans capacity for abstraction, birthed them to life. In other words, these words know who they are: brilliant even if deceiving stunt artist which, in their best invocation should understand themselves as a mark that points back to, yet can't ever be reality itself. Gustavo Esteva, a Mexican activist, "deprofessionalized intellectual" and founder of the Universidad de la Tierra in the city of Oaxaca whose thinking I have been spending much time with, has been helpful in untangling what I mean by words as stunt artists. Here is what he had to say about reality and abstraction in an interview back in 2015.

From the very beginning Plato warned us about the problem with abstraction. Abstraction means to take something away from reality -here is the reality- and I take something from reality and put it in my mind. In that operation, warns Plato, we need to be very careful. We need to put this abstraction within brackets to establish a clear difference between reality and what we have included of it in our mind.

So, you see, if we fail to understand words – these selective imprints of our thinking, basic units of language, and principal carriers of meaning- as abstractions born out of our

interaction with the world; we run the risk of living in delusion. Which is exactly what, according to Gustavo happened next, particularly in the West.

We lost the brackets! That was the first stage. [Then] we started to confuse abstraction and reality. But worst of all, we started to believe that the abstraction [was] reality [itself]. (O'Donovan and Esteva 2015).

Now just to clarify, I am using the term delusion in the Buddhist sense of the word, which suggests that our deepest frustrations –much like I have been pondering in this letter- are caused by our sense of being a self that is separate from the world we are in. This sense of separation, writes David Loy in a book called *Money, Sex, War, Karma: Notes for a Buddhist Revolution* (2008), is in fact, our most dangerous delusion and the origin –I would add- of all greed.

In trying to think through and find an example of the last movement of the western mind described by Gustavo, where abstraction is taken for reality, the first thing that came to mind was the design of a world economy that does not take into account the world itself. That is, Earth's actual material limitations, Earth's capacity to regenerate itself, as well as the fact that we ourselves, like your typo humanbean well expresses are entirely made out of and sustained by planet Earth. Have you ever seen a living being eat, drink or breathe money? In short and as crazy as this may sound, haunted by the delusion of separation, the forbearers of the patriarchal capitalist extractivist model of economy -the system you and I

live in, and participate of today-, basically omitted their one and only partner –Earth- in this economy devour. Thus, omitting also, all other form of life but theirs. What a horrifying joke! It is important for me to establish some of the consequences that spring from confusing reality with abstraction and then, go back to words as the essential carriers of these abstraction because; though all words are stunt artists, and therefore run the risks of being appropriated as reality, the ones we are singling out, know it! This –to me- is what makes them intelligent, almost alive and consciously pointing back to the observation that started them off in the first place, inviting us to do the same. You see, these words are saying ‘look at the world and verify of you own volition if -in this case- the characteristic relationship between a humanbean and a dog still resembles my name, or the mediation of life and death via the breath is still a truth. And last, if the -made out of, and kept alive by many others- selfness of our species and every other living thing on earth stands. Vocabulary is intelligence when its built-in form remembers reality; to remember reality is mindfulness. Mindfulness in Sanskrit is *smmirti*, and *smmirti* roughly translates into English as ‘to remember’.

Now just to trace back the fleeting trail of a bean’s soul back to its source, we have learned thus far that humanbeans exist 😊. However, in order for us to go full circle in our investigation and to beguine the conclusion of this letter; we might have to consider that, beans are partly human too. This became a tangible reality during my apprenticeship and knowledge exchange study trip at Las Cañadas Permaculture Cooperative in Veracruz. As

Every day upon visiting the dry toilets located right between the dining room and the vegetable garden, I found a perfectly positioned quote by Victor Hugo which read:

After long experimentation, science now knows that the most fertilizing and the most effective of manures is that of man. (I guess woman's manure was not yet considered)

This garbage heaped up beside the stone blocks, the tumbrels of mire jolting through the streets at night, the awful scavengers' carts, the fetid streams of subterranean slime that the pavement hides from you, do you know what all this is? It is the flowering meadow, it is the green grass, it is marjoram and thyme and sage, it is game, it is cattle, it is the satisfied lowing of huge oxen in the evening, it is perfumed hay, it is golden wheat, it is bread on your table, it is joy, it is life.

This quote is as fortunate as your typo, since it revealed the reality of interbeing at the most exacting of times! At Las Cañadas, I learned that it takes about a year for one of these two chamber dry toilets to fill up, and another year for the anaerobic decomposition process to transform human feces into the most soft and fragrant earth. Once the chamber is open, this nutrient dense soil better known as peasant's gold, is combined with the aerobic compost piles that are spread around the Cooperative and end up –when ready- in all the planting beds, including those of the black beans which are a staple food in the Mexican diet. And thus, my dear Rami, a cycle of reciprocity –brought to us by a miss-spell, counter-spell typo, but more deeply by intelligent vocabulary is completed.

I would like to end this letter by planting a seed –maybe a bean seed with a little bellybutton- for further exploration of the theme of intelligent language and its possible relationship to intelligent action. I am interested in this subject because I believe that many of the practices and schools of thought that you and I have been attracted to over the course of our friendship. For example, Buddhism, but more precisely the language of Zen and the practices that go along with it, have been carefully crafted, in the fashion of the words studied above. That is, with the intention to reveal on one hand, the interdependent relational makeshift nature of the world and, on the other, how language –the physical expression of our thinking with and about the world- can get confused with the world itself, as well as how it can also get us back in touch with it. Which seems to be one of the urgent task of our times!

From a humanbean to another,

Ronit

P.S – Thank you dear friend for agreeing to play with me!

Appendix D: Rami's response to Humanbeans letter

October 2, 2017

My dear Ronit,

Thank you for your letter! This is such a pleasure, to begin this exchange — which is really a carrying forward of many years of relating, speaking, texting even. Amazing what we have been able to cover by chat, in a medium that could be so constricted and yet we have been there with each other in challenging times, really connecting, and helping each other think.

First I have to tell you that the "human beans" in my first note were not a mistake but a deliberate silliness that I suppose I included to alleviate my earnest anxiety about letting you down. It is not an expression I made up but something I vaguely associate with my Aunt Heather and her way of poking fun in a slightly exaggerated California drawl. (There are

accents or idiolects where “being” is awfully close to “bean!”) I also feel like it may have been drawn from a comic book or TV from the US, from the fifties, maybe Pogo? This is one piece of my cultural (linguistic) legacy—and how perfect that it triggered your riff on the meaning of being and eating and identity. Really perfect, humanbeans!

I love your story of your cousin and you, when you were small, and the mock sombre ritual of acknowledging the soul of the bean. I would challenge lightly the idea that children speak from outside the dominant paradigms, although I agree we should listen closely to them! My understanding is that children are deeply inculcated in their culture by the time they speak – there is still friction in the process of being “socialized,” resistance, imperfectly-worked-out accommodation, and definitely they have a different lens than adults, but they have been absorbing and adapting to and engaging in the culture of their family and environment, since their earliest, pre-verbal days. Even farting is not always taboo – I remember my partner, Geoff, before we were together, demonstrating the completely casual way adults fart in India (or so he claimed): a total non-event. He, of course, by way of demonstrating, farting away loudly in the middle of a drunken party, created an event — for our edification, entertainment, embarrassment — meanwhile laying claim to his own culture-defying peculiarity.

My lover, a true weirdo humanbean and great big kid.

But back to beans. I have been growing scarlet runner beans in pots in my patio-garden for many years. I started with one small package of store-bought seeds about eight years ago,

and have never needed another — an exercise in micro-permaculture. Every year I eat some while the beans are small and the flesh is tender, picked right off the plant and popped straight into my mouth. Other beans I allow to grow until their pods are bulging with the beans inside, the seeds growing fatter and fatter until the hard, hairy pod is slowly consumed by the beans inside. They thrive, most years, and climb all over everything they can reach, the vines twisting against themselves vigorously to create support where there is none — sometimes winding so vigorously and gaining such height that a vine will fold over and break, that line of growth cut short. But there are more and more lines of growth, reaching up and out until the days get short and the hard frosts come. Then all the greenery dies; I pick the dry and brittle pods, and open them to release the beans which are brilliant pink with black spots! Then slowly they dry too, to a deep, dark purple, still spotted. I keep them stored until the next year, these dark purple and black seeds, when I plant them again in the spring, always a little later than I mean to.

This process of cultivation, and the life-cycle of the beans, feels so rudimentary and analogous to life more generally. It is not a difficult process in itself but requires some attention — planting, watering, picking, harvesting, storing, and so on. The process has great joy in it, for me. Simple, cyclical, mundane life, in all its richness.

This year I am experimenting with placing some luscious, full pods directly on the ground where I hope that beans will grow in the future. We will see how much this phenomenon, this particular cycle of life, can go on without my intervention, without intensive cultivation.



Beans reach for the sky



Bean pods beginning to dry

I am a little envious of you, with your three languages. I have only one, which I love writing in, and have no objection to living in, but I can certainly feel that there are things I miss, "lost in translation." There is an intensity of effort and cultivation in learning another language which has eluded me, although I have often craved it.

I have been reading a book my brother and his Korean wife sent me, *May All Beings Be Happy*. They live in Seoul, and while my brother is habitually quite rejecting of religion, they know I am interested in Buddhism and that I practice meditation. They carefully chose for me a book of writings by the Seon master and monk, Beop Jeong. (Seon is pronounced 'Sun,' similar to Chan and Zen but also distinct.) I believe he is quite unknown outside of Korea, but he was very famous and beloved in his home country. He died in 2010. I have been thinking of him in contrast and comparison to Thich Nat Hahn. Beop Jeong was deeply critical of the dictatorial regime that took over in South Korea after the war, in the 60s. I don't have a lot of information about the options were available to him, but he chose to go into the forest and mountains and live in isolation for many decades. He wrote monthly to the public, which was his way of staying connected to the outside world. My understanding from the little historical blurb I have read is that he felt he could not practice within his cultural mainstream, with the loathing and antagonism he felt toward the regime, and it was a better choice to live and practice directly in nature rather than protest or resist more directly, which might very well have cost him his life. Unlike Thich Nat Hahn, he did not go into exile outside of the country (although one could call his practice a kind of exile – what is the difference

between exile and refuge we might ask?). In exile/refuge he made an opposite choice for Thich Nat Hahn, not “engaged buddhism” but renunciate, resisting accommodation of the regime, resisting any kind of acquisitiveness, living in poverty and drawing his teaching as directly as possible from his direct experience of nature, part of a long tradition in Seon Buddhism, and Zen.

I in no way wish to imply any kind of judgement of one choice or the other, particularly since my knowledge of these two lives is so general and vague. It is interesting to me, the contrast in choices. At the end of their lives, we can look and see a great body of accessible, humane, profound writing from each of them; each of them have had broad and lasting impact in different ways. Both use really quite simple, experiential language to get to the heart of deep meaning.

May All Beings Be Happy is translated by Matty Wegehaupt who writes in his introduction of knottiness of language, and of translation. He begins with a warning, that “all words, especially the best one, are dangerous.”

He quotes Jacques Derrida:

What is literature? And first of all what is it “to write?”

How is it that the fact of writing can disturb the very question

“what is?” and even “what does it mean?”

And Beop Jeong:

In the depths of each and every person is a solitary existence.

Look carefully inside

to bring about the unity of this solitude with the mysterious world.

Do not seek to know everything.

Do not depend too much on books.

Religious theories and

even the teachings of the saints are hollow.

(emphasis mine)

Wegehaupt sees Beop Jeong residing in a long lineage of south-central Korean monks who take on this ironic task of using words to unveil the ways that words, themselves, change our minds, working with a “paradoxical link between reality and the act of its articulation” long before the French deconstructivists and relativism posed these questions. Beop Jeong uses direct examples often in his writing, making clear parallels between observable nature and the dharma, drawing from a tradition “utilizing voices of certainty to explain why explanations in and of themselves are fruitless.” I think of the “unity of solitude” — the paradox of universal aloneness, in union with the world; and the teacher who teaches: look within, do not put too much faith in teachers, or books, or words!

To write of Beop Jeong's writing like this, it is easy to become too heady, the voice of the critic vs the listener who would hear, perhaps more wholistically, poems like "Learn from the Flowers," and "Friends," or "Rust Eats Its Own Metal." So here, a little thing to "hear:"

Lotus Petal Wisdom

When raindrops fill a lotus petal,
the petal sways for a while together with each drop,
and when the water has pooled to a certain extent,
the petal pours the pure crystal-like water away without
any regret or attachment.

Then when the water falls again onto the lotus leaf below,
there again it wells up
and rolls right on off again, emptying into the lotus pond.

Observing this spectacle with no-mind,
I thought, "The lotus petal takes on only as much weight
as it can hold;
anything more and it empties everything out completely!"

I was struck by such wisdom.

Were the lotus to instead take the water greedily,
the petal would end up tearing or its stem would snap.

The principles for living in the world are exactly the same.

I could go on, and we will go on, so I will stop here, for now. Much love to you and so happy
to play and think together!

Rami

(I had also thoughts about "truth" and God's breath – so rich ... a note for later perhaps ...)