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Rooted in a series of images and texts, these artists pages present fragments of *Becoming with Wheat: Photosynthesis/Respiration Collaborations*, daily collaborative performances presented on Instagram during the first COVID-19 UK national lockdown in June and July 2020. Part of *Becoming With Wheat (and Other More-Than-Human Others)* which explores our interspecies relationship with wheat, as well as the other human and more-than-human entities that are entangled within the

kinship, the collaborative performances between myself and Emmer wheat plants cultivated in my garden during spring and summer 2020, enact the reciprocal processes of photosynthesis and respiration: the exchange and transformation of carbon dioxide and oxygen between plant and human. Over a two-month period, I knelt over the wheat patch to take deep breaths for a few minutes each day. I videoed the actions on my smartphone and posted daily excerpts on my Instagram feed with accompanying written reflections. Drawing inspiration from the collaborative performances, I have developed these pages that reflect on a range of literature intersecting with air, breathing, plant-human communication, collaboration, the weather, and political ecology.

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JUNE 11

DAY 5. Prior to conceiving these performances, *Becoming with Wheat...* focused on companionship with wheat through the gut, framed via its Latin root, *cum panis* meaning 'with bread' (Haraway 2016: 11). Yet I am reminded by anthropologist, Tim Ingold that it is not only through ingestion that I companion and collaborate with plants, but constantly via the medium of air: 'We do not live inside our bodies but – in breathing and eating – continually and alternately gather the world into ourselves and release ourselves into the world' (Ingold 2015: 42). Naming the performances as collaborations has triggered me to ask, 'Can it be called collaboration if one of the partners cannot give consent in the way that we humans recognise it?' Such reflections are pertinent, since plants in recent history have been 'positioned as no more than resource for human needs and desires' (Stark 2015: 183) being defined as 'inert, passive and background objects [making] their subjection to human intervention, control and consumption easy to justify' (Stark 2015: 181). So I refer to artist-researcher, Ashleigh Bowmott's essay, 'Mixed fibres: Human and non-human collaboration' where she analyses her collaborative practice with paper. Bowmott

extends the premise of collaboration outlined by Charles Green in *The Third Hand* (2001), from solely human-to-human collaboration to a partnership with the more-than-human paper pulp (Bowmott 2018: 200). Bowmott acknowledges that although pulp cannot give its consent to their activities it is more than a 'passive entity', appreciating its value and 'the close working relationship [she] believe[s] is at play' (2018: 200). Through our collaborative relationship, the Emmer and I via the in-between-ness of the atmosphere, transmute matter between our bodies, performing a collective plant-human-air 'metabolic mingling' (Ingold 2012: 77).

Bowmott, Ashleigh (2018) 'Mixed fibres: Human and non-human collaboration', *JAWS* 4 (2): 191–203.

Haraway, Donna (2016) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham: Duke University Press.

Ingold, Tim (2012) 'The Atmosphere', *Chiasmi International*, 14: 75-87 & Ingold, Tim (2015) *The Life of Lines*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Stark, Hannah (2015) 'Deleuze and Critical Plant Studies' in Jon Roffe and Hannah Stark (ed.) *Deleuze and the Non/Human*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 180-196.





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JUNE 15

DAY 9. Away from other humans, and any potential COVID-19 virus in the air, I feel safe to breathe in the garden. Pulling me into the present moment, the deep inhalations and exhalations go some way to alleviate my anxiety during this period of uncertainty as the national lockdown begins to ease. In 'Thinking with a feminist political ecology of air-and-breathing-bodies', Irma Kinga Allen surveys the way in which breath, the lungs, affect, and emotions are entangled, noting that 'paying attention to breath often reveals such invisible processes going on beneath the surface' (Allen 2020: 95). During these collaborations, slowly expanding my lungs not only incorporates much needed oxygen with which to release tension and carbon dioxide on the outbreak, it also reinforces the knowledge that, at this point in time, I have not contracted the coronavirus. My modification of 'respiratory rhythms and qualities are part of the ontology of emotion and thus fundamental in communicating subjective and physiological states' (Allen 2020: 95).

Constructing a diurnal activity as a framework for my practice which is bigger than myself and the anxiety I experience, triggers the impetus to venture from

the security of my flat into the communal stairwell, navigate the shared doors and their handle surfaces, and engage with the outside world. Once in the garden, I can safely take in the fresh air and companion with the wheat, which also alleviates the agoraphobia I am feeling. Such a practice with its focus on daily routine and breath enables what philosopher, Luce Irigaray proposes in her conversation with fellow thinker, Michael Marder in *Through Vegetal Being*, that 'a cultivation of our breathing, of our breath, allows us to be more malleable, to adapt ourselves to a situation without submitting to it'. She contemplates, 'we then can endeavor to make our breath more vital or more subtle, staying alive but modifying our manner of being and acting according to the context' (Irigaray and Marder 2016: 24).

Allen, Irma Kinga (2020) 'Thinking with a Feminist Political Ecology of Air-and-breathing-bodies', *Body & Society*, 26(2): 79-105.

Irigaray, Luce and Marder, Michael (2016) *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives*, New York: Columbia University Press, ProQuest Ebook Central.





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JULY 1

Day 25. Reviewing the first few performances, I realised that the fact I wore a scarlet jumper, although accidental, was significant. Perhaps it was an intuitive nod to red light, the wavelength that is mostly absorbed by plants in the photosynthetic reaction. Red also connotes the powerful conduit between plant and animal by way of blood. Reading evolutionary ecologist, Monica Gagliano's experience of communing with a Peruvian Socoba tree via a bark *dieta*, in *Thus Spoke the Plant* I discover how the tree spoke to her of 'the wisdom in the oxygen, and the blood [being] the great connector' through the vascular system (Gagliano 2018: 15). Gagliano goes on to describe the non-lingual lesson taught by the tree that showed her what happen to oxygen and carbon dioxide during inhalation and exhalation. The tree, 'excitedly, continue[d to point] out how we breathe each other in and out of existence, one made by exhalation of the other' (2018: 15). Gagliano retells, Michael Marder, that plants do not recognise water (and I add air to this proposition) as a 'distinct object' (Marder in Gagliano 2018: 16), distinguishing no difference between themselves and the rest of the environment, their milieu. A tree 'exists in

a state of open communion in which the fiction of personalised boundaries collapses' (2018: 16), the Socoba instructs, 'where skins and bark are no longer perceived as functional boundaries that separate inner and outer, containing us' (2018: 17). In the performance collaboration today, as we, the wheat and I know and make each other, and are known and made by each other 'through air-and-breath' (Allen 2020: 88), I pay attention to, and notice the interconnectivity of all matter through this vital enduring entanglement, and am reminded by what Gagliano says of plants, that they signify 'the marker points of our resistance to transcend our [human] narcissistic and anthropocentric propensities toward exceptionalism' (Gagliano 2018: 17).

Allen, Irma Kinga (2020) 'Thinking with a Feminist Political Ecology of Air-and-breathing-bodies', *Body & Society*, 26(2): 79-105.

Gagliano, Monica (2018) *Thus Spoke the Plant: A Remarkable journey of groundbreaking scientific discoveries and personal encounters with plants*, Berkeley, North Atlantic Books.





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JULY 2

Day 26. According to Tim Ingold in his 2015 book, *The Life of Lines* 'if the medium [of air] is a condition of interaction, it follows that the quality of that interaction will be tempered by what is going on in the medium, that is, by the weather' (Ingold 2015: 70), and this is certainly the case with today's performance-collaboration.

Despite the heavy and relentless rain, I kneel on the damp soil to commune with the Emmer through my inhalations and exhalations, discovering it is much harder to concentrate on my breath, and not to laugh, as I become increasingly soaked. Over the course of my counting thirty breaths, as the droplets grow bigger and more frequent, they feel less like drops and more, a deluge, conjuring the Latin root of weather, *tempus*, from which springs, time (tempo) and weather (tempest) (Ingold 2015: 70).

The sense that weather pervades our being in the world is palpable in the myriad of words that, although sound like tempo and tempest, in fact share the derivation of temper – *temperare*, meaning 'to mix'. Weather words such as 'temperature', 'temperate', but also terms for moods

and dispositions, 'temper' and 'temperament' (Ingold 2015: 72). During today's collaboration, not only was my anxious temperament dissipated through 'tempo', the slowing down to mix and mingle with the atmosphere through deep breath, the psycho-physiological effects of which has proven abilities to lessen nervous conditions and improve mental health (André 2019) but also through the hilarity of sitting and breathing in the heavy torrents of 'tempest'. I have not been able to measure my heart rate during these performances but certainly today I felt tangibly transformed, calmer and more at peace, if only for a short while.

André, Christophe (2019) 'Proper Breathing Brings Better Health', Scientific American, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/proper-breathing-brings-better-health/> 15 January, accessed 20 December 2020.

Ingold, Tim (2015) *The Life of Lines*. Abingdon: Routledge.





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JULY 17

Day 38. A tranquil early morning offered the optimal temperature for photosynthesis and the best time to sit in the sun before the scorching heat descends. If it was winter, my breath might be made visible through a shift in states between hot body and cold atmosphere. Warm vapours passing from my insides across the thresholds of nose and mouth would collide with cooler air to form an ephemeral 'little cloud' of 'condensed moisture' (Ingold 2020: 159), a more solid and visual, yet brief sense of the presence of breath 'pick[ed] out from its surroundings' (Connor 2010: 16).

During yesterday's performance, my invisible breath is made perceptible through its proximity to and effect on the wispy forms of the wheat plants. On such a still day, my breath-wind causes the only motion. The plants wave back and forth, as if with each exhalation my breath blows the Emmer away and each inhalation sucks it near. In earlier performances, the camera lens also appears to respond to my breath, fluctuating in and out of focus as if it too were alive. All of which makes my breath more tangible, more observable.

In my performances and these subsequent filmic documents, I am always facing and breathing westwards, as if to channel Eurus, the Greek god of the east-winds who is associated with autumn, often depicted bearing a sheath of grain and a sickle, the tool used for reaping. My gaseous expirations of carbon dioxide, feeds the Emmer's fruit making, and simultaneously aids its inevitable march towards its harvest fate, and with it, its own expiration. For 'to expire' means 'to exhale', but also 'to die'. Plants 'mediat[e] between the living and the dead', writes Michael Marder in *Plant-Thinking*, '...caressing the dead with [their] roots and obtaining nourishment from them...mak[ing the dead] live again (Marder 2013: 67). And lest I forget, that we are both deteriorating towards our demises, just on different courses and tempos.

Connor, Steven (2010) *The Matter of Air: Science and the Art of the Ethereal*. London: Reaktion.

Ingold, Tim (2020) 'On Breath and Breathing: A concluding comment', *Body & Society* 26(2): 158–167.

Marder, Michael (2013) *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, New York: Columba University Press.