

Becoming with the Garden
Presentation of a Research in Progress

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This presentation marks the beginning of my second master's research, this time in social anthropology, following a previous thesis in philosophy on time and the Anthropocene. Here, I want to sketch out where I'm coming from theoretically, explain a few key concepts, and then walk through my field site and methodology, before sharing some initial insights from the work in progress.

1. Where I'm coming from

This project follows a philosophical inquiry into time in the Anthropocene, a term that designates the current epoch shaped by human-induced ecological transformations. Though debated, the term remains a useful tool for thinking through the kinds of worlds we inhabit.

What drew me in was the disjunction between human-made temporalities and the rhythms of the living. I became interested in how time is made and particularly, in what I call ecosystemic time: the network of rhythms and tempos inherent to the living and their environments.

If the Anthropocene calls for new temporalities, perhaps our first task is not to define them abstractly, but to learn how to attend, to let time emerge from interrelations rather than impose it.

After working through this concept theoretically in philosophy, I wanted to root it in the tangible, embodied world. That's how I came to socio-anthropology.

I draw here on thinkers like Tim Ingold and Eduardo Kohn, who call for an anthropology that goes beyond the human, one that takes seriously the entangled becomings of humans and more-than-humans. Donna Haraway is another key influence, especially her idea of "becoming with": the notion that humans and more-than-humans learn and transform together, enabling new practices and relations.

So what I'm interested in is this: how do we make time with the living? It feels like a crucial question in the context of the Anthropocene. If we are indeed shaping the time of the Earth, then we need to reflect on how we make time, and how we stay alive while doing so.

2. Field site and methodology

But how do we actually approach such a question?

The garden seemed like an obvious choice: a privileged site of cohabitation between humans and more-than-humans, structured by practices of care and attention. A few months ago, I became the caretaker of a minimally maintained garden, partially rewilded over the past years. I chose to focus on this encounter with a territory I didn't know, but whose history I can partially trace, through material signs and photographic archives.

A recent thesis by Vincent Larbey ("Pieds dans la terre, tête dans les nuages", Montpellier III) reinforced this direction and gave me further tools to think with.

As for methodology, I'm developing a qualitative, interpretive approach centered around close observation. This is not only an inquiry into a specific site, but also an experiment in situated knowledge production, asking how one might come to know through attention, presence, and shared vulnerability.

My sample is unconventional: it includes the full spectrum of biotic and abiotic processes in the garden: from soil to snowflakes, plants, insects, fungi, birds, and wind.

That said, this network is too vast to fully encompass. I plan to alternate between two focuses:

- a broad observation of the ecosystemic web,
- and a closer look at specific interdependent vegetal species that dominate the site: brambles, nettles, and bamboo are likely candidates.

For these species, I'll explore their entanglements more deeply, gradually building knowledge of their specificities and lifeways.

Observation sessions will unfold over the course of a full year, allowing for a seasonal cycle. These will include:

- **Regular non-participant observations**, using different perspectives: fixed (e.g. 1.20m from the ground, sitting level, or at ground level) and mobile (walking, following living beings, or guided by impulse);
- **Participant observations**, engaging in gardening practices to become attuned to the gestures, rhythms, and physical effects of being in and with the garden;
- **Multimodal documentation**, using written notes, photographs (especially macro to highlight otherwise invisible details), sound, and potentially video.

My descriptive work draws from ethnographic and phenomenological methods as adapted by contemporary anthropology, particularly in the works of Tim Ingold, David Abram, and François Laplantine.

I'm fully aware of the scope and complexity of the terrain I've chosen, and of the novelty of the methodological approach. While this makes the project exciting, it also raises the risk of dispersion. I'm relying on the structure of my method to help navigate that, and I anticipate refining the research focus based on what proves most significant during fieldwork.

3. What I've learned so far

Even the first few observation sessions have been rich in insight, and in humility. What quickly became obvious was the extent of my own ignorance. Contrary to what some suggested, this is not a familiar terrain: I am encountering a community of presences I do not know, struggling even to distinguish them, let alone name or understand them.

For instance, during one session, I focused on the "bees" circling a particular bush. It gradually became clear that what I called "bee" actually referred to at least four visibly distinct buzzing insects. Likewise, what I previously perceived as "grass" turned out to be a tapestry of tiny, diverse green plants.

Learning to name is part of the work. But before that, I need to learn to see.

So the question of attention is becoming central. My first fixed-point observation was disrupted by a kind of inner restlessness: I was mostly seeing things to do. It hit me that this garden wasn't mine, not yet. On paper, yes. But not in practice. I didn't know it. I hadn't yet inhabited it. I hadn't territorialized it. Though listed under my name in the cadastre, the garden did not feel mine. I hadn't yet entered into relation with it.

Beyond inhabiting, the garden also reveals itself as a space of care. Gardening means accompanying its inhabitants, trimming and regulating when necessary. To care for a garden is to engage in ongoing negotiation, a relational ethics that resists both neglect and domination. In my case, most species were being overtaken by brambles. They too have a place, but not if they choke out all other forms of life.

For now, I'm focused on interspecific attention, and on the notions of territory and care. Time, my original angle, has temporarily receded, although one of its expressions, weather, is particularly present. The way the garden and its inhabitants respond to weather events, and the way I now experience those events differently, have been striking. A frost or a heatwave now feels like a disruption not just to human plans, but to the cycles and vulnerabilities of others.

4. Conclusion

I initially thought I would be working on time, but what I found first was attention: how to see?

That said, time is never far, because to pay attention is to take time. My work right now is about learning to give presence and weight to what is in front of me: the more-than-human beings that shape this space with me.

This is only the beginning, but I'm excited to see where it will lead. For now, I'm working with the garden as a space of territory, interspecies relation, and care, and experimenting with modes and styles of attention (inspired in part by thinkers like Baptiste Morizot and Donna Haraway).

In the future, I plan to complement this work with other methods – interviews, perhaps questionnaires – to bring in different perspectives. But the heart of this project remains the more-than-human, and what it means to encounter them thoughtfully.

What does it mean to make time with the living? This question remains open, but perhaps, with each gesture of attention, I begin to live my way into it.