

SOCIALBODY APOTHECARY


how can we learn to engage in deep listening with plants? how can we become allies with plants?





An invitation
to sensitive transplanting
within your contexts...





The roots of working with plants as **teachers, guides and allies** come from experiences in specific places and contexts, through collaborations with migrant, post migrant and refugee women. The methodology and the approaches of perceiving, reading, and medicine making can be applied or translated or transposed with sensitivity to other contexts. We invite you to engage this text as a grounds for your own thoughtful transplantations.

Movement from one ecology to another is demanding. It requires resourcefulness in adapting and is a precarious process.

When a plant or person is uprooted – whether by choice, by force, or by necessity – they need time to adapt to new ground.

They need water, support and patience. Sometimes this involves a phase of wilting, releasing and letting go, before new growth can emerge. It is a conversation and negotiation with the conditions and other lives present in that place.

We invite you to accompany the transplantation of these practices, impulses, and perspectives in ways that are responsive and nourishing, accountable to the context you are in.

SocialBody

The **SocialBody Apothecary** proposes valuing the knowledges and resources stored in our bodies and lands. We offer making medicine together as a decolonial practice of resistance against structural violence. We can understand the connections between symptoms that appear in individualised bodies as indications of what might be rooted in systemic injustices. Through coming together, exchanges and medicinal encounters arise, revealing how the experiences we often feel alone with are personal and political, shared and different.

The **body** that is emerging is not strictly anatomical, but rather **mixed, hybrid, queer, fugitive, monstrous, relocated, migratory, multi-centered, a multiple being that defies norms.**

Our personal bodies are equipped to navigate processes of adaptation, rather than assimilation into a dominant norm. Rather than an

approach of extracting our own optimal functioning, them as intelligent beings we learn to contribute to a social body.



the utility of plants for our we invite you to encounter ings from which we can ever-changing, complex

Apothecary:

The ‘apothecary’ original-space for the medicinal community – the person and was available as a Nowadays, ‘Apotheke’ corner, but how can we ‘expert’ to return to the apothecary as a folk resource, as knowledge held in our bodies and lands?

ly referred to both a storage resources and a role in the who held these knowledges resource to distribute them. pharmacies are on every move from an external

As such, we can reconnect our bodily navigational systems with the living world we are embedded in. Making medicine together is a practice of resistance against structural violence. In this process, we come to understand that our experiences are never isolated, but rather live within a wider social-body.

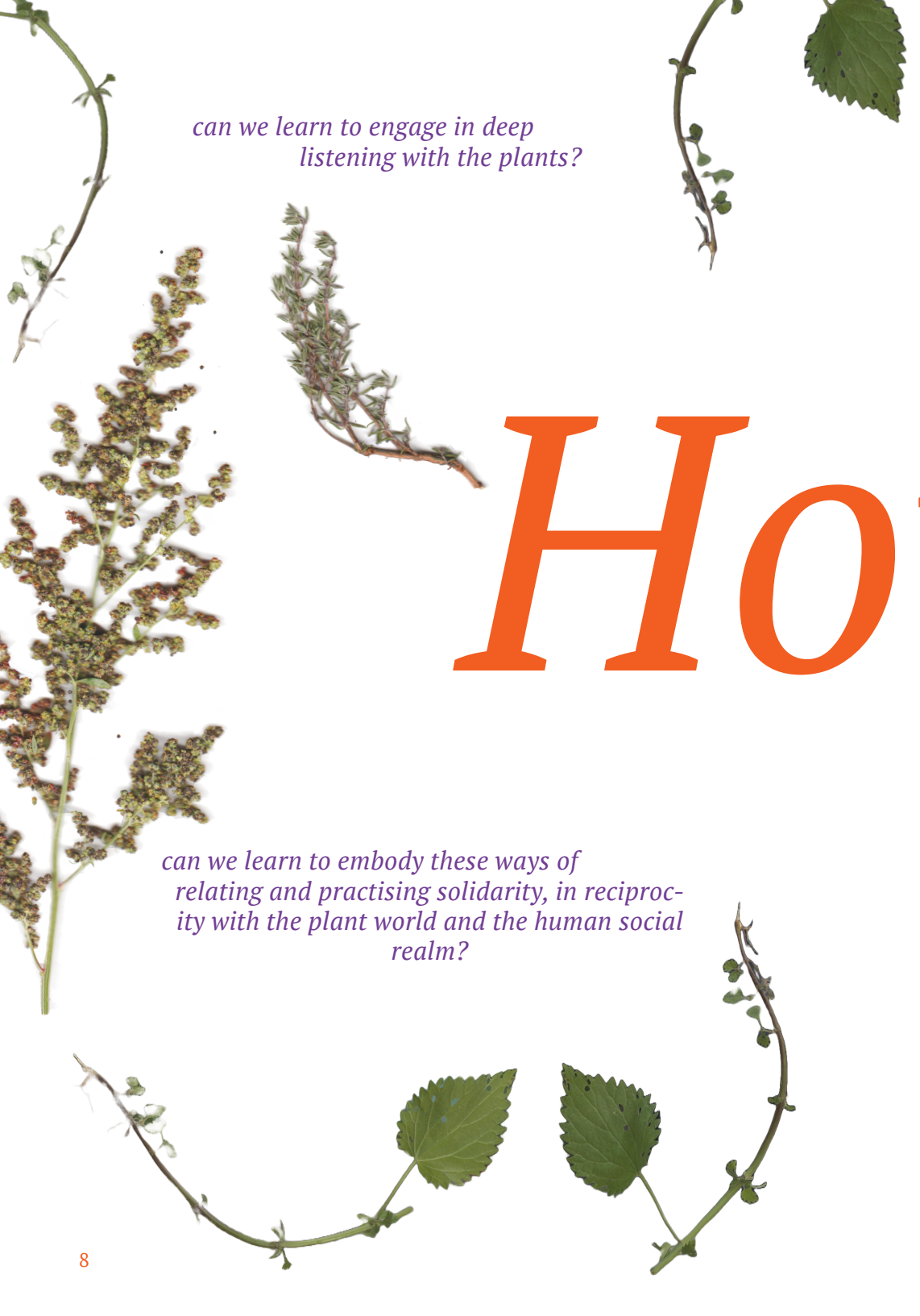
Plants as Allies

Given different structural and social vulnerabilities, what resources and capacities do plants offer that can support those? Those may include protective, expansive, adaptive, or other offerings.

Working with plants as allies means seeing how plants can support our processes of transformation.

We work with plants as allies and teachers and guides. Instead of just extracting their components we try to read how their architectures and ecologies create their relations. Knowledges about how they move our physical, emotional, spiritual, social, and environmental bodies are embedded in intercultural and intergenerational plant knowledge exchanges. Often these are not only found in books but conversations with elders and friends.

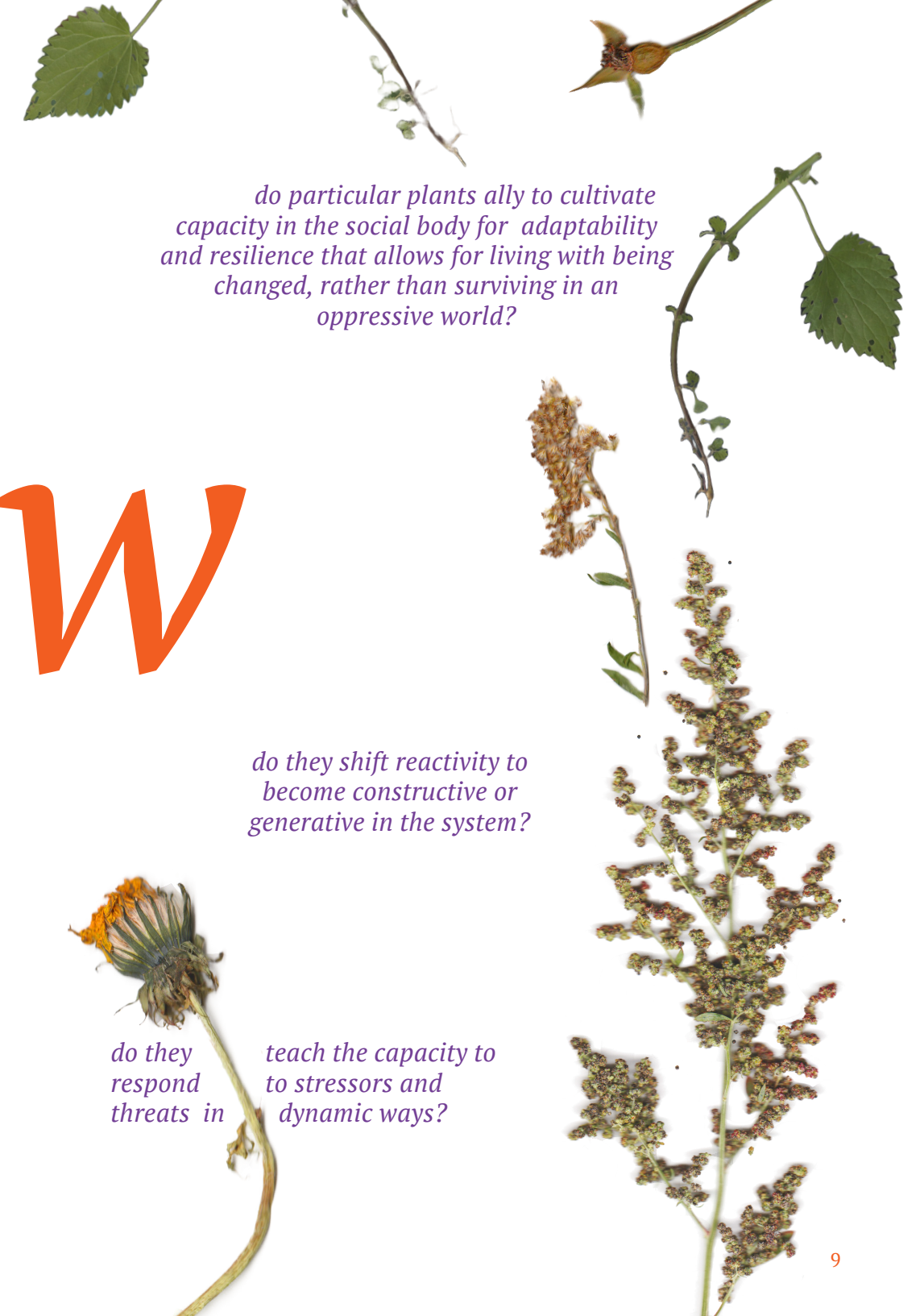




*can we learn to engage in deep
listening with the plants?*

Ho

*can we learn to embody these ways of
relating and practising solidarity, in reciproc-
ity with the plant world and the human social
realm?*



do particular plants ally to cultivate capacity in the social body for adaptability and resilience that allows for living with being changed, rather than surviving in an oppressive world?

W

do they shift reactivity to become constructive or generative in the system?

do they respond to threats in

teach the capacity to respond to stressors and dynamic ways?

Grieves work

“Grieves” acknowledges the multiplicity of grievings in the world. Personal and collective grieves like the death of a loved one or witnessing ecocide and genocides co-exist and accumulate. Grieves are nothing to be fixed, and to be gotten over, but something to learn to live with and move with. It involves attending to personal and collective grieving and asking

how collective grieving practices can become practices of imagining otherwise ways of living together. Rather than ‘getting over’, ‘healing from’, or ‘moving on’ we can learn from grieves to be with the unfixable, learn to sit in discomfort, and learn to be with and support each other in metabolising the many diseases of the this world.

Plants can be allies in this.



Resonance rather than Antidote

Rather than a medicine ‘fixing’ a problem by solving it with medicine as intervention, how can plants offer ways of accompanying, allying, resonating with rather than against?

Often, we think that ‘medicine’ is meant to counteract a particular process taking place in the body, that expresses itself in disease or disturbance. While medicine can be a resource to potentially shift into a more balanced experience, we want to recognise the norms that often condition understandings of ‘health’ and we also want to challenge the

discourse of opposition and removal that is embedded with dynamics of extraction – in bodies, in lands, and in relation to plants.

The point is not to divide and isolate plants or utilise them as easy fixes, but to see how this multiplicity indicates that there are many ways to aid or support the social body from different perspectives. Rather than cures, promises, or offering solutions based on the ideology of a singular solution for a singular problem, the plants work to address what is needed through medicinal dialogue with the system(s) it encounters.

How can we learn from this as a way of being with the world through the social body?



How we move with plants

Reading the plants

Signatures, architectures
& ecologies
Sensing & Storytelling

Spend time with a plant.

Give your attention to its architecture and ecology.

- How does it look, what specificity grabs your attention?
- How do its textures feel, its smell, its taste?

(Careful, some plants are poisonous.)

- Notice the shapes and forms, textures, colours – in the details and in the whole plant.

- Notice other plants and animals that grow in its vicinity.

- What kind of soil does it grow in, what kind of landscape does it inhabit and co-shape?
- What kind of forms, gestures, or structures does it have to navigate the environment?
- What time of year does it occur in and what is taking place at that time?

Remember what you have experienced with the plant and what you have been told about it.

Ask your elders, and friends for what they know and have experienced with the plant. In what stories, songs or tales does it appear. Are there any traditional cultural events devoted to it?

Remember to value the wealth of knowledge in people's bodies, in relationships, in casual daily life, in family spaces, in neighbourhoods...

Use these questions as openers for contemplation and (re)consideration. Perhaps, they will foster more questions rather than concluding with single answers. Trust your story-telling that weaves together many different sources and streams of information and experiential knowledge.

Our intention is to offer 3 plant storyscapes as seeds and pathways for you to enter into relations with the plants that grow around you, whether these ones or others, and hope this resource can support and enhance your capacity to perceive



and read your body within context. Finally, after having encountered a plant this way ask yourself:

what questions has it brought up and how are those possible to formulate?



Rather than cures or solutions,
consider how to think with...

Polarities

as contrasting qualities in dialogue
with one another (such as expansion/contraction, hidden/exposed,
lonesome/hyperconnected, etc)

Dynamics

that are created through the tension of these qualities

Spectrums

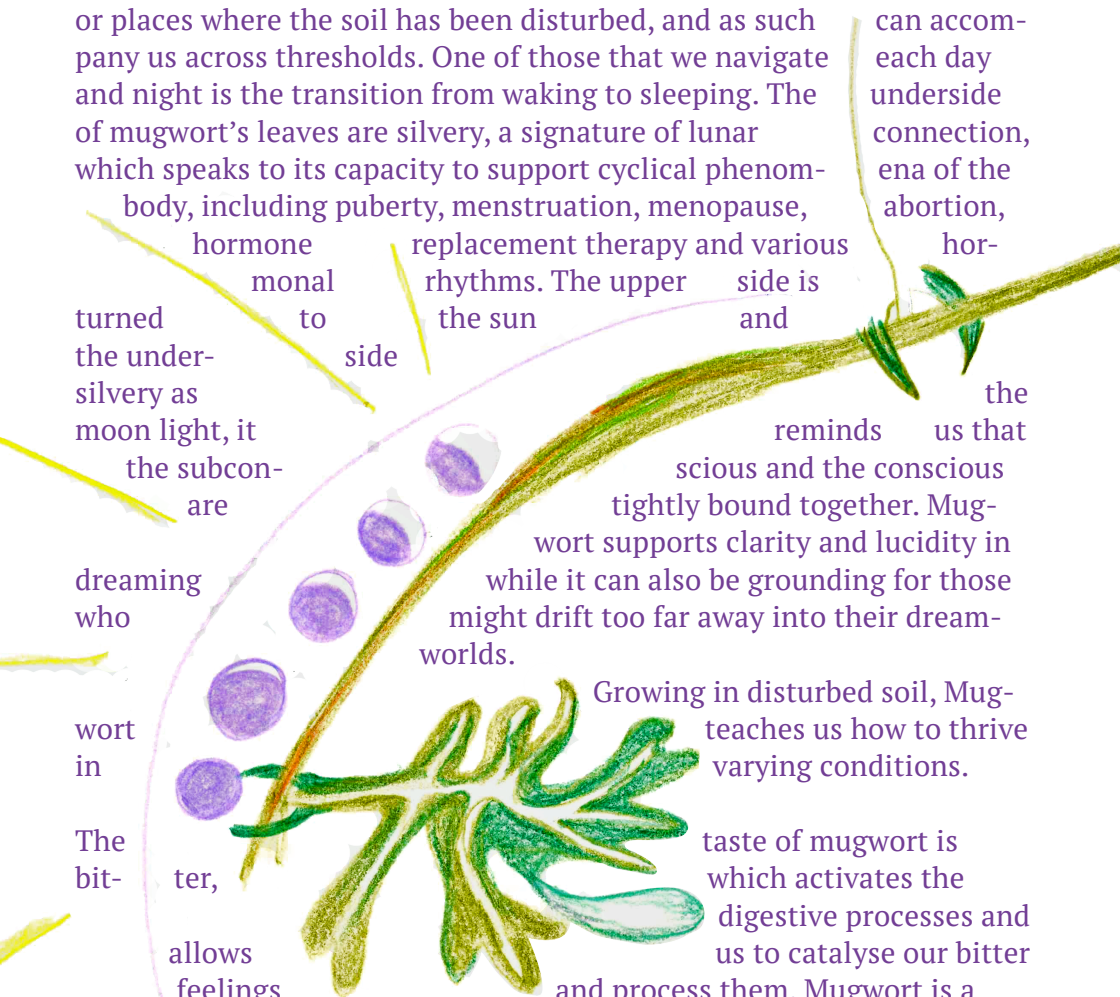
that include mobility within this range

Potentially, the plant medicines can enter into **resonance** along these polarities, spectrums, and dynamics where they may amplify, contrast, or match a particular expression within that theme and support a potential shift through empathetic encounter that includes harmony and dissonance.

Artemisia

Mugwort grows in the in-between spaces such as the sides of the road or places where the soil has been disturbed, and as such can accompany us across thresholds. One of those that we navigate each day and night is the transition from waking to sleeping. The underside of mugwort's leaves are silvery, a signature of lunar connection, which speaks to its capacity to support cyclical phenomena of the body, including puberty, menstruation, menopause, hormone replacement therapy and various hormonal rhythms. The upper side is turned to the sun and the underside is turned to the moon light, it reminds us that the subconscious and the conscious are tightly bound together. Mugwort supports clarity and lucidity in dreaming while it can also be grounding for those who might drift too far away into their dream-worlds.

Growing in disturbed soil, Mugwort teaches us how to thrive in varying conditions. The bitter taste of mugwort activates the digestive processes and allows us to catalyse our bitter feelings and process them. Mugwort is a navigator through the nervous system and aiding circulation and blood flow through the digestive region, including the liver and gallbladder through both its warming and cooling actions. By dialoguing along the pathways between the nervous and digestive systems, mugwort can act as a stimulant or soothe according to the present condition of the nerves.



A member of the *Artemisia family*, with cousins including wormwood and absinthium, it honours the Greek goddess Artemis, associated with the moon, animals, and rites of passage. Whether ingested, infused, smoked or experienced as incense, mugwort is a companion for journeying through shifting states of being.

What thresholds are you encountering and how can you navigate them?

*How close are your dreams to your everyday life?
How do they dialogue?*

How can you imagine and dream futures otherwise?

What companions can you seek out to support and promote your experience of transformation?



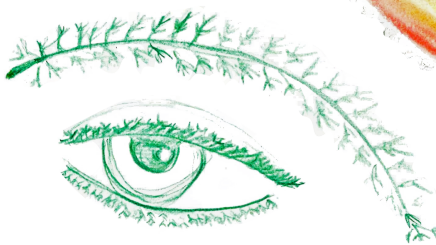
Yarrow

Yarrow is an expert in navigating the spectrum between porosity and protection. The plant grows skywards on a tall stem with feathery leaves and an umbrella of tightly knit white flowers that form a dome shape on top, open from a bird's eye view yet cave-like if one would hide underneath its flowers.

Physically, yarrow works with the expansion and contraction of the blood vessels, thickening or thinning flow, bringing flow out towards or away from the surface of the body according to the needs of the moment.

The bitterness of yarrow along with its carminative, sweat-inducing capacity can aid a healthy detoxing fever. Navigating contraction and

release, can also support the appropriate degree of relaxation in the muscles of the gastrointestinal tract, stimulating and firming the digestive organs.



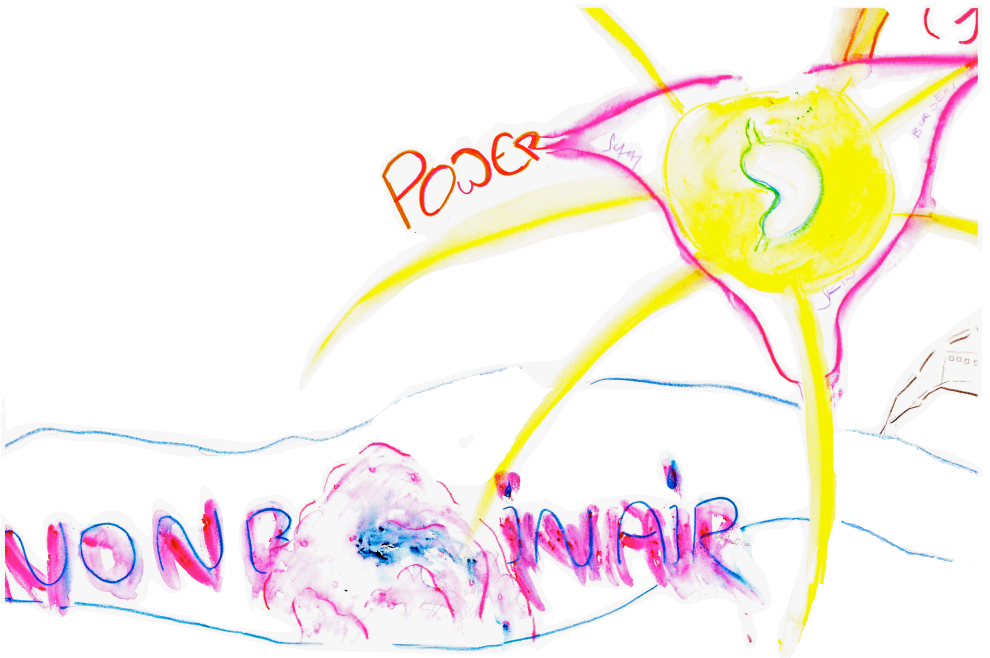
supporting appropriate relaxation of the gastrointestinal tract, stimulating and firming the digestive organs.

A great wound healer, yarrow can support the knitting together of the physical skin or the energetic body if one feels too open and absorbent. Many skin conditions are indicators of liver and kidney health, the outer layer allowing us to read the inner dimensions, as such yarrow works externally on the pores and internally in the cleansing organs.

Porosity is a shared trait, however devised racial hierarchies have made grave consequences of differences along particular lines of power. These passageways need discernment to navigate their sense of flow and safety. The reality of skin as a mediator, our largest and most encompassing container, literally holds it all together as a life-giving boundary and serves as a medium for filtration and being with difference, tightening and opening accordingly.

The Latin name *Achillea Millefolium* references the myths of Achilles – a soldier and a healer said to work with yarrow for wounds in the battle-field. Achilles, held by his mother and dipped in the river Styx between the living and underworld to become immortal, is known for his one vulnerable spot where he eventually sustained injury.

***Rather than
reproducing the patriarchal image of a
triumphant hero, how can this story indicate the value and
strength in vulnerability?***



*How are
we both containers and bound-
less beyond measure?*

*When
is it appropriate to hold things
in and when to let them out?*

*How
can you negotiate the ambiv-
alence of toxicity that you might be
absorbing?*

*How
might this ripple
onto wider layers, queering
social formations fixated on
individuality?*



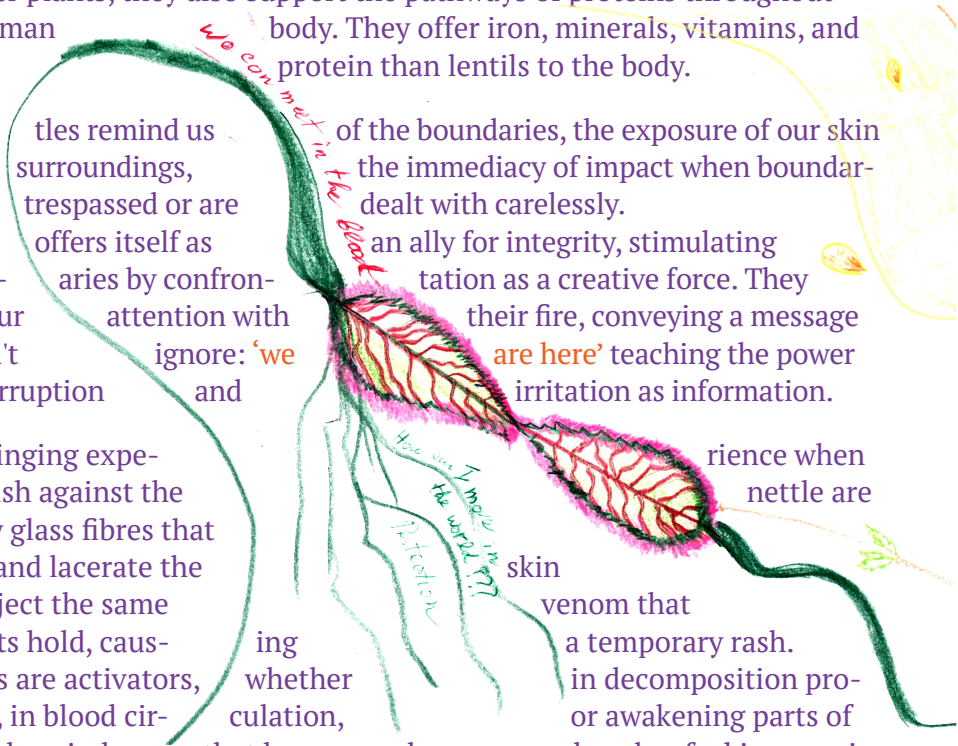
Nettle


You may see nettles growing in the drainage areas by leaky pipes, septic systems, among piles of manure or compost, at the edges of 'cultivated' areas or so-called 'disturbed' soils. As they decompose, they release nitrogen, serving as fertiliser and helping regenerate the soil. They host larvae of butterflies and moths. With an affinity to places where protein wastes are being processed, binding toxins and making nutrients available to other plants, they also support the pathways of proteins throughout the human body. They offer iron, minerals, vitamins, and more protein than lentils to the body.

Nettles remind us of the boundaries, the exposure of our skin to its surroundings, the immediacy of impact when boundaries get trespassed or are dealt with carelessly. It offers itself as an ally for integrity, stimulating boundaries by confrontation as a creative force. They call your attention with their fire, conveying a message we can't ignore: 'we are here' teaching the power of interruption and irritation as information.


The stinging experience when we brush against the nettle are hollow glass fibres that break and lacerate the skin and inject the same venom that causes a temporary rash. Nettles are activators, whether in decomposition processes, in blood circulation, or awakening parts of our body-minds that have become paralyzed or feel inaccessible. The leaves of the nettle are organised rhythmically in opposite pairs around the stem reminding us how rhythm facilitates movement.

I think of my grandmother's bare arthritic hands with which she was picking them as a medicine against the stiffness. Nettles are both the remedy and the poison, causing inflammation in the skin and helping to ease inflammation inside the body. They can sting and soothe, catalyse, mobilise, and repair flow after shock, absorb and release.






When the touch you encounter conveys a boundary, how do you respond?




What are the situations in which you can treat irritation as information?



What toxic situation will you address next?



How can your boundaries be expressed?



What is the power of 'no' to offer clarity?



How can we ally with beyond human forms of protection?

Flower essences

Flower essences are a subtle form of medicine that are very easy to make; the only ingredients are water, sun, and a flowering plant.

Flower essences work on the emotional body, treating emotions as expressions that arise through rupture in connections (with self/soul/purpose, with other relations, with ancestors, with land...) and indicators of where we can attend to accompanying processes of repairing these disconnections and harms.

To make a flower essence:

- *Set aside time on a sunny day to be with the flowering plant.*
- *Fill a small clear glass bowl with water – ideally well water to work with the groundwater of the place, but if that is not possible, work with what you have access to.*
- *Sit with the plant, with the intention of opening up to whatever encounter emerges. Try to include any perceptions of the plant, the environment, and within yourself, any thoughts, sensations, emotions, synchronicities, etc. You can come close and observe the details of the plant or you can simply rest and be nearby it. There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way, just trust and practice including anything as potentially something, even if it appears as a daydream state.*
- *Take a leaf between your thumb and pointer finger and use this to collect some of the flowers*
- *Fill the surface of the bowl with flowers*
- *Let this sit in the sun for 3 hours*
- *Then, strain the water to fill half of a small container (30-50ml size is fine) and the other half with preserving liquid (vodka at least 40% strength or apple cider vinegar) – **this is the parent bottle.***

- *Take only 3 drops of the parent bottle into another bottle (10-20ml) and fill it with preserving liquid – this is the storage bottle.*
- *From there, you can create another user bottle which is filled with water + 3 drops of the storage bottle liquid + a spoonful of preserving liquid. This can be carried around with you, placed somewhere special, and held to resonate with it. It can also be worked with through taking the drops directly in water, in a more consistent way, for a period of time.*
- *Or, you can simply take 3 drops of the storage bottle directly into a glass of water if you want to take the flower essence more singularly.*
- *Or, you can put the drops directly onto the skin somewhere in the body where you would like to absorb it.*

We invite you to drink 3 drops a day in a glass of water x 3 times a day.

*Listen to how your body communicates with the flower essence.
Can you sense movement in your system?*

Is it calming, contracting, relaxing, activating, etc?

What else can you sense? What does this medicinal encounter bring up? It may be subtle, so see how your rhythms sync up and potentially shift through the process of working with the flower essence.



Spell

Knowing that we carry knowledges in our bodies and lands, and understanding that we can ally with plants to offer medicine to each other and to the dis-eases of the world, we invite you to cast a spell together with the groups or communities you move with/in.

Each of you formulates what ailment of the social body you want to address. What remedy can you offer? (Remember to offer a spectrum not an anti-dote)

Where in your personal body does this remedy live (remember that your body is expansive and multiple including all the bacteria and non-human DNA that it is made up of. Remember that your body is porous and doesn't end at the surface of your skin).

Formulate the ailment in the social body that you want to address.

Formulate the remedy as a spectrum that you would like to offer, informed by the plants.

Formulate where in your body you can feel that you carry that remedy.

“To the ailment of _____ in the social body,
I offer _____.
And I can feel it in my _____.”



Some examples:

*For the ailment of isolation,
I offer the spectrum of connection and
release. And I can feel it in my hands.*



*For the ailment of surveillance,
I offer the spectrum of widening and
containment. And I can feel it in my
neck.*

*For the ailment of precarity,
I offer the spectrum of slowing
and quickening rhythms. And I
can feel it in the soles of my feet.*



*For the ailment of hyper-vigilance,
I offer the spectrum of restfulness
and steady flow. And I can feel it
behind my eyes.*

*For the ailment of militarization,
I offer the spectrum of firmness and
softening. And I can feel it in my
hips.*



References & Resources

While learning from relations, from family, from gardens, from plants directly, from places without titles or institutional structures, and trusting your own embodied intuition...

*“The body is itself a kind of place—not a solid object but a terrain through which things pass, and in which they sometimes settle and sediment.”
(David Abram) To wonder why some things settle in some bodies and not in others is to begin to ask questions about power, injustice, and inequity, questions that are bound in modern medicine with questions of colonialism.”*

- Rupa Marya, Raj Patel

Rupa Marya, Raj Patel:

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www.solidarityapothecary.org

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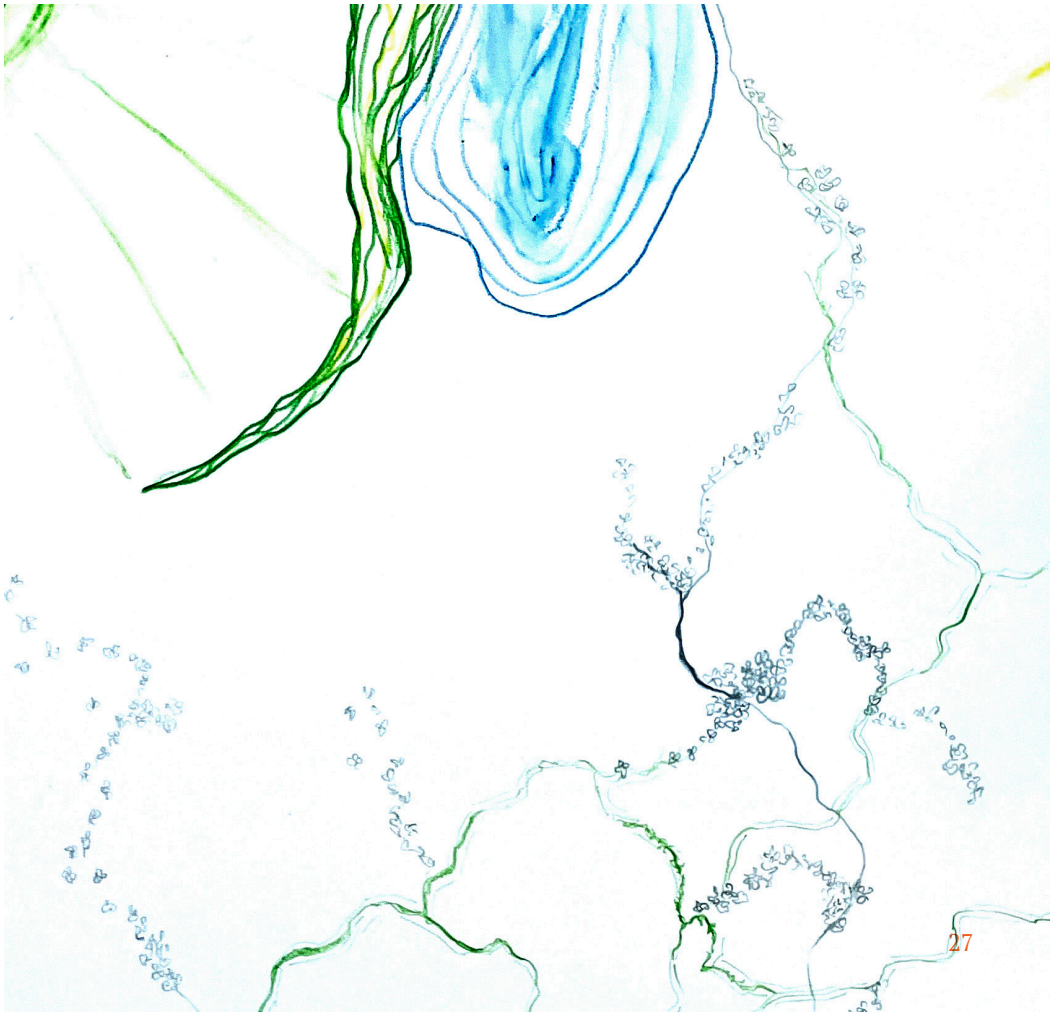
Chinese Medicine, Organs, and Meridians

Shelley Etkin, Siegmund Zacharias:
Herbalism in: An Encyclopedia of Radical Helping
Edited by Erin Segal, Chris Hoff, and Julie Cho (2024)

Social Body Apothecary: Lymph Flows in: Kontaminiert Werden Magazine,
Issue 2
Edited by Alena Trapp, Jann Mausen, Jona Möller, Mirjam Oswald (2023)

Homeopathy podcasts:
The Strange, Rare, Peculiar Podcast with Denise Straiges and Alastair Gray
Homeopathy Hangout Podcast with Eugénie Krüger

Flower Essences Background:
Edward Bach - The Twelve Healers and Other Remedies (1941)



Shelley Etkin is a transdisciplinary artist, educator, gardener, and herbalist. Her work engages with relations between bodies and lands through the plant world and intersections of place-based, (multi)local, migratory, and ancestral knowledges. Her practice integrates somatics/embodiment, herbal medicine, and ethnobotany with decolonial, queer feminist pedagogies in community-engaged processes to address questions of social-ecological change and land stewardship. Shelley has studied gender, ecology and contemporary performance, permaculture, and homeopathy. Working with plants as allies informs her practices of solidarity as a queer anti-zionist Jewish woman, of an Israeli family from the land of historic Palestine, raised in the U.S.-Turtle Island, and living in Berlin since 2012.

shelleyetkin.com

Siegmar Zacharias is a performance artist and trained death doula. At the intersection of art, radical pedagogy and activism, her work addresses the ethical dynamics of transformation in ecologies of artistic and social practice through a queer feminist lense. She collaborates with uncontrollable materials such as smoke, slime, saliva, the human nervous system, and grief. In somacoustic listening sessions she explores the materiality of sound as metabolic entanglements in intimacy and alienation. She was born in Romania and lives in Berlin.



The *SocialBody Apothecary* zine is one out of five workshops and zines that form part of the Little School, a summer school program that took place in July 2024 at Spore Initiative, in Berlin Neukölln. The Little Schools' invitation was to create a space for practical learning and exchange on topics such as environmental justice, health, and food sovereignty. A focus was put on those practice-based forms of knowledges, that enable different relationships to the land, forests, water, biodiversity and the plants that feed and heal us, while often being marginalised or not recognized as "valuable knowledge". Over the course of one week, participants took part in a variety of workshops for creative new methodologies and knowledge sharing.

The contributions were:

Decolonial Plant Knowledge, with **Abeni Asante**

Empowerment and power sharing in nature education,
with **Anthony Owosekun**

Singing and community. Workshop exploring the voice as an instrument for collective expression, with **Carolina Riaño**

Food and Body. Memories that inhabit us, with **Chepita**

The decolonial tomato. Picture stories about seeds, migration and the healing self, **Sarnath Banerjee**, and **Mikhail Lylov**

Plant allies for tending transformation, by **Siegmar Zacharias** and **Shelley Etkin** (SocialBody Apothecary).

Food by **Jasmine Al-Qaisi**, **Fatma Savun**, **Aline Winchester**

Design by **Aditi Kapur**

Images from collective drawings of the workshops and scans of plants and flowers by Aditi Kapur and textures.com.

The zines are meant to further extend this invitation to think teaching and learning through different practices, knowledges, principles, and processes.





For more information about the Little School and to get your digital copy,
visit the website of Spore Initiative or use this QR code.