

Epistemological Disobedience in a Tasty World

An Auto-Ethnography on Food as an Instrument of Dissent
Against Western Epistemology



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Abstract:

This thesis is a journey of dissent, an exploration of the counter-movements against the business-as-usual illustrated by the means of food. It relates my intense odyssey as student dealing with her own research process while diving into the fabulous tasty realm of food resistance. I aim through my words to demonstrate the significant potential of food as an instrument of dissent, of resistance against the current Western mainstream epistemology. Facing a multiplicity of crises, the humanity is running full speed in a wall. To stop this mad dash, I suggest that we need 'ecological activism'—mind and hands—performed through the means of food. While the story of food as a desired mere object of domination is often related through impersonal economical and political studies, the very methodological framework of this thesis provides a more personal perspective, an evocative account. Auto-ethnography immerses the reader into a first-person personal narrative enriched with critical and theoretical reflections on my exploration of food activism. At the same time, this methodology is also an instrument of dissent, a form of epistemic resistance that challenges the traditional research inquiry, and to a larger extent the Western epistemology too.

Keywords: *food, epistemology, neo-gastronomy, ecological activism, auto-ethnography, reflexivity*

“Stories are like vessels shaped from wet clay under a potter's hands. While each pot conforms to the stylistic and utilitarian conventions of a single society at a certain moment in time, it simultaneously bears the tell-tale traces of an individual potter's hand”

Walter Benjamin

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all the story's lovers, to my friends and relatives, who have been struggling for so long to understand the very topic of this master of Human Ecology, and especially my fellow scientific friends (you know who you are) who have always been skeptical regarding the 'social blathering'.

Through this work, I wish to generate some reflections within themselves. Last but not least, this thesis is dedicated to all these voices that inspired this odyssey from Sweden, France, and particularly those from Permacultura Barcelona who offered me the time, energy and opportunity to concretize and shape this journey the way it is now.

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I would also express my gratitude to Permacultura Barcelona who gave me the chance to practically apply those academic discussions and eventually dive into this wonderful tasty world of food activism. Thanks to them, I am more than convinced about food to heal the World!

I would like to thanks my teachers, my supervisor Pernille Gooch, who gave me freedom and security/guidance and consequently allowed me to struggle, find my own path as

young researcher, as well as Vasna Ramasar for her 'love activism' that she brilliantly embodies with her heartwarming words; and finally my sister Emmanuelle, who kindly offered her knowledge, time and energy to help me sort out my ideas.

I am also really thankful to my parents who offered me the opportunity to live this two years initiatory experience in Sweden. They literally provided me with some more years to explore and find my own path in this big World.

Last but not least, to whom the very topic of this thesis summarize our life project, 'From the seed to the plate: everyday neo-gastronomic resistance', my Norman farmer and life partner, Norbert.

FOREWORD

The master in Human Ecology at Lund University addresses some profoundly philosophical and existential questions. Adopting a holistic perspective on a complex interconnected World, it teaches us that there are other ways of being and understanding our societies. It teaches us to critically observe and reflect on every bit of knowledge, every social construct and concept. It teaches us to deconstruct and reconstruct, to 'learn to unlearn'. My position as a young researcher in Social Sciences is rooted in this constructivist perspective¹. Therefore, my subjectivity extensively pervades this thesis. Also, as I will argue later, narratives, accounts or stories are powerful means which profoundly affect people and convey meanings in a singular way. As Mary Bateson eloquently says, “our species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories”. Therefore, this thesis in its form will be a first-person intimate account.

I am accurately aware that this research in its tones and substance questions the traditional academic scientific inquiry and writing. However, I assume my position as young researcher and do understand that I have to play with the rules of the academia. I recognize those rules as legitimate and fundamental if we are to sustain a harmonious communication between us and for the very sake of improving our knowledge. However in presenting this thesis, I hope to provide some further reflections on the sensitive and highly debated discussion of 'doing and writing research', and the Western epistemology in general.

1 ¹By constructivist, I merely acknowledge the 'mental construction' of our knowledge about the material World we live in. Also, it depends on

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1. Introduction

This section concerns the roots of my scientific quest. It slowly brings the reader towards the research question of this inquiry that is: How is neo-gastronomy resisting the business-as-usual in the context of Western epistemology? Through these few pages, I expose my reflections and provide my interpretation of each term and concept which constitute the very title of this thesis.

1.1 In the Beginning Was the Seed

By the end of my first year in Human Ecology at Lund University, overloaded with theoretical knowledge about complex issues, I experienced some dark months of existential questioning about myself, the sake of humanity, and above all my position/role in this vast World. There is no doubt: humankind needs to *change* direction, to *engage* into another path. The business-as-usual we are living in, that is this frenetic megamachine² ruling our World and lives is heading straight in a wall (Latouche 2014). Our multiple crises are mere consequences of the “androcentric, eurocentric and ethnocentric, as well as anthropocentric”³ Western hegemonic model (Plumwood 2002: 101), that is our Western ontology and epistemology⁴. But *how* to step into a distinct pathway? Which means/tools can provide the impulse for humanity to deviate from its irrational mad dash and flow *with* the Earth's tide? How to foster this change, if not accelerate it considering the environmental urgency?

By May 2014, I was convinced that in order to tackle the current worldwide crises, it was urgent that humans realize, acknowledge and comprehend 'reality'/what-is-going-on in the World. I was convinced that to provoke and promote a change that would be resilient,

2 □The term 'megamachine' was coined by Serge Latouche, a French professor of economics emeritus, one of the leader of the Degrowth Movement. He describes this machine as a human-made imperialist, productivist political and economical techniques worldwide network. The Degrowth Movement is a network of practitioners, scholars, activist interaction around different fields of study. It is defined as “as an equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level, in the short and long term. (Schneider, Kallis & Martinez-Alier 2010).

3 □The suffix 'centric' refers to the idea of centrality, 'centered on'; while 'andro' means 'man, male'; 'euro' means 'Europe, European'; 'ethno' means 'culture, people, nation, class' and 'anthropo' means 'pertaining to man, or human beings' (Online Etymology Dictionary).

4 □Ontology refers to the study of 'being', it is concerned “with the nature and relations of being” (Merriam-Webster's definition). Epistemology is complementary, it refers to the ways of understanding the World we inhabit, that is our knowledge about it. I shall use the word 'culture', 'model', 'worldview' to vary but these remain embedded within an ontology and an epistemology they form of whole.

harmonious, happy and above all meaningful, one has to be aware/conscious and reflect on the conditions of his/her very existence, and then act consequently by engaging in the creation of concrete and tangible alternatives. By 'engaging' I mean behaving *consciously*, living *intentionally*, that is being an actor of our life, feel and sense the World through our body, as well as reflecting upon it through our mind. It echoes the idea of 'dwelling' coined by the phenomenologist Martin Heidegger. Tim Ingold, a British anthropologist explains “[dwelling is] not merely the occupation of structures already built . . . it rather signifies the immersion of beings in the currents of the lifeworld [...] Whereas the animal merely *exists* in its environment, within these limits it is possible for the human to *be*.” (2011: 10-11). It is a form of inhabiting the place, making a living by, through, with the place. I oppose this notion to what I would call 'squatting' or 'occupying' the Earth through our material bag of bones, when we are mere agent, passive puppets enveloped by a thin layer of skin.

I precisely remember this chilled wintery day when my eyes came across Marcuse's words, “[a]ll liberation depends on the *consciousness* of servitude...” (1968, 7 my emphasis). These words profoundly echoed in me, something clicked. Through his masterpiece, *One-dimensional Man* (1968), the German-American sociologist and philosopher Herbert Marcuse, advocates for “critical thinking” as the key to escape the totalitarian capitalist modern system that is enslaving us. Similarly, Val Plumwood an Australian eco-feminist intellectual and activist, adds that we need to engage “[o]ur capacity to gain insight from understanding our social context, to learn from self-critical perspectives on the past and to allow for our own limits of vision [which] is still one of our best hopes for creative change and survival” (2002: 10). Drawing upon these words, I started questioning the very ontology and epistemology of the Western model I was/am embedded in. Nourished by the reflections of Latouche, I realized that our imaginary—i.e. our values and moral as guiding framework—has been colonized by the technocratic, profit-driven and developmentalist ideology of economics, and more specifically by the inherent values of the capitalist system (Latouche, 2014). He stresses “the need to decolonize and change our imaginary constitutes the primary and necessary condition for the emergence and the triumph of alternatives” (ibid: 116 my translation). And perhaps the worst could be that we completely forgot how to critically consider, to 'filtrate', to stand back and put this knowledge into perspective (Marcuse 1968). The reason why I am emphasizing on the 'mind' is because as Schumacher explains our minds are filled with prejudices and pre-conceived ideas and thoughts about the World—which refers to the idea of 'epistemology'. Ernst Schumacher is the author of the classic *Small is*

Beautiful (1973), he writes “we think *with* or *through* ideas and that what we call thinking is generally the application of pre-existing ideas . . . [in the end]what matters is the tool-box of ideas with which, by which, through which we experience and interpret the world” (reedition 2010: 89-91). Therefore, this decolonization of our imaginary, this critical thinking combined with the creation of concrete alternatives occurs to me as a fundamental, an essential, a crucial *need* if we are about to stop our mad dash and change our direction. Above all, such activity both mental and physical, appeared to me as the very act of dissenting, of subversion, of resistance against the business-as-usual I mentioned above.

When I started this intense journey, I had a false belief, a rather narrowed definition of 'activism'. To me, it was first, mere '*action*', and second it equated with violent confrontations, spectacular and immediate conflicts such as Greenpeace's spectacular civil disobediences, or the French ZAD (*Zone à Défendre*, i.e. “Zone to defend”). The story of activism is told by a variety of actors from students, politicians, journalists, farmers all of them labeled as such. Depending on each perspective, it can be a story of violence, confrontations and conflicts, as much as a story of hope, dream and faith in humankind. Indeed, Ian Maxey explains, “[a]ctivism is not a fixed term, but is actively constructed in a range of ways . . . [within] the media, grassroots organizations and academic . . . [as] a rather narrow, exclusionary activism” (1999: 199-200). I jumped both feet into this normative, reductionist, discursively constructed notion of activism. Adopting a constructivist standpoint, he claims that we are both creators and participants of the society, “the social world is produced through the acts of each of us engages in every day. Everything we do, every thought we have, contribute to the production of the social world . . . we are all engaged in producing the world” (1999: 201). Maxey is a geographer at the University of Wales, he drew his interpretation of the concept upon the feminist, post-colonialist and post-structuralist epistemologies. To him, activism is “to engage critically and reflexively with the social world . . . [it is the] process of reflecting and acting upon this condition [as 'architects' of our social environment] . . . from where I am at politically, spiritually, emotionally, physically” (1999: 199, 201). I was seduced by his words. According to him, activism is a form of resistance, of dissent, of subversion against “the oppressive power relations” (ibid: 201); and therefore it can be a source of inspiration, of empowerment as well as emancipation. Moreover, Maxey emphasizes on the *continuous* and *daily* resistance, both internal and external, personal and collective, by stating that activism occurs from “wherever you are at” (ibid). Finally, his interpretation is rather holistic, it integrates both *mind* and *hands*, this complementary process of thinking and acting

constantly. This connection profoundly disrupts the Western Cartesian epistemology. By 'Cartesian', I refer to Descartes' 'dualistic' perspective, which is “an empathic and distancing form of separation . . . which creates a sharp, ontological break, or radical discontinuity” (Plumwood 2002: 101). As I read Maxey's definition I recall the wonderful *Steps To An Ecology of Mind* (1972) of Gregory Bateson. This brilliant British anthropologist advocates for a vision of human where heart/head/hands forms a whole connecting and interacting. For these reasons, I will refer to what I called 'ecological activism' as this perpetual both mental and physical activity which encompasses critical reflection and concrete answers.

This is with such statement that I started this journey. Ecological activism happened to me as one part of the answer. Yet, I needed a means, an instrument to illustrate, to perform this holistic form of resistance. The truth is that the key was deep within me from the beginning, waiting silently. It took me some time to realize and unearth it: food. Nature's bounty, fruits, vegetables, cereals, grains, legumes took a while to catch my attention. They were buried deep within myself, they were mere neutral input, inactive fuel for my bag of bones. Food, more precisely the very concept of neo-gastronomy coined by Carlo Petrini, was a *revelation* to me. Let me bring you to this tasty colorful and subversive world.

1.2 Food to Heal The Planet!

I have never been an avid reader. For some reasons, I have always been more attracted and fascinated by face-to-face interactive dialogue, rather than 'face-to-page monologue' I had with books. There are only a few books that I really felt captivated by which I could not close until I turned the last page. This was the case of Carlo Petrini's bible *Slow Food Nation* (2007). Petrini is a charismatic Italian “professional gourmet” (The Independent 2009) who created in 1986 the association Slow Food as a response to an industrialized food industry which was profoundly threatening the Italian gastronomic and cultural traditions (ibid.).

Through these two hundred pages, Petrini extensively describes the very idea of *neo-gastronomy* as “the reasoned knowledge of everything that concerns man as he eats” (2007: 80). He considers food as very *vehicle of thoughts*, as an impetus which discloses and reflects on humankind, “food [is] the best representation of societies and the best means of

interpreting their characteristics” (ibid. 69). He adds, “in telling stories about food, one tells stories about agriculture, about restaurants, about trade, about local and global economies, about tastes, and even about famine” (ibid. 37). Food thus embraces a tremendous variety of issues: from botany, physics and chemistry, agronomy, ecology, medicine to anthropology, sociology, geopolitics, technology and industry, cooking and even epistemology (ibid.). Therefore, the neo-gastronome adopts a holistic perspective on food. He/she recognizes the strong connections between the plate, the planet and the culture. This precisely is why, as I will further argue later, selling a carrot is a political, economical and social act! Food is also a daily topic that enters our body as much as our mind. It is a physiological *need* for our body, the fuel to active it, but more interestingly it concerns our very psychology—that is, our gustatory and olfactory senses are vectors of history, a door to our past⁵. Finally, food is right at the intersection between culture and power, as “the primary defining fact of human identity” (ibid. 36), caring our history, our traditional knowledge about farming, cooking, or herbal medicine for instance; our economical and geopolitical decisions about seeds banks and trades, genetics (GMOs), or techniques.

As I devoured the words of Carlo Petrini, it became all evident and clear. By revisiting and widening the perspective on food and on gastronomy, his words became a large source of inspiration. Neo-gastronomy perfectly illustrates Maxey's definition of activism, what I called ecological activism, stimulating both mind and hands, and expressing some disagreements with the surrounding socio-political environments we are embedded in. My endless enthusiasm concerning this topic profoundly affected the direction of this adventure.

Here I had the topic of my inquiry, the theme I wished to dive into, the ocean I wished to dive into mind and heart alike. I wished to explore this fabulous flavory universe, from the soil to the plate. I wished to investigate food as an instrument of dissent, of resistance against the business-as-usual, and to a broader extent against Western predominant epistemology which enslaves our imaginary. More specifically, I was about to slip into the subversive ecological activism performed and encouraged by these foodie dissenters, these spicy food activists, or neo-gastronomic resisters. I wondered: How is neo-gastronomy resisting Western epistemology?

5 ¹ Marcel Proust and his madeleine (*In Search of Lost Time* 1913) could tell you a lot about it.

For this, I wished to listen to people's stories and experiences, to conduct few but in-depth participant observation. Yet, I was still lacking a methodological framework to investigate and share this tasty inquiry. I spent hours at the library, diving into books on 'doing social science'. All were using a specific terminology such as research design, methods, theories, variables, data and much more. I was confused, in fact I failed to grasp all of these. It sounded like an unreachable lingo. Above all, I was torn due to internal conflicts, some personal concerns that I needed to clarify. Auto-ethnography occurred to be the solution I encountered, both as a means to share my subversive story as well as to solve all these personal issues.

Rooted in the constructivist epistemology, the auto-ethnographic methodology is a journey, a continuous process of doing *and* writing research (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011). Grounded in mind and body, that is drawing upon both theoretical and experiential/sensory knowledge, it depicts ('graphy') one's individual reflexive narrative analysis ('auto') embedded within a given material/physical and socio-political world ('ethno') (ibid.) In this case, my intense inquiry in the tasty world of food activism within the context of Western epistemology. It is therefore a first-person account, personalized and highly reflective which attempts to evoke and immerse the reader through a vernacular and vivid rhetoric. The data used are all 'filtered' by the researcher's subjectivity, they vary from self-reflections, intuitions, diary and notes to collective discussions, interview—i.e. formal interactive dialogue (ibid.).

It is worth mentioning that although I started my inquiry exclusively focused on food, over the months I realized that I wanted to share another subversive story. I decided to describe extensively my intense journey of 'doing and writing this master thesis', to share some ontological and epistemological stances. These indeed guide and support auto-ethnography as a methodology. Above all, as the reader will understand through these pages, this very methodology is also as instrument of dissent against the orthodox scientific inquiry, and to a broader extent the Western epistemology. Along with food activism, auto-ethnography stimulates ecological activism. This thesis is therefore a journey of epistemological disobedience, of resistance, of ecological activism illustrated by both the tasty topic of my inquiry and the methodological framework I used.

The following parts concern my methodological design (2), including these personal reflections, these intimate concerns (2.1) which led me towards this methodology of auto-

ethnography (2.2). Afterwards, I invite you to immerse with me in this dissenting tasty world through the exploration of various resistances undertaken by the neo-gastronomic dissent (3).

2. Methodological Design

2.1. A Reflective Approach on Philosophy of Science: The Little World of a Student in Human Ecology

As I stepped into the mysterious world of scientific research, I had a profound feeling of disconnection, of remoteness from 'reality'⁶, combined with the awful sensation of guilt. I indeed felt profoundly *alienated*, that is from another World. I felt somehow privileged, part of the 'elitist academic bubble'. I was unable to communicate with my non-academic fellows friends and relatives outside the university walls. It all sounded like a pretentious jargon to them when discussing daily problems. I had the feeling that we created two distinct 'cultures', the academic and the non-academic one, somehow reflecting the Cartesian dichotomy theory/practice. I had the sensation that we were agents of two distinct worlds that face a somehow similar 'reality' but deal with it via different means, attitudes, behaviors. Carrying such feeling of remoteness, I had the 'humble ambition' to re-establish a sustainable and respectful communication between these 'two cultures'. Don't get me wrong, I did not at all have an arrogant, snobbish, and superior perspective of 'telling the truth' to my fellows friends—I would be in contradiction with my constructivist epistemology. In fact, I rather attempted to solve those uncomfortable feelings by creating an evocative and accessible academic thesis.

I also felt guilty as I realized our positions as academics, more precisely our *power*. I kept on wondering what to do with all this knowledge within me: how to share it and make the most of it? I started to reflect on some fundamental questions such as, what is science? What is a valid scientific inquiry? What makes the difference between a mere story and a scientific report? Why is that the personal, experiential type of knowledge carried in our hands is not considered as a relevant/valid knowledge? I also felt uncomfortable with my title

6 I am aware that this statement between academic and reality can be problematic. As I will further elaborate in the section 2.2.1, I believe that the Western traditional research's model, which advocates for an objective, impersonal, dispassionate scientific inquiry, can lead to such separation.

of 'young researcher' which implies that this 'academic thesis', on the contrary to people's everyday stories, could be labeled as 'the truth'. The words of the agronomist Michele Campanari quoted in Petrini (2007) illustrates my thoughts:

“I had learned from books at the university. My knowledge, based on scientific research and published in specialist texts, seemed without doubt more powerful than the traditional knowledge of the farmers [she spent time with them in the countryside]. It was more powerful because it was written down . . . [whereas their traditional knowledge] simply existed in the minds, in the culture of the farmers” (185)

Overall, I presume that I was trying to deal with this position of being a 'privileged' white, middle-class, and educated woman. I had some epistemic concerns about the conduct of a scientific inquiry. I definitely knew within myself that there was something *beyond*, or rather something *complementary* to these books, theories and discussions, another form of knowing our environments alongside these words. I realized how I became myself a mere 'thinking-machine' deprived of my senses, my feelings were inhibited. I was unable to 'loose myself', to feel, to touch, to smell my surroundings. My very existence was strictly governed by my reason, my cognitive structure, my words. I was in fact profoundly affected by Descartes' legacy on our mainstream Western epistemology.

I was advocating for an experiential/sensory knowledge, that is the one gained through senses, through bodily experiences, the very idea of 'learning by doing'⁷. Inspired by the critiques of Ivan Illich (2003) and David Orr (1992) against the institutionalized education, I had deep faith in this interactive and practical knowledge. I recalled the practical/manual knowledge of my grand father who would built a wonderful garden house with just a few branches and nails. I remembered my grand mother's extensive knowledge on herbal medicine—she would always tell me “you are what you eat”! All these individuals outside the academy also had thousand of stories, sensory experiences and knowledge of their World to share! In Petrini's words, “[our] treasure is the 'slow knowledge', that lives in the *hands and hearts* of millions of farmers . . . in the hands of cooks . . . in the traditions of peoples” (2007: 187 my emphasis). It is worth clarifying what I mean by experience: I am here referring to the personal, sensory one, which is not acknowledged as reliable source of

7 I will further elaborate on the concept of experiential/sensorial knowledge in the part 2.2.2.

knowledge because too personal and subjective; on the contrary, there is the technical scientific experience realized in laboratories, which holds the status of valid and legitimate because mechanical and therefore apparently neutral, impartial, valid and relevant. Indeed, I was deeply frustrated by the reductionist logocentric and librocentric⁸ Western epistemology. The one that generates accurate, credible, and so-called universal knowledge through words (Burman 2012). Overall, I was upset by the imperialist dominion of theories, or words to know the World we live in. I recall this vicious circle I entered in the last months. I was blaming myself for not 'studying' enough, for not 'learning' enough. I had the belief that I was wasting my time when I would play the guitar, go for a drink with a friend, go gardening, and do these so-called useless, these 'idle activities'. I actually recall my escape from theories and abstract explanations when I started working on this thesis. I could not digest them any longer. To me they lacked concrete, tangible applications. From then, I relentlessly sought for practical, sensory, experiential responses to these problems taught in class. I was literally 'craving for solutions', better said for experiences. I wanted to re-embody my bag of bones, to recover my five senses. Above all, I wanted to bring these words and theories into life. At the end of the day, I unexpectedly embarked on a radical journey of “epistemological disobedience” (ibid: 118). I wished to balance this disequilibrium between those two forms of knowledge. I wished to re-value this personal, lived sensory form of knowing, to raise it to the same level as the theoretical one.

Finally, another impulse that shaped the very conduct of this research is related to the (overly) critical tone we used when discussing issues in class. I assume the post-studies 'depression' I experienced, came also from this problem-driven perspective that pervaded this master in Human Ecology. I literally got sick of such critical theories, I had an 'overdose' of thoughts, ideas and words fluttering in the air. My glass was full. Full of complex theories, facts, oversized numbers, and information about what is happening in the World. I *knew* it was going wrong, I knew about unequal ecological exchange, I knew about the daily tremendous depletion of thousands of species, plants and trees, I knew about the horrific social injustice and neocolonialist relationships, and I just had *enough*. I needed to see that despite such negative thoughts, such critiques, there was/is some hope, some alternatives

8 Logocentric comes from the Greek 'logo', meaning 'word', which suggests words and language as fundamental expression of the Truth. While librocentric, also comes from the Greek 'libro' meaning 'book', which advocates superiority to knowledge acquired through books.

already swimming against the capitalist tide. I needed to dream about my 'concrete utopia'⁹! I needed to focus on the optimistic creative existing and on-going solutions that answered those problems discussed during this year. Although, it might sound like a harsh critique of the educational institution, this is not my aim. Rather, I attempt to reveal my ontological and epistemological stance, that is to lead you on the path that framed my inquiry. I intend to situate you, to connect you to the researcher I am who conducted this research. I am aware that with such biases, personal beliefs and concerns might sound irrelevant or pointless to some. Also the setting of this research, that is the Western culture I previously described, has inevitably profoundly affected and shaped this inquiry. I accurately acknowledge that this personal journey is unique and cannot be detached from this specific Western context, nor that it can be detached from the person who wrote this paper, her worldview and understanding of the world. Yet, I cannot escape and can only acknowledge this situation. As I expressed previously, these personal feelings—of remoteness and guiltiness—combined with those epistemic reflections led me towards the very structure of my inquiry in a subversive tasty world, the methodological approach, which I am about to explain. I had all the ingredients, yet I lacked the stew to cook them altogether. I needed one that could fully encompass, rather embellish and make the best use of all these ingredients, in order to reveal each flavor, shape and color.

2.2. *Auto-ethnography as Methodology*

2.2.1 *The Power of Narratives*

*“The stories we tell literally make the world.
If you want to change the world, you need to change your story.”*

Michael Margolis

The questions remained in my mind: how could I share this story in an evocative and optimistic way that is accessible to both the academic and non-academic bubble, and potentially at the same time stimulate this ecological activism “from where I was at” right

9 I coined this term from the Degrowth Movement. On the contrary to the idealistic 'abstract utopia', the 'concrete' one describes as the sense of 'where we want to go', a point of horizon, 'what we dream about' along with practical, concrete resistance at the front stage. I noted this 'definition' on my notebook last September 2014, while participating at the Fourth International Degrowth Conference in Leipzig.

now? I thus reflected on my own position at this time, that is student in Human Ecology program at Lund. Although, I was at this time blindly focusing on the practice, the action, the doing, I could not escape this status, and what for? I could not just give up my studies for not being able to solve a 'problem', a *frustration*. I could not just decide not to complete the game I started. My role as researcher holds a powerful status as I previously explained. I should rather take advantage of this status, that is to accept it and use it as a strength, and to see it an *opportunity*. As I entered the fantastic world of permaculture¹⁰ via my internship in September 2014, my friend and responsible Álvaro taught me one of the first principle of this philosophy: “the solution is in the problem”. I played the game and sought for this “solution” buried, hidden, waiting silent, within the “problem” I was facing. My epistemic concerns and the very idea of having to use words, theories and complex scientific concepts, vanished when I decided to *tell a story*. An eloquent, optimistic and flavory story about humankind!

Auto-ethnography is defined as a reflective narrative analysis of one individual's unique life experiences in relationship to a particular physical/politico-social environment (Custer 2014; Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011). It acknowledges the inextricable relationship between the personal and the cultural, the individual and the society, “I am the world and the world is me” (Wall 2006 in Custer 2014). Reacting against the orthodox scientific inquiry, that is the hegemonic one of the Western epistemology that equates with objectivity, value-free/impartiality, rigor, disengagement, dispassionateness (Greenwood & Levin 1998: 239; Muncey 2010), the methodology of auto-ethnography proudly grasps, acknowledges, embraces the interconnectedness, intersection, and reciprocal relationship between the researcher and his/her subject/object of study, it in other words celebrates the researcher's subjectivity to *enrich* the inquiry. Rooted in the constructivist epistemology, which recognizes a form of 'situated knowledge', that is specific to a place and time and embedded within a subject, Tessa Muncey (2010) asks:

“[c]onsider what particular kind of filter you are employing to separate your own experience from what you are studying. It must be a very powerful one if you try to deny that the impact of your experience has no bearing on the way you conduct your own work. Isn't it healthier to acknowledge the link and purposely build it into your work, or even more interestingly, make yourself the focus of the study?”

10 I will further explain this philosophy in the section 3.3

Active participant in the neo-gastronomic resistance, why not using my own insights in dealing with such topic? Who better than myself could express my own statements, beliefs and experiences? Why use a third person who will inevitably influence and interpret my thoughts? The researcher thus combines both the tenets of the autobiography and the ethnography to do and write his/her account. She/he thus aims “to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011: 1). Observing and participating in a specific 'culture'—in this case the West and its hegemonic ontology/epistemology—the researcher relies on personal and social/collective data, both theoretical and experiential, in order to create this intimate story.

We all have stories in our mind. Now, at this present time, there are few stories floating in your head. In fact, our mind is *filled* with stories. Depending on our worldviews, our cosmologies, the country we grew up, our childhood has been lulled by stories of fairies, monsters, princesses and knights, talkative thousand-centuries wise mountains, malicious foxes, expressive trees and so on. Our entire life is soothed and shaken by thousand of stories we hear everyday. From the early morning sipping your cup of coffee, the radio station is already shouting. Within a few minutes, you get an overview of all those stories that happened in the world last night when you were asleep. When you read a book while waiting for the metro, then sit down with a warm cup of tea and listen to your grandma's account of her first jump in the Baltic sea. Until the late dinner facing the TV stand, the newscaster with her bright smile who unequivocally spreads horrific dramas, scary tragedy but also happy coincidence and romances etc. These are all *stories*. Narratives, tales, accounts, whether adventure, fiction, myth, drama or comedy, any specific genre that *make sense* of our worlds (Muncey 2010). Whether written in a book or narrated by an eloquent individual facing you or through the television screen, these stories are “complex, constitutive, meaningful phenomena that taught morals and ethics . . . [and] unique ways of thinking and feeling . . . [and help] people make sense of themselves and others” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011: 1). To the contrary to facts, number and abstract typologies, stories and storytelling convey messages and meanings. In his book *The Politics of Storytelling* (2002) Michael Jackson, an anthropologist from New Zealand explains, “[u]nlike polemic, which cultivates a disinterested, objective, abstract, and authoritative view from afar, stories are a form of

'situated thinking' that brings philosophy down the earth, working within the everyday lifeworld of human struggle, encompassing a plurality of perspectives, in order to gain an enlarged view of human experience" (252). Stories evoke and embellish these daily, concrete and so-called anodyne human experiences. They are therefore an inspiring instrument that can have tremendous impacts on our ways of seeing and understanding the world around us. Stories are, I argue, a powerful tool to provoke change that is more than needed, to encourage this ecological activism: "in times of personal tragedy, *crisis and transition* . . . it is not the legitimacy of science that we demand but the need for a sense of agency, voice and belonging" (Jackson 2002: 185 my emphasis). Overwhelmed with horrific, terrible and dreadful stories constantly broadcasted via mass medias, I believe there is a need for optimistic, hopeful narratives to balance the trend, give hope and faith.

Performing my 'epistemological disobedience', I was not solely acknowledging my positionality, which influences the inquiry, but I also undertook a higher degree of self-reflexivity and role within this research. I am aware the autobiographic genre is one form of narrative among others. Using the first person subject, it is highly personalized and profoundly self-reflective. The truth is that I felt deeply implicated within the tasty story I wanted to tell, it made sense to me to use my own voice. Also, I felt uncomfortable with the normative image of the researcher as "a rational actor model of social performances . . . [a] disinterested spectator, surveying, watching, analyzing, and reporting at a distance about people's personal, institutional and culture lives" (Bochner 2012: 158-159). Finally, I felt alone in the jungle of social science research right from the beginning.

Captivating, mesmerizing and spellbinding, storytelling aims to strike a chord within us. And this was precisely my aim, to 'strike a chord' within you. As I previously expressed, I felt deeply alienated from 'reality', this continuous flow of energies and knowledge floating outside the academic. Above all, I felt misunderstood and disconnected from my non-academic relatives. I would argue that most of the social sciences writings are not solely "dry and overly abstract" (Bochner 2012: 161), but they are first and foremost barely understandable—precisely due to this specialized lexicon. I wished my story to be comprehensible, eloquent and expressive to a wide diverse audience "usually disregarded by the traditional scientific inquiry" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011, 13). I wished to share my experience not solely to the academic bubble, my teachers, my fellow students, but also to the non-academic one, my relatives who quit the university benches a long time ago, or to those

who never step into it! I wanted to invite them into conversations on the same issues *we*, academic and non-academic, *are all concerned about*—and this is precisely one of the purpose of this story, which I wrote for both for these 'loyal traditionalist scientists', and these lovable farmers grounded on their 'real soil' to whom this scientific jargon seems unreachable and even useless. By its vivid and emotional style and vernacular rhetoric, this methodology displays a potential relationship between science (academic paper) and art (story), between “social sciences and living of life” (Muncey 2010: 33). It is on a knife's edge between science and literature.

I argue that it is important to explore the canonical scientific research in order to justify this 'subversive' methodology. Let me recall that by definition Social Sciences Research (SSR) investigates society and the manner in which people behave and impact their surroundings (Muncey 2010). Similarly to the Western epistemology that recognizes one hegemonic form of rational, observable, provable, and explicit knowledge (Plumwood 2005; Burman 2012), the canonical SSR undertaken within a particular politicized framework fosters this model “apart from the world of application” (Greenwood & Levin 1998, 239). In Schumacher's words, “science cannot produce ideas by which we could live . . . [it is] completely inapplicable to the conduct of our lives or the interpretation of the world” (2010: 92). Also according to Greenwood & Levin, SSR is disconnected for 'reality'—due to the fact that it usually addresses a fashionable topic, that is the political agenda (1998: 239). Similarly Bochner writes, “[w]e are groomed to engage in certain types of research experiences and to compose texts that satisfy the expectations of our discipline's norms” (2012: 160). Often, the university replicates and perpetuates such oppressive traditional socio-political structures and fails at encouraging *other ways of gaining and sharing knowledge*. Custer eloquently writes “as a community of beings, one authoritative truth or vision is not sufficient for all love unique stories” (2014: 7). Auto-ethnography based on the personal and collective reflections, emotions, lived-experiences, tacit¹¹ and sensuous knowledge, could precisely enable me to rely on these other forms of knowing along with the theoretical one.

11 □The term 'tacit knowledge' was coined by the scholar Michael Polanyi referring to the implicit, personal, sensory information and images grasped by one individual. To illustrate, he used to say, “we know more than we can tell”.

2.2.2 *The Potential of Experiential/Sensory Knowledge*

As I previously wrote, my frustration with the librocentric and logocentric Western epistemology led me towards an intense 'fight' to give legitimacy to the sensorial, experiential and personal form of knowing the World. I found strength and confidence in the work of Merleau-Ponty (1966 in Gooch 1998), Burman (2012) and Petrini (2007). The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that the “body is our medium for having a world” (1966). He discusses the idea of 'embodied' knowledge which refers to the experiential and sensuous one I was talking about. He stresses “the world is not what I think but what I live through . . . [we are] inhabitant of our movements” (1966 in Gooch 1998: 298-299). She explains how Merleau-Ponty “approach[s] 'knowledge' not in terms of scientific and detached knowledge but as 'useful practical knowledge in the everyday world’” (ibid. 297). From America to Asia, passing by Europe and Africa and Oceania, we all share the same sun that warms up our skin or this wind that gives you goosebumps and chills these warm days of summer. We all smell of the grass freshly cut or this rain that nourishes the 'dark gold', the soil; we all experience the sound of the wave that breaks on the shore or this wind that roams within the leaves of the trees, and finally the bitterness of the coffee on your tongue. Wherever these senses bring us back in time and space, whatever sensations and feelings they create within us, we all experience this World through our body. In the same vein, the ethnographic fieldwork of our teacher Anders Burman in Bolivia provides some inspirations on knowledge production and diffusion. According to these traditional communities, embodied knowledge refers to “the winds and smells [...which] think through, with and from within us, and make us experience and sense the world” (2012: 108). It is the “non-linguistic, experiential knowledge that is lived-through and gained *in, from, with* and *within* the world . . . the ways things are” (ibid.:102). In fact, they argue that “books are good enough if you are interested in people's opinions, ideas and judgments, but they are . . . not experience lived.” (ibid: 103). Finally in the same vein, Petrini describes experiential knowledge as “the foundation on which all theoretical knowledge is built” (2007: 160). Such statement is really disturbing as we are usually taught in academia the strict opposition, that is *theory* is the basis to experience! By re-considering and re-valuing this form of knowledge, I would stress that the change does not *only* happen within and from the mind (i.e. critical thinking). This is an egg-chicken controversial discussion on the Cartesian dichotomy mind/body, but as I will attempt to demonstrate with the data in part 3, experiencing and sensing the World can also generate the decolonization of our imaginary, the mental activism, the change of mindset and

behavior.

This embodied form of knowing the World is therefore inherently personal, internal, subjective, that is can only be sensed and felt through one's individual material body. Yet, at the same time, I would argue that there is a certain unity of humankind. Our oneness that oversteps geographical and social limits. The one that allows you to immerse and feel this story. The one that allows us to be empathic, tolerant and helpful towards each other. The one that allows to cohabit together and collectively dissent against this business-as-usual while creating a more respectful, fair and resilient future. We are individual embedded in a complex organic World¹². As Muncey writes, “our personal worlds are complex and unique but share certain characteristics and this enables us to participate imaginatively in another person's world” (2010: 11).

Overall, auto-ethnography appeared to me as a the best suited form of scientific inquiry to deal with such tasty topic of neo-gastronomic resistance. The critical perspective of my master of Human Ecology gave me the confidence to embark heart and mind into this 'original' methodological approach. Auto-ethnography allowed me to create an evocative story comprehensible to a wide audience—and therefore reconnect with my fellow friends—yet scientifically relevant. It attempts to bridge this theoretical academic world to the everyday human lifeworld through storytelling. Also, it gives back legitimacy and encourage this form of experiential, sensory way of knowing. As I healed my epistemic frustrations, I eventually realized how these 'hatred' theories discussed in class a few months ago, could actually benefit, complete and make sense of the tasty stories we were living. At this point, I realized that this story also concerned the realm of epistemology, the world of knowledge production and diffusion. More importantly, auto-ethnography is a form of resistance against the canonical way of doing and writing scientific research. I realized that my 'academic subversion' was a form of ecological activism too, I was actually embracing and performing it. Just as much as neo-gastronomy which resists the atrophy and enslavement of our imaginaries by challenging the Western epistemology. The more I embraced this methodological framework, the stronger my epistemological disobedience grew. All in one, this food story was *my* form of activism “from where I was at”.

12 □By 'organic', I refer to the expression of the social ecologist Murray Bookchin as being “an interconnected society where each part collaborate with another for the benefit of all [like a living organism]” (2014: 19, my translation).

I was fulfilled. I felt properly set up/equipped with an appropriate stew where I could cook my ingredients. I had an endless thirst to listen to people's tasty stories, my ears were wide open. Gandhi's words resonated into me, "Be the change you want to see in the World". He accurately said "be", that is *embody* mind and hands alike.

2.3 Methods and Data Collected: Playing a Puzzle of Thousand Stories

The methodology of auto-ethnography highly relies on reflexivity. This notion is heavily debated in social sciences. Its broad definition would be a circular relationships between cause and effects, that is a mutual influence. In the area/field of reflexive anthropology, Davies (1999) defines reflexivity as "a process of self-reference" (4) which therefore blurs the lines "between subject and object" (5). More simply perhaps, "reflexivity expresses researchers' awareness of their necessary connection to the research situation and hence their effects upon it . . . [which has] often been conceived in terms of the subjectivity of the researcher" (7)—by opposition to this orthodox objectivity in traditional scientific research. Reflexivity can be a personal/individual/private process, as much as a social/collective/public one. In auto-ethnography, reflexivity is an inherent component. According to Maxey (1999) besides reflexivity's potential for "personal transformation" and 'self-discovery' . . . [it] has been used (by feminist in particular) to bring about wider transformations . . ." (201). Therefore, reflexivity is one tool for epistemological disobedience, it challenges not solely these Cartesian dichotomies subject/object, mind/body, personal/social, but can also disrupt the oppressions and power relations embedded within a "sociohistorical context of researchers and the disciplinary culture to which they belong" (Davies 1999: 9).

Through this long auto-ethnographic journey, I observed and reflected upon the society I was embedded in and I gathered data. Carefully following the methodology, I trusted the relevance and legitimacy of my personal experiences, my self-reflectivity, my intuition, my tacit knowledge, and all these personal material usually disregarded and devaluated by the traditional model of scientific inquiry. I thus dove into my inner thoughts, and I reflected some long hours in the noisy Barcelona. I deconstructed and reconstructed, analyzed and attempted to make sense of this information. It is worth saying that this

methodology is a *process* as it encourages the researcher to stir up past events. These existential demanding discussions we had in class, these conversations I had until this day, my personal inner conflicts, all emerged and nourished my inquiry. For this very reason, this story could not be limited to the geographical place of Barcelona where I did my internship. It is rather an initiatory journey over the months. Another ingredient that nurtured my reflections were some deep conversations I had with friends, these informal talks at home, heading to the cinema. I recall some of these mere chats were incredibly relevant for my research. Through these informal talks that the clouds parted.

At the same time, I also conducted some interviews in order to deepen my understanding of neo-gastronomic resistance in Barcelona dissenting against the Western World. These peoples I interviewed were *the voices* of this ecological food activism. They were embodying, performing it, as much as they were stimulating and encourage it. As the auto-ethnographic methodology suggests, these interviews were rather interactive conversations, dialogues between two individuals, inter-exchange of thoughts. These were *reflective conversations*. On the contrary to the traditional ethnographic interview, I was allowed to openly express my thoughts and positions on the topic. I wanted these interviews to be a collective/mutually shared reflection, not a mere extraction of data and use of other's opinion. By being truly honest and 'vulnerable' on a specific issue, I could encourage my participant to share some of his/her inner feelings and thoughts too (Davies 1999). Above all, it will allow the participant to reflect on his/her own knowledge. That is, we were experiencing this relational experience of learning through the other. The appendix A shows the questions I have asked during these formal interactive discussions. They were mostly guiding lines as the conversation remained really open-ended. Overall, I intended to create a climate of trust, honest and open-hearted discussions with my participants. I wanted to grasp the very intimate thoughts, reflections, feelings and emotions, their very interpretation and experience of neo-gastronomy, of everyday food resistance within this given Western context. I wanted to immerse into their stories, to live them, and more 'egoistically' to generate a frame of reference¹³—this fundamental stage that allows you to strengthen your opinions, to gain confidence to eventually share and spread the word.

13 I use this expression in the sense of looking for a (comforting) feeling of belonging to a group of people that share some similar ideas, to find echoes in others' voices

All of these materials, personal and collective, nurtured this story. These dialogues actually helped me to reveal some information and to co-generate new knowledge. Knowledge production is in the end a collective and continuous process. It was in the end a personal odyssey but also a product of a substantial collection of voices, thoughts, ideas and reflections of others. As Muncey drawing on Bakhtin writes, “all sociocultural phenomena . . . are constituted through the ongoing, dialogical relationships between individuals and groups” (2010: 34). Despite the first person narrative-style, this journey is thus a personal and collective story, a retrospective on our conditions, on our multiple neo-gastronomic resistances against this model we don't agree with. As Jackson (2002) explains stories are reflections of a cultural, social, collective environment. Even the first-person narrative highly subjective is part of a macro-level world, the society. He writes, “storytelling is inextricably linked to the sharing and integration of one's experiences with that of others. In recounting one's own story, one salvages and reaffirms . . . the *social* bonds that bind one to a community” (133). Therefore auto-ethnography, although usually unfairly qualified as an auto-centered form of inquiry, is actually driven by some social purposes, transformations and engagements. (Greenwood & Levin 1998). I have to clarify that through this inquiry, I do not aim at generalizing this neo-gastronomic resistance. This journey is an exploration, a work of reflexivity and in-depth analysis. However, it is likely that some tasty features and elements of this unique research are common to some other food resistance.

Before sharing these stories of food as an instrument of resistance against the Western epistemology, let me elaborate on this Western environment from where emerged our voices. Let me set the stage where our tasty story was played. Let me provide the rules if you are to play with the Western epistemology and the values/behaviors attached to it.

3. Theoretical Exploration of the Data

As I mentioned in the introduction, I am not going to remain on the dark, hopeless, gloomy sides of this Western world, rather I attempt to provide an eloquent, positive, optimistic and enthusiastic thesis. After describing the settings of this inquiry, I am disclosing three main counteractions/resistances characteristic of this subversive tasty movement, which directly disrupt, challenge, question Western epistemology: the first one concerns the

holistic/ecological perspective adopted by these foodie dissenters when redefining our relationships to the World (3.4); in the second I discuss the significance of small-scale everyday slow activism (3.5); while in the third I stress how the neo-gastronomic activists emphasize on the embodied knowledge and often act 'from practice to theory' (3.6). Finally, in the fourth part I share some further reflections on activism in general with some insights from ecological psychology (3.7).

To provide you a reference, I recall a drawing I made last May 2014, right after our last class of the year. I called it 'The Tree of Life' (see appendix B). I imagined it through self-reflections, dialogues and readings. Each branch and leaf of this majestic tree illustrates fundamental values of our concrete utopia, this different path we are taking. I opposed this drawing to a dead and dry tree (see appendix C) which depicts the values that pervade our current Western epistemology. It is striking how these values are antonyms. I acknowledge that this is a mere artistic project, and that it looks like a black-and-white perspective of the current versus future world. I know that 'reality' is not as such, as sharply separated, and I do consider that some values/attitudes are present in both worlds. We often say “a picture can speak a thousand words”. Language is only one means to communicate. I strongly believe that there are other ways to communicate our inner feelings, emotions, thoughts and values. Drawing is one of them.

3.1 Kids of the Liquid Foul World...

"There are two things we should give our children: one is roots and the other is wings"

Hodding Carter

My story in the colorful and flavory world of neo-gastronomic dissent began last June 2014, when I fell in love with Petrini's words. From then on, I actively dove into my own thoughts and started to reflect upon the conditions of my very existence.

In 2012 for ninth months I settled in Chamonix, the famous ski resort beneath the Mont-Blanc. Back from my Erasmus year in Finland, I *needed* to see more. I needed to explore, to experience, to touch, to feel *more*. I had the wanderlust. I was a rootless hobo, a

barefoot nomad ready to climb every mountain, to cross every ocean. I was 20 years old. I was just a kid squatting the Earth. I was living life to the fullest, I was burning the candle at both ends without wondering much about the consequences of my actions. Mind and body could not stop moving. I had no roots, I had no wish to go back to Normandy, no attachment to my homeland, no *sense of place*. I was a little pigeon but not homing nor messenger. I was a pigeon in the sense of naive little being with two prominent wings and an intrinsic thirst for traveling. During this gap year, I planned to hit the road again, I was dreaming of a route to Nepal passing by the Trans-Siberian railways and the wild plains of Mongolia. Yet, I believe that I am definitely not the only one striving for and eventually adopting such a lifestyle. Everyday glued to my chair facing my computer screen while sipping my coffee, Facebook and other addictive social media display pictures of friends traveling the world and proudly sharing their new purchase: a trendy-hippy-but-noisy Volkswagen ready to plot the route! How exotic and 'authentic' it is to cross the arid Australian lands seeking indigenous aboriginal tribes! All around me, I hear/read about young kiddies on the road in search for “*something*”. Are they seeking for something lost in the past, something we drop on the side of our route to the holy progress? Are they looking for something new, something different? Is it an object or a mere abstraction? Are those backpackers lonely wolves lost in a frenetic incomprehensible world? Are they escaping this frenzy, ashamed of, and entirely disconnected from, this system they were born in? Schumacher, analyzing the Western capitalist society, qualifies us as “footloose wanderers” (2010). We are left-alone orphans wrestled from our Mother Earth. We are afraid of committing and engaging, which would imply the loss of our so-called freedom, while at the same time we are afraid of missing out the new, the fresh, the different. What Bauman calls the “avoidance of fixation” (2013). We are mere stroller, clumsy vagabond, egoistic tourist, superficial player unable to commit, to find stability (ibid.). Driven by our fears we always expect the grass to be greener on the other side. We constantly worry about making a choice, what's the best one? We superficially explore, we grab some pieces and bits here and there, we try things out.

Some scholars argue how our globalized capitalist system systematically encourages us to tear ourselves from our roots, our past, our history. Marcuse suggests that there is an “historical amnesia” (1968: 97), we forgot our past, our history and identity and even our very everyday language is deprived from historical dimensions. While Pierre Rabhi, an Algerian-French philosopher and farmer, says “we spend our time to forget” (2008). We are constantly incited to move, to be hyperactive material bodies and souls pounding the

pavement, we are continually encouraged to tolerate and even nourish our wanderlust for the sake of our so-called freedom, yet all our needs and choices are driven by this authoritarian system (Marcuse 1968). Travel agencies bloomed everywhere in the city, they endlessly display wonderful-but-power-pointed exotic landscapes—this paradisiac scenery we aren't living in but should definitely explore! Schumacher proposes the “idolatry of giantism” as the roots of such wanderlust (2010: 73). He addresses how the very stable structure of our system has been threatened and became vulnerable. In the summer of 2013, my traveling plans fell apart and life rather called me back to my native Norman lands. After a rock'n roll year of debauchery, I eventually realized it was too much, I pushed the limits. I felt guilty and egoistic. A wealthy kid living the dream, an easy life made of superficial conversations, endless snowboarding, exponential drinking within the wonderful alpine mountains. I slowly gave up my childish costume to endorse a responsible and 'active'/conscious character.

In September 2013, I decided to hit the books and go back to school. I had played enough. Stepping out of the mainstream educational curriculum was audacious and pretty exceptional in France and I am proud that I did it. Although I first felt guilty and ashamed of this so-called 'waste of time', I actually learnt *a lot*. I observed and participated in this environment surfing down the thick powder, weaving among the trees covered by a thick white layer of fresh snow, pushing the limits of my body. I learnt 'from scratch', mostly through my embodied knowledge. Above all, it helped me to return to the basics, the essential components of my life. This dynamic beat which kicks you out of bed every morning. This pulse which makes your day, which gives meaning to your life. At this point, it seemed evident to me that I had to study for some extra years, more particularly in the field of 'sustainability'—whatever that means! I enrolled in the master of Human Ecology: Culture, Power and Sustainability in Sweden. Adopting a constructivist standpoint, these studies led me to an uncomfortable sensation of insecurity and confusion. We were constantly deconstructing taken-for-granted ideas and concepts about the World. I remember these intense few hours of lectures per week. It was a matter of eight hours per week, but how challenging they were! I recall this awful feeling I had after these two hours of complex discussion. I recall my classmates and friends skepticism, our torn spirits. We were endlessly considering, analyzing, investigating, challenging, criticizing, arguing, disputing, reflecting, debating, tergiversating and often lost in our own game, we ended up shifting issues and merely procrastinating. Perhaps, we were merely easing our conscience! This sounds like a severe and sharp judgment towards these classes, but those were feelings I felt deep within

myself during this year. I profoundly felt like a stupid vagabond occupying a chaotic world. I felt spoiled, indecisive, insatiable, like a whiner, constantly complaining and above all, unhappy. Lost. I was completely lost and certainly overloaded with new information. Knowledge that differed from the one I had gained during those past years. Too much. It was too much of everything. Too many choices, here and there. It was really challenging and disturbing, a psychological roaming until I reached a limit, an impasse.

The Polish scholar Zygmunt Bauman, developed the concepts of 'solid' and 'liquid Life'. The first refers to the pre-industrial society, when we were mostly producers driven by security, stability, order, lasting etc; while the second one concerns our current consumer society pervaded by the feelings of uncertainty, fragility and vulnerability, extensive/large-scale, transient/ephemeral and immediateness. Above all, he argues that human needs both freedom *and* security. As well as Schumacher who writes, “we always need both freedom and order” (2010: 69). We need some stability, cohesion, permanence and stability, this common thread, but we also need to innovate, to adapt, to dream, to fantasize about this utopia. Nowadays though, we live in this frenetic, hyperactive and globalized world. We faithfully praise the ideology of speed (Virilio 2006). Petrini stresses “speed has become the dogma of modern life” (2007: 179). The abstract capitalist conceptualization of time, that is the human-made one disconnected from Nature's cycles, dictates our lives (Bauman 2013), “the frenzy [of this World] is like a discordance with the rhythms of the Universe” (Rabhi 2008, my translation). In Barcelona, I remember our discussion with some of the members of the Degrowth Movement on Virilio's book *Speed and Politics* (2006). We concluded by stating that our technocratic frenzy reduced our traveling journey to the 'arrival point'. Sitting silent in the metro, the train, or the plane headphones on our heads, our traveling journeys become boring trips that we need to shorten by playing games on our phones, or merely sleeping. Our physical bodies travel from place to place, yet our spirit/soul needs some more time to accustom and inhabit the new place we are stepping into—namely the effect of 'soul-lag'. There is no time to be a dreamy idler. There is no time to spend hours drawing, painting, playing the guitar, and merely chilling under the weeping willow's shade. Petrini responds by advocating for a quest of slowness, as a value, and rather suggest to “lose yourself in thoughts that do not follow utilitarian lines” (2007: 180). This is with these assumptions and biases that I entered the tasty world of neo-gastronomic resistance in Barcelona.

3.2...Or Heirs of 68?

“Think global, act local!”

My diary, November 2014.

In September 2014, I tread upon the catalonian lands for the first time of my life. The summer destination *par excellence*, the touristic cheap spot for young kiddies spending days lying on the beach while drinking fresh mojitos. The sunny and warm welcoming European relaxation paradise. Here I settled for a some six months: Barcelona. I choose to do an internship with Permacultura Barcelona. Within this unknown-but-fascinating city, I expected to finally engage in practical and collective actions resisting against the Western model. Permaculture is defined as “ethical design of human systems for a sustainable future” (“Definition”, Hemenway, Permaculture.net), where the natural and the social environments are in symbiosis. Although it was initially focused on a resilient and respectful food system production, the philosophy nowadays expanded to encompass all the sphere of our societies. Permacultura Barcelona therefore draws its inspiration from these ethics and principles and aims at an “ecological and social transformation with a focus on empowerment and growth through resilience [with a specific target on the urban area]” (“Our vision”, Permaculture Barcelona website, my translation). With them, I literally jumped into a new philosophy of life, body and mind straight into it. At the same time, I also joined some other grassroots associations, namely La Colmena Que Dice Si (“The Beehive that says yes”), Nyamnyam and of course, Slow Food Barcelona.

All of them are part of the neo-gastronomy philosophy. All of them participate in neo-gastronomic resistance, this tasty dissenting, and organize a smooth transition inside the system. All of them gravitate around food as a vehicle to reconnect, to guide, to share thoughts, values, as well as practices, and habits, from the garden to the kitchen. All of them this medium to gain and diffuse both theoretical and practical knowledge, through their activities that include gardening, cooking workshops, popular lunches, discussions and debates, these actors make the most of the potential of Nature's bounty to bring about a cultural change, to engage their local fellows citizens to undertake this alternative path and 'join the force'. All of them are part of a global alternative movement that focuses on food issues. It is in line with the alternative movements like March Against Monsanto, la Via

Campesina, Food Not Bombs, Disco Soup to name a few. They are part of a universal network resisting the unethical agro-industry and transnational organizations which reduce our food to mere artificial, tasteless and empty of fundamental vitamins products (Petrini 2007). From the soil to the plate, these rebellions are international and local grassroots organizations, NGOs and associations part of global network of resistance expressing their dissent towards the colonization, industrialization, standardization and denaturalization of our food, our soils, our seeds, our relationships to Mother Earth, our very existence (ibid.). There are in Petrini's words "a *network*: of men and women, of knowledge, of methods, of environments, of relations" (ibid: 175). He confesses, "I belong to various realities, but at the same time to one alone; to various *food communities*, but to a single *community of destiny*"(ibid. 176).

Overall in this Liquid World, whether footless wanderers, rootless hobos, insatiable conquistadors, or innovative chef craving for some exotic dish, we are all on a quest for discovering *new* lands, *new* spices and recipes. Trying out these things that will apparently guaranty our happiness. However, I would argue that such fascination for the other also carries a more humanistic and hopeful message, as inhabitants of our organic universal society. Endlessly crossing boundaries with no fears, whether physical or social/cultural, the free backpackers on the road, showing off their exciting, ever-changing lifestyle, embody in my sense a powerful alternative movement relieved from capitalist chains. I believe those colorful and tasty nomads are not merely lost souls, but rather *activists*! Seeking for different ways of living, they are learning 'from scratch', through their bodily experiences, through the differences of the other, setting aside their own culture and enthusiastically embracing another standpoint. They are actively searching for different relationships and meanings in the World that surrounds them. Although I am using the figure of the traveler, I am convinced that the foodie dissenters share the same aim. In fact, I believe that this dynamic quest for new relationships discloses an ecological/holistic perspective which precisely counter-acts the Western Cartesian, reductionist and exclusive epistemology.

3.3. Redefining Relationships: “We Are One”

'El Gótico' is the touristy downtown district of Barcelona. The narrow streets are shadowed by the tall buildings from the Middle Ages, they are filled with cheap *tapas* bars and second-hand/vintage shops. By a sunny afternoon, it becomes complex to walk by this crowded neighborhood, you have to wriggle between the cool skateboarders sipping their fresh beers, the rootless vagabonds, and the tourists camera in hand. A few meters away from the famous 'Plaza Georges Orwell', eloquently renamed 'Plaza del Tripi' (“The Trippy Square”), you can find Daniele's small vegetarian/vegan restaurant. He is a fabulous vegetarian chef holding the status of co-president of Slow Food Barcelona. I ended up by chance in his restaurant and happened to taste the best vegan carrot cake I ever had. I just could not leave this place without complimenting the chef. At this time, I realized I just stepped into one of the most famous Slow Food restaurant of Barcelona. Incredibly easy-going, Daniele immediately accepted to answer my questions and participate to an 'interactive conversation'. We shook hand and he warmly welcomed me to try out their local Catalan salad next time. We met in this noisy typical Catalan brasserie a few weeks later. People were talking loudly, the orders were shouted from the other side of the room and the skilled waiter was weaving between the tables. This time Daniele did not hesitate to kiss my on both cheeks, as they usually do in Spain. It was my first ever official-scientific-formal-interview, and in Spanish *por favor!* Profoundly excited about it I had troubles hiding my joy and enthusiasm. Daniele was for some years the secretary of Slow Food in Italy, as well as a close friend of Carlo Petrini! In line with the neo-gastronomy's principles, he explains that Slow Food Barcelona attempts to reconnect the consumers to Nature's bounty, starting from the seed to the meal and to develop the contact between the producers and the consumers. To do so, they organize popular lunches and gathering in the countryside few times a month. He mentioned that it is important to stimulate this direct relationship which has been lost among the intermediary positions of resellers.

In the meantime, I joined La Colmena Que Dice Si. I used to define it as a hybrid between the Community-Support Agriculture (CSA) and the 'conventional eco-friendly business'. The CSA is a locally based food production and distribution organized by some volunteers in order to directly connects farmers and consumers. I mean by 'conventional eco-friendly business' the strategy of the profit-driven agribusiness industry to meet the current

demand for eco/bio/organic products. La Colmena is thus an enterprise structured by a vertical hierarchy which attempts to relocalize the economy by making available local and mostly organic products. In France, La Colmena is growing bigger everyday, yet it is really disputed precisely because it is one direct 'rival' to the CSAs. I was curious to know how does it work in Barcelona. Eva and Justine are the two project managers of the organization at the national scale. They initiated various self-organized 'beehives' around the city which propose local, seasonal, and strictly organic product. They share the same goal as Slow Food Barcelona, that is creating a trustful and sustainable relationship between local producers and consumers. However, these connections go far beyond mere geographical lines. Justine often emphasized on the feeling of belonging that pervades the group of participants. Daniele, Eva and Justine are unanimous: the agroindustrial system has profoundly disconnected the producer from the consumer, both mentally and physically. Petrini explains, “[t]here was a sort of umbilical cord that was guaranteed by the proximity between agricultural practice, processing, and consumption. Many activities of this productive cycle were the appanage of the consumer himself, who was thus in effect a *co*-producer . . . nowadays, that umbilical cord has been cut” (2007: 167). Perhaps worst, it has dramatically disconnected the farmer and his/her own lands as growing became a mere profit-driven activity, “[t]he producers are at the mercy of this system just as much as the consumers, and many have lost the taste of the lands” (ibid. 170).

Alva also shared with me her dynamic resistance in Gràcia. During my internship in Barcelona I lived in the craftsman-hippy district of Gràcia. Every weekends the square where I used to live, 'Plaza Virreina' was animated and 'occupied' by the inhabitants. Dance, music, popular lunch, I woke up every Saturday excited to discover what is going to happen this weekend. I participated a few time to 'El Plat de Gràcia', Alva is one of the main project leader, she explains “[it] is a bi-monthly gathering of neighbors living in Gràcia, a self-managed volunteer association that relies on the active and spontaneous participation of individuals. Twice a month, we occupy the big square and prepare communitarian lunch with the food saved from the dumpsters . . . it's a powerful transformative and experimental physical space where you can meet your neighbors, exchange ideas about the world and learn about and from others”. As a socio-political project that I fully support, I indeed do believe that too often our sharp grey urban homes keep us away from each other, from our neighbors living next to us. Listening to their voices, I realized how they intended to develop strong and 'genuine' connections among themselves as well as among the nourishing Earth and Her

inhabitants, non-human beings, organic and non-organic alike.

While I was studying in Sweden, I eventually felt homesick for the first time. I was sick of feeding my wanderlust as the society suggests us. I was desperately seeking for my *roots*. The very idea of rootedness whether physical or mental/spiritual has been actively debated within the anthropological field. Quoting Simone Weil, Jackson writes, “to be rooted . . . is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul (1952: 41). But rootedness is, Weil also observed, a *social fact* before it is anything else” (2002: 12). While I would definitely agree with such statement, I can vividly recall missing my family and relatives, this social bound I lost in the Liquid World, but also my Norman *lands*. This famous region owes its reputation to the D-Day beaches from the Second World War, as much as its endless rainy weather. During my year abroad, I realized how little I knew from my native lands. I have been backpacking over the globe and I could probably better describe the Northern Scandinavian lands than my homelands. I was on quest for a *sense of place*, that is to reimagine our relationships to the place we inhabit. I was inspired by the explanations of David Orr (1992), an American professor emeritus of environmental education and politics. He suggests that it is necessary to develop harmonious, respectful relationships to the non-human organic and non-organic environment that surround us, to deepen our knowledge of the cultural traditions, these mythical stories that pervade this landscape, of the wild bounty flourishing in the meadow and forest, of the dazzling colors that change all through the day from the dawn to the sunset, and so on. It therefore encompasses the cultural and the 'natural', it is “a way to overcome the entrenched division between the 'two worlds' of nature and society” (Ingold 2000: 4). It echoes the notion of 'dwelling' I explained above, it is the very notion of 'being-in-the-world', mind and body, physiological and psychic (Merleau-Ponty 1966 in Gooch 1998).

In the same vein, our voices emphasized on a need for more 'authenticity', in the sense of complete transparency but also trustful and deep relationships to other beings. Daniele strongly argues that “people are looking for the *story* behind their daily food . . . they want to know where it comes from, who grows it and how”. When discussing the issue of labeling (i.e. certification of organic products) he claims, “to me the best certification you can get are the hands and the face of a producers”. Eva and Justice also explain how it is important to them to *know* the producers, “far beyond a mere label what matter is the trust that develops between the consumers and the producers. We have to be honest towards each other, and it is

precisely this trust that will obviously give you a great tasty product!”.

All through this journey, I often blamed our over-developed ego. Indeed, I would argue that we often tend to believe that we hold the 'Truth'. We often assume that our experiences in the World, through the years, provide us some certainties about what's true, what matters and so on. Marc is actively involved in the gardening group of Permaculture Barcelona. He is vegan and currently studying a two-year permaculture program in order to earn the international diploma. It was a sunny day in March, in Can Masdeu—a squatted social residence project surrounded by communitarian gardens—we sat in the garden for a while, listening to the bird songs in the quietness of this place isolated in the hills yet located only a few miles away from hectic and noisy Barcelona. I asked him about his feelings of engagement in the world, his inner sensations when putting into practice his values. To him, the key is education. Educating the youth more importantly, about tolerance and empathy, about integration instead of segregation. In order to balance our oversized ego, he believes that one has to be taught with such values. This ability to reduce our prejudices, to actively and profoundly listen to one's story and accept the diversity of opinions. Schumacher (2010) stresses that our education is lacking metaphysics and ethics, and that only the “know-how” type of knowledge is not enough. I recall Alva's reflection, “I think people have different ways of thinking and understanding. The open-mindedness is relative. Yet, it's a core value. It relates to our emotions, our affectivity, and connects us to the feeling of *love* and *care*. This is to me the seed for a 'better future', this ability to listen, to care, to love each other, to nurture our empathy, comprehension and to value differences”.

The ecological stance adopted by food activism blurs the lines between mind and body (Bateson 1972). In fact, it advocates for a continuous flow, that is understanding human as a whole instead of categorizing and dividing up each of his/her components. Besides this holistic/ecological perspective another main feature that emerged was the small-scale, local and slow approach adopted, and consequently the significance of every small step.

3.4. The Hummingbird Tale: A Slow and Resilient Revolution

*“One day a terrible fire broke out in a forest.
A huge woodlands was suddenly engulfed by a raging wild fire.
Frightened, all the animals fled their homes and ran out of the forest.
They came to the edge of a stream they stopped to watch the fire.
They were feeling very discouraged and powerless.
They were all bemoaning the destruction of their homes.
Every one of them thought there was nothing they could do about the fire,
except for one little hummingbird.
This particular hummingbird decided it would do something.
It swooped into the stream and picked up a few drops of water
and went into the forest and put them on the fire.
Then it went back to the stream and did it again,
and it kept going back, again and again and again.
All the other animals watched in disbelief;
some tried to discourage the hummingbird with comments like,
"Don't bother, it is too much, you are too little,
your wings will burn, your beak is too tiny, it's only a drop,
you can't put out this fire."
And as the animals stood around disparaging the little bird's efforts,
the bird noticed how hopeless and forlorn they looked.
Then one of the animals shouted out and challenged the hummingbird in a
mocking voice, "What do you think you are doing?"
And the hummingbird, without wasting time or losing a beat, looked back and said,
"I am doing what I can."*

Wangari Maathai

By September 2013 right before flying to Sweden, I was truly self-confident. Ready to step in, to engage, to attempt to understand these global issues and potentially to solve some of them, *at my scale*. Yet, I soon felt 'queasy' by the holistic scale we adopt in Human Ecology. Contrary to most of the academic fields anchored in the Cartesian dualistic mindset, which is systematically dividing up, categorizing, analyzing every detail of the phenomenon studied, we do the strict opposite. We follow Aristotle's words, “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”. It profoundly disturbed me and I felt powerless and confused in this organic complex world. Schumacher's expression “small is beautiful” speaks for itself. The global scale can be quite problematic, inconvenient and even intimidating¹⁴. I often felt overwhelmed by the issues we discussed in class, more particularly their interconnections. That is, dealing with the impacts of our local actions at the global level. How complex is it to

14 Note that I make the distinction between the holistic/ecological and globalize/over-sized perspective advocated by the Western capitalist epistemology.

understand, to foresee the consequences of our daily actions! How demanding it is to realize that this piece of meat that has been over-laminated was fed by GMO soya shipped from Argentina, and that this very soya is dramatically threatening not solely the environment but the population of peasants. Also, some psychologists argue that we are visual-dependent, which means that our sense of sight is 'over-developed' in comparison to our other senses (Winter 1996). Therefore, we have a strong reliance on what we can see and we are less likely to believe in things we do not visualize (ibid. 196). Better not to think about this enormous mess when grocery shopping...! Overall, this tremendous global scale can be profoundly disturbing: I often hear around me such comments “What for recycling? What for saving energy? My little action won't change the World!”. I am always tempted to answer that it actually does!

Petrini claims “our choice of food . . . is the most important communicative tool that we possess. Our decision about what to buy and consume, in a world where everything is geared to profit, is the first significant political act we are able to make in our lives” (2007: 87); he also adds “cooking . . . is becoming an antidote to the lifestyles imposed by the dominant social models, a form of neo-gastronomic resistance and protection of diversity” (ibid. 79). Petrini goes further by reflecting on the role of consumer. In relation to the umbilical cord I mentioned above, he rather uses the term 'co-producers' because “the very act of production involves consumption” (ibid. 165). I always claimed that “gardening and cooking are political acts!”. This was precisely the title of a series of workshops organized by Nyamnyam. Ariadna and Iñaki, a Catalan couple of artists, are co-founder of this dynamic eco-friendly social and political association. Based in the industrial district of Barcelona, they created their life project centered around art and food as mediums to “convey messages . . . show things differently, confront issues within different contexts” in Ariadna's words. Few times a week they open the doors of their house to offer an experimental space to “try things out” she said. On the sixth floor, the main room serves as kitchen and dining-living room. It is a bright open-space and despite the walls painted in white the atmosphere is always warm and welcoming. Crossing the entrance door, you can read on the wall in black wide letters: “Todo lo que me gusta es ilegal, inmoral o engorda” (“Everything I like is illegal, immoral or fattening”). Ariadna underlines the importance of what she calls the “social and political body” alongside our individual one. For instance, buying organic and ethical food does not solely concern us, our material body is fed with nature's nutritional bounty, but it also affects our children's future, the Bolivian peasant who grew this quinoa, and to some extent the food

sovereignty of his/her country. It also impacts the reseller who runs this tiny eco-store in hectic Gràcia, and so on until this quinoa reaches your plate. Both are firmly convinced about the impacts of small-scale and local actions. Iñaki explains, “we are aware we *cannot* change the entire world, but at least, we can change our micro-level one, our direct surroundings, the one on our scale, step by step. In the end, we share the same space as our neighbors, we share this same reality here in Poble Nou [name of their neighborhood], we experience it, we *embody* it through different perspectives, yet it is the same environment. Altogether, we can provoke a small revolution!”. In the end, it is fundamental to adopt this holistic perspective on a globalized World, to be aware of these connections that bind us across physical limits, yet it remains important to re-localize, to zoom in the issue at your scale, a human-sized one.

From Daniele in his kitchen, to Eva and Justine in their beehives, Marc hands in the soil with his muddy knees and Ariadna & Iñaki, we all express a strong faith in local and daily actions—which often tends to be devaluated, or hidden in this 'globalized big big World'. We all believe in a bottom-up slow revolution. Because we are tired of the demagogic politicians “disconnected from reality” in Justine's words, we believe that change will occur from the bottom of the pyramid, the 'little people' from the street. We all accomplish our small-scale actions everyday when cooking, when watering the plants on our little urban balcony, we all bring their thoughts and ideas into life while resisting the current system and believing in our concrete utopia. We embody and encourage the resistance, this ecological food activism, with our minds and hands. We are all resilient hummingbirds, “they all do what they can for wherever they are at” (Rabhi 2008). Justine and Eva stress “people need simple things to change, they are evolving *at their own pace* and we should respect this”.

Along the same lines, Álvaro my close friend from Permacultura Barcelona told me about the importance of being tolerant and respectful towards one's own pace and position in our transition towards a better future. It was a rainy Thursday, I was about to move out from Barcelona after six intense months. Álvaro is a busy happy Peruvian working hard on spreading love and care. He is a quiet character and amazingly clever. We have had hours of inspiring discussions previously. Our discussion sounded profoundly different when titled as 'interview'. I felt it less 'true', less 'authentic'. I noticed that he seemed pretty uncomfortable. I could understand his feelings as I have also been interviewed for some 'scientific researches'. Every word counts, therefore you must carefully pick them. Your opinion, at least your words are recorded and you are attentively listened. However after a few minutes, we loose

ourselves in our world, in our thoughts and reflections about activism, about finding our place in this big world. One question concerned the values of his concrete utopia, this ideal world we are not solely dreaming about but also actively and daily working on. He shared words such as responsibility, conviviality and co-living, connections. Then, he started drawing some curves on my paper and explained, “See, we are all part of the same universal river [these curves]. All beings, humans and non-humans. We need to learn how to co-live respectfully with each other beings. But we also need to learn how to *swim with* this river rather than against it. Imagine that we are paddling on a boat that floats on this river, we master it, we drive it at our own pace; sometimes we stop on the shore for a while, so that we are all not at the same place at the same time. We all have our respective pace on this river. We have to understand that the river will always be running and that it is stronger than us and our wooden boat. Therefore, we have to *flow* with it”. His metaphor struck the chords of my inner voice. His humble statement was not solely about tolerance towards each other, but also about scale, our position in this universe. I felt also ridiculously small in this giant cosmos, but at the same time I felt strong and surrounded by wonderful people in my small world.

In reaction against this “idolatry of size” in Schumacher's words (2010), growing some spiritual and physical roots in a specific environment, we are likely to develop different meanings to our surroundings. I asked to my interviewees what evoke the words 'garden' or 'kitchen' to them. The appendix D illustrates some of these sensations, emotions, values, feelings we have.

When I started my internship in Barcelona last September, I had blind faith in informal and alternative education¹⁵. Rather said, I had a profound distrust and some strong arguments against the institutionalized education—i.e. primary/secondary schools, high-school, universities. Our asphalt boxes where we spend most of our childhood, adolescence and even twenties, provide us with theoretical knowledge, which is specific, abstract and often unrelated to the direct surroundings, the outer reality behind these walls¹⁶. Blinded by this librocentric and logocentric Western epistemology, I was at this time believing that the mere 'input of knowledge' into each individual was enough to bring about this ecological activism. Whether practically or through mental action, I thought that sharing information was enough. I needed to zoom to the personal scale, to dive into our psychology, our values

15 I am referring to the alternative pedagogies of Maria Montessori, of Rudolf Steiner (“Waldorf”), of free and homeschooling which profoundly diverge from the official mainstream educational system.

16 See the group paper two other classmates and I wrote on education (Bardos, Fassina & Thiébot 2014).

and attitudes towards food.

3.5 *Embody the Change: “Ecology: We say it, we do it!”*¹⁷

Sitting silent in Ariadna and Iñaki's house, my mind is overwhelmed by inspiring perspectives about food, art, and local revolution. Ariadna pours some tea in a bowl and hands it to me. I remain speechless for a few seconds, torn between an exciting feeling of belonging (I am not the only one thinking this way!) and a sensation of confusion. I can imagine the tiny plumbers reorganizing this mess in my mind, these incoherent packed Lego pieces constantly moving. I eventually manage to share my enthusiasm, “your artistic background is such an interesting perspective! It's so great to experiment and propose different discourses via original artistic creations.. you know by *doing* things rather than merely talking about them!”. She cracks a smile and answers, “you know, we are from a world of creativity and imagination. We have a totally different perspective from businessmen or traders. We usually start by experimenting and doing things, and then we talk about them! Which is actually the exact opposite of the common rule 'from theory to action'.”

As I previously wrote, activism is often understood as this violent resistance organized by a bunch of anarchists. I even myself have been fooled! Especially when I felt sick of these abstract-academic-discussions-that-do-not-provide-any-solutions. It took me a while to fully grasp Maxey's definition of activism. It took me some months to recover from this overdose of words and eventually understand that our academic work was far from useless and *passive*. It was just another form of activism, of resistance, of subversion, but a one that takes place in our head, mind, and soul. I could not hide my enthusiasm/satisfaction when Eva confessed to me, “before this interview, I wouldn't have thought about my job in La Colmena as a form of activism. Simply because I always imagined activism as a struggle, a conflictual resistance, even a physical fight! But now that you shared your thoughts on the definition of activism I understand that it doesn't have to be conflictual and violent. It can be a sort of slow and pacific engagement with a different model, right?”.

17 [Slogan from the French green party, namely “Europe Ecologie-Les Verts”, my translation.

By this time, it seemed pretty obvious to my participants and myself that the very idea of activism was a continuous flow in the mind and the hands. For all of them engaged in the reality of Barcelona, their daily *actions* could lead to a resilient change in mindset, towards the art of conscious living. The activities they proposed with food, such as gardening, cooking and so on, were direct actions which could provoke this shift of mindset, this reversal of thought, this decolonization of the imaginary, *from the practice to the theory*. Let us imagine, the mere fact of growing a plant on your balcony forces you to *care* of it. You need to water it, to pay attention to the temperature, the light and so on. Over the long-run, this daily ritual might foster within you this sense of care not solely to this plant, but it might expand to your relatives, the fellow beings that surround you. Care might become a fundamental value in your 'Tree of Life'. In the same vein, the mere act of cooking might strengthen the value of care for feeding friends, family and/or perhaps those homeless peoples who participate in the weekly popular soup of the social center located at the corner of your street. It might foster the diversity of taste, smells and textures, the notion of patience and even creativity. This statement addresses the debated discussion on the taken-for-granted dichotomy mind/body of the Western predominant epistemology. It suggests that values, thoughts, beliefs, attitudes can be inculcated *from the hands to the mind*. It thus adopts a nuanced position on the idea that the mind *is* the *first* place where change happens. Therefore it appears as necessary to concentrate and encourage this practical, experiential and embodied learning and knowledge, which is too often disregarded and devaluated in our Western World.

Engaged in an honest dialogue with my participants, I felt confident enough to dive into their inner feelings and emotions. I asked them to recall and share their emotions occurring within themselves when *embodying* their thoughts, that is when bringing their values alive, when practically applying them. All of them shared sensations of fulfillment, coherency, wholeness, plenitude, authenticity, pure bliss, hope, satisfaction. Yet, they also mentioned the uncomfortable feelings of inconsistency, frustration, guiltiness, marginalization and loneliness, or even lack of realism. I have myself experienced these emotions. I blamed myself for proudly yelling my environmental and social justice engagement in creating this project of weekly food boxes on the campus of Lund's University; while at the same time I was accumulating miles by flying over Europe. I have also condemned my voracious appetite towards a juicy chicken wing while accurately knowing about the non-ethical meat industry. I sometimes felt alone and marginalized, unfairly labeled as 'anarcho-hippy' by some of my immediate social bubble. I often 'gave up'

simply because the immediate, short-termed pleasure was more important to me than this moral restriction. I kept on passing the buck to society, supermarkets, carnivorous friends and politicians. I soon realized that I was not the only one craving this instantaneous pleasure that sets aside all my moral.

Indeed, Eva confessed her fear towards 'extreme movements', namely the dogmatic/radical ones yet described as 'open-minded' and 'welcoming'. She firmly disagrees on that and rather suggests that their attitude is pretty much the contrary. Isolated into their own bubble they are anchored in *one* reality, theirs. Daniele commented the same, he argues that people actually avoid and escape these radical movements because disturbing the norm, the reality they grew up, *scare* them. He explains how Slow Food Barcelona rather slowly adapts, how it attempts to follow the human pace, to be *resilient*. Surely this is not the perfect model, but this is part of the smooth and happy transition they advocate for. Petrini says, “we don't wish to adopt a strategy of open conflict with the multinationals . . . instead he and his colleagues set about creating resistance to fast food by *building awareness* of the wealth of traditional food that was at risk” (The Independent 2009). He accurately specifies that Slow Food does not perform spectacular and radical actions (like Greenpeace for instance), but rather propose a slow, intimate revolution, by definition. Marc also believes that radicalism can be intimidating and even counter-productive. He says “if you try to convince someone, this latter might close himself/herself off, or even ignore you, he/she might stop listening to you and this can potentially generate a conflict”. “Alone you can't change anything!” claims Eva, “plus, they don't understand you, there is a lack of communication, that's why you have to find this balance in/out the system. In fact, I think you should bring the change *within* the system, to push and to deviate from inside!”. I firmly share with my participants the importance of having 'one foot in/one foot out' the system in order to provoke the change. I do believe in the happy resilience and efficiency of this in-between position. That is, the idea of *compromising*, which is I would say closely related to our ego once again. Compromising does not equate failing. I would argue that one should remain tolerant and sympathetic towards someone else's 'truth' and position—remember Álvaro's metaphor of the universal river. We all have our reasons, our values, our truth shaped by our daily life, past and present. The transitions requires time, Nature, we, need time to evolve, to adapt.

Perhaps, it is fair to say that this daily food activism is rooted in the hedonist and epicurean philosophies. Often qualified as egoistic, these philosophies advocate for sensorial and intuitive pleasures as the main goal of life. Again, I would suggest that this judgment can be nuanced. Although the movement Slow Food advocates for “pleasure, hedonism, enjoyment, tranquility, conviviality, richness . . . [and it] has never made any bones about its commitment to the truly sweet things in life” (The Independent 2009), I believe that such 'goals' do not equate with selfishness nor arrogance. The Degrowth Movement encourages for 'simple living'—or 'happy/pleasing sobriety' in Rabhi's words (2008, my translation). That is, they suggest that happiness does not correspond to this idea of exponential and immediate accumulation of goods. I think it is fair to recognize that happiness once again is relative and we might reach it via different means (Schneider, Kallis & Martinez-Alier 2010). I do believe that in order to spread happiness, one has to be happy with oneself first. These two philosophies mentioned above are closely related to the stunning 'positive thinking' that emerged from these interactive dialogues. I was impressed by the positive mindset, the optimistic and even enthusiastic words that came out from their mouths. I was struck by their decision to invest their energy, mental and physical, in the construct of alternatives, rather than on the deconstruction of the problematics we are facing. I recall Álvaro arguing, “permaculture provides you with tools to build another future, more fair and harmonious. This is precisely what I aim at, having a happy life and spending my energy on the creation of alternatives. I had enough of dark theories!”.

Above all, I noticed that despite our different backgrounds, we are *aware* of what- is-going-wrong. We accurately *know* that the current system is heading straight into the wall, full speed. In fact, I realized how amazingly *knowledgeable* were/are those people anchored in the 'reality' and how unfairly the academic scientific epistemology throw them on the side and annihilate their extraordinary knowledge for the sake of progress, 'better, faster, stronger'. Petrini stresses, “in the name of technology, over the last thirty years a process of cultural annihilation has taken place . . . to the disappearance of the farmers' traditional knowledge (2007: 185). My Cartesian-categorizing mind was getting back on top, I was centered on each subjectivity, yet I forgot that we are embedded in a larger group, in a society. I realized that it was not solely a matter of information, of knowledge diffusion through words and actions. This change more than needed is not exclusively due to the lack of awareness, or the misuse of knowledge. Information alone is *incomplete*. In March 2014 I reached this second impasse. I could not understand why is there so much of those feelings of guiltiness and frustration?

Why is there so much of inconsistency in our actions? Why is there this gap between thoughts and actions, between values and behaviors? Why is that we don't always *act as we think*?

3.6. Further Reflections: Insights From Ecological Psychology: Why We Don't Always Act As We Think?

One day roaming in the library of social sciences, my eyes stopped on Deborah Winter's book, *Ecological Psychology.: Healing the Split between Planet and Self* (1996). Its appealing title and cover immediately attracted my eyes: the Earth encircled by two hands. This book offered me with some inspiring insights concerning our daily activism in relationship to our social, political, economical and physical/material environments. Often labeled as useless and incomprehensible, usually disregarded or on the contrary misused for some unethical purposes by the capitalist system¹⁸, psychology is one fascinating field of study I never took time to investigate, until March 2014. Winter eloquently advocates for the need to include psychological dimensions in the global discourses on the multiple crises we are facing. Psychology is the “study of behavior and mental life” (1996: 4). Therefore, it deals with our ontologies and epistemologies, she thus stresses that “environmental issues are deeply philosophical and psychological” (ibid. 61). Drawing upon behaviorism, cognitive psychology and social psychology, she provides insightful perspectives on the discrepancy between our thoughts and actions, between our values and behaviors. In a nutshell, behaviorism is rooted in the environmental determinism, that is individuals as biological material bodies react to external environmental stimuli such as the rain on your skin, the acidity of lemon juice on your tongue. For behaviorists, “our behavior is a result of the environment, not of some inner events such as conflicts or values” (1996: 163-4). Cognitive psychology on the contrary, focuses exclusively on the mind that dictates our actions. Winter writes, “the main message of cognitive psychology is that our inappropriate environmental behaviors are due to our inadequate, mistaken, distorted or missing information about the consequences of our actions” (ibid. 212). Although I am not an enthusiastic reader, this book kept me on the edge of my seat for hours. My eyes could not stop devouring her words and relevant examples within our daily lives. Although I believe that these two approaches to

18 ¹See neuromarketing and behavioral economics.

understand humans' behaviors are both reductionist and simplistic, I would argue in favor of the *complementarity* of these two perspectives. That is to say that one cannot go without the other. Behaviorism provides us with the core idea that information solely, cannot provoke a change in humans' behavior and attitudes (ibid. 166). While on the other hand, cognitive psychology emphasizes on the fundamental role of information evolving within our minds filled with thoughts, beliefs, values, moral, and prejudices. Probably due to my personal experience these last months in Barcelona, Lund or even back home, I was literally absorbed by the chapter concerning social psychology. Closely related to sociology, social psychology highlights the impacts of the social settings on our attitudes and behaviors. Winter claims, “social psychology reveals the enormously powerful (although usually unconscious) influences that other people have on us, our reasoning, our beliefs and our behavior . . . [in other words] environmental issues are largely social phenomena” (ibid. 63).

This chapter appeared as the keystone, the triggering element that allowed me to understand this conflictual discrepancy between thoughts and actions. Whether neo-gastronomic resistance, climate justice organizing, or the Degrowth dissenting, the insights from ecological psychology provided an answer to my interrogations on activism in general. Above all, I realized that the ecological activism I am advocating for, needs to be both personal/intimate and social/collective. More striking, via a retrospective work I perceived that these formal interviews, as much as the informal talks around a pint of beer on a Saturday night in Gràcia, were tremendously influenced by the social settings. The theories she discussed reinforced the idea which I previously mentioned, that knowledge production are result of a progressive, that is changing, a co-creation gained through dialogues and communication. According to the social psychology approach, some of our fundamental values, such as environmental justice for instance, might be disrupted by social pressures, at least influences. You might be a harsh defender of animals' rights perfectly aware of the unethical settings of the slaughterhouses, yet you might not be not vegetarian nor vegan, there is some chance that you succumb to the temptation of eating this piece of industrial beefsteak made with love by your mother for Christmas. This might be a feeling of respect towards her, you do not want to disappoint her and you are perfectly aware that she always cooks meat. Or, you might simply feel uncomfortable for being this only-vegetarian that requires another free-meat dish. There is a variety of reasons, of inner feelings and emotions that might occur within you at this precise time and eventually push you to eat, or not, this flavory dish. In this Liquid individualistic World where we define our identity via our consumption (Bauman

2013), you are individual, a subjectivity that lives among other individuals within a group, that is a society. You are *entangled* to this social sphere. In this Liquid world of disengagement (ibid.), one can consider the power and facility of words. Easier said than done, right?

Inspired by the insights of social psychology, this does not mean that I am denying the impact of the material/physical environment. On the contrary, I also believe that this latter strongly influences our daily behaviors. Nevertheless, I realized that the 'social factor' (i.e. social determinism) is a powerful tool that we often forgot to take into account for the sake of our holy 'individual will' abundantly fed by our over-developed ego (Ridoux 2006; Latouche 2014). I recall my conversation with Ariadna concerning food as a mean to reeducate our five senses. She pointed out the importance of the place you live, in her words “you touch, smell, hear different materials, odors and sounds in the city and in the countryside. Usually in the city, these senses are artificial”. In Petrini's words, “our senses, incomparable tools for a deeper understanding *of the environment and of ourselves*, have undergone a regression owing to the rhythms of life to which we are forced to conform, and which deprive us of many exquisite ways of tasting the world” (2007: 82 my emphasis). Our body experience our immediate physical environment. As Ariadna suggests, depending on this latter, our body will react differently. Petrini therefore adds, “[i]n a world where 'sensorial deprivation leads to the dulling of our abilities to see, touch, taste, and smell', the training of the senses becomes 'an act of resistance against the destruction of flavors and against the annihilation of knowledge’” (ibid.). I cannot but acknowledge that within the shiny and warm climate of Barcelona, some activities such as gardening or collecting wild bounty for a workshop on herbal medicine, are easier and 'more enjoyable' with such atmospherical conditions. Having lived in Scandinavia for more than two years from Northern Finland to Southern Sweden, the dark and cold months of winter are less encouraging to do gardening or any outside activities, like occupying the streets for instance. It is remarkable how I noticed the differences between the Catalanian and the Viking lands, especially when it comes to socio-political conditions. I would argue that 'the Welfare State' embodied by Sweden, suffers from social isolation, on the contrary of Spain known as the loud-extroverted-region but economically disturbed country. The physical environments as well as the socio-political ones differ from these two countries. Nevertheless, I realized how knowledge are *shared* and *common*. As I previously argued, beyond geographical and social boundaries there is a common ground, a feeling of belonging and unity as citizens of the Earth, individuals within an organic worldwide society.

As the bus drove me to the airport back to Sweden, Barcelona seemed different. After these six intense months, this city did not only look like a mere summer destination *par excellence* nor the touristic cheap spot for young kiddies, Barcelona vibrated from much more than this. Beyond this superficial layer, it was a dynamic city of dissent, of resistance, inhabited by inspirational people working everyday on the creation of a fair World. My legs quivered when I entered the plane, I had learnt so much these past months. I was excited to share my tasty story!

4. Conclusion

“Cooking is the mental place—as the kitchen is the physical space—of gastronomy”

Carlo Petrini 2005: 79.

Carolyn Ellis concludes her paper by writing, “an auto-ethnography can be evaluated by considering these questions: Is there anything new in the story? Is it complex and nuanced? Will it help others better understand their context? Does the story promote dialogue? . . . Do I continue thinking about and/or experiencing the story or does my consciousness easily flow to something else . . . If I read the whole story, stopping frequently to think about details of my experience, my memories or feelings called forth by the piece, then the work has evoked me . . . Has the author been able to represent the chaos, yet do it in a way that provides a readable and understandable experience? (2000: 329)

By the end of this intense journey, my first statement persists: food can heal the World! Food—more precisely the people who embody the neo-gastronomic dissent—is a tool, a vehicle of thoughts which can profoundly perform/embody the critical thinking and the creation of concrete alternatives, that is ecological activism, as much as it encourages, stimulates it. More precisely food is an instrument of dissent, and the on-going neo-gastronomic daily resistance is currently disrupting the mad dash of the Western Cartesian, androcentric, eurocentric, anthropocentric epistemology which colonizes and enslaves our imaginary. I hope that you got a glimpse of the subversiveness of this tasty movement.

Through my voice and the voices of these activists who embody/perform and

stimulate 'ecological food activism', I attempted to share an evocative and eloquent narrative enriched with some theories and further reflections. We are accurately creating another epistemology, nourished from not solely Western epistemology but also from others. I wished to demonstrate how these subversive foodies attempt to reconnect to the nourishing Earth as much as among themselves beings inhabiting, squatting or dwelling on the same planet—which counteracts the Cartesian, reductionists and exclusive Western worldview. I intended to explain how the holistic perspective we adopt does not deny but rather re-value the potential of the small-scale, slow and daily, individual and collective revolution—which disrupts the idolatry of a large-scale globalized World we inhabit. I tried to stress the value of practical, experiential and embodied knowledge, the call to re-educate our senses and knowledge about the World gained from our bodies—critically answering the librocentric and logocentric mainstream epistemology. And finally, with some further reflections, I attempted to emphasize on how socially embedded we are, as individual part of a society. Information alone will not bring the change, nor a green tyrannical state dictating our eco-friendly behaviors. Change happens via sensuous feelings, embodied knowledge, emotional states, concrete actions *and* complex abstract dialogues. It happens within social sphere within a specific physical environment. Our personal, social, and physical worlds are *entangled*, altogether interacting with each other.

I hope this narrative provided you not solely with tasty insights about food activism, but also about the very concept of activism. There is a need to engage in this ecological activism, that is mentally and physically, personally *and* collectively. There is a need to reflect upon the conditions of our very existence from its very roots, that is on epistemology, to the daily routine. As Maxey (1999) suggests, we should not punish ourselves for the infinite number of things we cannot do, but rather celebrate each moment, each thought and deed undertaken in this spirit of critically reflexive engagement, *from where we are at* (201).

To some extent, I wish my reflections and position on 'doing sciences' generated within you some reflections about the very status of researcher, his/her role and power. Auto-ethnography allowed me to deal with these personal conflicts and uncomfortable feelings of guilt and alienation at the roots of this inquiry, this call for re-connection to the two worlds, academic and non-academic, academia and activism, myself and my fellows relatives, this very story and you, the reader. Similarly to the neo-gastronomic resistance, it strengthens my belief in the potential of experiential, sensory, embodied knowledge as a rich learning tool, as

a significant way of knowing. Therefore, I hope that this methodology has seduced you as much as it has me. I hope this singular scientific approach touched and impacted you and therefore convinced you of the power of narratives. Over abstract facts, numbers, narratives have definitely a role to play in engaging the dissent. They convey meanings, ideas, values and thoughts about our World. Similarly to food activism, auto-ethnography is an active element of resistance that questions a broader epistemic discussion: how do we relate to the World? How do we know what we know? What is knowledge? They both appear as fabulous stimulators for ecological activism, and therefore as a means to choose another path.

For further studies and investigations, we warmly welcome anyone interested in participating in our life project with my partner: From the Seed to the Plate at our farm, “La Ferme ô VR”. Rooted on the Norman seaside, the rich cultural and natural environment might provide you with theoretical and embodied knowledge alike!

This personal inquiry of a Human Ecology's student questioning about this 'big big world' and its very epistemology embedded in a tasty perspective is a unique account. Yet, I hope that through my personal account I evoked, echoed and I inspired you. I hope my endless faith in humankind which pervades my story has touched you.

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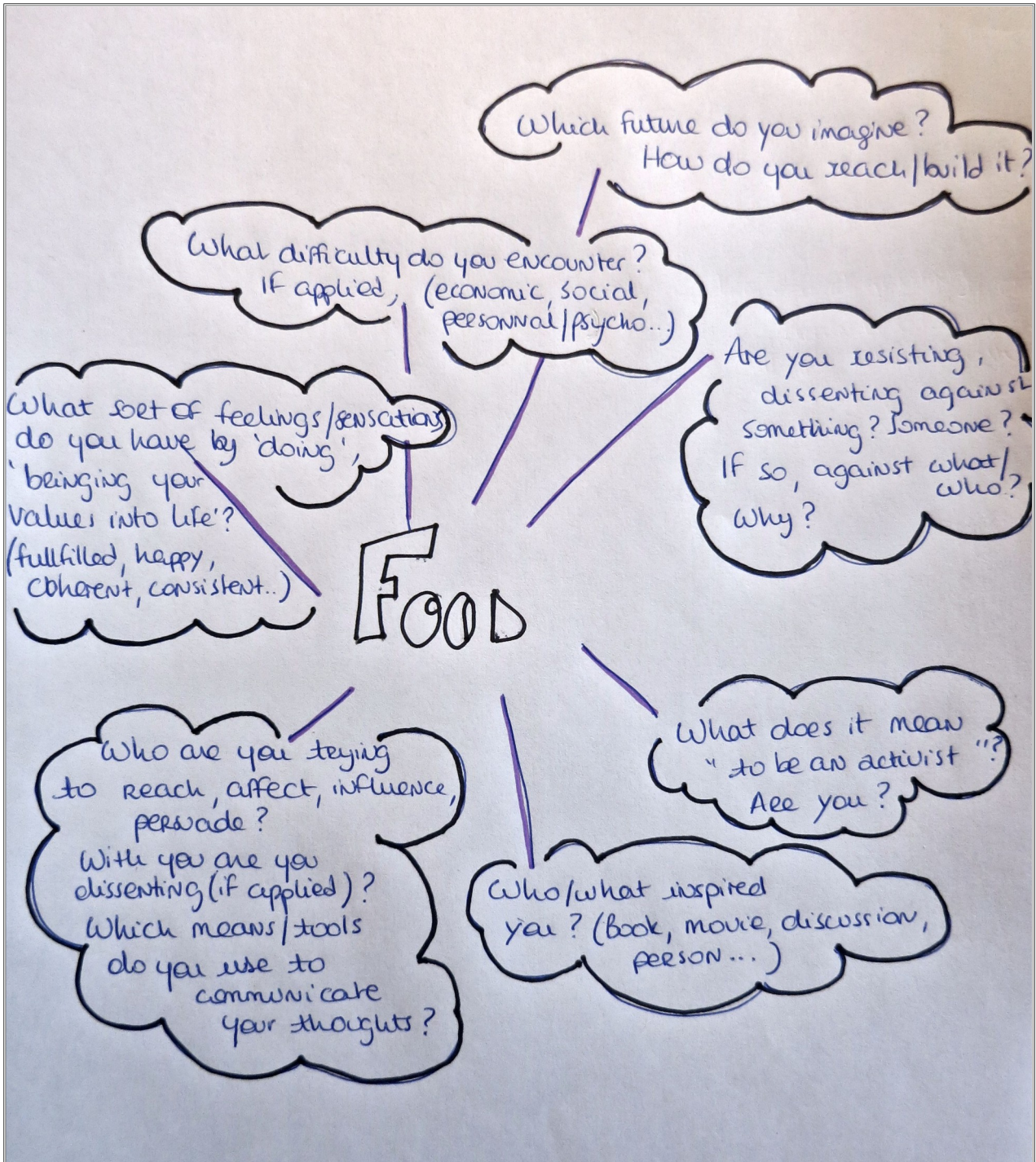
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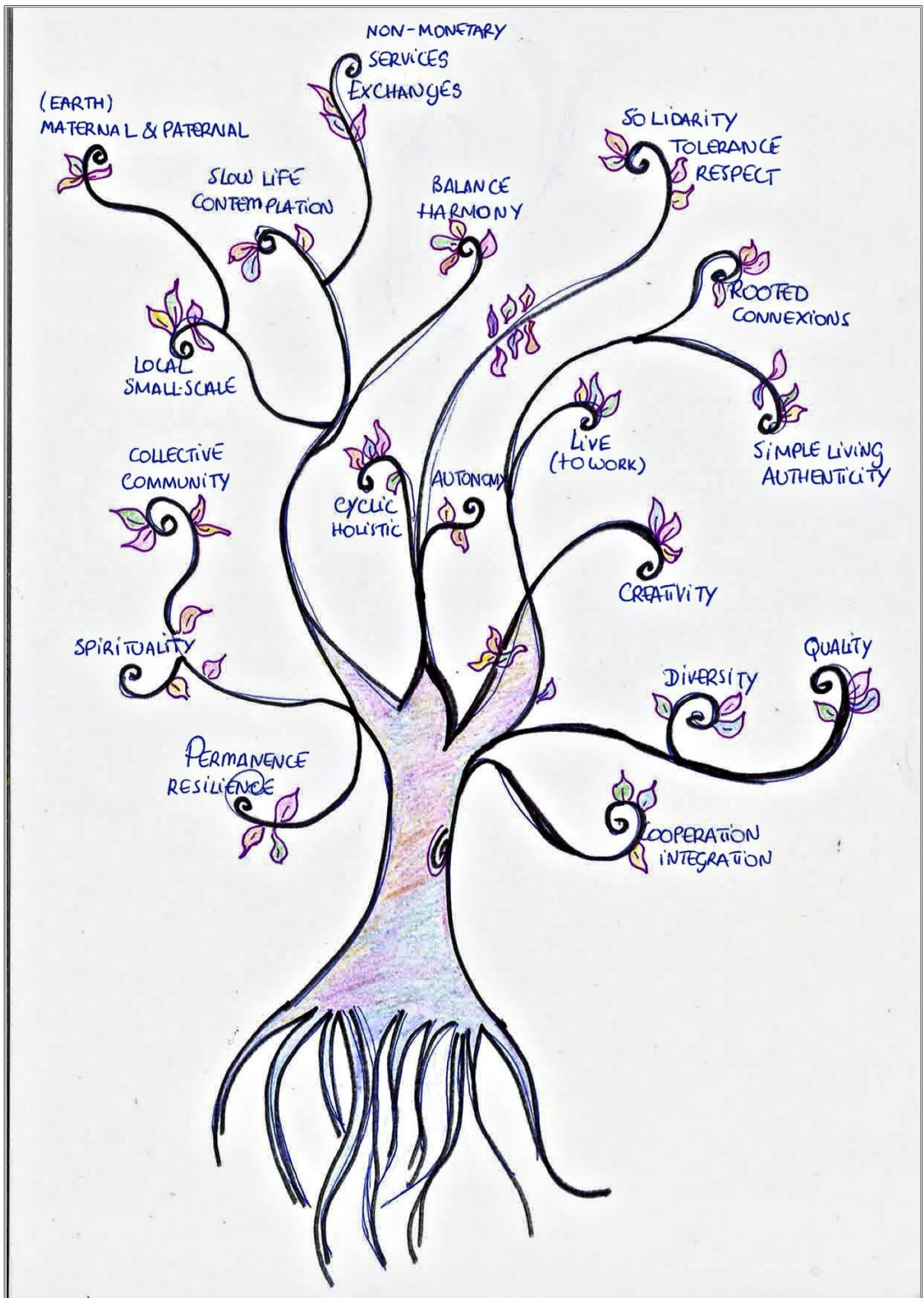
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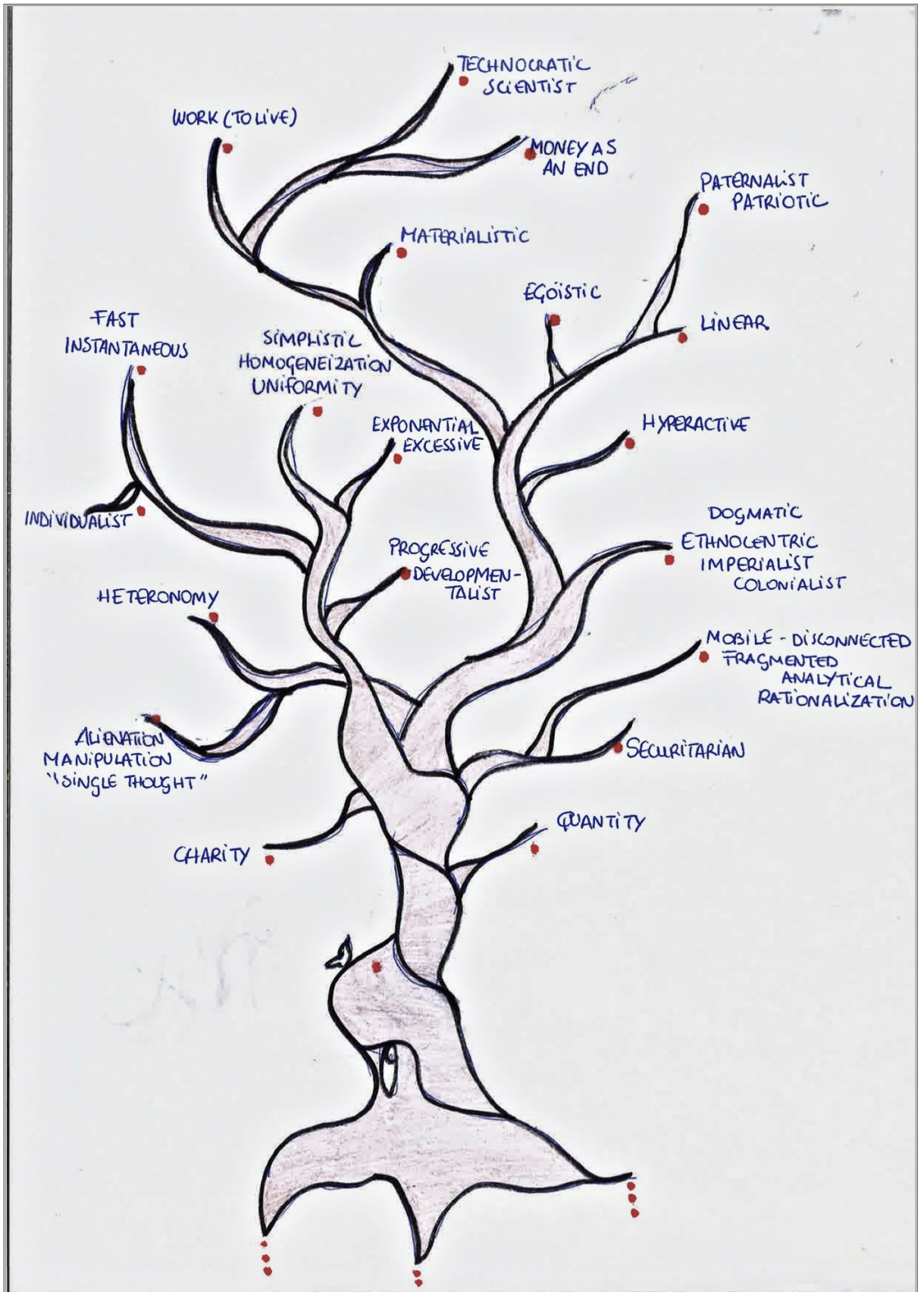
Appendix A



Appendix B



Appendix C



Appendix D

