Grief and Hope in Transition An orienteering guide

Tools for Reorientation

The current discussion about a transition to a society not depending on fossil fuels is often characterised by optimism and confidence, grounded in the belief that it will be possible to create a safe and secure future. The optimistic and confident outlook is often tied to the possibility to replace fossil fuels with new technologies, such as biogas and electrification. Despite fossil energy being indispensable for the development of our current modes of living, it is entirely taken for granted that we will be able to live in the same way as we have gotten used to. This also despite the strong evidence that new technologies and alternative sources of energy will not be enough, and that we probably would do better preparing for far more fundamental changes of our modes of existence.

In this project, *Grief and Hope in Transition*, **our approach to transition has been one of reorientation, a departure from the belief in new technologies as the solution to all kinds of problems, an attempt at deviation from modernity's familiar territories and road maps**. Together with people living in different rural areas in Sweden's southernmost landscape Scania, we formed a study group in future orienteering. Commitment and curiosity have been our values as we, the researchers in the project, together with these citizens and invited experts, have explored the unknown terrains of a future in the making.

Orienteering became the choice of thought figure for the study group's practice, as it invited us to envisage several possible paths through a terrain, several possible futures. As opposed to a road map, focusing on already existing roads, an orienteering map is a tool to navigate the local terrain. Such a map shows large stones, rivers, rivulets and ruins, and allows the map's readers to find their own ways. But not without paying close attention, and closely relating to, the actual terrain.

When we try to envisage a fossil free future, we might feel lost and disoriented, since so many of the tools previously used for navigating no longer can be taken for granted. We might consider alternatives to air travel or serving our guests something with a smaller climate footprint than the usual steak. But how do we go about it? Are we simply making small adjustments in relation to the already beaten tracks and signposts, or are we able to identify other objects, approaches and practices? How do we reorient in times of disorientation? How do we establish new pathways, leading in new directions, in the face of the loss of a future already so invested with hope and meaning?

Such a reorientation, away from our current ways of living, can be perceived as frightening. The fact that we probably will need to let go of established ideas about how society is organized and functions can truly be unsettling. An important aspect of our reorientation must therefore be **the courage to let go of the optimism and confidence inherent in the idea of a carefree future existence**. In order to do so, we will need new

orienteering tools. In this project we attempted to invite grief as a kind of companion, while using a gritty hope as our compass, when we went looking for new pathways.

Grief as companion

There are established rituals and traditions to express and contain the grief after the loss of a close friend or relative. But how do we grieve the objects, practices, habits and ideas that a society based on fossil fuel made possible, that we now need to let go? And how do we grieve the loss of landscapes and species altering or disappearing because of climate change?

Many of us are already experiencing and confronting losses caused by climate change and transition. But we also resist talking about these losses. The losses mentioned and discussed often happens in other parts of the world, or take place in an abstract and distant future, not immediately affecting us. In order to **reorient we need to find ways to approach and live with loss**. This is why we invited grief as a kind of companion.

Amongst other aspects this has meant trying to make losses, relating to both climate change and transition, present and tangible. Not in order to be able to continue as before, but **in order to understand how both we, and our planet, already has and will change in the face of things already lost, of losses to come**.

For us, **making loss present is important also as it makes it possible to approach grief together, as a**

collective rather than as individuals. The changes we are facing will not be fairly and evenly distributed; it will be necessary to tackle them together.

In order to reorient we will thus need to get used to live with grief. This doesn't mean we have to let go of hope. It means we need to explore other ways to understand, create and sustain it.

Gritty hope as compass

Rather than an optimism based on clearly visible contours and solutions, we need a riskier, more motley, ambiguous and gritty hope-in-the making. A hope that doesn't depend on one solution, or on others to figure it out. Maybe we could try comparing the hope we need to a heap of grain. In order to distinguish the tiny grains, we need to apply all our focus and attention. Each grain can be looked at as a separate entity, and carefully examined. But it is when added to one another they create a whole, a multi-faceted totality.

Using such gritty hope as compass is to keep faith in a possible future, despite having no guarantees that everything will get better. It requires learning **to understand each of us as part of different futures, created in on-going, assiduous, everyday practices**. Such hope invites us to explore entirely new pathways, even when we have no idea of where they will take us.

We will have to **let go of heroic stories of the lone explorer, finding the one true path leading to all solutions**. Instead, we have tried to identify hope in specific places, in what's happening around us, in situations and instances where we can actually act. Reorientation with a granular hope as compass means looking inwards, but also looking at the ground, at where our feet are, instead of ahead and away.

Shifting terrains

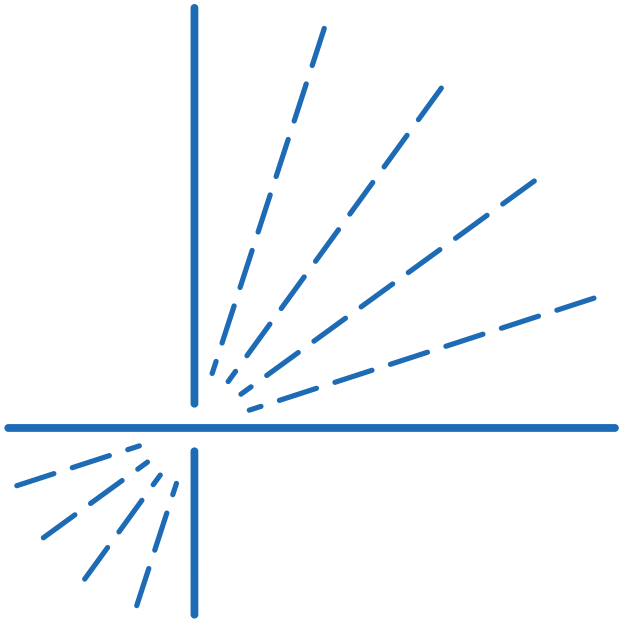
In our attempts at reorientation, towards a society no longer dependent on fossil fuel, we have visited **places where different futures already can be anticipated**. In other words, we have been moving in shifting terrains. The change in these places might be due to the climate, to demands for alternative energy sources and much coveted metals, or to an engagement in local resources. We have visited them thinking they might contain important learning. But also because the futures they anticipate are uncertain. How we choose to navigate through and with them, will affect the futures of both us and these specific terrains.

Exercises in reorientation and new map signs

Together with the study group's participants we have explored how these places, their histories and possible futures, might **help us prepare for an uncertain future**. Our common exercises and discussions have aimed at accustoming ourselves to be accompanied by grief. But also, and above all, to get better at navigating with the help of a gritty hope.

In order to facilitate orienteering through these shifting terrains we have developed a series of new map signs. A consistent characteristic is their function as a reminder of an on-going change of the current terrain that requires attention, care and commitment..

The eroding beach & falling landmarks



Falling landmarks

A landmark is a reference point used for navigation and orienteering. Distant land formations, like mountains, of faraway buildings, are helpful when making our way through a specific terrain. When landscapes change, by erosion, drought or flooding, such landmarks, that once helped us navigate, are also in peril. Falling landmarks serve as a reminder of slow and subtle ecological changes otherwise hard to perceive.

Which kind of landmarks can support and guide us in times of ecological decline and insecure futures, affecting us all? Can such landmarks help us understand and approach these changes in terms other than loss?


H&G
Yuva Øknelid

The eroding beach

A farmer, who grew up close to the beach, told us about an oak, then growing over fifty yards from the sea. The family's cows used to graze under the tree. During his entire life, the farmer has used the oak as a landmark. He has seen the sea get increasingly closer to it. Finally, the oak fell, undermined by the eroding beach. From the position of this oak, the farmer could tell that the sea, each year, conquers yet another yard of land.

The terrain we try to navigate is a beach, lined with lush trees hanging over the white sand.

The steep gradients we observe between forest and beach are created by ocean currents and waves, eroding and recreating what is now land mass. Does global warming enforce the eroding power of the ocean currents here? Nobody can tell for sure. What we can observe is that large boulders have been placed on the beach, to keep of the sea and protect the small chapel, often used for weddings. Since these protective measures seem to be of no avail, there are now talk about moving the chapel further inland.

Well discussed scenarios for the future point out how we might be able to reduce the effects of climate change. But we will not be able to prevent rising sea levels from affecting this specific beach. On top of that, climate change also cause weather in general to be more unpredictable, increasing the risk of temporary high sea levels. One and a half century ago, this part of the coast was devastated by one of the larger natural disasters

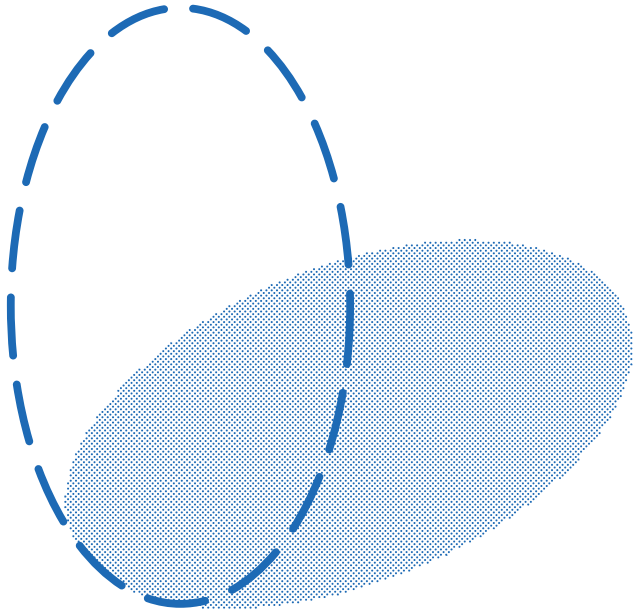
in modern Swedish history. Meteorological factors – a storm and an unusually low depression – coincided and made the sea rise to more than three yards above its usual level. The ensuing disaster caused death and massive destruction along the coast of southern Sweden (and all around the southern Baltic Sea). In these kinds of situations, boulders will never be enough. To predict the frequency of such extreme weather events is never easy. All we know for sure is that climate change increases the risk.

The farmer's oak now lies on the beach, a fallen landmark, its shape slowly changing over the years. Children use it for climbing. Loving couples cut their names on the surface of the trunk, insects and mushrooms have made it their habitat.

Exercises in reorientation: for the purpose of navigating the eroding beach we marked out trees on the verge of falling. From these trees we took cuttings, in the hope of being able to create new landmarks. As the farmer's oak, they might be able to support us in making both change and loss felt and present.

Most likely we will not be able to hinder neither erosion nor future, more frequent flooding. But our visit to the beach made us sensitive to the gritty hope to be found in the life flourishing in fallen trees. A dead tree can be the habitat of over thousand species. Dead oaks particularly so: according to experts they can be hosting up to 202 endangered species. This served as a reminder that hope not only can be found in the protection of existing landmarks, like the chapel, or in counteracting erosion and the ensuing material losses. As one of the participants expressed it, hope also is about "daring to fall and receive change in creative ways. As an act of preparation."

The proposed mine & potential shadow places



Potential shadow places

Shadow places are terrains that provide us with energy, raw materials and other important resources, but that to most of us are invisible. Our current everyday comfort depends on them, but the actual localities are sacrificed and shadowed. The fossil era has produced plenty of such shadow places: those where oil and gas are extracted, those still recovering from oil spill, mining areas where the minerals supposedly helping us to advance technological development are extracted and processed. But even a future without fossil fuels will produce shadow places. That each geographical location is, and will be, dependent on others make it problematic to focus our attention and care solely on places we like. How can we get better at noticing and appreciating what is hidden in the shadows of the pathways leading to a future without fossil fuels, regardless of whether in other parts of the world, or in our more immediate surroundings?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50.94
V
vanadium
Yeva Oknelid

The proposed mine

Here we find ourselves in a terrain characterized by billowing fields, crossed by small gravel roads and a larger, tarmac highway. On each side of the highway is a small village. Not an unusual kind of landscape in these parts of southern Sweden. But what is not visible to the naked eye is that mining concessions has been made all over this terrain. Its clay soil is potentially rich in minerals, and mines might be located here in the future.

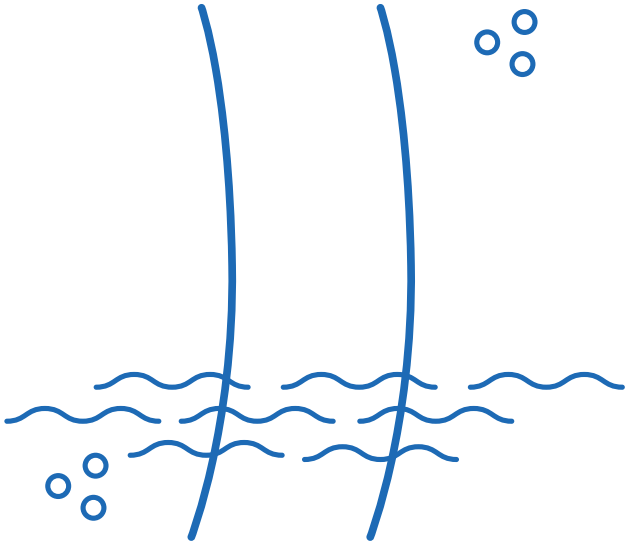
The local clay, traditionally used as building material for the local houses, has turned out to contain a coveted resource, and the village risks a future as a shadow place. Vanadium is a mineral used to make steel stronger, in buildings or in weapon. But it is also needed in the rechargeable batteries used for storage in solar and wind power systems. In the transition to a fossil free society much technological optimism is invested in Vanadium as a resource that might make it possible to maintain our current levels of energy consumption.

The experience of being sacrificed and marginalized is already part of this place's history. One and a half century ago, spring came early. The cattle were brought out to graze and the farmers ploughed and sowed. But in May, winter returned with full force, leading to immediate crop failure and subsequent famine and misery. It was the last famine in Sweden, caused equally by sudden and unforeseen weather events and some following, ill-advised political decisions. The local feudal lord seized upon the opportunity to terminate the farmer's

tenancies. Claystone by claystone, the farmer's homes were deconstructed. Some housed were moved into the forest; others were never rebuilt. Maybe the clay from these houses was returned to the fields we now overlook, surrounding the village church, once in the middle of a cluster of houses.

Exercises in reorientation: in order to navigate this landscape, which possibly will be sacrificed in order to ensure our future prosperity, we collectively made an inventory of the place. The clay inspired us to make castings of a range of smaller objects we found; material impressions of the place that might allow a certain degree of reproduction and restitution. The impressions, of traces of tractor wheels on a field, ploughed earth, asphalt, a well, a particular stone, generated both thoughts concerning, and stories about, human-time-nature relationships. They also made us think about the complicated dilemma that lies in "extraction in order to increase our material welfare and technology development on one hand, and food production on the other", as put by one of the participants.The potential use and meaning of this inventory are not closed matters. Maybe we can understand our inventory as a kind of memory, from a place we might need to sacrifice, from a future shadow place. Or as a kind of caring for this place in the present moment – regardless of whether we are, or feel, at home here.

The planted forest & more-than-wasteland



More-than-wasteland

Land of no particular value, not suitable for neither farming nor forestry is in the southern Swedish dialect referred to as "taskmark", perhaps best translated as "wasteland". But many contemporary experts point to the high intrinsic value of this type of land, a value derived from its rich biodiversity and high capacity for carbon dioxide storage. This type of land is often swampy, well suited for planting willows and poplars harvested for energy production. How can we move beyond understanding such places in other terms than waste lands, or weedy, overgrown fields? How to take all these values into account, simultaneously?


kWh

The planted forest

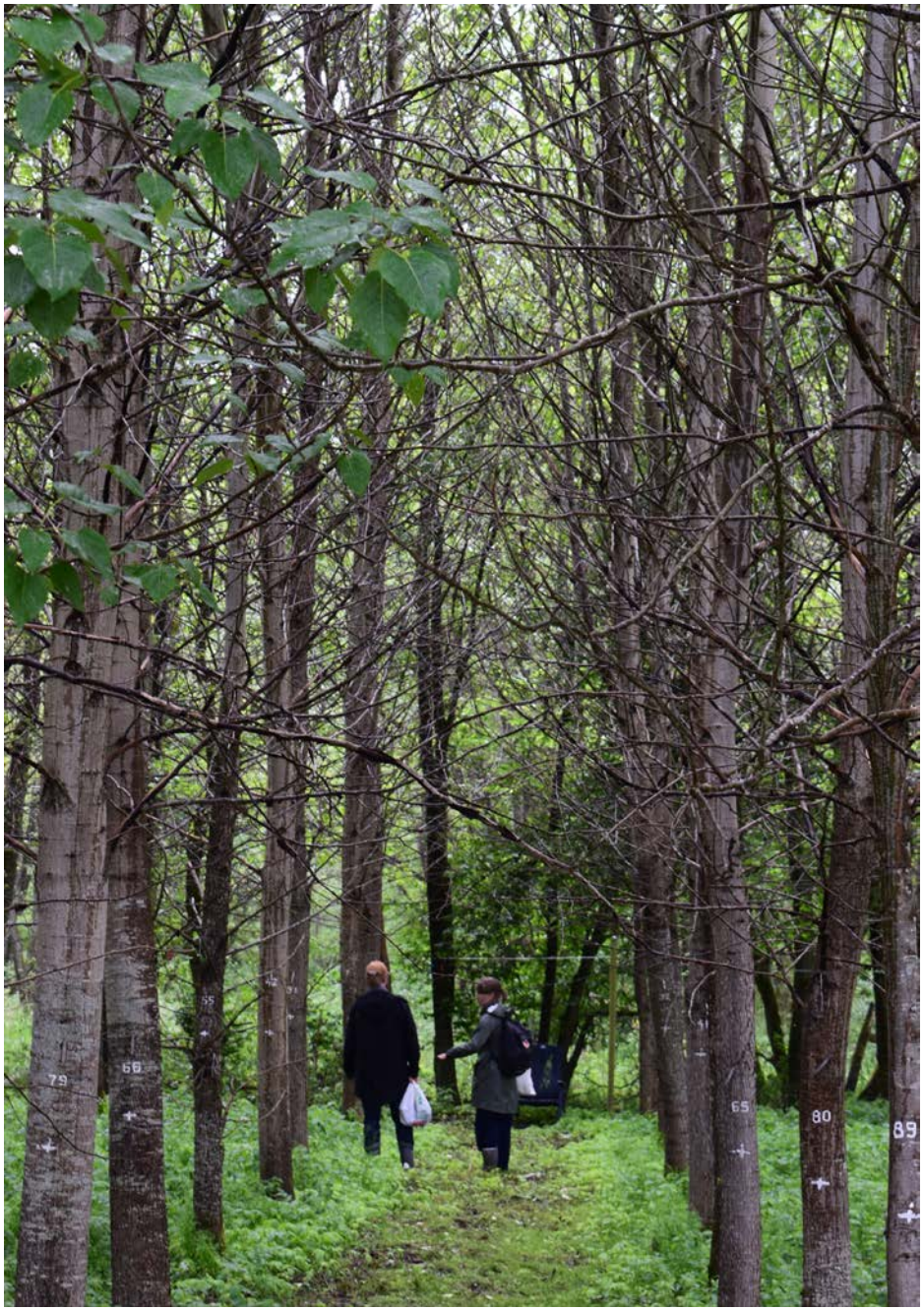
Scania, the southernmost part of Sweden, is well known for its lines of willow pollards, yellow-blossoming rape fields and apple orchards. But the landscapes here didn't always look this way. Through centuries they have changed continuously according to the needs of its human population, in relation to both fluctuating economic values of crops and a changing climate. Before the many drainages that took place during the 19th century, the landscape here was rather characterized by an abundance of wetlands. These wetlands, then converted into farmland, were extremely biologically diverse.

In our current attempts at replacing fossil fuels much hope is invested in solar and wind power, as well as in energy forests. But many experts also express concern about the effects these energy forests might have on other species and on the overall landscape. The current value of an energy forest is measured in its potential economic gain, how often it can be felled, or simply put: how many cubic meters of wood chips it can produce.

The terrain where we now find ourselves is rather marshy and obscure. The small saplings at the forest bottom struggle towards the intensely green foliage high above. This terrain is neither classified as farmland nor woodland or mountain. It is a kind of liminal space, the kind of landscape called "taskmark", a local word for waste land. Looking up we see a multitude of straight tree trunks. We are in the middle of an energy forest,

surrounded by willows and poplars, and the atmosphere instils a feeling of sacredness. We often perceive energy forests as overgrown, impenetrable spaces, harvested every couple of years. But the tree trunks here are massive, the soil is thick, and the undergrowth richly varied. Despite the forest being enclosed by a deer fence, we observe many traces of roes and rabbits. Near the forest is a solar park, and fields with straight artificial rows of corn and barley. This forest is also cultivated land.

Exercises in reorientation: to familiarize ourselves with this place as more-than-wasteland and to apprehend its multifaceted values, we entered the forest from different angles, and in different ways. Much like in forest bathing we slowly walked together between the trunks. We picked small green plants growing on the ground. We used the sunshine, and the old photographic printing formulation cyanotype, to make a catalogue of the forest's diversity of plants. We invited artists, who tried to capture and depict the aesthetic value of this landscape. Together we tried to find words to describe it: forest, plantation, complementary forest. Some of us were particularly captivated by the forest's simultaneously industrial and sacred character. Others imagined it like a possible future forest garden. Such a forest garden invites the sunshine through the foliage and makes it possible to grow rhubarb and other edible plants between the trees. One person emphasized that the forest is best perceived from within: slowly strolling through it and making use of all bodily senses allows for a full appreciation of its values. This forest is not solely a waste land; it cannot be reduced to its production of wood chips.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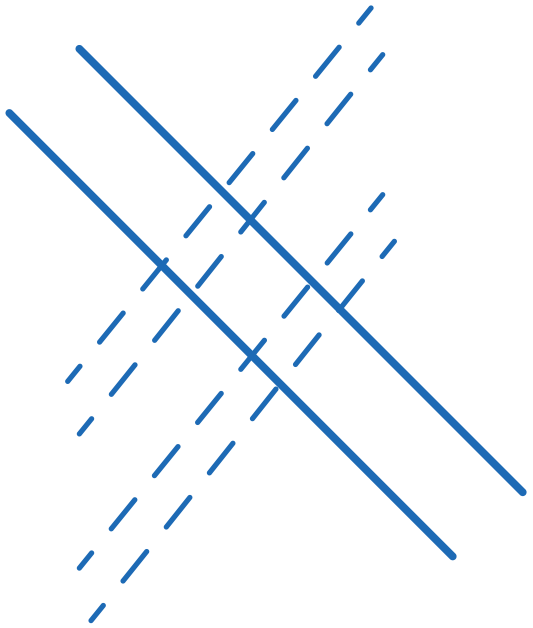
The closed-down country shop & pathways through time



Pathways through time

Our current society is in so many aspects formed by the access to fossil energy. But we can also make out traces from an era preceding our current dependence on fossil fuel. Such traces can be found in traditions, in infrastructures, in certain food and crops that once were very common but has been substituted, even forgotten. There are some local initiatives in which people pick up on these traces, to try getting away from fossil dependence, try out new possibilities. The cultivation of heirloom crops, such as field peas, is resumed, and once closed-down country shops are reopened. How can we use these traces, telling stories of less fossil dependent ways of living, not only to re-enact history but in order to create new pathways? Pathways with a both material and temporal dimension?


LANTHANDEL

The closed-down country shop

We find ourselves inside a closed-down country shop. It closed at a time when it became difficult to compete with the supermarkets' round-the-clock service and ability to meet every possible demand regardless of the actual season. In one of the country shop's rooms, we find old posters advertising staples like sausages, cheese and margarine. Such staples were most probably produced in the local area. And it is very likely that the groceries on the shelves were seasonal as well.

Today we have opened the shop in order to make the table for a Midsummer celebration. As many other high festivals, the celebration of the summer solstice relates to seasonal changes, to the yearly rhythm of agricultural practices. Christmas was celebrated with plenty of fresh meat. The poultry started to lay eggs again in spring, which is why we eat them during Easter. Midsummer was celebrated with abundant produce from the grazing livestock: sweet and soured milk. But traditionally also with porridge – a so called "white porridge", grain or flour boiled with milk instead of water.

Several traditional Swedish dishes can be found on our Midsummer table: pickled herring, new potatoes, soured cream and chives. But some of the dishes are less familiar to us – like a vegetarian "pickled herring" made of mushrooms and aubergine, as well as smoked African sharptooth catfish. The later has been farmed in closed fish tanks, part of some Swedish farmers' recent development of methods for local and land-based fish

farming. We don't serve strawberries though, the weather this spring has been cold.

All dishes are anchored in tradition. At the same time, they also suggest ways we can adapt to contemporary conditions. Traditions are always subject to change. Take for example new potatoes: they only became part of Midsummer celebration in the early 20th century. Previously, harvesting and eating those small and early potatoes was considered reckless in the face of the constant threat of crop failure. Similarly, pickled herring might not be taken for granted as a future Midsummer dish: the Baltic Sea population of herring is seriously endangered, as is the entire ecosystem of this inland sea. On top of that, large amount of Baltic Sea herring is fished and sold as food to the Norwegian salmon farms.

Exercises in reorientation: To reorient among those tracks and pathways from a time of lesser fossil fuel dependence, we tried to revive several now lost Midsummer traditions. On such tradition is the salty "dream porridge", eaten before bedtime on Midsummer's eve. The saying goes that if you eat this porridge, and don't drink anything with it, your future mate will appear in your dreams. But instead of trying to reveal the future, as if it is already written, we tried an updated version. We invited the participants to make commitments for the future. Instead of submitting to dreams and notions of fate, we opted to use the commitments to position ourselves as part of the future, in the significant relationships we choose, create and maintain. Our dreams were about fostering community around meals, about improving our relationships with the past, with seasons and other generations. But some commitments were about allowing more time and space for daydreaming, allowing space for the undetermined and about getting to know the trees and plants in one's immediate surroundings. One participant even suggested the importance of "letting ordinary days be somewhat dull", in order to more fully appreciate variations and festivities. Another person committed to start eating more porridge, and to enrich it with delicious side dishes, inspired by other culinary traditions and dishes such as risotto, grits, žganci, upma and conge.

Epilogue

Together with people living in rural areas in the southern part of Sweden we have practiced reorientation in precarious terrains where several possible futures can be anticipated, accompanied by grief and using gritty hope as a compass.

Our grief and hope have taken on different forms and expressions. We have been grieving what is already lost, like the fallen oak. But we have also practiced **a kind of anticipatory grief, in being attentive to possible future losses**. To grieve in waiting is a kind of preparatory act, opening space for other pathways and directions. In order to identify these possible new paths and directions we have turned our gaze towards what is shadowed when we try to maintain ways of living that were, and are, made possible by fossil fuels.

Our attempts at **expanding the repertoire of grief** have made it possible for us to share with and learn from one another. The agonies caused by the apparent need to let go of a carefree existence urge us to confront both previous, actual losses and potential, future ones, as a collective. We have also identified the need to find better ways to learn from history and from other parts of the world. Making our worries the cause for gathering has shown how **grief can be a many-faceted and productive force, propelling change**. But turning grief into such a transformative force requires labour and collective care.

Navigating with the help of a gritty hope also requires labour and attention. Instead of looking for hope in grand, heroic narratives, we have been looking for **an everyday hope inherent in our small and daily actions**. This urged us **to look for, and create, hope in places where we didn't expect to find it**. We have found hope in what has been lost, such as new life forms emerging and thriving in a fallen tree. We have found hope in places considered worthless. We have found hope in long lost practices, suggesting pathways leading to less fossil fuel dependent futures.

To, yet again, become independent of fossil energy, will require labour, intense labour! But such labour is life-affirming. It teaches us to comprehend our own futures as inherent in ourselves, not as something decided for us.

This text would not have been possible if we hadn't had others to think with. Thus, we would like to thank Lesley Head, Steven Jackson, Blanche Verlie, Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman, who all have taught us new ways to understand and practice both grief and hope. Sara Ahmed's work on reorientation has been of tremendous value, as has Val Plumwood's concept of shadow places and Ursula K LeGuin's invitation to look beyond the heroic narratives. We would also like to express our gratitude to Anne-Charlotte Ek, for her careful reading and comments.

This project would not have been possible without all the different participants in, and contributors to, our study group. Thanks to all of you who, rain or shine, have been practising grief and hope with us in unknown terrains. We also would like to thank all other persons and organisations who have not participated in the study groups but in many and other ways have enriched our project: individuals, village communities, hiking teams and others alike.

Thanks to Anna Blomkvist, Barbara Wohlfarth, Lars Christersson and Håkan Jönsson for generously sharing their knowledge and experience. Thanks to Gabriella Dahlman, Kerstin Engblom Clavijo, Per Gustavsson, Anna Rochegova and Hasse Karlsson, who all helped us see unexpected aesthetic values in shifting landscapes. Thanks to Gunnel Petterson for sharing her gritty hope, to Tim Astbo for taking care of our tree cuttings, to Emma Bergström and Caroline Skovbye for space and food in the closed-down country shop, to Jon Tillberg and Åsa Wiktorsson for providing lodging when we needed it. Thanks to Daphné Hamilton-Jones and Èmile Roch for your creativity, curiosity and perceptivity. Thanks to Anders Gustafsson, Jan Månsson, Frans Larsen, Kerstin Nilsson. Thanks also to Sjöbo Konsthall and to the Swedish Research Council Formas.

Responsible for the project *Grief and Hope in Transition* are Kristina Lindström, Li Jönsson, Christina Lindqvist, Jonas Larsen and Per-Anders Hillgren, all researchers at Malmö University.

The project was made possible by a grant from Formas, registration number 2019-01996

Print and graphic design: BEAST Studio

Illustrations: Ylva Oknelid

Translation: Ylva Gislén

ISBN: 978-91-7877-419-7

DOI: 10.24834/isbn.9789178774197

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