

Living Methodologies

– what enters
the field with
us?

Marjolijn
Dijkman

Sam
Nightingale



Field_Notes – Living Methodologies, 2025. Photo: Ellie Ballentine

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MARJOLIJN DIJKMAN
& SAM NIGHTINGALE

This conversation between **Marjolijn Dijkman** and **Sam Nightingale** explores how personal and embodied experiences are entangled with fieldwork across the sites, contexts, and disciplines in which they work. Their discussion began during ***Field_Notes: Living Methodologies***, in what they felt was a safe and generous environment to explore these aspects of their lives and practice. Subsequently, they reflect on these moments together, recognising that they were productive for discussing these topics and relating them to other sites, projects, and experiences.

Field_Notes – What brought us here

Bioart Society's eighth field laboratory, *Field_Notes – Living Methodologies*, took place in collaboration with Kilpisjärvi Biological Station in Gilbbsjávri, Sápmi from 14 to 24 September 2025. Responding to shifts in the fields of art and science, this field lab emphasised that the ways in which we conduct research matter and sought to engage with the methodologies themselves.

During the laboratory, a group of 22 participants worked together to examine, exchange, and experiment with different methods and approaches for shaping a future ethics and politics of research in Gilbbsjávri and beyond.

Our guiding questions were: How do fieldwork encounters call us into ethical relationships with the lives—human, more-than-human, material—that they engage? How might we rethink “data” in ways that honor the complexities of lived, entangled field experiences? How do we cultivate methods that emerge through lived, embodied experience rather than imposing external research logics? What kinds of practices, commitments, and collaborations enable research methodologies to be reshaped by plurality rather than merely incorporating it?

Field_Notes: Living Methodologies participants included: Anastasia (A) Alevtin, Hannu Autto, Ellie Ballentine, Yvonne Billimore, Marjolijn Dijkman, Eamon Edmundson-Wells, Antye Greie-Ripatti, Hanna Husberg, Ziggy Lever, Elina Waage Mikalsen, Milla Millasnoore, Aleksija Neimanis, Astrida Neimanis, Sam Nightingale, Anu Ruohomäki, Camille Sineau, Sumugan Sivanesan, Taylor Alaina Liebenstein Smith, Eliisa Suvanto, Manuel Díaz Tufinio, Leena Valkeapää and Tessa Zettel.

MARJOLIJN: I think it was one of the first days ending with a collective reading session, when (A), yourself, and I were sitting at the reception of the Biological Station, sharing quite intimate stories. It was the first time I had heard of the term ‘internalised ableism’, which appeared in one of the texts (A) had selected for a series of reading sessions they were invited to host during *Field_Notes*. The term resonated with me, and I remember we started to talk about it afterwards. This small, precious gathering really affected me and my time in *Field_Notes*. I felt a strong connection and learned a lot from both of you. We were talking about our bodies, identities, the fluidities within these, the transformations that we’ve been going through, including illness and processes of grief, and how these also relate to the work that we do in the field. These relationships among the site, my body, and personal experiences are not something I have explored in writing or when discussing my work publicly, but I know they are important in the process.

SAM: This was a powerful moment for me, too. We were all coming from vulnerable positions that connected our personal histories of disability, chronic illness, gender identity, and grief. In that moment, in that configuration of people and place, the three of us opened up in different ways. I had no idea that was going to happen. In most situations, I would not share such personal reflections, but in the right setting, with the right people such conversations can emerge. The situation became conducive: one person offered something, and that provided the ground for another to do the same. Very quickly, and I think unconsciously, we attuned to each other on deeper levels and frequencies.

What is it that makes this possible? I believe it goes beyond that moment in the reception. The situation was already shaped by the configuration of a larger group—artists, designers, theorists, a veterinary pathologist, and others—who were brought together in Gilbbesjávri, Sápmi, a contested land, to consider what it means to have an ethical and political practice in the ‘field’. It was a place where we were thinking through and with methods that emerge from lived and embodied experience, rather than ones purely imposed on a research site. I have wondered whether others in the group have had moments like this, when connections were made, and vulnerabilities were revealed. What made this convergence?

MARJOLIJN: Yes, I think that was well curated and hosted by Bioart Society, who, of course, already imagined there would be meaningful links between our practices. They made a strong effort to create a ‘safe space’ within the context of this very particular ‘western’ scientific research station. The station, in many ways, by its presence on Sápmi land, is an act of epistemic violence. We as a group were very aware of our collective presence there, and that opened valuable discussions about our personal experiences and impressions that we might not have had in a less complex context. Perhaps us being there and feeling slightly out of place, a sense of discomfort in being an uninvited guest in Sápmi—at least in the case of most—created a setting to become even more aware of our identity, bodily presence, and the personal ‘luggage’ we bring to the site?

SAM: At the outset, when I arrived in Gilbbesjávri, I had this feeling of openness... a sense of ‘radical openness’*. Since this experience at *Field_Notes* and our continuing conversations, I have been thinking about the differences between vulnerability, as I expressed it a moment ago, and something I am starting to think of as ‘radical openness’. There are significant differences between these

*In a continuing process of discovery, I recently learnt that bell hooks published the essay ‘Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness’ in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990). I wasn’t aware of this at the time of my conversation with Marjolijn.



Salt as a unifier, salt in sweat, salt in tears: salt's material intimacy with the human body—an essential nutrient that provides balance and, at the other extreme, toxic. We talk of ancient soils, their deficiencies and overabundance, how salt is both a product of colonialism and its disruption. Salt breaks binaries: it disrupts the clear divisions between things. The salt that permeates the soil and water of the contested lands is composed of the same mineral that sustains my own body. In writing of one, perhaps I come to understand the other.

(Sam Nightingale, "Spectral Materialism: encounters with land-time-scapes", PhD dissertation, Goldsmiths, 2026)



states in terms of consent and control. Whereas vulnerability is often unequal, imposed, and carries a risk that exceeds one's capacity in the moment of exposure, be it physical or emotional, structural or situational, thereby eliciting precarity or marginalisation, I think radical openness is something different. It has agency. I see it as a deliberate orientation; a willingness to be unsettled and changed by a situation or encounter. It is almost like intentional exposure, being aware of one's limits and staying within them, even if only just. In this way, it could be thought of as a practice of care for oneself and for others involved in that moment. For me, radical openness is about attuning and being responsive to what emerges in the moment— as it did between us in Gilbbsjávri.

MARJOLIJN: I love that idea, radical openness. I can imagine this could also be an interesting approach in your work and artistic process. How does that idea relate to your practice as an artist?



Salt is entangled with histories of violence and resistance. It is bound up with systems of extraction and survival. Yet it also holds the possibilities for imagining otherwise. From the sodium ions that spark neural signaling, to the queer and trans imaginaries that reconfigure embodiment, to the geological formations that bear the scars of colonial terraforming. Salt emerges not only as a biochemical necessity but also as a material witness – attuned to spectral presences and nonlinear temporalities. To think with salt is to think with matter. It is to recognise that imagination is not a disembodied act of cognition but a relational, mineral, and world-making force. Imagination begins in the body, in the earth, in the salt. It moves through the charged intra-actions of ions, histories, and desires. To imagine otherwise is to engage in a speculative practice – one that insists that the future is not given. It can be imagined otherwise.

(Sam Nightingale, "Salt – an elemental medium for imagining otherwise", *Extractivism: Towards a gendered and transdisciplinary approach at the threshold between land and sea*, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 2025)

SAM: Reflecting further on the idea of radical openness, I am linking it more directly to my artistic research practice, where I work photochemically with the mineral salt as a medium that brings disparate temporalities and the possibilities for imagining otherwise into proximity. I can share how my personal history has shaped this research. A few months ago, I delivered a conference paper; it was experimental and speculative, and it was the first time I connected my personal experience as a transgender man with how this experience informs my research practice and interest in salt. This mineral has a significant ecological impact in the Mallee, a semi-arid region in southeast Australia where much of my research has taken place; this is the unceded Country of the First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee, the Traditional Owners of these lands. Salt also sustains my bodily functions at multiple levels. In the paper, I explore how salt is both a conduit for the afterlives of settler-colonial violence and, within the human body, a chemical that enables neurons to spark in the brain—igniting imagination and opening the possibility of imagining other possibilities or directions for life from the given or expected.

In that paper, for the first time, I shared the idea that my fascination with salt (sodium chloride) is not only because it is a medium that shapes landscapes, where hypersalinity can be an effect of settler-colonial terraforming and geological time converging, but also because the sodium chloride causing neural firing in my brain, sparking imagination and other cognitive functions is also what makes it possible for me to imagine salt as a temporal medium in my practice. At the same time, over twenty years ago, if I follow this saline trajectory, sodium chloride was the same chemical compound that, neurologically, enabled me to imagine a different future for myself and the possibility that the external world could recognise me in the gender I had always considered myself to be. To live as a transgender man offered me a radical and political possibility for imagining a life, my life, *otherwise* from what I had been born into. In writing that paper—which I see as an act of radical openness—I shared a significant personal history, linking it to my artistic research, which was new for me. It was pretty wild and put me out of my comfort zone, to be honest. But suddenly I recognised that my work using salt as a photo-alchemical agent of transformation was deeply connected to my body and the chemical transformation it has undergone. Salt, imagination, and transformation meet as material and affective forces that pulse through bodies, traumatised landscapes, and personal and geopolitical histories.

MARJOLIJN: That's really an interesting reading, the salt in the brain as a kind of igniter of imagination connecting mind, body, materiality and landscape. Will you continue to produce new works as part of this project, and do you think you would approach the medium differently now that you have been writing about these speculative aspects? Have you ever incorporated your writing into your artistic work?

SAM: Yes, I have started developing a more embodied writing practice grounded in a personal-theoretical, sensory-material perspective. These take the form of 'field notes' that interweave multiple temporalities, theories, and practices, along with reflections that arise from a body—my body—situated, sensing, mediating, responding; striving to make sense with and alongside other bodies (spectral and material; human, environmental, animate, inanimate) that compose the research encounter. The writing is intentionally relational and, at times, speculative in its interpretation of theory. This form of writing is open-ended and shares personal experience, but only in ways that offer new insight into the site, or at least into my engagement with its complexity.

MARJOLIJN: This reminds me of what you said one day while we were walking in Gilbbesjávri, about how careful you are when sharing personal experiences. These days, speaking out is politically important and powerful, but also more risky.





Research image from *Turbid Tides*, 2025. Photo: Marjolijn Dijkman

Alongside the estuary, an ambitious wetland restoration experiment is underway: the Twin Dyke, an inland tidal basin where turbid waters flow through a controlled breach and gradually settle into a regenerating salt marsh. This restoration site is physically connected to the Google data center via a pipeline that carries the facility's cooling water, which is heated by data flows arriving through marine internet cables, into the estuary. That water now enters adjacent to the dyke's opening, where it may seep back into the tidal salt marsh, creating an unexpected feedback loop between digital expansion and ecological renewal. *Ebb Flow, Query Return.*

*Digital Northsea, Data Delta,
Tidal Computations, Subsea Clouds,
Bit streams, Turbidity Currents,
Sediment Connectivity, Submarine Networks,
Smart Dikes, Digital Breaches,
Silted Slops and Data Swamps*

(Marjolijn Dijkman)

This is quite a significant moment in your practice, perhaps one that might also shape your future projects? I understand why you prefer not to use the word 'vulnerable'; it doesn't feel empowering, but there are real personal stakes involved.

Although our experiences differ and the risks aren't the same, I relate to the hesitation to share. For example, if I were to highlight personal grief in relation to my work, I wouldn't want it to overshadow how people see my work or my practice. At the same time, I'm well aware that the loss of our child has changed me and my work in irreversible ways. I've also never really talked about how working with ecologically struggling landscapes mirrors my own body struggling and recovering from Long Covid.

I currently work on the project *Turbid Tides* around the Ems-Dollard estuary on the Dutch-German border as an artist in residence at WaterLANDS, an EU Horizon project on the restoration of wetlands. The estuary is depleted of life due to siltation of the water, caused by various interacting factors, including dredging, land reclamation, soil subsidence due to gas extraction and peat oxidation, sea-level rise, and water management infrastructure such as the world-famous dam, the *Afsluitdijk*. Both my body and the estuarine waterbody are directly affected by the climate crisis and human activity. That emotional tie is perhaps also pushing me to engage with these kinds of places.

SAM: The stakes are significant on different levels: the broader geopolitical, environmental, and political—the big picture—and the personal, felt through history and life experience. This is one of the reasons I have started to talk about being a trans man in the context of my art practice. The political climate for trans people has regressed considerably over the past few years, particularly in the UK, where I am based, as we have seen a very deliberate erosion of trans rights. As a result, I decided to be more visible and outspoken about being trans and how that might shape my art practice. I guess it's another example of 'radical openness' that brings different scales (political and personal) into relation.

How do you articulate the multi-scalar dynamics of these differing worlds? I'm wondering how much the connection between the difficulty of our personal histories, which for me also involves personal loss and grief, as well as transitioning, and the sites we work in—many of which have undergone violence or trauma in some way—is fully articulated or even acknowledged. Or is it latent yet still informing our interests, methods and practices in the background?



Marjolijn Dijkman, *Remote Entanglements*, installation view, 2020. Photo: Peter Cox

MARJOLIJN: Yes, I think our personal experiences are latent in these sites. You bring these things with you, unconsciously, I guess, at least in my case. As I mentioned, this is not something I usually speak about in public. Alongside the processes of a turbid estuary and restoration efforts, and their relationship to my own recovery process, there is another personal motivation to work in that context. A few years ago, my father and I discovered that my grandfather had been part of the Dutch resistance and had been tortured and imprisoned in a camp in Germany, then returned deeply traumatised. He never spoke about this. My father grew up only knowing his father as highly dysfunctional, without understanding what had happened to him.

I thought about this part of my family history and its relation to a site after Elina Waage Mikalsen's session during *Field_Notes* on listening and asking permission. There's a place in the Netherlands where radio telescopes were built on the site of a former WWII deportation camp, not far from where I grew up. I was interested in working with the site for a while but hesitated due to its charged history. A Jewish friend once told me: "If you feel strongly like you need to go there, then go for it. You'll figure it out." This made me think of what we practiced in Elina's session: asking for permission from the site or land to be present. It felt as though my friend had offered me a kind of permission that helped me allow myself to engage with the place. One day, walking on site with my father, he faintly remembered a moment from his youth: his father once wanted to take him to a camp in Germany, but the trip never happened. By going through archives, amongst them those at NIOD (Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies) in Amsterdam, we gradually uncovered this part of our family history. If I hadn't started working with the site, we might never have uncovered it together. In the end, my father assisted me when filming on location, which was quite a special process.

I never really knew my grandparents, but they grew up and are buried near the estuary where I'm now working on a four-year residency project. My grandfather was apparently very interested in local history and left behind books that are now part of my research. Working in this area, meeting the people who live there, and researching the landscape's history somehow bring me closer to a part of my family I never connected with. It's another reason for my attachment to this place. Being part of *Field_Notes* helped me reflect more consciously on this process as being a part of my 'methodology'. I also realise that speaking about it breaks a silence that was present for most of my life.

'Remote Entanglements' is a video installation conceived in response to the Voyager Golden Records. In 1977, the Voyager 1 probe was launched carrying a gold-plated record containing images and music, intended to introduce humanity and Earth to extraterrestrial life. Among the 116 illustrations included on the record, assembled to offer a representative picture of humanity, its environment, and its most remarkable achievements, is the Westerbork Synthesis Radio Telescope (WSRT), which has stood on the grounds of the former deportation camp in Westerbork since 1970. The telescope was chosen on the assumption that its purely functional design would be legible to any extraterrestrial intelligence.

Camp Westerbork was established around 1939 to house Jewish refugees from Germany in the wake of Kristallnacht. Under German occupation, it became a deportation camp for Jews, Sinti, and Roma. After liberation in 1945, it served as an internment camp for Dutch collaborators, and later as housing for Moluccan members of the Dutch East Indies army and their families. In 1970, ASTRON (the Netherlands Institute for Radio Astronomy) chose the site for its telescope array, remote, undisturbed, and uninhabited. Today, a memorial center chronicling this layered history has been built around the telescopes. Westerbork brings together a whole range of worlds and eras: persecution, war, astronomy, and the Dutch colonial past.

The split-screen projection serves as an addendum to that record image, bringing together a reconstructed watchtower and the telescope array. Today, visitors to the camp encounter both the watchtower bearing witness to one of humanity's most harrowing chapters and the telescopes trained on outer space. Together, their fields of observation span 360 degrees.

(Marjolijn Dijkman, *Remote Entanglements*, 2020)

SAM: Who we are, our stories, and what we bring to the field are meaningful, right? What you described about the former deportation site and your father and grandfather adds another layer of meaning to the project. Sure, it's not an autobiography... but it's still there, isn't it? It still informs the work you make.

When people ask about my research, I tell them it's about salt as a medium or conduit for storytelling about the Mallee in Australia. I tell them about the methods I use to engage with subjects that are often invisible or hard to perceive, such as using salt and salt-impacted soils and plants in experimental photochemistry to better understand the intersection of geological processes, the afterlives and ongoing effects of colonialism, and their impact on climate futures. But I know there is another part of the work that I tend not to talk about—chemical transformation and change on an embodied level.

During our walk up Saana in Gilbbsjávri, we talked about this a little, both wondering how relevant or necessary it is for us to make explicit the impact that grief, illness and transition might have on our choices of location, subject matter and methods in our practices. As I said, I have started exploring this, making connections among geochemical transformations, personal and geopolitical histories and imaginaries.

MARJOLIJN: Yes, I remember we discussed this during the walk. We both felt strongly that we didn't want to exploit these personal stories, make them performative or overtly inform our identities as artists. You don't want to project all of that onto the site, but then, yes, you do bring it along. It's about being honest about the different parts of ourselves, the site, contexts, and histories that are woven together. This is part of the process of acknowledging these kinds of entanglements, which is itself a form of radical openness.

SAM: So, "What enters the field with us?", is the question we are really asking. It's a 'configuration' of elements or a 'constellation'; we both used these terms. I like them because they indicate that there is always a relationship between who we are, what we bring, and the site itself. Equally, I want to be careful not to overburden the project or the site with a personal story imposed from the outside, which would be contrary to my approach. But it is impossible to go into the field without acknowledging that other elements join us. They are intentional; we can't escape them because they are part of us, yet often unacknowledged.

How do fieldwork encounters call us into ethical

How might we re-think "data" in ways that honor the c

How do we cultivate methods that emerge through research logics?

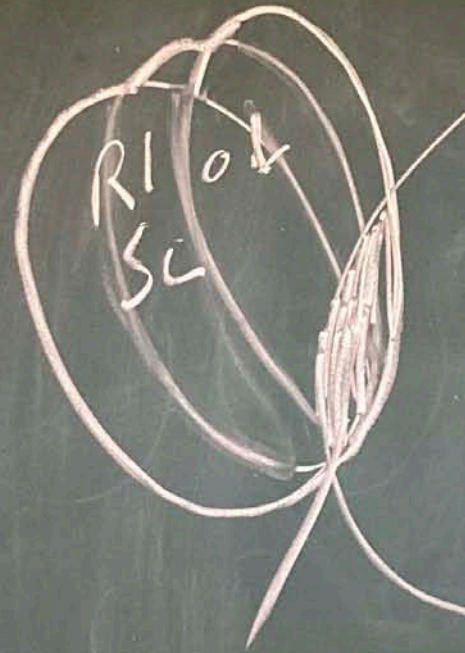
What kind of practices, commitments & collaborations by plurality rather than merely incorporating it?

Other
Other
Other

MONDAY
Who wants to glacier?

ASTRIDA
I WILL JOIN
WHATEVER
EXCURSION
HAPPENS...

SUNDAY
Afternoon: Dal Sa
mires w/ Taylor?



relationships with the ^{human} ^{more-than-human} ^{material} — that they engage?

complexities of lived, entangled field experiences?

lived embodied experience rather than imposing external

enable research methodologies to be (re) shaped

- be mindful
- do no harm
- consider effects

RI
or
Science
helps

Dynamisation Process

7 to left

15 Mins

7 to right

60 Mins

3-4 hours

Repeat 7 times!

'Care time entails "Making time" to get involved with a diversity of timelines (such as the ones involved in the living soil) that make the web of more than human agencies.

Maria Puig de la Bellacasa

MARJOLIJN: This reminds me of a conversation I had with an ecologist about how my practice as an artist and hers as a scientist actually overlap in certain ways. We work with the 'field', talk to people and communities, read a lot about the context, and so on. Our research practices can look surprisingly similar. But then she mentioned that in science, there's a push to overcome personal bias and aim for objectivity to avoid confirmation bias. It's a term you'd never really hear in the art world, right? As artists, we're often trying to get closer to a subjective point of view, not distance ourselves from it. In this conversation, we're also trying to be more open about how much our work is shaped by things we don't always fully acknowledge. A scientist would try to rule out all these 'biases', including feelings and intuitive responses. Of course, all real biases need to be challenged and unlearned. But there are other, more subjective influences and personal experiences that are just part of who we are, and we can embrace them. They shape how we see the world, how we enter a site, and how we engage with others.

SAM: This word, bias, is interesting, and the way it enters different disciplines. We are now talking about a scientific discipline, what that means, and the idea of objectivity, but equally, we also need to examine this in relation to positionality and decoloniality. But the term 'bias' is very weighted, especially when we consider other things that might enter the field with us. What would be another word for these unintentional, unacknowledged aspects that we bring to the field that we are referring to here? Maybe it isn't one word. Perhaps it's many things. It's certainly something very personal. It's history, our personal history.

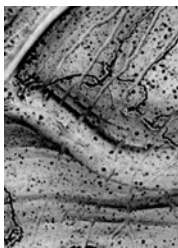
MARJOLIJN: Yes, I agree, it's a complicated term, but it was interesting to realise how different our discourses and the language we use in science and the arts are. It's that balance between knowing where you come from, what you bring, and being open to the field, and how these things interact. I think *'Living Methodologies'* provides a valuable way of thinking about this in relation to the fieldwork. Yet it raises a question: to what extent is it important for an audience to know about these more personal experiences, histories and stories that we bring to the field, if these are not explicitly part of the work? Is it necessary to understand or to access the work emotionally? Or do we feel that they are implicitly part of the work without having to be highlighted?

SAM: I wonder whether sharing or highlighting a personal story relevant to the work opens it up in a new way. One of the concerns I have about doing this is that I don't want the work to be over-determined by my personal narrative, either. Otherwise, it becomes a project about personal history, identity, health, grief, etc.

Yet, during *Field_Notes*, we found connections between the traumatic events we had both experienced, such as: "Ah, you have had a big loss. I've had a big loss." We started asking, "How does it change me?" not only on a physical and mental level, but also in how I view the world. Then what does that mean for me as an artist and the work I make? Can I ever see things in the same way after such events?

MARJOLIJN: Right, and how does that relate to the choice of working with certain sites? We're choosing to work on sites with traumatic histories. I often work with hidden or invisible subjects, sites, or phenomena. It's a recurring theme in my work: those overlooked issues, the things that go undiscussed or stay out of sight, or places that are shaped by layers of events but usually represented in just one dominant way. I'm drawn to complex sites where human stories, interspecies relations, and ecological impact are intertwined.

SAM: And that's a common theme in both of our practices. This invisibility, this aspect, how do we work with it? I work through it with a concept I call 'spectral materialism', which, at its most fundamental level, asks how something can be both absent yet have a material and affective reality in the present. I link this



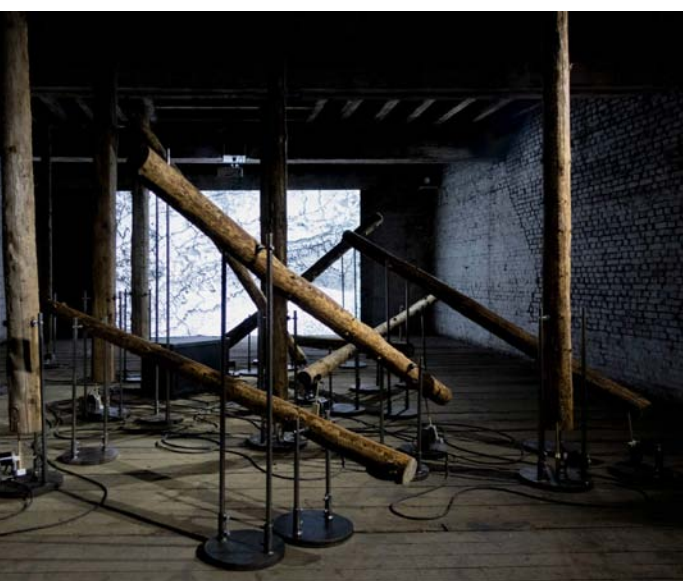
to colonial afterlives that continue to impact the site's material and ecological conditions. However, on another level, this idea relates to the invisible aspects of ourselves that we bring to the work. I often wonder why I choose the sites I do. Is it perhaps fulfilling a need to make this invisibility present, but not in a blatant way?

MARJOLIJN: In a way, the site becomes a way to address topics we rarely discuss openly, yet we've experienced ourselves. So that's a form of 'living methodologies' as well, a way to process life experiences. I learn a lot from the sites I work with, and through the site, I learn about myself. When we share insights into our methodology without sharing the personal stories we bring, we might exclude people from a crucial part of the process. On the other hand, I believe I cannot rationalise all these processes, and, besides that, we all have a right to privacy and to share whatever we choose.

SAM: It is essential that we consider our ethical responsibilities, protocols, and ways of working in relation to the site. In tandem, something messier is going on; I like the mental image of Ursula Le Guin's 'carrier bag', which she evokes as a container that holds together the stories of who we are. And in a sense, one of the life-changing events for me has been living with the grief of losing my life-partner, Bridget, to cancer. Because of that, I'm now more likely to empty my carrier bag and share personal stories. Not all the time, but when certain moments emerge, I do—as I did in the station's reception during *Field Notes*. I understand life-changing events come in many forms for different people, but we know when they happen: there comes a point when you realise: "I'm not really the same person I was before" and you carry that experience into all dimensions of life.



Marjolijn Dijkman, two stills from *Between the Lines*, 2024-2025



Marjolijn Dijkman, *Between the Lines*, 2024-2025

'Between the Lines' is a sound and film installation featuring robotic drummers playing trunks from the Red Zone (Zone Rouge) near Verdun, a scarred and contaminated landscape filled with 12 - 15 million pieces of unexploded ordnance alongside the arsenic, chlorine, and phosgene. As part of post-war restitution, Germany donated Norway spruces to reforest the polluted landscape, planted in dense, monocultural rows, following the industrial forest management Germany itself had invented in the 18th century. Over 80,000 soldiers remain unrecovered beneath the forest floor, a landscape also known as a 'living sarcophagus'. A century later, in the scorching summers of 2018 and 2019, bark beetles invaded these weakened monocultures.

The installation traces these entangled legacies of industrial warfare, the industrialization of nature, and the climate crisis in this monumental landscape. The film unfolds in short chapters, weaving together drone footage, aerial LiDAR imaging of craters and trenches, and historical photographs of the post-WWI landscape, interspersed with slow close-ups of fallen bark bearing beetle traces. The sound composition part of the installation draws inspiration from military marching bands, Morse code communication from the First World War, and the sounds bark beetles use to navigate beneath the bark.

(Marjolijn Dijkman, 2025)

MARJOLIJN: Yes, exactly. In my work, there's a growing acknowledgement of grief and loss. For instance, when working with former First World War battlefields near Verdun in France, I found myself dealing with the histories of a generation that had suffered grave losses. Those fields are still actively charged, not just with unexploded ammunition in their soil but with the weight of history. The land is constantly trying to survive the war, monoculture forestry, and drought caused by climate change, layer after layer of disruption imposed on it. I've been learning more about intergenerational trauma in recent years, especially after uncovering parts of my own family history. The aftermath of this war will affect many generations to come in a multitude of ways, and the material impacts on this landscape will be one.

My project *Between the Lines* is an experimental gesture responding to and monumentalising these events, connecting past and current impacts on the land. A large part of the forest planted on this land died in 2018 and 2019 due to the intense heat and drought, which made the trees vulnerable to beetle infestations. The work also reflects on this period of drought, which effected many forests in Europe. I think in this region droughts are perhaps not commonly commemorated, unlike floods, earthquakes, or fires.

There was this uncovering of the past, when the dying forest was clear-cut to avoid forest fires; it literally reopened wounds in the landscape from the war, the trenches, craters, and other traces. There's resilience present in the landscape which tries to overcome these events, but also an acknowledgement that they occurred and left their mark. This traumatised landscape has shown me how to hold scars and still continue. How to live with grief. Ecological grief or climate grief, like grief in general, tends to be taboo; it doesn't really have a place in western cultures and societies at the moment.

I guess after significant life events, you reconfigure not only yourself, but also your practice as an artist. You may need to imagine an alternative future; I know I certainly had to. My work becomes part of that process and can somehow also guide it.

SAM: Yes, grief is often connected with the loss of a life that *should* have been much longer, so you also grieve the loss of that potential future. That's why it can leave you numb and uncertain about your own future. These events deeply affect us, leaving scars. This loss extends beyond individuals to ecological and climate grief, as you just mentioned, where the grief is not only about what is already being lost but also about the foreclosure of futures for multispecies life. For instance, the Australian drought is an immediate crisis with 'legacy effects' that reshape landscapes and economies for decades. I have recently been looking at how drought in the Mallee acts as a catalyst for soil erosion through groundcover loss, groundwater depletion, and soil displacement, creating a cycle of land degradation that threatens ecosystems, agriculture, and multispecies sustainability, with effects lasting far beyond the drought itself.

MARJOLIJN: Perhaps we've both somehow tried to 'pretend' that every time we approach a new site, we start somehow with an open mindset, ready to learn, engage, and live with it, letting the site's ecology, perspectives, communities, and histories guide us. But of course, our engagement is always shaped by who we are.

SAM: I agree with you. It is always a dialogue between the site and ourselves. So why is there a resistance to acknowledge it fully? Why do we do that? Are we trying to make it align more with a scientific model of objectivity? We both engage with science in different ways, after all.

MARJOLIJN: I have worked for quite some time in collaboration or exchange with scientists and do have to admit that it took some time to find my place within scientific

fields as an artist. I tend to move freely across disciplines and connect different forms of knowledge into complex configurations, which is really different from the scientific fields I work with. I have come to a point where I can be confident that I contribute in ways that are meaningful to me as an artist and to the scientists I work with, which is always a challenge in this kind of collaboration.

Science has a complicated colonial and Western-dominated history, and it affects almost every part of our lives. That's why I work across scientific fields as an artist: to unpack these histories, question how they shape our world, and create space for alternative perspectives and forms of knowledge production within these fields. As a woman, I sometimes choose to work in male-dominated fields, like electromagnetism, engineering, or astronomy, in order to disrupt them a bit. As I mentioned during *Field_Notes*, I see myself as a 'critical friend' of science. It's important to decolonise science and I'm glad this is starting to happen in different places, with researchers welcoming other forms of knowledge and allowing space for the subjective within the work.

While I believe it is necessary to question the foundations of the dominant scientific paradigm, I also value trusting science, as lives depend on advances in treatments, for instance. These are interesting tensions to work with.

You work with scientific chemical processes and the ambiguities of science, the unexplainable parts. At the same time, I noticed you follow very detailed protocols for producing your work. I like that ambiguity. How do you relate to professionals in the scientific field of ecology and chemistry as an artist?



Sam Nightingale, *Saline Intimacy and Alchemical Renderings* process documentation. Soil chromatography using soils collected from saline groundwater discharge zones and from sites shaped by introduced hydrological systems and disposal basins, such as Bullock Swamp, in the Mallee, 2024.

Today, I met with Sue Argos, a geospatial specialist in Mildura who works with a community organisation, analysing GIS data on salinity impacts and agricultural irrigation in the Mallee. She showed me a satellite image of Bullock Swamp, an irrigation discharge basin (a location where I have also collected samples for soil chromatography). She explained it is a False Colour Composite, revealing hypersalinity patterns shaped by decades of irrigation, agricultural intensification, and hydrological engineering.

The hypersalinity issues at Bullock Swamp, including environmental damage, infrastructure risks, and agricultural pressures, are significant. Sue emphasised the need for creative community engagement. We explored how remote sensing and arts-based research methods, such as soil chromatography, serve as visual tools that make the unseen legible.

As I leave, I reflect on how the spectral rendering of GIS images and colonial history converge at the land's surface, where past actions become visible through mediations that bridge technical analysis and creative intervention. I hold two images in mind: the satellite image, which visualises invisible wavelengths, and the soil chromatogram, which reveals human and environmental entanglements through pattern and tone. Both are data forms that require interpretation and can help shape future possibilities.

(Sam Nightingale, "Spectral Materialism: encounters with *land-time-scapes*", PhD dissertation, Goldsmiths, 2026)



Field_Notes – Living Methodologies, 2025. Photo: Bioart Society / Milla Millasnoore





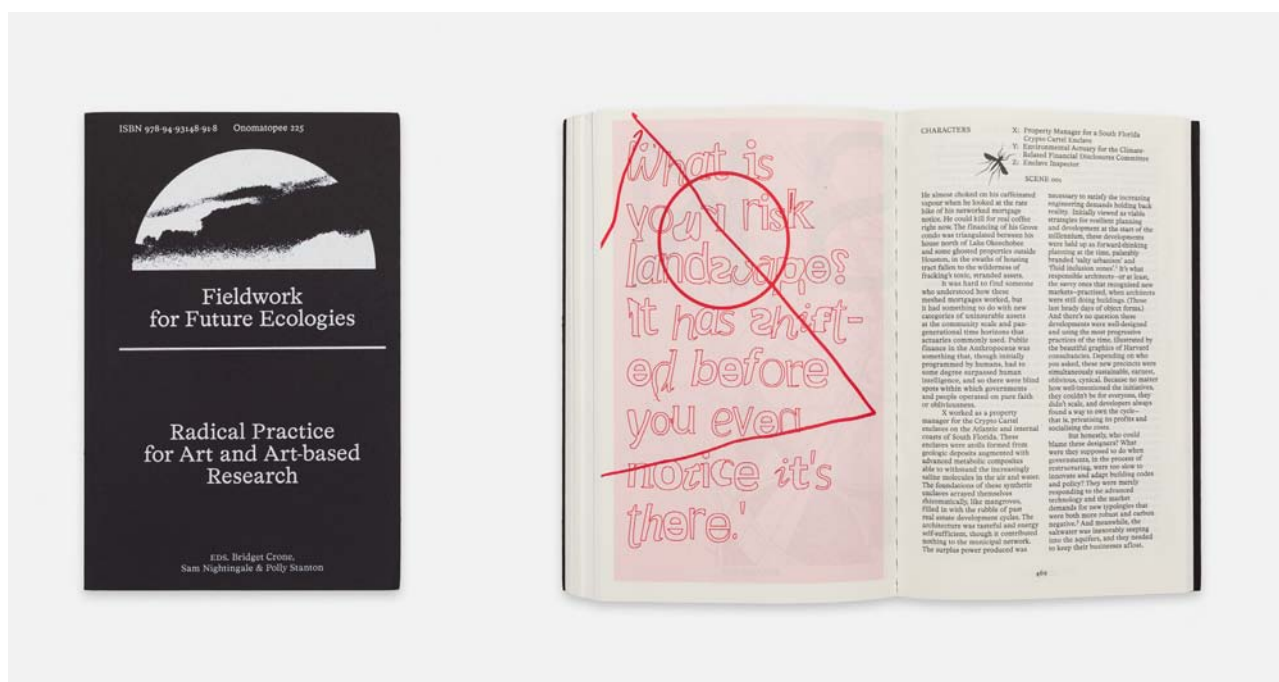
Sam Nightingale, *Para-photo-mancy (halophytes)*, 2024. Working with salt-tolerant plants (halophytes) from the Mallee in Australia that have adapted over millennia to hypersaline environments, the practice enlists plant chemistry as an agential force in a photo-alchemical process. Images emerge as traces of encounter among plant matter, saline waters, silver compounds, and my involvement in the process.



SAM: I feel like there is a subtle but crucial process of negotiation happening between the ‘objective’ knowledge gained from disciplinary ‘experts’ and, then, once in the field, the obligation to remain ‘responsive’ to that specific site or situation, in ways that cannot always be anticipated beforehand. I enjoy working in this space between ‘expert’ knowledge and lived experience, where art-based site-responsive methods can be developed by attuning to a ‘something else’ that emerges through an embodied relationship with the site. This ‘something else’ can be both conscious and unconscious—a gut feeling about what to do in a situation that exceeds quantitative or factual knowledge. Importantly, that ‘gut instinct’ doesn’t form in isolation; it develops over time, through related experiences and in dialogue with others, generating its own kind of expertise. Ultimately, our capacity to respond is our own. I would argue it’s part of how we develop ‘living methodologies’: methods that are alive, porous and responsive.

Art-based research is a big experiment in this. Where science offers ways to understand the world through so-called rational knowledge, art opens the possibility of staying with the unknown and the idea of ‘something else’ emerging. Maybe it’s a feeling, the sense of empathy connecting to an emotional part of ourselves. The expression of that can be more challenging for those with scientific training to embrace. Of course, there is a lot of change taking place in the scientific world, and many are increasingly discussing subjective experiences in their work. Art-science collaborations provide a platform for this too. Aleksija Neimanis and Astrida Neimanis’ talk during *Field_Notes* about their project with artist Patty Chang, *Learning Endings*, is a powerful example of this.

MARJOLIJN: Exactly, art-science collaborations have the potential to open up new ways of knowing, relating and engaging, both within scientific fields and the arts. From my experience, there’s a growing interest from the scientific community in working with artists, as they recognise that art can connect with audiences in ways that data and reports often cannot. We live in a time when the enormous volume of scientific reports on climate collapse does not seem to shift public opinion. There’s a sense that art might offer a different, more resonant way to confront these crises. Of course, artists aren’t science communicators, and it can be an interesting challenge to convince scientists otherwise in some projects. But when these kinds of interdisciplinary collaborations work out, they can lead to really meaningful, moving projects, as the one Astrida and Aleksija shared with us.



Fieldwork for Future Ecologies: Radical Practice for Art and Art-Based Research, edited by Bridget Crone, Sam Nightingale, and Polly Stanton (Onomatopoe, 2022)

SAM: Do you censor yourself when you speak to scientists?

MARJOLIJN: Not really, I like to understand, within my capacity, how things work, how decisions are made, and what methodologies are used when I engage with a specific field. So, I often ask many questions, but I also like to participate in and tag along with certain processes, going along the grain, which helps me understand how they affect me. Then I can reflect on these from experience rather than from the sidelines. Again, a form of 'living methodologies'.

I believe we also discussed something like this on the last day of *Field_Notes*. About feeling uncomfortable going into a site of melting fragile permafrost as a group. Many people questioned afterwards, if it was important to go through the process of going into this site to experience and learn from this discomfort. Some people felt more uncomfortable than others there, but it was a significant question: did we need to go there? But if we didn't, we wouldn't have had this embodied experience of what it means to enter that space. It's a complex issue, especially when it could involve harming the site and when we are (uninvited) guests on this land.

SAM: Ah, yes, the trip to the bog! I remember you telling me that when you started walking on the bog, you had a very strong physical need to remove yourself and return to the road.

MARJOLIJN: Yes, I felt very uncomfortable in the bog and strangely more comfortable under the elevated road. It was quite a bizarre experience!

SAM: What is interesting is that you only became aware of that feeling in the moment of the experience. Importantly, you listened and responded, and you removed yourself from the setting. This is what I mean by the 'something else' that guides us - the gut instinct. In the introduction to *Fieldwork for Future Ecologies*, we described this as being "in the midst of things": immersed in the conditions of the field, the site, the situation, while recognising it as a dynamic and shifting space. As site-responsive artists, we are often trying to navigate this difficult, 'boggy' terrain ethically, politically, and personally.

MARJOLIJN: Yes, and if I had not been part of the trip to the bog, I would not have had this strange experience under that brutal piece of infrastructure of the road. The road was such a problematic and complex thing, right? Cutting a line through this landscape with a highly charged history and now being expanded double size to make space for the width of two tanks to pass for this so-called hybrid war hanging over our heads. I felt quite compelled into engaging with it and researching the construction of it further.

SAM: While the experience of visiting the bog was incredible, I also felt like an intruder. Later, I thought more about the possible impact of our interactions, wondering how our small steps were affecting this landscape. I then remembered the enormous road that cut straight through the permafrost. Both scales matter and make a difference.

MARJOLIJN: You could see the permafrost cracking open and feel the vulnerability of this ancient skin of the earth. It was very soft and clearly not in good condition. But it was very special to be there. I love the recording edited by Antye Greie-Ripatti (AGF) of us singing and reading texts. There were different moments during *Field Notes*: sometimes people were uncomfortable but some of those moments were also “productive” as reflective processes, individually and amongst the group.

SAM: I also felt uncomfortable on the day we went for the walk on Saana, where we were to take a selection of soil samples for the chromatography workshop I was guiding later in the week. As a group, we had already had important conversations about ‘living methodologies’, and then suddenly I found myself in a practical setting, walking and giving instructions on how to take samples. A strong feeling arose: “actually, I don’t want to do this anymore”. This was such a different setting from how I would normally work with this method in my practice, where I would have a more sustained engagement with a site. But I thought, “Sam, you’ve got to just carry on ... I’ve got to put it to one side, because I have been invited and now also invited others ...”

MARJOLIJN: ...to do the workshop!

SAM: Yes! I knew we were following the proper channels set by the research station for where we could take samples, but I was still very aware that I felt uncomfortable doing so.

MARJOLIJN: Yes, we were just informed by Leena Valkeapää, Bioart Society’s local host, that Sámi people inhabited this land for thousands of years without digging holes or leaving any permanent traces. I was the first to prepare a sample and had to make a real effort to push the hand drill through the dense layers of roots and soil. Yeah, I felt quite self-conscious about that. But by participating in the somewhat uncomfortable act of sampling, a scientific method, I became ‘complicit’ and even more aware of the contrast between the scientific research station and the indigenous land on which it stands. It’s a clash, like the road and the permafrost. These exemplify such different worldviews. But as I mentioned earlier, I think it can be productive to engage with scientific methods like these to take a position grounded in embodied, situated experience.

SAM: These are good examples of the difficult, messy situations we can encounter while doing fieldwork, and they reveal what it means to confront ‘living methodologies’. That experience was valuable for me. I learnt something in that moment. Perhaps it comes back to the difference between vulnerability and ‘radical openness’ as a deliberate orientation in a practice.

Radical openness means sitting with discomfort, reflecting on it, and seeing how it might change me and my practice. I realised through that experience with soil collection that while part of my practice is about sharing methods and working together, it can't be at the expense of something becoming illustrative, which, without a larger research context, could happen.

MARJOLIJN: Well, I think it was a clear recognition that our methodologies are never neutral. Beyond these potentially complex overlaps with scientific methodologies and their implications, they are shaped by who we are, what we carry, and how we choose to engage with the world. The tension between vulnerability and what you describe as 'radical openness' speaks to the delicate balance of bringing personal narratives into the field without imposing them. I guess it's about acknowledging that our presence, our bodies, our grief, our identities, are all part of our 'living methodologies', whether we like it or not. Along the way, we will have to find ways to navigate this process.



Field_Notes – Living Methodologies, 2025. Photo: Bioart Society / Milla Millasnoore

Protocol for wayfinding

Centre yourself at the site upon arrival.

Find a compass, real or on your phone.

Use the compass to find the direction of your point of departure.

Face that direction.

Takes two steps in that direction.

Take a minute and pay attention. What is the furthest thing you can see in that direction?

Take note.

Find North. Walk 2 Steps.

Take a minute and think: "Why am I here?"

Find East. Walk 2 Steps.

Take a minute and send greetings to your community.

Find South. Walk 2 Steps.

Take a minute and think: What are you grateful to have brought with you?

Find West. Walk 2 Steps.

Take a minute, close your eyes, and listen for a little while.

Welcome things in.

Open your eyes and arrive.

This protocol was devised by Marjolijn Dijkman, Elina Waage Mikalsen, Sam Nightingale, Camille Sineau and Taylor Alaina Liebenstein Smith during *Field_Notes: Living Methodologies* as part of the session *Protocols of Care* guided by Aleksija Neimanis and Astrida Neimanis.

Marjolijn Dijkman lives and works in Brussels (BE) & Lahaymeix (FR). She is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice operates at the intersection of culture, science, and speculative fiction. Working across film, photography, sculpture, and installation, her practice focuses on rapidly changing environments and their human and nonhuman interdependencies. In 2005, she founded Enough Room for Space (ERforS) with Maarten Vanden Eynde, a collaborative platform for artistic research that fosters interdisciplinary dialogues on social and ecological transformation.

Sam Nightingale is an artist-researcher whose work combines environmental media, experimental photography and expanded fieldwork to investigate the entangled histories and ecologies of land-time-scapes. Through site-responsive, material-led photochemical practices, he develops ways to sense and make sense of extraction, environmental change, and more-than-human adaptation.

Bioart Society is a Helsinki-based association working at the intersection of art, science and society. Established in 2008 the association has close to 200 members in Finland and other countries, and participates in global networks of bioart and art & science. With a focus on biology, ecology and the life sciences, Bioart Society supports artistic and transdisciplinary work through workshops, residencies, long-term collaborative projects and public dialogue on how biosciences and biotechnology shape the social, political and ethical dimensions of life.

References to other materials cited in text:

Five Tapes for Living Methodologies, online recordings by Anastasia (A) Alevtin [available here](#)

Learning Endings: Ecologies of Care in Arts-Sciences Collaborations, recorded talk by Aleksija Neimanis and Astrida Neimanis [available here](#)

bog-song recording by Antye Greie-Ripatti (AGF) [available here](#)

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