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Caring for the Weeds

A vegetalised approach to urban activism and participatory art

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Abstract

*Care is a slippery notion, especially in times of ecological upheavals when a seemingly benign metaphor could have the power to instigate a new social, political or environmental change. Due to its instrumentalisation in theoretical and practical endeavours as a gendered concept, caring as environmental consciousness loses its potential to facilitate active change in day-to-day urban activities and risks becoming a violent tool trapped in patriarchal narratives (Macgregor, 2007). This article draws from the interdependencies between artistic expressions of urban activism and plant specificities and agencies through a vegetalised approach (Myers, 2021) to interspecies entanglements. The main section investigates plant/human relationships from an ecofeminist perspective, by offering an overview of the interweavings of public gardening, the representation of wastelands and how collective ‘response-ability’ (Haraway, 2016) is reformulated in the context of caring for informal urban spaces. The practice and artistic interventions of Sophie Leguil and Lois Weinberger will unravel how tending to marginalized plants facilitates an empowering caring perspective, producing speculative narratives to overcome anthropocentric and violent views. By invoking the concept of plant-thinking (Marder, 2013), the second part of the article will focus on other artistic expressions where human and vegetal subjectivities co-evolve, revealing a way to mix the economy of grassroots movements with the politics of cosmopolitan environmental consciousness, encouraging action across differences, intra- and among species. The article concludes by showing the transformative potential of Dagna Jakubowska’s installation *Weeds* (2021) and Ellie Irons’ performative laboratory *Feral and Invasive Pigments* (2012 - ongoing) to encourage new visions of caring for environment as a political act.*

Keywords: *Politics of care; urban landscapes; weeds; vegetalisation; plant-thinking*

Introduction

Disturbed ground including shores of moving water.

Disturbed areas adjacent to freshly seeded lawn.

Gardens and other human-disturbed places.

Waste places and roads, roadsides and ditches.

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From “Habitat”, *Garden Physic*, (Legris, 2022, p. 58)

For the past few months, I have been constantly carrying Sylvia Legris’ poetry collection, “*Garden Physic*”, in my backpack. Populated by an ever-pulsating rhythm of gardeners’ voices, botanical manuscripts, roadside weeds and other vegetal entanglements speaking contradictory, long-forgotten voices, this book has transformed into a personal talisman and a *recipient*² of my speculative fabulations — a vegetal manifesto for caring symbioses between all living beings, old and new. In this article, her verses act as poetical, metaphorical tools that help me to expand my perspective about plant gatherings and specificities. During that time, on October 2022, I attended the “Community Gardens of Drumul Taberei. Guided Tours”³ workshop on a fairly sunny October afternoon. The project, consisting of a guided tour through labyrinthian networks of informal gardens, was organised by a Romanian editorial and cultural platform, *Iscoada*, in one of Bucharest’s more peripheral neighbourhoods, where it also happens that I spent a good part of my childhood and teenage years. While joining the walk through the green heart of the suburb, the main questions the group were trying to respond to included: “How do the residents show concern for the lands surrounding their blocks of flats?” and “What kind of relationships traverse the intimacies between people, gardens and their more-than-human inhabitants?”. Behind the big boulevards and among the stacked socialist blocks, an abundance of life awaited, distributed among informal gardens, desolate lawns, and privatised plots swallowed by dense vegetation and weeds. Walking and quietly talking (so as not to disturb the residents working in their gardens) became gestures of active involvement with the surroundings, with the more-than-human patterns of living and dying. Advancing deeper and deeper into the neighbourhood, I could not but notice how both human and non-human inhabitants became suspended and interwoven in asymmetrical caring networks and socialities. Back then, I felt the urge to touch the talisman in my backpack at every step. I thought for the first time about how even the tiniest bodily actions became a caring practice on its own.

As a highly contested concept by many ecofeminist thinkers, care is a slippery word. Environmental historian Carolyn Merchant (1983) argues that, since premodern times, the concept of nature overlaps with that of womanhood, fertility of the Earth with women’s sexual reproduction capacities, and nurturing with mothering. Furthermore, she claims that the advent of the Scientific Revolution and the rise of mechanistic logic deepened the separation between humans and nature, reinstating the control over both women and the environment (Merchant, 1983, p. 2). Several authors have strived to denaturalise traditional and patriarchal approaches to care throughout the last four decades. Usually, care can be seen as an act of *doing something* [care-work] and as a moral orientation with normative implications in our daily lives with the intent of striving for good life (Macgregor, 2004, de la Bellacasa,

²I use the term “recipient” in the sense of Ursula le Guin’s way of using the metaphor in “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction” for uncovering capacities to care, respond and live-together in mostly (yet)invisible, untold stories and worlds in times of danger and acute hostility.

³ The neighbourhood of Drumul Taberei [Road of the Camp], initially a vast, empty field, has a long and complex history, beginning with Tudor Vladimirescu’s Wallachian 1821 political and social uprising against the Phanariote administration. For almost a century, the Romanian army used this location as a setting for military camps until the 1960s, when the Communist party allowed a group of architects to project a new neighbourhood, more accustomed to citizens’ needs, following a Corbusier’s modernist principles. It was devised such as to become a city in itself, self-sufficient and insular.



2017). In the ecofeminist literature, perspectives that collapse caring practices onto caring values or reify the politics of care and “the female principle” (Mies and Shiva, as cited in Macgregor, 2004, p. 59) as universalising or biologically determined traits are highly criticised⁴ (Lahar, 1991; Sandilands, 1997; Macgregor, 2004). Inspired by Andrew Dobson, Sherilyn Macgregor turns to post-cosmopolitan care because, more than taking on the non-territoriality aspect of cosmopolitanism, the concept rejects idealising “pre-political notions of the world community” (Macgregor, 2006, p. 94).

Moreover, reminding us of the capacity of affective ecologies to involve the intermingling of human and nonhuman bodies in acts of living-together and creating possible lively worlds, Macgregor problematises the local-global dichotomy “by considering the «nested» and interconnected nature of these sites within ecological space” (2006, p. 116). Those who can assume these positions should be called “earth citizens”, people who not only care for their environments but “extend equal rights” to all living creatures (Van Steenberg, 1994, in Macgregor, p. 93) and engage in networks of response-able⁵ (Haraway, 2016) actions as well as in affective narratives of inclusion and exclusion from the public space. Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) presents a tripartite, asymmetrical categorisation of caring, pointing to its affective, ethical and practical dimensions. This tentacular character of caring becomes much more than a moral prerogative when involved in material-semiotic becomings (Bellacasa, 2017, p. 28). Rather than romanticising narratives that treat women’s capacity to care as one of humanity’s most necessary tools when confronted with multispecies urgencies, I advocate for a more inclusive vocabulary when addressing the economies of care. This vocabulary would encompass various forms of care that avoid the reinforcement of gender stereotypes and envision care as a more-than-human collective struggle inherent to both human and nonhuman societies and individuals. Due to its instrumentalisation in theoretical and practical endeavours as a gendered concept, caring loses its potential to facilitate active change in day-to-day urban activities and risks becoming a violent tool trapped in patriarchal narratives (Macgregor, 2007).

We live in a time of ecological upheavals, where the potentiality of care to bring change and better collaboration practices among species must be revised as a “multispecies recuperation and resurgence” act (Haraway, 2016, p. 8). When we intersect the theory and politics of care with environmental humanities, we notice how ‘caring’ ceases to be an exclusively human affair. Extended to more-than-human entanglements, it can be described as a way of “staying with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016), a process of repair, “a manifold range of *doings* needed to create, hold together, and sustain life and continue its diverseness” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 70). Closely following Bellacasa’s steps and bridges that she opens towards Haraway’s speculative fabulations, I use the threads between caring and trouble to weave together stories of vegetal intimacies, acting as methodological devices. Care pervades different realities and

⁴ These perspectives are not exhaustive of how caring practices have been perceived historically. For example, how care has been equated with masculine traits in agriculture and landscape representations. For more information see Saugeres (2002).

⁵ Feminist scholar Donna Haraway uses the term “response-able” to reconfigure the relationships between human and non-human beings regarding agency, collective action and the interrelatedness among all beings. Being “response-able” involves something more than being held accountable for actions towards the environment or fulfilling ready-made perspectives (like histories of ecology, class, gender, ethnicity, and social justice). The concept implies the need for a situated response to the ecological crisis, which recognizes and actively gets involved with multispecies stories and natural-cultural assemblages. It means to be attuned to the needs and vulnerabilities of the Other, demanding active engagement with the world while going beyond the individual to encompass broader communities.

temporalities, ranging from an individual's personal, intimate sphere (human or nonhuman) to global problems (Ureta, 2016, p. 3), such as dealing with the Anthropocene's political, cultural and social layers. Recognising the relational character of care and its capacities for decentering anthropocentric perspectives that objectify nonhuman subjects has become central in discourses about plant-human relationships.

Thus, it is my point of departure to argue for green peripheral spaces as speculative filters of caring relationships, within which caring becomes “a selective mode of attention” (Martin et al., 2015, p. 627); both a form of inclusion and exclusion, embedded in everyday activities and mundane vectors of thought and action. In addition, I address the possibility of rearticulating care from the position of a plant lover that seeks refuge in the sensuous world of plants. As a consequence, I find it appropriate to ask: how do the politics of care change when approached from the lens of plant-human entanglements inherent to the fabric of our social and biological lives? My contribution to the issue of the *Journal of Ecohumanism*, titled “Feminist Ecological Citizenship and the Politics of Care”, is a response to Puig de la Bellacasa's urge to analyse the politics of care as a more-than-human affair. In particular, the article delves into porous and (dis)continued forms of caring through radical gardening in the urban environment. Tracing the heterogeneity of precarious nonhuman lives through informal gardens and disused sites and exploring artistic and performative interventions altogether will create a fertile ground to stage plant-human negotiations in damaged landscapes. This article argues for a reconciliation of caring with urban activism through a *vegetalised* approach (Myers, 2021) to interspecies entanglements. *Involvement* with the sensuous rhythms of the vegetal becomings (Hustak & Myers, 2012) is a first step in addressing the multiple-edged nature of care in informal gardening practices and radical artistic interventions. The main section of the article investigates plant/human relationships by offering an overview of the interweavings between the economies of public gardening, the representation of wastelands and collective *responsibility* (Haraway, 2016). It is hopeless to affirm a singular interpretation of care, let alone a single definition. Instead, the article will consider two possibilities of encountering a politics of care inspired by plant specificities: care as vegetalised practice and care as *weedy* resistance. These possibilities will emerge from urban artistic interventions and performative installations that act as regenerative plant-human sites of affective becomings.

Caring “while staying with the trouble”. Walking through weeds and wastelands

/Acts of caring as moving worlds — celandine hidden under red bricks is what my grandma used as a skin treatment⁶/.

The meanings of care have gone through many attempts of resemantization, remaining inconsistent and producing, still, “a partial and fragmented picture of caring in society” (Thomas, 1993, p. 649). How caring is represented in different contexts, such as social media, campaign slogans or in day-to-day activities, is only a poor facet, a segment of the totality of caring, implying that the boundaries described by vectors of caring (for or about) point towards an ongoing process of exclusion and inclusion of different sets of social relations

⁶ The lines of the articles written in this form are personal observations that take a more poetic form, echoing the style and affective tone used by Silvia Legris in her poetry book. It is a way to expand my attention towards vegetal attunements by creating an inner rhythm of the text.



(Thomas, 1993, p. 649). Caring expands its tentacles and variations along a large spectrum from the domestic domain to the public one, embodied through gestures of touch and vision, and relegated to human and more-than-human configurations. As Bellacasa emphasises in her volume, caring is not a harmless concept. It hides in its own structural layers forms of oppressive powers directed towards marginalised others, forming asymmetrical gestures *par excellence* “that don’t follow unidirectional patterns of individual intentionality” (Bellacasa, 2017, p. 122). Similarly, other theorists in the domain of the politics and ethics of care find themselves visualising care as an elusive and “slippery concept” (Martin et al., 2015). Moreover, Mol et al. (2010) propose an alternative perspective that denies the apprehension of care solely as a ‘warm’ relation between human beings, while others visualise it as a multi-dimensional keyword with a contextual nature (Hamington, 2004). For anthropologist Natasha Myers, gardens are sites of “experimental encounters”, where “people stage relations with plants – whether these relations are intimate, extractive, violent, or instrumentalising” (2017, p.1) and where we can explore how power relations and harmful hierarchies are enacted through plant’s symbolism and cultural representations.

This essay sets out to find possible answers to Sherylin Macgregor’s project of revaluing the nature of care in the context of ecofeminist thought in a way that has the potential to disrupt the dualistic affirmation of gender roles. To counteract masculinist philosophical traditions that objectified both nature and female actors, Macgregor thinks that ecofeminists struggled “to make the invisible more visible,” and for this, they envisioned the “female experience” and women’s statuses as carers, mothers and sisters as an antidote to phallogocentric ethics (Macgregor, 2004, p. 60). While maternal feelings of protection should not be invalidated, environmental engagement should be rooted in another source that is not exclusively feminine-oriented (Sandilands, 1997; Macgregor, 2006, p. 64). Domesticating nature and obscuring its otherness as such “reinforces the idea that struggles for nature by women must be made through some representation of identity — identity in the sense of sameness” (Sandilands, 1997, p. 146).

Following Macgregor, I firmly believe that caring should be grounded in a vocabulary that connects to a “more flexible, open-ended version of subjectivity [...] in which a subject is constituted imperfectly in discourse rather than transparently prior to discourse” (Sandilands, 1999, xx in Macgregor, 2006, 53). As transpiring from Legris’ magnetising insertions in her cornucopia of botanical entanglements, what might be helpful to appear in the realm of more-than-human poetical caring relations are strategies capable of *forecasting the verbs* and *weathering the adjectives* which will help human beings rearticulate their ecological surroundings (Legris, 2022, p. 49)⁷. Thus, I acknowledge the urgent need to search for more suitable articulations of care without necessarily renouncing it. Drawing inspiration from Puig de la Bellacasa’s arguments about caring as a more-than-human affair becomes even more valuable in the context of severe environmental degradation and the appearance of new ecological niches where citizens can nurture new modes of attention that are better adapted to the realities of heterogeneous environmental timescales. Acknowledging the failure to address the degradation of the micro-relationships between people and their surroundings, we “need to

⁷“BEAR UP — DETRACTORS/ANOINT THEIR CLAWS WITH WORDS/FORECAST THE VERBS/WEATHER THE ADJECTIVES”, last four lines of Legris’ text “The Oath” that urges readers not only to expand their knowledge about the attunement of vegetal and human lives, but asks them to expand, implode and bend ossified language legacies canceling non-human potencies to act in the world.

revolutionise the way we manage and envision our common spaces” (*forty five degrees*, 2022, p. 17). Likewise, Anna Tsing announces in her essays that we live in a world of weedy configurations, a world of ecological disturbances, where landscapes gather human and nonhuman stories (Tsing, 2017). To learn how to foster relations of care in multispecies sites, we should focus on what Tsing calls “the bounteous diversity of roadside margins” (2012, p. 141) or what Gilles Clément delimitates as “the third landscape”, the neglected land that is not empty but becomes the harbinger of resilience grounded collective, more-than-human imaginaries (Clément, 2004). Here, it becomes necessary to become more familiarised with these landscapes that “allow us to think across a variety of scales, from deep time to current events” (Tsing, 2017, p. 7-8). Thus, Bellacasa suggests that care might become a catalyser, a way of intensifying and making more visible human and nonhuman moments of symbiotic becomings into troubled landscapes:

Caring for’ a nonhuman in a way that doesn’t objectify it appears as a particularly noninnocent process involving ‘non-harmonious agencies and ways of living that are accountable both to their disparate inherited histories and to their barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures’ (Haraway 2003, p. 7). Care appears as a doing necessary for significant relating at the heart of the asymmetrical relationalities that traverse naturecultures and as an obligation created by ‘necessary joint futures’. Relations of ‘significant otherness’ are more than about accommodating ‘difference’, coexisting, or tolerating. Thinking-with nonhumans should always be a living-with, aware of troubling relations and seeking a significant otherness that transforms those involved in the relation and the worlds we live in” (2017, p. 83).

The nature of care invites a relational ontology that becomes more flexible and inclusive when addressing the continuation of life processes, which catch human and nonhuman beings in constant fluxes of living, co-creating the realities in the social fabric of our landscapes. As people wander through their surroundings daily, they are constantly engaged in naturecultural micro-interventions, seen and unseen. Care is inherently situated in forming and maintaining more-than-human subjectivities, and greater attention to mostly invisible urban dwellers, like spontaneous vegetation and insects, could help these interdependencies surface. As Bellacasa argues, matters of care are an intervention, different from Bruno Latour’s matters of fact in that they can access more easily the feminist history of science studies and can give account to marginalised standpoints, human or nonhuman, by subtracting the self through radical passivity. Radical passivity is my way of imploding harmful histories that suffocate caring, giving more space for affective vegetal meshings to weave themselves together. Matters of care are expandable and characteristic of distributed forms of agencies across familiar urban contexts: backyards, public gardens, and abandoned plots inundated by dense vegetation. To decenter anthropocentric behaviours, it is essential first to recognise that starting to care for our environment actively means manufacturing ways of staying with the trouble. This trouble is nothing more than a way of “making kin” (Haraway, 2016), cultivating the capacity for response and keeping “close to the earthly doings” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, 88) or, as Schrader described it, a struggle to conceive a less anthropocentric “notion of care that is attentive to indeterminacies in its practices” (Schrader, 2015, 668).

Places that fit the category of the third landscape is where the article departs from the so-perceived empty places, the undecided urban configurations at the periphery of the city, land “awaiting allocation or awaiting the implementation of projects that are subject to budgetary



provisions or political decisions” (Clément, 2004, 7). These cracks in the city’s architecture become hosts for nonhuman species not welcome or appreciated elsewhere. Paying close attention to matters of care in these mostly invisible and unfamiliar situations exposes *sub-* and *supra-* terranean fluxes of becoming entrapped in the sensuous world of (urban) more-than-human entanglements. Thus, I looked for different contexts to position myself closer to urban human-vegetal coexistence. I could encounter plants suspended in their vegetal exuberance, escaping rigid classifications while inhabiting the borders between well-tended and unattended land. I became aware of the potential of weeds as active participants in naturecultural assemblages to build speculative paths towards “personal-collective ethos transformation” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 130). In this context, the traditional anthropocentric notion of the (human) individual as the exclusive source of decision-making is decentered so that the collective includes plants, animals and all Earth’s resources, capable of showing vulnerability in the production of shared space. It was through weeds that I could encounter my hometown differently. Returning to the story from the beginning of this article, about the workshop I participated in, guided by Bogdan Iancu (anthropologist) and Alex Axinte (architect), I realised how that experience was a decisive turning in how I currently merge thoughts about the production of care, human-decentered affective ecologies and weedy assemblages. Leaving behind the concrete life of the city centre, we delved into the land of informal gardens that Axinte classified as the *showcase garden* (with upcycling decorations, DIY installations of flowers and suspended passages for feline companions), the *talking-playing garden* (primarily for kids’ activities) and the *planted garden* with shrubs and flowers (Axinte, 2022, pp. 81-82). Despite my deep-rooted history with this neighbourhood, Drumul Taberei now opened up to me as an unfinished place, fertile for ad-hoc adaptations, its green spaces acting as “narrative spaces” (Axinte, 2022, p. 78).

Moreover, little did I know then how deep one of our guides’ comments would remain engrained in how I perceive the city’s weedy corners and ditches. Pointing towards a small patch of recently installed lawn, Axinte recounted how dense and thick weeds previously colonised the area. According to him, the local administration had just turned the parcel into an almost blinding lawn of evenly cut grass, claiming that it was already devoid of life and lacking any practical utility. This is a clear-cut example of a unilateral act of caring, one that purposely remains blind to the other’s realities — in this instance, the other being represented by the plant/insect symbiosis inherent to any spontaneous plots of wild vegetation. As Natasha Myers reminds us, garden infrastructures, as they enforce biopolitical regimes, “shape how plants and people get entrained to one another’s lives” (Myers, 2017, p. 2). Axinte’s observation stuck with me from that day onward and acted as a tool in refining my notions of care concerning plants sprouting on street corners, patches of green suffocated by lawns and wild in-between urban spaces.

Networks of more-than-human subjects and symbiotic becomings inhabit these landscapes, when, for example, weed-pollinator affective relationships maintain the urban ecosystem’s biodiversity, where nonhuman processes of becoming together in uncertain ways allow for distributed agency among all subjects, human and nonhuman, in (*forty five* degrees, 2022, p. 21). Similarly, when speaking about the so-called “abandoned areas” of a landscape, Clément specifies that these “oceans of soil, fields of nitrates” (Clément, 2011, p. 278) hide unpredictable shared vulnerabilities where people alongside their vegetal companions get mixed in material-semiotic ecologies “at different scales of time and space” (Haraway, 2016,

p. 16). Simultaneously, they become places of rearticulating care that enable collective resistance and new patterns of caring inspired by vegetality and acts of vegetalisation. As such, it was these types of negotiations activated by such liminal urban spaces that, in my opinion, encouraged a form of care that works far beyond a socially constructed form that is feminised and private, serving instead as a destabilisation of existing identities (Sandilands 1999, cited in Macgregor, 2007, p. 113).

On Plant-Thinking transformations and the intimacies of vegetalization

/Weedy, small steps into the outer unknown and uncared for/

Where should we search for the possibility of caring that morphs into a method of staying with the trouble, subtracted from narratives about utopic pasts and apocalyptic futures that anaesthetise human beings' capacity to act and react when faced with anthropogenic effects? During the last few years, weeds have brought me more than once to situations where I could experience the sharpness of thorns and thistles; close to borders where human and more-than-human subjectivities blur; through contested sites where political agents are created as a result of bodies becoming porous, open to change. Plants and gardens are the main protagonists of Critical Plant Studies (CPS). CPS is a transdisciplinary field that combines theoretical spheres such as cultural botany, nonhuman geography, aesthetics, art and philosophy. In a nutshell, CPS analyses plant-human dynamics by questioning concepts such as agency, intentionality and subjectivity. At the same time, I envision the discourses about the history of plant representations in social imaginaries as a symptomatic response to plant blindness. In an article published in 1999 called "Preventing Plant Blindness", James Wandersee and Elisabeth Schussler define this condition characteristic of contemporary society as an inability to observe plants in the environment and an impediment to recognising their importance in the biosphere and human activities (Wandersee & Schussler, 1999). Seeing human bodies as porous forms devoid of strict contours, Myers imagines the affective charges of human-vegetal intimacies as a site suitable for addressing plant blindness through *vegetalisation* — the act of reversed anthropomorphisation (Myers, 2014, p. 1). While exploring the relationships and intimacy between plant researchers and their subjects, Myers examines the transformative power of vegetalisation and applies it to other contexts (such as artistic contexts and urban gardens) as an affective practice. Allowing themselves to be caught in plants' different temporalities and rhythms, Myers argues that it would make people "pay attention to the ways they defy all-too-human notions of individuality, bodily integrity, subjectivity and agency" (Myers, 2018, p. 58).

Michael Marder, one of the pioneers studying the history of plants' representations in Western metaphysical thought, observes that the vegetal subjects populate "the margin of the margin, the zone of absolute obscurity" (Marder, 2013, p. 2). Marder highlights the plant's capacity to disrupt conventional notions such as intentionality, agency, or interiority. When philosophers write about plants' representations, Marder (2013) criticises, they state that "the existence of plants is less developed or less differentiated than that of their animal and human counterparts" (pp. 2-3) or "alien to human beings" (p. 108). This attitude towards otherness, which often takes monstrous dimensions, results from the way people are tuned (or not) to plants' different temporalities and rhythms, represented by their "infinite movements of growth and efflorescence" and "immoderate proliferation" (p. 107). This seeming exacerbation of growth and lack of purpose makes people turn plants into uncanny presences



that haunt human imaginaries, “transgressing borders meant to confine and define” (Keetley, 2016, p. 13) and undermining human attempts to impose order over the natural world. All these characteristics become even more visible when we consider the attitudes towards the outcasts of the vegetal kingdom, the unruly spontaneous vegetations, commonly labeled as weeds, which embody the negation of human desires for controlled landscapes.

In the Western social imaginary, weeds are defined as plants “in the wrong place” or “out of place” that become aggressive vegetal invaders and disrupt frontiers, clean delimited gardens or suffocate other green neighbours. As Crosby reminds us, “weed” is not a scientific word, as it does not refer to plants “of any specific species or genus or any category recognised by scientific taxonomy, but to whatever plants spring up where humans do not want them” (Crosby, 2004, p. 28). Due to the lore attached to weeds that portrays them as a lurking menace to Western society, they have become the absolute other, embodying an “implacable strangeness” (Keetley&Tenga, 2016, p. 1). Other times, they are metaphors for unworthy or marginalised others, human and nonhuman alike, what the geographer Tim Cresswell termed “metaphors of displacement” (Cresswell, 1997, p. 334). Weeds will more than often imply either a lack or an excess of care; the more invisible parts of caring resurface when weeds become the harbingers of the absolute lack, an idea which echoes Bellacasa’s words that the lack of care “undoes, allows unravelling” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 1). Weeds bring us closer to reimagining the nature of wastelands and abandoned places swallowed by vegetation as material-semiotic terrains of struggle, community building and collective and political agency. Thinking of them with care becomes grounded in a speculative gesture perceived as a “mode of thought committed to foster visions of other worlds possible” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 110) and multispecies conviviality. Such an enriching naturecultural community should sprout out of “collective figures of speech, of foundational myths” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 105), defined as tools for “intervention in reality” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 105) and as interrelational figurations that impact our imagination. Assuming this approach will allow us to ground our notions of care not in universalising metaphors that erase differences or essentialise day-to-day experiences but in “performative affinities”, which reject a “pre-political and overdetermined identity like earthcarer or mother environmentalist” (Macgregor, 2006, 75). For this purpose, I use the figuration of the “vegetalisation of the senses” by which citizens can learn and live alongside plants, becoming co-conspirators in their world-making projects (Myers, 2021).

Active involvement in the life of plants, weeds and other animals can rearticulate our sensoria and subjectivities to suit new forms of individual and collective assemblages of political agencies. For this exercise to be completed, urban dwellers will need an expansion of our “morphological imaginary” (Myers, 2017, 70). In “Involutionary Momentum: Affective Ecologies and the Sciences of Plant/Insect Encounters”, Hustak and Myers’s feminist approach to interspecies entanglements provided us with a criticism of neo-Darwinian developments in plant ecology and with a theory of *affective ecologies* that delve deep into human-plant-insect interactions (Hustak & Myers 2012, p. 78). While exploring Darwin’s “multisensory experimental techniques” developed during his studies on insect-orchid intimate encounters, Hustak and Myers investigated how the botanist was lured into plants’ behaviours, co-developing moments of intense affinities and unexpected alliances (Ibid., p. 79). During these moments, Darwin appealed to the potential of mimicry to immerse himself in the daily rhythms of plant lives, an almost surprising gesture that Hustak and Myers read

“against the grain of his evolutionary logics” as his habitual modes of active attention were profoundly remodelled according to the orchids’ dynamics and fertilisation processes (Ibid., p. 82). The portrayal of the involution narratives thoroughly developed in this article provided me with a suitable cartography of plant-human caring possibilities — *momentum* is the word the two theoreticians used to describe Darwin’s forays into plants’ lives, a kind of impetus in bringing human and nonhumans together, bodies among other bodies resonating through fugitive enmeshments and repulsions (Ibid., p. 96-97). More than this peculiar but vital co-developing of more-than-human social subjectivities, I find it significant to trace the similarities between the asymmetrical characteristics of caring for the weeds through touch and the performative gestures inspired by Darwin’s acts of mimicry — both liberating and violent, but at times infused with reciprocity and the capacity to suspend objectifying hierarchies. *Involvement* with weeds brings into focus a “greater emphasis on the acoustic, tactile, or olfactory texture of space rather than fleeting visual encounters” and fosters political dialogue by raising awareness of environmental issues concerning marginal landscapes (Gandy, 2013, The search for an ecological aesthetic section, para. 4).

The “vegetalisation of the senses” is one of the mechanisms suitable to foster caring relationships that refuse anthropocentric ideals and facilitate speculative insights into the formation of caring in more-than-human worlds embedded in mundane acts of perpetuating life. It is widely known, for example, that gardens are highly contested sites with a long history of natural, sexual and racial objectification (Aloi, 2018; Casid, 2005; Crowdy, 2017; Kincaid, 1999; Carroll, 2017). They are also a network where the “darker side” of care becomes more visible (Martin et al., 2015, p. 627) — another example which can embody care’s destructive capacities⁸ (Varfolomeeva, 2021). Gardens have also been studied as sites of power relations where the undergrowth and other weeds become co-producers of queer sexuality (Crowdy, 2017). Citizens transform neglected spaces into guerilla gardens, filling in the vacant lots resulting from abandoning activities with flower beds, native flora and food resources as gestures of protest and of reappropriating privatised urban lots. Guerilla gardens become “a battle for resources, a battle against scarcity of land, environmental abuse and wasted opportunities” (Reynolds, 2014, 8-9). Disturbed spaces are where radical gardeners situate themselves in a quest to combat environmental degradation and soil erosion by actively reassembling social and urban lives by constructing green oasis enclosures. In a nutshell, guerilla gardening means cultivating flowers, food or other small crops on land that gardeners do not have any legal right to plant on, such as construction sites, privatised interior courtyards, or debris-filled or underused land. As Reynolds recounts in his manifesto about guerilla gardening, a small collective of New York residents founded by Liz Christy started the non-traditional protest in the early 1970s, calling themselves the “Green Guerillas” (Ibid., 9-10). Guerilla gardening is a form of civil society activism, an example of a grassroots movement that promotes social cohesiveness and empowers local communication channels. For Michael Marder, guerilla gardening is a form of restituting vegetal members to the urban community while not subscribing “to a total instrumentalisation of plants in the name of subsistence agriculture and self-sufficiency” (Marder, 2012, 31). Following his observation, I also diverted my thinking to models of guerilla gardening activated through artistic

⁸ For a more nuanced example and explanation of ‘destructive care’, see Varfolomeeva’s (2021) discussion about care relations and practices within human-industry complex networks. Also, see Mastnak&co. (2014) for a description of the destructive potential of gardening and of caring for the soil, deeply ingrained in the history of garden’s colonial legacies.



interventions, dealing with collective empowerment and resistance. Seed bombing, the central act of guerilla gardening, becomes not only a tool to trespass privatised areas entrapped in decay but also an active agent in disrupting the borders between private and public space, nature and culture, an activity that encourages citizens to “invest sites and spaces with new meaning and value” (Pedersen, 2018, 14). Moulding clay into seed bombs, creating recipes out of invasive plants and getting entangled in weedy urban species become traces of caring relations in reappropriating the public configuration of more-than-human vibrations.

What adds more controversy is the different attitudes such people have regarding weeds, a status both native and non-native plants can acquire, as these resistant plants do not show “respect for human norms of taste and private property” (Crowdy, 425). Plants cross borders and become pioneer species in recolonising damaged land, becoming a “reality of the Third Landscape” that “works with the very mobility of the subject being dealt with: that of life on the planet” that “coincides with the administrative divisions on a temporary basis” (Clément, 2004, 13). Guerilla gardening practitioners have various, often diverging views about weeds⁹ and their management, but usually, the radical movement expresses its preference for gardening with native plants, sometimes uprooting the non-native ones. Looking closer at these specificities of plant-human networks that have hardly managed to attend an equilibrium, I follow flashing encounters between people and weeds mediated by touch, where the economies of guerilla gardening patterns are emulated and reviewed in performative installations that activate ecological sensibilities and merge human and nonhuman ways of being in-between borders of vegetalised matterings. In her article “Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces”, Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe argued that every social practice is the product of hegemonic politico-economic articulations, sometimes with a slight possibility of consensus and final reconciliations. At the same time, “public spaces are always plural, and agonistic confrontations take place in a multiplicity of discursive surfaces” (Mouffe, 2007, p. 3). Following Mouffe, we should seek examples of participatory art that can act as vectors of ecological acknowledgement, challenging dominant hegemonies “through reappropriations or occupations of public space” (Pederson, 2018, p. 10).

For the past few years, a new movement has spread across Europe, which started from a bunch of “mysterious” botanists from Toulouse who used chalk to spot and name the weeds encountered in their travels through the city (The Connexion, 2019). Soon enough, more “rebel botanists” across cities from the UK, France and Italy started to come up with the question, “Why and how should we care for the weeds in our surroundings?”. In the project

⁹ The native vs non-native plant discourse involves multifaceted perspectives from environmentalism, conservation plans, postcolonial discourses and gardening and agricultural issues. As Alfred Crosby (2004) explains, with the arrival of the Europeans in the Americas during the postcolonial period, a vast exchange of plants, animals, products and diseases happened between the Old and the New World. For example, Mastnak&co. (2014) view colonialism broadly as a project of planting and uprooting people, plants and animals. As a reaction against the colonial enterprise, they advocate botanical decolonisation projects and encourage people to home garden with native plants (already existing in the soil before the Columbian exchange). Some aspects of their arguments are also part of some guerilla gardening discourses. Although the introduction of invasive plants can be a problem in the real sense (for this, see Simberloff, 2003), several theoreticians consider that the existing rhetoric and vocabulary attached to non-native plants “relies on troubling definitions of closed ecosystems, neo-colonial borders, and anthropocentric taxonomies” (Stanescu&Cummings, 2017, vii). The often-encountered criticism of maintaining a strict dichotomy between native and non-native plants (and the invasive equivalents, weeds) is directed towards sinister acts of anthropomorphisation, which entail violent rhetoric, sometimes sliding towards or juxtaposed with xenophobic, nativist, anti-immigration discourses (Subramaniam, 2001). As discourses about the aesthetics of weeds and their symbolism are manifold and deeply entwined in postcolonial stories, invasive biology rhetoric and aesthetics of the every day, I find more suitable for this article to resume the analysis of how different forms of visual arts can inspire human beings to think more deeply about marginalised others, non-human mobility and chains of production.

“More than weeds”, which now appears on numerous social platforms as a hashtag, botanist Sophie Leguil takes on the strategies of guerilla gardening, encouraging active involvement in the life of undesired plants through organising educational walks and workshops in London. She uses chalk to trail the histories and paths of forgotten non-native flora and educate citizens about the benefits of recognising the vital importance of weeds in urban ecosystems (Morss, 2020). This campaign and others like it, such as “Sauvages de ma rue”, become synchronised with recent bans in France in 2017, when new laws were proclaimed against the use of glyphosate pesticides in parks, streets and other urban places, leading to a surge of urban wild flora (Morss, 2020). Leguil’s observations entail that in troubling times of ecological upheaval, the flourishing of urban vegetation serves as a symbolic indicator of resilience, survival and adaptation. Acknowledging the benefits of tending to the weeds, Leguil not only performs guerilla acts through botanical education and eco-art initiatives, but she facilitates soft acts of caring for the plants, where naming the weeds and searching for seed dispersal mechanisms get her subjectivity caught up in plant histories and more-than-human trajectories. As such, weeds become catalysers of different narratives that recount the diversity of plants’ origins and habitats in the city, transforming humans in seed dispersal mechanisms. For example, rapeseed plants, typical for open fields and agricultural crops, or South African native lobelias, now propagate across borders into previously-unfamiliar environments, developing roots in pavement cracks and hanging baskets on London’s streets. From this point, we can see how caring is a more-than-human act as species care for one another through active collaborations that work “across difference, which leads to contamination” (Tsing, 2015, p. 28). Therefore, this diversity of vegetal geographical and historical paths shows us how categories are unstable, identities and categories built through (non)innocent encounters (Tsing, 2015, p. 29). Following Leguil’s steps allows other temporalities and modes of attention to emerge. estural unfoldings in constant relation to their worlds, where noticing human-vegetal micro-proximities activate citizen participation in the lives of wild urban flora. Propagating new possibilities of attunement to plants’ dynamics, the “More than Weeds” campaign opens up a kind of civic mobilisation that does not remain trapped in local becomings but immerses citizens in the complex traces and dynamics of moving plants across the globe. The cosmopolitan character of non-native weeds connects citizens to other networks of postcolonial agricultural legacies, food scarcity and symbolic discourses attached to plants across different cultures. The reappropriation of the public space gets enacted by walking alongside weeds.

Ballast hills, industrial residues, damaged soil full of pesticides, vegetal insurgents, spontaneous vegetation — all of them are components of what Matthew Gandy, among others, calls “ruderal ecologies” associated with human disturbance in aggressive capitalist societies (Gandy, 2013). Constantly, these active collaborators conjugate adaptive landscapes inhabited by plants that have arrived either by human mediation or as ballast flora from ships or other communication passages that thrive locally without human intervention. Despite being criticised as opportunistic and damaging, several ruderal plants such as creeping buttercup, knotgrass, plantains and nettle are highly praised by researchers such as Richard Mabey for their ability to recolonise debris and diminish the effects tumultuous wars have on the quality of the soils, taking root in the city’s “open wounds” (Mabey, 2017, pp. 18-19). *Thinking-with* and caring for ruderal species like the Japanese knotweed or kudzu means “bringing the unnoticed, the trampled and the trodden to the space of our agonistic polis”, which must be re-conceived as a site of alternative ways of reproducing and reimagining public



space as a common politicised ground, a place of acute micro-interventions, where humans and more-than-humans care for each other in surprising ways. Most of these plants are unanimously called weeds, the radical green invaders that people tend to perceive as less glamorous familiars (Mabey, 2017, p. 19); they are also the main protagonists in Austrian artist Lois Weinberger's urban installations that produce new phytocentric instantiations of our more-than-human cities.

As a side note, drawing from Weinberger's practices and thought, I consider his way of tending to ruderal plants from post-industrial wastelands and peripheral urban spaces as an example of enacted and enacting *plant-thinking*, a concept Marder would describe as a way of thinking that doesn't objectify what it strives towards, "a non-appropriative relation to the environment" (Marder, 2013, p. 129). Marginal, ruderal plants pertain to the under-world, to the dust of the urban coagulations, closely following "the tracks of human movements across continents" (Mabey, 2010, p. 22); they rapidly recolonise the soil after demolitions or wartime destruction, such as the case of the rosebay willowherb, the "bombweed" which erupted in London's bomb sites (and, actually, all over Europe) after WW2 (Mabey, 2010, p. 19). These capacities of high rates of vegetative growth and adaptability to extreme conditions while playing the role of poor soil nutrients capture the weeds' vitality in constantly disrupting superfluous, pre-determined attributes such as order and cleanliness. Weinberger's artistic trajectory recounts stories of various experiences of immersion into plants' strategies of resistance in post-industrial, aggressive capitalist realities. These stories provide new representations and collaborations alongside weeds that refuse an idealisation of "pristine nature" or of a romanticised wilderness, which would hold the dualism of nature-culture still undissolved and unquestioned. Far from transforming these "useless" patches of land into an aesthetic of neo-pastoral urban spectacle (Gandy, 2013), Weinberger acknowledges plants as "the most subtle artisans of our cosmos" (Van Cauteren, 2020, 70) and manages to recognise "the margins within oneself, and extending that self to include that which is withdrawn or overlooked" (French, 2016, 86). More precisely, Weinberger's interventions in the strata of urban life are what Pederson described as examples of "non-presence" (2018) or, as the artist himself has articulated, "precise indifference" (Weinberger, 1997, in Trevor, 2014) forms of tending to plants that reevaluate the exclusionary powers of caring for urban, wild flora.

In his in-situ intervention for *Documenta X* in Kassel (1997), Weinberger made space for a new socio-cultural order open to heterogenous becomings and a pluralist translation of emerging moving (forced or not) identities. To Weinberger, rebooting nature through care, envisioned as a political gesture, starts from level zero, a point of non-anthropocentric and non-normative affiliations. The point zero enacted here was the disused platform of Hauptbahnhof an abandoned railway track. For *Documenta X*, Weinberger planted a garden amongst the railway lines of the abandoned area of Kassel's central station. Along almost ten kilometres of abandoned tracks, Weinberger built a "reservoir of endangered plants" (Trevor, 2014) with seeds of disregarded plants gathered by the artist from Central and East Europe during and after the communist period. Moving plants from one place to another has the potential to become gestures of caring relationships happening at the soil level, at the interface between scientific endeavours and artistic interventions in the social lives of urban becomings (Puig de la Bellacasa, 23). Weinberger's handling of plants makes us reflect upon the radical mobility of plants through seeds, animating them and mirroring their entanglement in networks of human agency, global trade and the separation of habitats. Working closely with

plants, Weinberger enacts a vegetalised practice and becomes affected by plants' histories, mobilities and symbolism, restructuring plant-human relationships according to what Bellacasa sees “as a way of transforming more than human relational arrangements into matters of care, of inevitably becoming affected within them, and transforming their potential to affect others” (Bellacasa, 2017, p. 64).

As examined before, care means to become affected, where affect is portrayed as a “relational dynamics between evolving bodies in a setting” and “designates specifically those encounters between bodies that involve change — either enhancement or diminishment — in their respective bodily capacities or micro-powers” (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019, p. 27). Tending to plants in such ways involves touch and “reciprocal efficaciousness” between human and nonhuman bodies (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019, p. 27). Sometimes, weeds become a metaphor for social crises, migration and dislocation of the other, human or nonhuman. Weinberger manages to “open up forms of freedom” (Van Cauteren, 2020, p. 74) and learn from the weeds and the characteristics of nonhuman mobility, thus creating a vegetal manifesto as a form of criticism towards xenophobic attitudes. At the same time, he finds a new home for the non-native plants — foreign immigrants to the German soil, with the power to subvert “human projection of territorial sovereignty, or fixed borders” (Trevor, 2014). Caring as weeding out is questioned by fostering new alternatives to think about undesired plants that challenge political empowerment through *vegetalised* negotiations of the public space and create a more nuanced discourse about nonhuman economies, migration and (en)forced mobilities. Beyond a pivotal figure in Austria's eco-art landscape, Weinberger developed experimental forms of gardening with ruderal plants as intersubjective entanglements in weeds' affective pull — *intimacies formed at a distance* (French, 2016, p. 80).

Thus, the artist disturbs the smooth visualisations of the cities, as he draws inspiration from the vegetative world “as a mutation of the common, as an alternative for a culturally and politically calcified way of thinking” (Van Cauteren, 2020, p. 74). Here, the abandoned trail is reanimated in a vector of freedom and accommodates the permanent transient status of weeds, which Weinberger treats not only in their specificities as a vital ecological partner in urban “biodiversity hotspots” (Irons, 2015) but as a figure that has renewed artistic visions about migration, violent urbanism, dislocation, control and politics (Van Cauteren, 2020). Weinberger teaches us that caring for repressed plants can become a model of accommodating the voice of the marginal, the unheard and the unseen. What pervades Weinberger's informal gardens is an affirmation of caring for nonhuman beings from a non-essentialist perspective that not only gives political power to its subjects and the possibility to reconfigure the public space in the times of the Anthropocene but rearticulates an alternative vocabulary of care.

Performative interventions and “resisting like a plant”

*Something
comes into the world unwelcome
calling disorder, disorder—*

(from “Witchgrass”, Louise
Glück, 2005)



Non-appropriative interventions performed through lack and absence inspire new ways of traversing the city with alternative modes of attention that give rise to new forms of resistance through caring — on the one hand, opposing plant blindness, on the other, becoming the harbinger, the energy, the concept that articulates new collective empowering.

/Modes of attention that keep the eyes down pointed to critters of mud/

In this reasoning, human beings in our Western societies find themselves facing the dwelling place of speculative forms of more-than-human political engagement in the day-to-day response-abilities to caring for symbiotic others. Phytocentric visions emerge as thought-provoking methods to acknowledge how neglecting vegetal life and attention to plants' representations in the social imaginaries was detrimental to ecological consciousness. Plants function as “mediators between the organic and the inorganic realms, between particularity and generality, between a singular form of life and vitality as such” (Marder, 2014, p. 242), between local and global forms of ecological subjectivities assemblages. Turned against hegemonising centres and surpassing simple dichotomies, phytocentrism recognises the importance of plants in the biosphere and challenges a “zoo-centric” focus on biological education. Here, politics and other forms of social resistance are understood not purely as human affairs but as a network where people, plants and other organisms become harbingers of care, both as a hostile and a welcoming ground.

The almost-turned-into slogan “Resist like a plant”, also part of the title of one of Marder’s articles from 2007, seems to have become the ethos of recent art-botanical interventions in urban dwellings, which activate collective participation. However, as French explains, when Marder argues for political movements that assume an identity rooted in plant metaphors, he describes a politics of space that conforms to the unique ontology of plants (French, 2016, p. 86). As a final step of the article, I will explore how two more participatory art installations can revitalise the vocabulary of caring while tending and opening up towards stories of weeds and weedy configurations. While keeping these ideas in mind, I will examine how the language of care changes in the interdisciplinary works of social activist, artist and educator Ellie Irons. Working across media, Irons combines fieldwork with botanical education, social practice and embodied learning, using watercolours, mixed installations and “un-lawning” experiments to examine the relationships between citizens and spontaneous urban vegetation. In “Feral and Invasive Pigments”, the New York-based artist examines the multifaceted and mostly invisible histories rooted in colonial legacies of weedy plants, which she gathers from local neighbourhoods (Irons, 2015). Wholly immersed in wild urban ecologies, Irons finds herself in an ongoing process of providing asylum to wild plants and invasive species. At the same time, she creates a framework to investigate how people and plants co-create their environment, enacting a *vegetalised* approach to analysing the formation of novel landscapes. For this, she works with more than forty local species, which she collects to create hybrid watercolour paints that create a less dichotomous view of weedy species (Irons, 2015, p. 11) and connect citizens to vegetal modes of resistance in the face of Anthropocene dilemmas.

With “Feral and Invasive Pigments”, Irons conducts fieldwork exploration of weediness, care and stewardship through the symbolism attached to invasive plants. She creates pigments from plant parts collected from human-dominated disturbed green patches. Her interest in watercolours departed from noticing, one day, a deep, emerald blue stain in her sketchbook caused by the algae she was growing in her studio (Irons, 2015, p. 116). One of the pigments

Irons works with is a mix of Asiatic Dayflower and pokeweed. The first one is a plant portrayed as a superweed in the US media, native to East Asia; the other becomes the figure of the common weed that inhabits road margins, hedges and wastelands, usually perceived and treated as native to the US landscape. Irons enacts a form of caring while creating her watercolours and encourages people to assemble the pigments, asking them to think of their mixture as a figure mirroring migration stories and co-evolving plant-human subjectivities. As Richard Mabey describes, already in the twentieth century, most common weeds like chickweed, knotgrass, and stinging nettle were “virtually cosmopolitan” occurring “on all five continents” (Mabey, 2010, pp. 14-15). Drawing from these stories, Irons’ urban artistic interventions have the potential to resonate with how Myers describes plants’ ways of being: “plants are, like their roots, entangling”, enticing “entire ecologies of other creatures to participate in their care and their propagation; they have the know-how to entrain others in service of their rhythms, their wiles, and desires” (Hustak & Myers, 2012, in Myers, 2017, p. 1).

Considering all these characteristics that surface from Irons’s method of working with undesired plants, I argue that this kind of social intervention and vegetalised activist approach echoes Macgregor’s preference for (post)cosmopolitan values in a global civil society and sustains the development of the identity of *earthcitizens* (Macgregor, 2006, p. 86). The workshops and artistic interventions I have mentioned until now strive towards Macgregor’s observations mainly because working with weedy plants means a direct connection to histories of botanical imperialism, aggressive neo-extractivist societies, human and nonhuman inequalities and histories of queer vegetalisations that disrupt universalising desires (Sandilands, 2017, p. 422) in a manner that works simultaneously — weeds connecting Antropocene’s precarious landscapes with attention to differences. Hybrid watercolours are far from being natural, native or local. Thus, working with them means working across a heterogenous array of spaces and temporalities. After a watercolour workshop, the participants remain with pigment stains on their palms and bodies, which I interpret, in a Harawayan sense, as testimonies of active encounters with *weedy critters*, following the rhythms of affective pulls, ruptures and repulsions among “organisms constantly inventing new ways to live with and alongside one another” (Hustak and Myers, 2012, pp. 96-97). As such, Irons encourages students, plant lovers and eco-art enthusiasts to treat weedy plants as indispensable companions in ever-changing, contaminated landscapes.

“Floraphilia. Revolution of plants” was a collective exhibition curated by Aneta Rostkowska, which took place at Temporary Gallery during the Biennale Warsaw 2019. The exhibition gathered several visual artists who tackled eco-trends and social aspects of botanical histories and consisted of anarchist laboratories, surrealist films with haunting vegetation and labyrinths of healing garlands. Overall, the artworks presented during the exhibition acted as speculative transducers to peculiar worlds and dealt with notions embracing the possibility of enacting social and political change by using plants’ histories of resilience and spontaneous adaptation in the face of unexpected changes. Finding echoes in all other case studies previously examined throughout this article, the Polish artist Dagna Jakubowska evokes the specificities of “the third landscape” as a “reservoir of natural freedom — undesigned and uncontrolled biodiversity that cannot be found in any other areas” (Gańko, 2020, p. 149). As we have seen previously, weeding and caring are inextricably linked. With the installation “Weeds” (part of a more extensive series of hers, titled “Edible Map of Migration”), Jakubowska performed a double articulation of caring, first reinscribing it in the logic of *plant-thinking* and then de-



feminising it through a radical gesture performed against a patriarchal notion of the act of nurturing.

The “Edible Map of Migrations” is a political atlas in the form of maps illustrating vectors of more-than-human mobilities in and out of the European continent through which she examines how the concept of invasiveness is visually constructed at the level of social imaginaries of food chain production. Jakubowska transforms the gallery space into an alchemist’s kitchen, where a table full of glass receptacles containing dried plants is carefully presented to the public. These dried plants, such as the Japanese knotweed, the red-root amaranths, or black cherries, were nothing else than spontaneous plants that the artist gathered from peripheral places and abandoned sites, many of them listed on the platform “Global Invasive Species Database”. In the gallery space, a weedy manifesto is enacted through plants that mass media and popularising scientific discourses vilify through demeaning titles such as “volcanic pioneers that strike back”. These almost turned-into-chant descriptions of weedy companions appear on posters that the artist carefully arranged in the installation as sources of inspiration for recipes. During the event opening, Jakubowska introduced the discourses surrounding the figure of invasive plants through a performative dinner for which she prepared dishes and drinks with ingredients consisting of invasive plant species. The menu consisted of Japanese knotweed, Japanese wild rose and black locust, one of the most aggressive invasives in Central Europe. Jakubowska burrowed the symbolism attached to weeds represented in mass media as agents that threaten national borders, “aliens consuming the continent”, and paired it with the politics of care performing through the capacity of nurturing the other. Thus, I argue that this performative invitation to make people chew on weedy species exposed any assumption of a “gender neutral [ecological] citizen”, as Macgregor would say (Macgregor, 2006, p. 97), making the asymmetrical dimensions of globalisation and the impossibility of a “common human condition” instantly resurface (Dobson, 2003, in Macgregor, 2006, p. 111).

Figure 1. Dagna Jakubowska, *Weeds*, 2019, installation view, part of the exhibition “Floraphilia. Revolution of plants”, Temporary Gallery. Courtesy of the artist.



Dagna Jakubowska acknowledges the same characteristic about weeds as Weinberger or Irons. Namely, that weeds can present human beings with subversive models of resistance and adaptation while creating unforeseeable habitats in times of extreme degradation and human exceptionalism. Treating weeds as active agents in forming new political identities as opposed to forms of environmentalism premised on concepts of purity and masculinist approaches to the nature of “feminine experiences”. As such, the invasive plants that prove to be useful but ignored sources of nourishment become entangled in a ritual where Jakubowska devises an antidote against the fear of the other and the blurring of local-global dichotomies, as well as against legacies of “nature-as-female” or “nature-as-home” approaches. I argue that in “Weeds”, Jakubowska offered invasive plants to participants to counteract obsessive needs to consume and assimilate the other (human or nonhuman). Echoing Sandilands’ ideas, Jakubowska’s artwork creates a radical space of heterogenous becomings “beyond the taming of language” (Sandilands, 1997, p. 147). At the same time, what arises from this enactment of the radical, almost ironic gesture of feeding the other something which culturally can be translated as bad, is a resignification of spontaneous plants as harbingers of change and trespassers of borders and strict categories, both geographically and metaphorically, as nature-culture assemblages working from within the intimate texture of the flesh. For this purpose, plants become the unapproachable and nonrepresentational others, with no other means to interact with them than through chewing and swallowing. Jakubowska transforms weeds into companion species that can open life from inside and below, from the fissures of our cities,

towards “anthro-decentric” possibilities (Sandilands, 2017, p. 426) of open-ended networks and co-evolving subjectivities of vegetalised care.

Conclusion

While exploring vegetalised forms of caring, I noticed how nonhuman entanglements engage discursively and materially with ontological inseparabilities, where our all-too-human sensoria enter transformative journeys. Considering the arguments about some questionable traits of care in contemporary societies, such as its gendered nature, my aim throughout the essay was to present and build an alternative speculative system, a pathway through plant-human intimacies and spontaneous becomings in the heart of a precarious Anthropocene where a crisis of care arises. The article has departed from some care limitations and strived to propose an alternative pattern of grounding caring, starting from collective acts of response-abilities in times of ecological distress. Following this path and through analysing art projects and affective entanglements, we have unravelled a vocabulary of care which refuses to be rooted exclusively in feminine-oriented definitions. A meditative foray into the asymmetries of affective ecologies, we have explored how various artists have enacted the process of vegetalisation, facilitating collective “response-ability” (Haraway, 2016) and ecological awareness. Arguing for a phytocentric perspective when recontextualising the basis of caring possibilities, the article explored the representation of wastelands and weeds to access forms of “*resisting like a plant*” (Marder, 2007) through non-appropriative radical passivities.

Among our meanderings amidst informal gardens, we have tested the potentiality of weedy creatures to become agents of politicised subjectivities. Through reflections on plant and vegetal urban configurations and the social imaginary attached to spontaneous vegetation, I have delved into the complex nature of caring and some of the inherent contradictions it engenders. Waging on the slippery status of caring and how it can conjure up reparative acts and violent endeavours, I have launched myself in an exploration to find my “inner plant”, as Myers sometimes names the process of vegetalisation (Myers, 2021). At the same time, the investigation of the mutable character of care, as informed by discursive-material practices within ecofeminist thought and Critical Plant Studies was focused on the interest of various artists to address inequalities and power relations inside more-than-human communities, as well as on the need to emphasise the inextricably entangled histories of violence, marginalisation and anthropocentric values. Marginalised plants can rearticulate our senses, connect us to botanical networks, and stand as a criticism and a form of resistance in the face of anthropocentric and heteronormative practices ingrained at the heart of caring relationships. / *Weedy steps and infinite gestures traversing places and space — familiar, at the same time — unknown. Touching my backpack, searching for weathered verbs, and always-expanding adjectives has become an unintentional gesture. A ritual, an internal joke, a safe space. Phytocentric visions make me of the soil, resonating in affinities and highly manneristic gestures of vegetal unfoldings/.*

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