# Fabulating Together

nordic fabulation network

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Fabulating Together
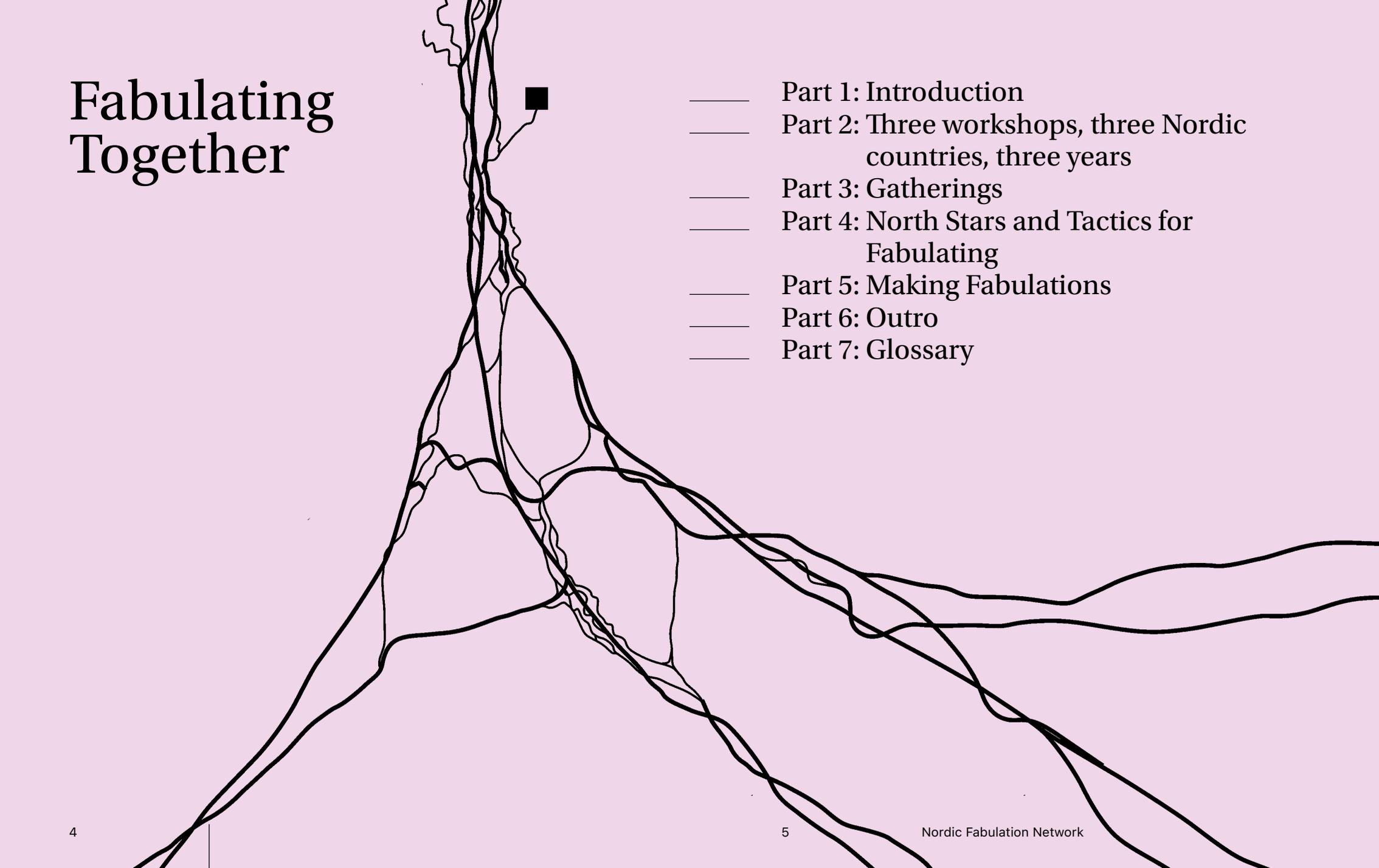
Introduction:
Nordic Fabulation
Network:
A cauldron of stories
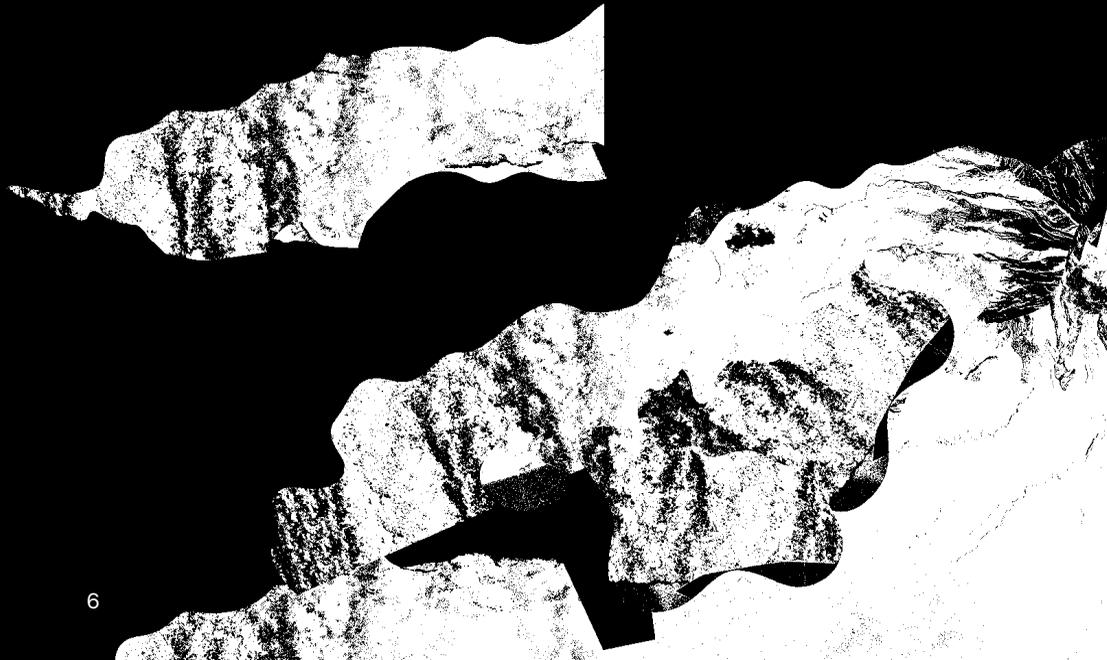
What does it mean to fabulate?
Fabulate is to think sideways.
Not to move linearly in time, but
tentatively with hope.
To entangle concepts with one another.
To understand one through another.
To entangle ourselves and our identities.
To share ourselves with others and let
other people's experiences become lenses
to understanding our own.
It's making, but not making-for, nor
making-in-the-name-of, nor just making.
It's making-with-hope, touching and
feeling how materials and concepts could
be combined otherwise.
And think through how those
materialisations ignite possibilities
and openings.
For (re)telling stories that matter with a
focus on "for whom?"

Caring With the Nordics

The notion of caring for its own citizens is the basis of the Nordic welfare state. However, we live in times of turbulence. The shifting of power relations across citizens and states, new forms of public private partnerships, the rapid emergence of novel technologies that permeate every facet of our lives, and novel forms of service provision, are among many aspects that contribute to transforming how states, communities and caregivers plan and improve living conditions of the populations. These transformations are not arbitrary or neutral but follow from predominant narratives of care that we have been accustomed to, which continue to colour the stories we (re)tell ourselves and each other about the worlds we want to live in, and those we want to build for future generations. They are, and always have been, political.

What should be cared for? Who does the caring? What should care look like and for whom? These questions are present in stories that permeate our everyday lives, but also our research and practice. They create the problems deemed to be fundable in the first place; they inform the studies we do, the technologies we develop, and the discourse we create in our publications and in public discourse. We take these stories seriously; they have material consequences and world-making effects. As feminist researchers, designers, and technologists, we see it as urgent to create new forms of situated, plural and collective data and technology futures—that is to develop approaches for imagining and crafting alternative desirable and inclusive futures, that value individual and collective needs.

1. Haraway, D. (2013). SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far. Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology, No.3.

2. Haraway, D. J. (1991). Simians, cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of nature. Routledge.

Fabulation

Fabulation is one of many existing approaches that offers a set of techniques and orientations for probing the development of such futures. As a form of speculative story making or storytelling has ties with the fields of Science and Technology Studies and Feminist Technoscience and is oriented towards alternative forms of critical world-making: What stories we want to tell and what stories we are consciously omitting telling. It is not "one single and specific thing", but it can be seen as an approach of thinking, making, relating, being even, which has strings and ties to many different concepts, theories, literature, critical and design traditions, including, but not limited to science fiction, speculative thinking, Afrofuturism. Some characteristics of fabulation are that it uses speculating/imagining existing things differently, to foreground absent or neglected relations when imagining alternative lifeworlds. It also places less emphasis on designing/imagining technologies and more emphasis on social and cultural relations, political tensions, and power hierarchies among human, non-human, environmental, and technology co-existence. So, when engaging with fabulation as an approach to imagining and developing alternative futures, it is not so important how novel, finished or perfect something you imagine and create as a possibility is, but how it aims to probe, critique or trouble existing norms.

Scholars We Think With

In our journey of exploring fabulation, we have been *thinking-with* a number of scholars, whom we want to mention briefly, aiming to situate our take on fabulation. The first one is Donna Haraway, professor emerita in the history of consciousness and feminist studies departments at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and a prominent scholar in the field of science and technology studies. She has described what she has come to call *speculative fabulation* as a mode of attention, a theory of history, and a practice of worlding[1]. Haraway has been developing for many years new storytelling figures or figurations of thinking otherwise, including her famous *cyborg manifesto*[2], breaking

down, established notions of biology vs culture, or figuration of Camille[3] heavily critiquing the consequences of the Anthropocene. For Haraway, speculative fabulation, and, as she calls them, SFs—speculative fiction, situated feminisms, string figures, speculative philosophy - are important practices in both scholarly writing and everyday life. While rooted in everyday storytelling practices, speculative fabulation defamiliarizes perception, and disrupts habitual ways of knowing.

The second scholar we have been thinking-with in our journey of fabulating is Ursula K. Le Guin, American author known for her books and poetry on speculative fiction, and science fiction. She had worked with similar questions like Haraway through science fiction literature writing. She developed many new universes troubling notions of gender, science, technology, and politics, aiming to find new centers, voices and figures against the patriarchic and white supremacist society. In her short essay *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*[4], she challenged the linear, progressive mode of the Techno-Heroic using the carrier bag theory of human evolution. She proposed that weapons of violence— and the history of 'man the hero' killing to survive—represent neither our true collective history nor humanity's greatest invention. Instead, she proposed that *"before the tool that forces energy outward, we made the tool that brings energy home"*[4], arguing that our ancestors' greatest invention in fact was the container. The container as the net bag, made from hair or plants, that was used to collect and carry seeds, and other things for surviving and nurturing the collective. With that, she invited us to always take a stance on how we tell and re-tell history and facts, what do we put in our carrier bags as concepts, theories, discussions, and what do we discard.

Another scholar is Saidiya Hartman, academic and writer focusing on African-American studies, who works with cultural history, photography and ethics at the intersections of law and literature. She has been engaging with fabulation as a kind of storytelling that's blending the real and the imaginary, building new worlds around them. She coined

3. Haraway, D. (2016). The Camille Stories: Children of Compost. In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (pp. 134–168). Duke University Press.

4. Le Guin, Ursula K. (1996) *The carrier bag theory of fiction.* The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology 149-154.

5. Hartman, S. (2008). Venus in Two Acts. *Small Axe 12*(2), 1-14.

6. Rosner, D. K. (2018). *Critical fabulations: Reworking the methods and margins of design.* The MIT Press.

7. https:// nordicfabulation. net/

the phrase *critical fabulation* in a vivid essay *Venus in Two Acts*[5], where she is writing against the limits of archives that are rendering lives of enslaved women—unknown or unknowable, their stories unrecorded: *"By playing with rearranging the basic elements of story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event."*[5]. In that she's imagining what might have happened, what might have been said, what might have been done. So, this retelling from the past allows us to process it and bring it with us from a new perspective into the future.

Finally, Daniela Rosner, professor in the Department of Human Centered Design & Engineering at the University of Washington, explores design- its practice, discourse, its past, its present—and through her book[6] defines critical fabulation as *"ways of storytelling that rework how things that we design come into being and what they do in the world. They deconstruct design methods to open different understandings of the past that reconfigure the present, creating new opportunities for a just future. Derived from the practice of telling fables or stories, the term fabulation orients design toward narrative potentials."* Rosner is explicitly drawing on Hartman's critical fabulation, (re)working stories that are lost or forgotten and brings this perspective to design research within the field of Human-Computer Interaction, with a focus on technological developments.

The Nordic Fabulation Network
Drawing on such prior work that highlights the potential of fabulation to think otherwise, we created the *Nordic Fabulation Network*[7] as an initiative to bring together scholars and designers in the Nordics interested in exploring, theoretically and practically, how fabulation via storytelling and other material-making practices can be used for crafting feminist care futures. The current network consists of the contributors/authors of this publication, who participated in at least one of three main workshops we conducted across 2,5 years, each lasting for two full days. Some participated in all three workshops, some in one or two, and some

only in one. This brought a nice continuity on how we introduced and explored fabulation tactics and discussed topics, because some of the themes approached in earlier workshops were reiterated and refined in subsequent ones. At the same time, having some participants who were new to the fabulation process in each workshop proved important for exploring and refining how to introduce fabulation and what are the "necessary ingredients" needed for fabulating.

The Workshops

The first workshop *Concepts* (Umeå, June 2023) was on conceptual work around fabulations – what it is, what it can do, how can we explore this in relation to our research and practice. The second workshop *Approaches* (Oslo, January 2024) departed from the conceptual grounding to map current and potential methods for fabulating. The third workshop *Interventions* (Copenhagen, November 2024) gathered learnings, tools, and methods to reflect on the potential of fabulating as a method for making change. In the next part, we offer a brief overview of them, in the form of the lived experience of being in the three workshops, through a linear progression, starting in June 2023 and ending the moment we have published this book.

The workshops as sites of active engagement with fabulation, and the work we conducted in-between the workshops to reflect on the processes and outcomes, transferring learnings to the next one, have proved very rich and generative. We produced implosions[8] of already familiar concepts and ideas, made new connections of concepts and theories, developed material probes and collages of fabulatory worlds, but also tactics for fabulating (i.e. North Stars). Our aim was never to do science or design fiction, but rather to interrogate present material and ideological conditions that enable specific imaginations of the future. Like in a witch's cauldron, we mixed the stories we carried with us along this journey, adding new stories, concepts, figures and archetypes that represented alternative visions for caring for ourselves and others.

8. Dumit, Joseph. (2014). *Writing the implosion: teaching the world one thing at a time*. Cultural Anthropology 29.2: 344-362.

The Book

The result is a concoction of ideas, of potentials many yet unrealized that we offer in this book as partial learnings in a condensed, but hopefully useful format that we believe can open up new ways of doing design, doing technology, and imagining social relations. We invite others to be motivated and inspired to use fabulation in their research, practice, engagement with stakeholders, or everyday life, to think imaginatively and inclusively about futures (with or without tech). We see the contents of this booklet as ingredients and open-ended recipes that can be borrowed, adapted, re-mixed, critiqued, and imagined differently. Finally, we hope our thoughts and reflections on how fabulation can be used, including strategies and tactics for developing meaningful shared futures, will travel to other places, such as labs, universities, creative, or activist spaces. These ideas are intended to act as possible trajectories for crafting futures centered on care, both Nordic and beyond.

Workshops

———— Three workshops
———— Three Nordic countries
———— Three years

Umeå **Concepts** Umeå University June 8–9, 2023

Day 1:
Mapping out Nordic Care Futures

Keynote: Noura Howell, Georgia Institute of Technology: "Emotion AI & Fabulation"

Themes of Nordic Care Futures:
- Body and Healthcare
- Energy and Environment
- Urban and Civics
- Intergenerational Care
- Futures for whom?

Orienting questions in theme groups
- What have been predominant narratives of care that have driven technological progress in the Nordics?
- Which future(s) should we care for?

Implosion method
Based on objects brought by researchers to a theme

World Café
Assembling "missing" things
Core future visions
More-than-human perspectives

Day 2:
Theory and Connecting Threads

Storytelling Circle (Bring your own fabulation)
Researchers told stories that inspired them, resonating with practice and culture

Arpentage
Inspirational theory and texts were deconstructed and used to annotate and develop new stories in groups

Post-workshop analysis leads to Tactics and North Stars

Oslo **Approaches** Oslo School of Architecture and Design Jan 25-26, 2024

Day 1: Knotting the Threads we Carried from Umeå

Keynote: Camilla Mørk Røstvik, University of Agder: "Remembering Witches: Memorials, Memory and Magic in Public Space"

Re-introduce fabulation as an approach to design futuring
- Imagine and create representations of alternative social relations— ways of designing, ways of knowing, and ways of living with or without technology
- Trouble established ways of knowing
- Understand, work with, and make theory

Making relations between North Stars and the figure of the witch
- Carrier bag activity
- Materialising fabulations
- Collage-making and short stories

Group conversation and feedback

Day 2:
Refining and Exhibiting Fabulations

Creating exhibition in AHO gallery
- Refining material fabulation
- Focus on cross-pollination of fabulations
- How could these co-exist (or not) in a future/alternative world?
- How do these fabulations speak into the current state of affairs?

Post-workshop analysis leads to AI-generated design briefs

Copenhagen **Interventions**
IT University of Copenhagen
November 7-8, 2024

Day 1:
Developing Fabulation

Keynote: Kristina Lindström, Malmö University and Åsa Ståhl, Linnaeus University: "The un/making studio"

AI-generated design briefs to problematize the following topics and as a departure to fabulate from:
-   Caring across More-than-Human and Planetary Timescales
-   Caring for the Ever-Changing Body
-   Nordic Robot Futures: Embodied Intelligence and Human Experience
-   Caring at the Margins of the Welfare State: Inclusive, Adaptive Systems for Belonging and Care
-   Follow the Food: Collaborating for a Sustainable Nordic Food System

Fabulation Tactics:
1. Think and talk in opposition to AI-generated design briefs
2. Making in silence with low-fidelity materials
3. Writing/materialisation for feedback across groups

Day 2:
Refining and Exhibiting Fabulations

Fabulation Tactic:
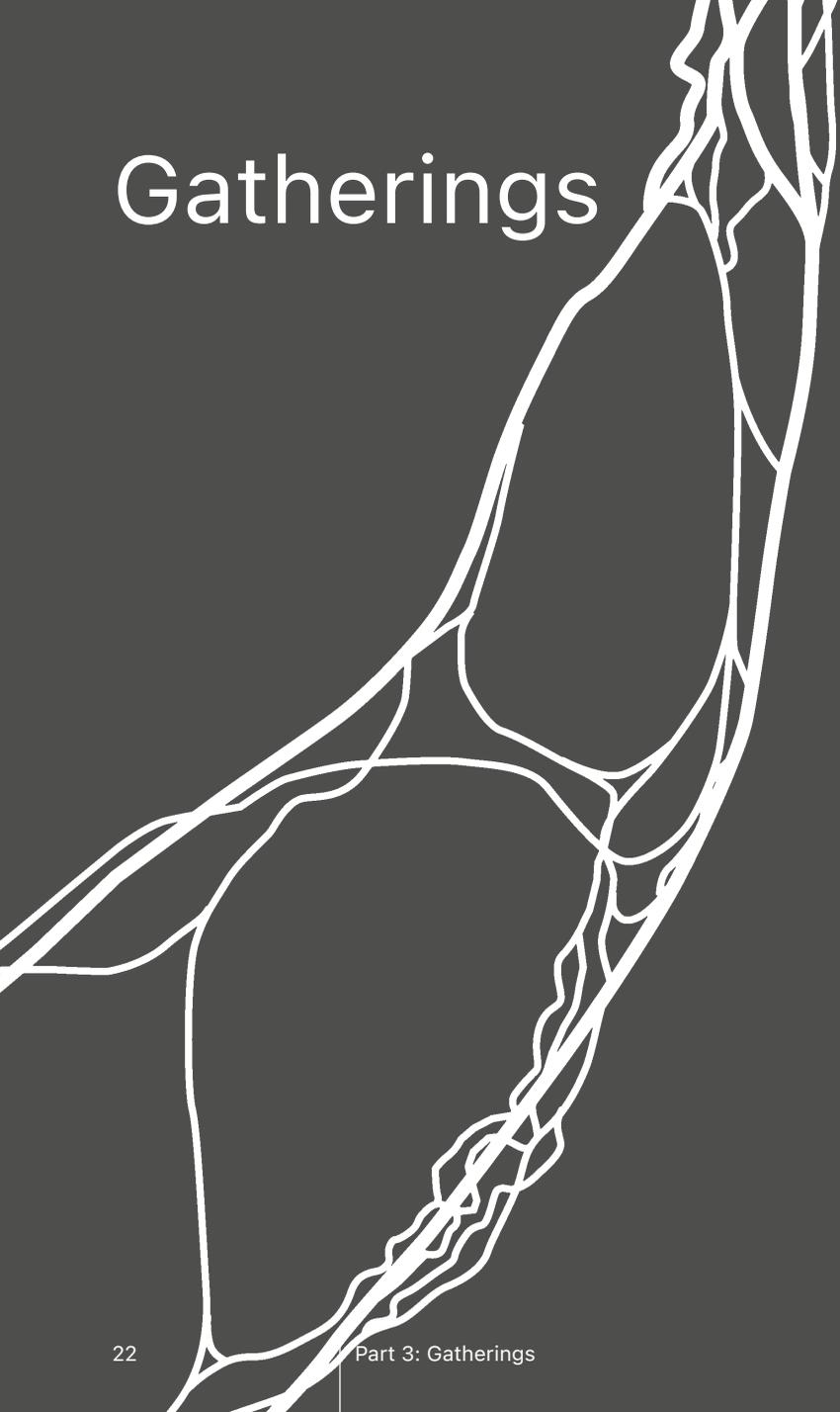4. Making connections across projects

Fabulatory outcomes:
-   Visual collage
-   Photographic enactment
-   Fictional narratives
-   Wearables
-   Film

Creating Exhibition in ITU's Atrium

Gatherings

Gatherings are about collecting stories, concepts, values, wishes, fears, and putting them in conversation with one another. Gatherings can be done alone, or in groups, and are a never-ending process. The gatherings presented here are merely reflections and snippets of approaches we explored during and between the three workshops. We found them useful starting points for fabulation.

They were chosen as they produced interesting returns, and served well in knitting together a diverse group of participants in our fabulatory endeavors. The gatherings should not be seen as static prescriptions for other workshops. They are shared in the hope that they will be of use, that they will be reworked, refined, and rejected depending on the context within which they will be implemented.

Arpentage
Getting texts to talk to one another

The basics:
Although its origins are shrouded in mystery and myth, arpentage is a tactic for collective reading connected to the French working class struggles. It has a legacy of critical, popular, and participatory engagement, which speaks to us today.

Arpentage is a three-step process:

First, the organisers, participants, or both, can select texts they wish to engage with. This can be one or many texts.

Second, these texts are then torn up and distributed to the participants who read them individually. The participants can get just one piece of text, or several from the same or multiple sources.

Third, the group then reproduced collective knowledge by coming back together to discuss the text collectively. This can be done through group discussions or by further cutting and connecting the text into a collage.

With the burden shared by dividing up the text, abstract or complex subjects can be tackled with collective co-learning.

More inspiration:
Delvenne, P., et al. (2022) 'Entering into resonance: vibrations around a common world from encounters between the 9th art and science'. *Annual Congress of the Society for Social Studies of Science (4S)*.

Tactical Technology Collective (2020) Readings: *Surveying for collective learnings into resources*. Available at: https://gendersec.tacticaltech.org/wiki/index.php/Readings_Surveying_for_collective_learnings_into_ressources

Henriksen, L., et al. (2022) 'Writing bodies and bodies of text: Thinking vulnerability through monsters', *Gender, Work & Organization,* 29(2), pp. 561–574.

Arpentage in action:
Worlding through fabulation texts
"Concepts" workshop, Umeå, Sweden, June 2023

We collected some key texts on fabulation, care, speculation, printed then out, and then small groups engaged in the destroying and re-assembling of these key texts. With this, we aimed at exposing participants to the theoretical foundations of fabulation by inviting participants to read fragments of texts on the subject. It also served as a means for the participants to critically engage with these texts that were selected by the workshop organisers. In so doing, the workshop outcomes up to that stage were contested, and new connections and narratives of existing and additional material were developed.

Cartographies
The individual is a lie

The basics:
To know where you are, you must understand your relationship with other things. We are relational creatures, never separated from one another and our environment. As such, it matters to know where you are in relation to other things. Cartographies help to shed light on this.

> *"Exploring how the world is interconnected one process and thing at a time, how these connections are vitally and politically important, and how this work is inexhaustible" (Dumit, 2014: 344).*

These connections should not constrain themselves to the present, but acknowledge their past roots, how they reverberate with the past and towards the future. There are multiple ways to do so. You may wish to start with an object and implode its relations. You can ask, what are the symbolic meanings of the object? Which stories have been told about it? How is it produced and what materials, social structures and forms of labour does it depend on?

> *"Any interesting being in technoscience, like a textbook, molecule, equation, mouse, pipette, bomb, fungus, technician, agitator, or scientist can—and often should— be teased open to show the sticky economic, technical, political, organic,*

historical, mythic, and textual threads that make up its tissues" (Haraway 1997, 68).

Cartographing can be achieved through a range of techniques which were drawn upon in our workshops, such as a World Café.

More inspiration:
Dumit, J. (2014) 'Writing the Implosion: Teaching the World One Thing at a Time', *Cultural Anthropology,* 29(2), pp. 344–362.
Haraway, D. (1997) *Modest_ Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan©Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience.* New York: Routledge.
Löhr, K., Weinhardt, M., & Sieber, S. (2020). The "World Café" as a Participatory Method for Collecting Qualitative Data. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 19.

Cartography in action: Strangers, Stars and String
"Concepts" workshop, Umeå, Sweden, June 2023

The participants shared a wide range of objects and photos to introduce themselves including a box of matches, a bag with tea made of herbs picked from the Swedish forest, a piece of fabric from a wedding suit that one participant was sewing for her own upcoming wedding, and a handmade bag with an unfolded story of a local community in Oslo.

Starting from the objects and the participants' research focus, we discussed epistemic knowledge boundaries on bodies, such as global health issues standards and who gets to approve these. Discussions also included personal experiences that contradicted medical diagnosis of health issues, some participants also shared personal stories on self-tracking of menstruation and chronic illness.

Discussions and connections were also made in terms of the Global North and Global South, as well as to local spaces (i.e. in the Nordics). This connected to the question of what is indigenous knowledge? Starting from the herbal tea, we discussed how becoming knowledgeable on the herbs and nature of a country can be a way of becoming "native".

Carrier Bag
Perfect for when you don't know where to start

The basics:
Sometimes, it can be difficult to prioritise where to start. Often the world is too rich and too overwhelming. For example, what to do if the cartography produced too many concepts to handle? Well, you can make a carrier bag, a sling, a shell, or a gourd. Not so small that you won't fit more than what you can carry in your hand, but not too big either—*Lagom* in Swedish, not too big, not too small—just right.

If you think something is important, throw it in there. It matters little whether you know now how it will be combined with whatever else is in the bag. What matters is that it mattered enough to be in the bag.

Remember humbleness, from hunter to carrier. There's always a counter narrative out there, waiting to be found/told.

> *"A book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings. A novel is a medicine bundle, holding things in a particular, powerful relation to one another and to us" (Le Guin, 2019).*

More inspiration:
Le Guin, Ursula K. (1996). *The carrier bag theory of fiction.* The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology (1996): 149-154.

Carrier Bag in action: Ice and Architecture
"Approaches" Workshop, Oslo, Norway, January 2024

To aid in group formation, we prompted participants to take a fabric bag/pouch and select some of the cards with the tactics and Nordic stars we had printed. They then put these in the bag. We were inspired by Ursula K. Le Guin's Carrier Bag Theory (1996), to ask our participants , "What concepts do you want to bring with you to the workshop today?"

We invited participants to open their bags and discuss the use of the concepts with the group to guide opening conversations on North Stars with the others, starting from their own research. Departing from that, we asked them to keep one carrier bag per group, and use the individual carrier bags as frames for conversation and discuss what should go in their collective bag and why. Here we also invited participants to add their commitments, cares, concerns, methods, orientations to their collective carrier bag.

Story Telling Circle
Make stories yours

The basics:
Bring a story.
Sit in a circle.
Share it with the group.
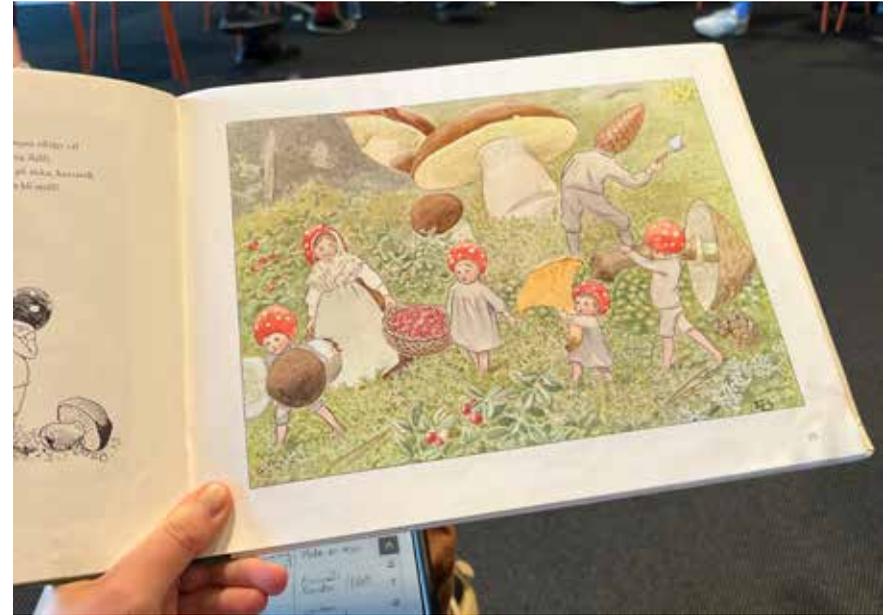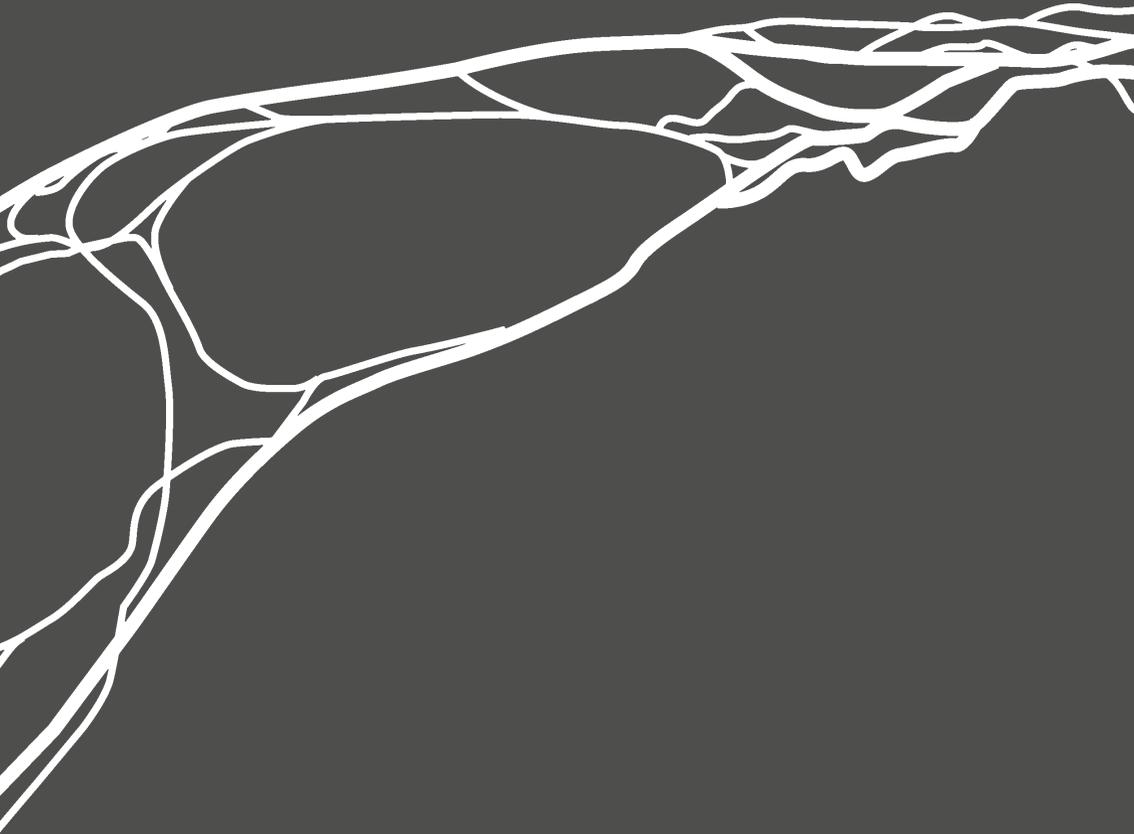
Story Telling Circle in Action: Oranges, Accents and Frogs
"Concepts" workshop, Umeå, Sweden June 2023

We formed into one large story telling circle, sharing the stories we brought one by one. We focused on unpacking what is in a story or in a fable, which concepts the process of fabulation can rely on, and how they can be mobilised towards imagining alternative futures. This was a very intimate session where we could share stories related to our upbringing, identities, morals, and symbols.

Ungathering: AI generated text and Fabulation
To inspire or spark derision

The basics:

Vast models, built on scale, on aggregation, on investment, on dispossession, competing with biological species for water, space, and relevance. The sum of human language available at our fingertips? Or simply parroting the inequalities built into the infrastructures they feed on? Language, languages, and ways of communicating are not neutral. They are embedded in, and embed cultures, values, and viewpoints of those who make them, and in turn are made by them.

Large language models are thus made from the internet, driven by and driving capitalist logic. They are also made by selections of books, music, arts and culture-not as lived exp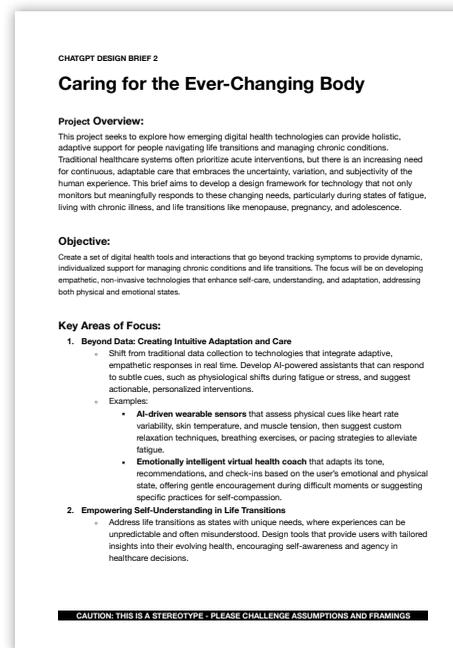eriences — but as commodities detached from their creators, stripped from their intrinsic value, as one always must be when at the bottom of any pyramid of scale. They are also made of underpaid labour data annotation practices of "human" alignment, where humans are conceptualised as suspiciously similar to those holding the capital to create them, or the markets deemed valuable enough to be sold into.

Asking whether such models can dream, or imagine futures, is to attribute magic and agency to deeply embedded Western cultural objects. We prefer to treat them as such, as mirrors of Western capitalist culture. Mirrors of some languages, and not others. Accessible for some humans to communicate with, provided they have also been trained in the same language. Can they help us fabulate? We asked ourselves that question repeatedly, and though we have no definitive answers, we found them useful to understand how we might be reproducing those logics in our design work.

CHATGPT DESIGN BRIEF 2

Caring for the Ever-Changing Body

Project Overview:
This project seeks to explore how emerging digital health technologies can provide holistic, adaptive support for people navigating life transitions and managing chronic conditions. Traditional healthcare systems often prioritize acute interventions, but there is an increasing need for continuous, adaptable care that embraces the uncertainty, variation, and subjectivity of the human experience. This brief aims to develop a design framework for technology that not only monitors but meaningfully responds to these changing needs, particularly during states of fatigue, living with chronic illness, and life transitions like menopause, pregnancy, and adolescence.

Objective:
Create a set of digital health tools and interactions that go beyond tracking symptoms to provide dynamic, individualized support for managing chronic conditions and life transitions. The focus will be on developing empathetic, non-invasive technologies that enhance self-care, understanding, and adaptation, addressing both physical and emotional states.

Key Areas of Focus:
1. **Beyond Data: Creating Intuitive Adaptation and Care**
   - Shift from traditional data collection to technologies that integrate adaptive, empathetic responses in real time. Develop AI-powered assistants that can respond to subtle cues, such as physiological shifts during fatigue or stress, and suggest actionable, personalized interventions.
   - Examples:
     - **AI-driven wearable sensors** that assess physical cues like heart rate variability, skin temperature, and muscle tension, then suggest custom relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, or pacing strategies to alleviate fatigue.
     - **Emotionally intelligent virtual health coach** that adapts its tone, recommendations, and check-ins based on the user's emotional and physical state, offering gentle encouragement during difficult moments or suggesting specific practices for self-compassion.
2. **Empowering Self-Understanding in Life Transitions**
   - Address life transitions as states with unique needs, where experiences can be unpredictable and often misunderstood. Design tools that provide users with tailored insights into their evolving health, encouraging self-awareness and agency in healthcare decisions.

CAUTION: THIS IS A STEREOTYPE - PLEASE CHALLENGE ASSUMPTIONS AND FRAMINGS

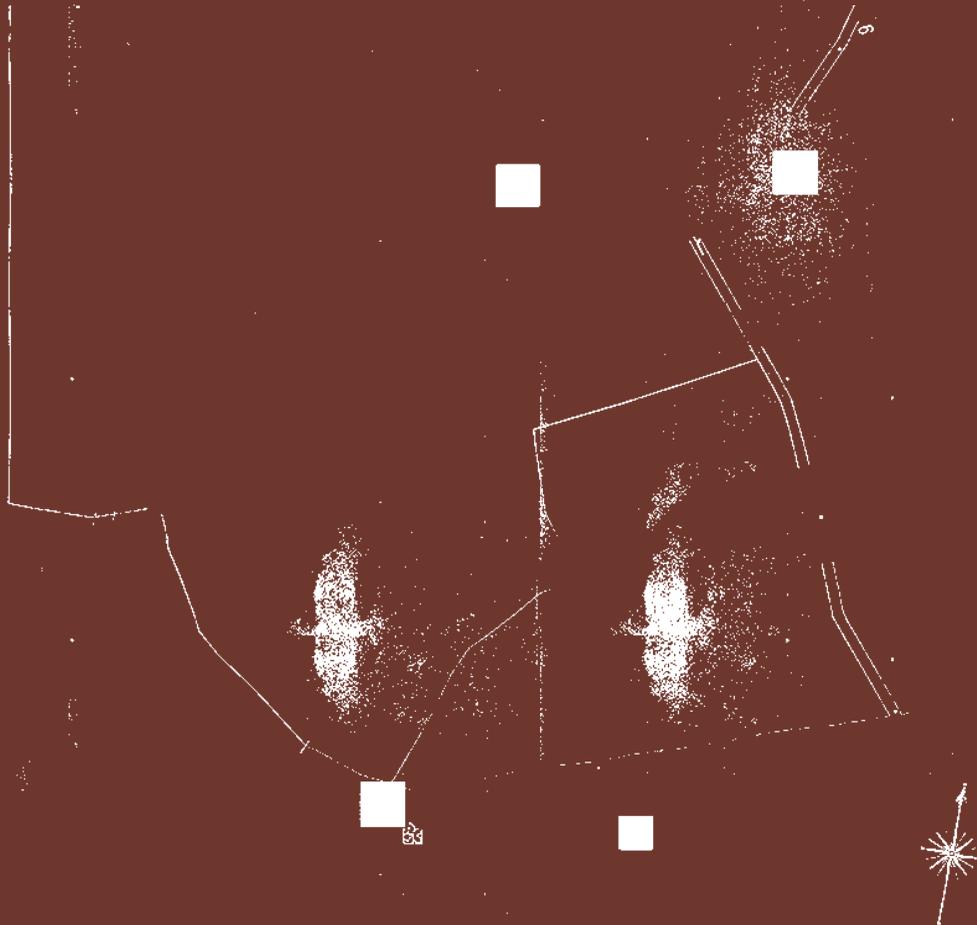## Ungathering: AI generated text and Fabulation In Action
Promoting Fabulation — Sludge, Sycophancy and Surprises
"Interventions" Workshop, Copenhagen, Denmark, November 2024.

In our third workshop, we started from design briefs produced by a popular LLM, ChatGPT, which was prompted with notes from prior workshops, research topics of the participants and a request to use imagine how different emerging technologies could be deployed to solve issues of healthcare, intergenerational care, environment stewardship, and so on. The briefs were polished, plausible and promised tentative solutions to complex problems.

What hides beneath the shining polished surface? Can we imagine beyond solutions presented convincingly? Can we contest them, respond to them?

North Stars and Tactics for Fabulating

Carrier bag = a physical bag that has tactics, North Stars, seeds, and blank cards, that will help groups fabulate.

North Stars = relations between things (people, humans, non-humans) that serve as compasses for reimagining nordic care in a designerly way. As with every relation, they contain tensions that we can explore and unpack during the workshop. Closer to topics, domain areas or matters of concern.

Tactics for Fabulating = methodological commitments or prompts that can help steer and disorient the fabulations.

North Stars

1. Communities of belonging along difference
2. Making space for forgotten memories
3. Becoming hyper-local with herbs and seeds
4. Moving rivers and mountains
5. Childhood and the sustaining of generations
6. Hunting (traces and trials of) witches
7. Bodies of joy and cyclical well- being
8. Temporalities of waste
9. Regenerating species and nature
10. Breathing systems and nurturing infrastructures
11. Beyond the nation and state (of)____

Tactics for Fabulating

Fabulate-with difference

1. Start from something that you only partially belong to
2. Where does the periphery begin?
3. Give control to someone else for a while
4. Instead of empathy: affinity, sympathy (with trouble)
5. Not more-than-human, not less-than-human. We are all compost
6. Form alliances across difference
7. Find unquestioned answers
8. How could you know about _____ differently?

Fabulate-with the past

1. Create language for hope for the future
2. How will the ancestors talk to our future children?
3. Preserve difficult problems
4. Care for those in the past
5. Bridge nordic modernity with ancestral forms of care
6. What horizon are you considering? Shift it
7. Hope is a form of relation to the future Create a language for it
8. The future is a river
9. Rename something
10. Unname something

Fabulate-with the everyday

1. Large journeys begin with a single step
2. There is no journey Only routine
3. What would we make if we didn't need to consider scale?
4. Make your dream very very small
5. Embrace the everyday mundane
6. Futures are built from the present
7. Speculation without the spectacular
8. Playful actions lead to joy, pleasures
9. Find a place for inaction

Making Fabulations

Fabulations can be stories, worlds, or troubled/ing acts of imagination. But how can these speak outside of the sites where they were produced? How can they travel? This section presents materialisation tactics we have seen made and remade at the Nordic Fabulation Network workshops, offering possible dimensions to represent or portray potential routes to materialising fabulation. By materialising, we mean that stories and worlds sometimes need objects to travel alongside them to make them legible absent a storyteller. These objects act as carriers for unfolding narratives, offering coordinates for a larger design story and design space, creating waypoints for discursive journeys.

This section offers accounts of collaborations in situ as possible directions to think with, post hoc reflections on strategies that seemed to work in certain ways, abstracted to try to find something more general in them. To prescribe means of articulating narratives feels both limiting and somehow beside the point: traditional design representations or prototyping are neither necessary nor sufficient for successful fabulation. Rather than proposing this set of articulations as exemplars of how fabulation should be, we offer them as examples, sited representations of how we developed stories into things as part of this series of workshops.

Deriving from the projects and fabulations occurring in our workshops, these materialisations can offer dimensions to think along. In design more broadly, we may speak about "fidelity" to describe the representational strategy of a prototype, alluding to an imagined future product or artifact. A fabulation may also represent an imagined alternative past/future/present world. But for fabulation, representational success, or fidelity, comes from something other than material quality. Rather, we think it is the fidelity of the world-building process, the stories, concepts, perspectives and troubles we entangle in world-making and how that entanglement points at openings, and breathing space for ideas that matter. What travels is the mode of thinking, of sharing and relating, not the final material. To us, these representations are tactics, not methods—**situated strategies for making.**

Conjuring device

A board game offers a set of rules to play through an ideological or theoretical agenda. It casts participants as players, and makes them perform and enact fabulatory thinking directly. As a proceduralisation of thinking, it casts participants into the logic of a fabulation, scripting them to interpret rules that structure their relation to a board, a setting, and way of thinking. The board game is active and participatory, and the players can be authors of the game or not. In either case, the stories that are told from the game are as important as the representation of the conditions that the board game embodies.

Anja Neidhardt-
Mokoena

Marisa Cohn

Martin Abildgaard
Padalak

Tom Jenkins

Reflection by Marisa

We had the prompt to consider how design could better engage with the past and started out by considering through our different projects, how the past was banished from design and technocratic projects. The artifacts that our own research inhabits and engages with ranged widely from scientific software to agricultural drones to design museums. Fabulating with the past was a challenge for us as it prompted many questions such as whose histories are absent, where might we make room for the past to reside? Speculative practices and processes, often oriented towards the future can sometimes be a part of the way that the past is banished or abandoned, in the move to reimagine and think beyond our present. The pasts we might want to engage in our design practice are absent not for lack of imagination but because they have been discarded, erased, broken or effaced. The past is not sparse or limited. In a sense asking ourselves to fabulate with the past is like asking how to bring back old growth forests while standing in a carbon capture farm. And so we decided that instead of figuring it out for ourselves, we might open up to the possibility that the past has things to say, and that we should simply find a way to listen.

There was a resonance with the other artifacts made that day. One, in particular, was also a listening device for hearing non-human worlds and species, a kind of telephony based internet. It seemed to come from a similar space of fabulation, that is if we want to work towards more-than-human design practices maybe we first need to listen to the more-than-human. Ours took a similar approach that the past merely needs to be granted a way to speak.

We decided then to make a conjuring device, borrowing from ideas from cartomancy, scrying, and spirit boards. We considered this a kind of way to meta-fabulate in that we might first make the conjuring device and then apply it to one of our projects to see what the past had to say. To make the board we added imagery from each of our projects and also from collaging materials that also spoke to futures - sustainable futures, urban design futures. We looked for images where

tropes of "the past" were already poking through as well as images where the future seemed to arrive in a monstrous all consuming way. We each had a corner of the board to develop. One corner depicted how software itself and digitalization reaches out and creates a monstrosity of the idea of adaptability and change which can consume other patterns of continuity. We had an all-seeing eye of the drone that promises a god's eye view but also erases other forms of tactile knowing. We found an image of "green corporate man" who existed in a urban modern surrounding and placed him as the "hanged man" who is part of an upside-down-world where sustainability means green roofs on high rises. We found an image of the ox and its plow, technologies that are yet to be made obsolete. And in the middle we placed the image of a plastic water bottle, which acted as the conduit, defining a liminal space. The water bottle, which came from Anja's work, conjured both the industrial excess of plastic waste, as well as an object that does not belong in a museum but is placed there solely as a means of sustaining its workers. And then we spun the bottle.

To create a conjuring board requires at least a few steps, presented here in reverse order.

The event of conjuring happens when you engage in an act of chance and then read the results through a means of manteia - obtaining knowledge from what is unseen, in this case the pasts which are present but have been submerged or made voiceless. This can only occur when the people participating in the reading are able to arrive in suspension of any disbelief that the device is unable to speak. Sceptical observation, in critical mass, is a form of non-use that has a way of undoing the effect.

The act of conjuring will require you to summon a gathering in which you designate roles. The querent will select the question. The medium will act as the conduit for the conjuring. This can be one person or several depending on the manteia device chosen since some are cast by a single person and others are held jointly to see where they "land" or "point". The interpreter will "read" the results of the interaction with

the board. Interpretation can belong to the querent, to the medium, to a third person, or be done collectively.

You will eventually need a device for interacting with the conjuring board - an artifact that can serve as a conduit between the board and those reading and interpreting the messages received. You will need an object that can be cast, thrown, spun, dropped, or guided around the board in order for a reading to be made. This could be done with casting objects onto the board, moving a planchette or pointer around the board, rolling dice, throwing a dart, dropping leaves, spinning a wheel or top, or hanging a pendulum or other device which will enable the interpreters of the board to engage with it through manteia and chance.

But before you choose this device, you should first make space for the past to speak, and for this you need to create the board itself as it will contain semiotic material for the device to point towards. This is the bulk of the work. This board should be varied enough to provide an element of chance (obviously if the board contains too singular a message you know what answer you will get). Where will you source this multiplicity and how will you organize it? It can help to give yourselves over to the process at this stage, to let the worlding of the board itself be a bit out of your control - it is essential to tell stories while you do this.

For our conjuring board we collaged while talking to each other about our work and our questions . All fabulating methods seem to require and build from the ability to tell stories while you work. We first focused on how to define that space, what would be inside of it, how might it be organized (concentrically around a center point? As rows in a tablet?) Since our conjuring device was going to be flat and laid on a table top, it lent itself well to thinking about boards used for games that are often defined as a territory or fictional map with boundaries and edges, well-known areas, and areas of uncertainty and danger "here be dragons".

Momentary pop-up protective circle

This approach invites others to fabulate alongside researchers. While the board game demands structured, rule-based participation, there is a gentler form of fabulation here. Participants are invited to take part and share in a practice of things operating in ways that may usually not. The performance is a means of exploring the intersection of the world-as-it-is and the world-as-it-might-be, as the performers bring to life a fabulation for others to take part in. A performance invites people to participate in imaginings otherwise and to cast themselves in those worlds—participating in theory, as rhetoric, as practice.

Reflection by Åsa, Kristina and Marisa

In this fabulation we used fabulating as a method of slow science as it applies to the university as a learning environment, by taking up the university as a "legacy technology" for intergenerational learning.

How to understand and problematize the "generational gap" between teachers and students so that it does not serve to naturalize temporal narrative of linear progress, but rather

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Lindström

Marie Louise Juul
Søndergaard

Marisa Cohn

Åsa Ståhl

Lindström, K., & Ståhl, Å. (2016). Plastic imaginaries: becoming response-able stakeholders?. In Proceedings of the 14th Participatory Design Conference: Short Papers, Interactive Exhibitions, Workshops- Volume 2 (pp. 72-73).

Stengers, Isabelle, and Stephen Muecke. Another science is possible. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2018.

as a generative distance between us, an intermingling of heterogeneous temporal stories or shared time in overlapping learning journeys that are different because of what we have lived through and carry with us?

Given that the the imagined "green university" of the site we were at, the IT University of Copenhagen, involves circularity of material infrastructures and goods, how might applying that virtue of "circularity" look like in the way a human life, or learner's journey, is also circular - if we apply it across generations?

In our intervention we used the method of fabulation, telling stories to each other, about our own learning journeys interwoven with academic journeys. We shared challenges and strategies with both high granularity of detail and broader brush strokes, which included how to dare to make bold decisions and how to find strength to grow through vulnerability such as frictions between teachers and students. Furthermore, we used fabulation in crafting a "story" for the intervention which was also an "invitation" (Lindström and Ståhl 2016), that played with the politics of inviting students into the magic circle as a space of learning. One way of doing this was to ask for help; help to split a pumpkin and help to eat an apple.

We set ourselves the assignment that our fabulation of what this intervention was, should aim to perform Stenger's call to "cultivat[e] together with those we trust, an informed art of disloyalty, the art of discreetly dismantling academic habits, of confusing the gaze of the inquisitors, of regenerating ways of honoring what it is that makes us think and feel and imagine." (Stengers 2018, p.132). We took it quite seriously.

The "artwork", if we want to call the ritual circle that, was installed within the atrium of the IT University, a space in which it was exposed to the "gaze" of its main occupants - students - and was aimed to confuse in the sense of seeming not quite to belong. It was "disloyal" by appropriating objects from the space such as chairs, and weaving them together in

ways that disturb the flow. One needed to literally go around it since it was acting like a growing spiral that would aim to catch a student in its web. In addition, we added seats to the woven circle in ways that honored what we value. We allowed our own teachers to take an imaginary seat on the chairs - materialised in different ways. Those included both human teachers and crabs and leaves. What we dismantled was perhaps our own habits of stretching ourselves into the contemporary moment, of updating ourselves, of carrying progress narratives on our backs, as developmental professional narratives in which our newest selves are always better than previous, and relevance to the urgent pressing times that students are living in, is honored to the extent of eclipsing our own net bags of lessons and learnings.

The question of how to be adaptable and responsible to the world we share and inhabit within the present practice of the university as a learning space, is one that requires a new answer. If adaptation is a question of what to continue carrying and what to set down, how do we do that? What if being responsible is not a question of individual performance in a progressivist sense of the individual as a bounded entity, but a question of inviting others into a shared accountability for our learning spaces?

Eirini Kaklopoulou

Enrique Encinas

Lara Reime

Laurens Boer

Sarah Homewood

Vasiliki Tsaknaki

Anchors
Making objects designed to be interacted inside fabulatory worlds helps to build that world up in a bodily way, and offers a means of stepping inside new imaginary practices. These anchors are human scale, imagining human activity that relates the everyday to something new. Making these objects entails making relations between the anchor and its setting, how we imagine it being used, and the observer of the object and its imagined use. Making anchors for use sets the thinking of the relation into the world to be directly performed and examined.

Reflection by Vasiliki
Our group in the Oslo workshop started working with the topic of nurturing Nordic Care infrastructures, health and access to the healthcare systems in the Nordic countries, accessibility and knowledge coming from bodies or doctors/ care practitioners. Then, within this broad topic, we fabulated on nurturing nordic care infrastructures and daily rituals in dental health care and access to that in the Nordic countries ("outside" the broader healthcare system).
We used fabulation approaches (North stars and tactics) on un-naming things, and shifting narratives of naming. We explored the use of local seeds and herbs, playing with self-

care and how to collaborate with others in this very intimate context. We acted out mundane everyday small actions that you could do with the items you could or carry with you. We developed the following story, in the form of a fabulatory world, for which we then developed material prototypes that respond to specific identified issues:

"The figuration of the "dentist" figure as a monster. Narratives of keeping the (…unnamed…) away. Always within reach and always beyond reach. We become the tooth witches of everyday care, moving across horizons of small-scale interventions of self- and collective care. Who has access to dental healthcare in the Nordics? Fabulating with the everyday dental care becomes hyper-local, hyper-ritualistic, and shifts from the "I" to the "we", to being entangled with bodies and nature. Magic potions and recipes from our ancestors and from collective knowledge. Talismans to protect the teeth, lenses to enlarge and zoom into mouths, seed mirrors that invite for sharing care. Using gold, turmeric and mint as natural medicine that shifts norms and horizons of nurturing daily rituals of dental hygiene. Keep your potions and recipes on your belt and exchange recipes and knowledge with others."

We used the shifting horizon of "going to the dentist", i.e. the moment to visit the dentist. We problematized this shifting horizon based on how it can be kept further away, through developing small everyday practices and caring rituals about teeth and mouth, for collaborative dental care, mixing rituals and local healthcare knowledge from different countries participants in our group were coming from.
Developing the fabulation of the "world" proved generative in the brainstorm on different tools and artifacts that could exist in this world. We brought many different materials on our table, and during the process of making and assembling this fabulation we worked individually, in smaller groups, and collectively. For example, one person had an idea about a tool, arising through the properties of a material on the table, e.g. small seeds that were covered in copper which Vasiliki had brought- it was a disassembled part of an old project of

hers- could be imagined to have reflective properties. One person started imagining that copper leaves could be used as a collaborative dental tool, to look at another person's mouth, which led to the second artifact below. "The inside outside". In that way, small materialisations were taking place parallel to fabulating on how this new tool could highlight problematic aspects in this context, tensions, or be used to subvert particular values. In this case, an action that can be considered disgusting (to look inside another person's mouth), becomes a practice of mutual dental (health) care. Then we also performed the artifacts, using our bodies to show and feel how they can be worn, used, interacted with.

We made an ecology of artefacts that reflect our fabulation:
1. A belt with artifacts/tools for dental care that you can carry with you all the time
2. "The inside outside": seed copper leaf mirrors to look at each-other's mouth. (Something disgusting becomes a practice of mutual care). This is a tool to invite someone to this practice
3. "As children bite the pain away, adults bite the stress and the discomfort": bite this bag/material to unclench your jaw
4. "Toothy boundaries and playful lenses": A lens that you can wear to look at someone else's mouth
5. "Healing in the shadows": a floss that prevents cavities. Idea of mouth-guards
6. "Cavity-healing monster": a spiky bead that can be worn as necklace/ when you chew it, it heals your cavities
7. Mouth wash that includes gold to prevent cavities
8. Learning from nature: cavities in nature, e.g. in chestnuts, which we filled with copper
8. A UV light to grow plants and seeds
9. Embroidered talisman with the evil eye- to keep the bad tooth hygiene away
10. "A diary of glitches and switches"
11. Substances that can support a more philosophical understanding of your eating habits

Part 5: Making Fabulations

Fabulating Together

Camilla Mørk
Røstvik

Claudia Nuñez-
Pacheco

Mafalda Gamboa
Nadia Campo-
Woytuk

Diegetic Artifact Ecologies (witch children's book, tote bag, protest)

Fabulation in the context of doing design means that classical design strategies and methods can be used productively for fabulatory worlding. Producing diegetic prototypes helps to convey intention and make a tangible and believable setting rich with history, bubbling with potential for future stories and imaginations.

Reflection by Nadia and Mafalda

The composition of our group highly influenced the fabulation, entangling personal identities and anecdotes, as well as our specific domain knowledge. We knew we wanted to make a fabulation about witchcraft or witches since we had Camilla in the group, who had been the keynote speaker of the workshop, and inspired us about the (perhaps dismissed or erased) history of witches and witch trials in the Nordics. We immediately decided to center our fabulation around the character of a witch who faces a modern-day or even future-day trial. Discussing the language, format, and values embedded in past documents concerning witch trials (such as letters of accusation Camilla showed us), we started borrowing from these documents and imagining and writing a letter of accusation that might be addressed to a witch from the future. We critically reflected on why a person might be accused of being a witch in approx 100 years, and Camilla retold how people were often accused of being witches in the past just because they were 'outsiders,' they were strange in some way, they disrupted the norm. We fabricated the character of an immigrant from the global south who immigrated to Norway and faces racist accusations of having tampered with the snowfall and accelerated climate change. As Claudia, an immigrant from the global south herself, was very interested in research threads concerning otherness and nomadic practices, we conceptualized the witch as a nomad, moving around from country to country and living in a portable house, like an expandable shell on her house. Thus, The Snail Witch became the fictional character central to our fabulation.

In order to tell the story of the witch, we made a collection of artifacts and showed them as an exhibition. You can piece together the story via the collection all together, not so much from each individual artifact. We made objects that portray the normative narrative (from the eyes of the oppressive force that accuses the witch), the official and legal narrative, and objects that also reflected perspectives of resistance and solidarity towards the witch. the counter narrative, the protest and activist and cultural, the glimmers of hope, the people and community coming together to support the witch, even books getting written about it.

Our exhibition brought the story of the Snail Witch to life through a collection of crafted artifacts. We began with the letter of accusation, inspired by historical documents Camilla had studied, which included words in a foreign language that the witch used to describe her house—highlighting her "otherness"—and was dated according to an alternative calendar with a 13th month, hinting at the possibility of (maybe positive) change in this distant future where superstitions had diminished. A news article simulated a "neutral" journalistic perspective, but subtle biases in its wording revealed a quietly negative portrayal of the witch, echoing modern media tactics. We also created protest merchandise, including a tote bag and poster featuring a linocut "Snail Witch" logo, showing the hopeful activist dimension to the story. To represent the witch's supposed "crimes," we displayed a small amount of real snow as evidence. In a short video, Camilla acted as a xenophobic bystander claiming to witness the witch stealing snow, filmed humorously in front of "Free Palestine" graffiti to link themes of climate change, imperialism, and colonialism. Finally, a children's book cover generated with AI imagined the Snail Witch's legacy as a hopeful figure for future generations, showing how her story continued to inspire and endure.

We came to two reflections in this way of designing fabulations:

Fabulations as in medias res: Fabulating arrives already entangled in histories, voices, and myths. To fabulate is to step into the middle of a story that was always already unfolding, where the threads of speculation, evidence, and memory cannot be neatly untangled. Our witch did not appear as an origin figure; she emerged as a knot, already accused, already displaced, already part of a world that names climate change and colonial inheritance in the same breath. Thinking fabulation as in medias res means recognising that stories of the past are never self-contained: they reverberate in the present, and the present constantly rewrites them. Every history begins midstream; fabulation simply makes that condition explicit.

Fabulations as Superimposed Stories: To fabulate is not to choose between fact and fiction but to dwell in their overlapping fields. Like two photographs exposed on the same frame, fabulation produces an image that is doubled yet legible, contradictory yet coherent. The snail witch was both an invention and a historical echo: she carried the scars of colonial persecutions while standing accused of a future catastrophe. We aimed to collect artifacts that would show both how she was prosecuted but also how the community supported her through protest. Both accounts were true, and neither canceled the other. Thinking of fabulation as superimposed stories allows us to resist the demand for singularity: the one official truth, the one authentic record, the one hero story. Instead, fabulation stages a simultaneity where multiple truths rub against one another, generating friction, resonance, and sometimes dissonance. It is this layered truth that unsettles linear history and opens space for imagining otherwise.

Meta reflections on the process:

The presence of a historian in our group was the catalyst for this fabulation. Out of four, the other three of us were designers, used to, and perhaps somewhat disenchanted with the idea of fiction altogether. But the involvement of someone who still found the notion engaging gave us the motivation to dig deeper into her knowledge and how it could be re-appropriated as fabulatory facts. Her vast knowledge of witch trials, documents, and the history of witches in Norway was fundamental to create the superimposed stories. She knew how to guide the construction of artifacts in a way that played onto present-futures.

With the short time we had at hand (just a few hours), we found it helpful to allow ourselves to go in many directions and create a plethora of artifacts which could then be included or excluded from the final collection. This kaleidoscope approach, diffracting into many different stories rather than a coherent one was beneficial to our collaboration.

A Costume: The Snail Witch Dress and Home

A costume invites a performance of the other, and creating costumes for characters in a fabulation works to enliven that identity in our world. Costumes make an identity, and as we all wear masks, we all wear costumes: creating a new kind of costume creates a new kind of person that we can imagine performing. A costume is something that can be related to—there is a person who wears or should wear the costume—and to craft the costume is to correspondingly craft the wearer.

Reflection by Claudia

I was lucky enough to work in a very creative team where ideas and enthusiasm were flowing. The world-building was being nurtured fast; we had an entire ecology of artefacts pointing to the Snail Witch's trial and her fascinating story. But then, where is the witch?

To give some context: The Snail Witch is the fictional story of an immigrant who was accused by the Norwegian authorities of stealing snow to take back to the Global South. Although the witch was used as a scapegoat by climate change deniers, the truth around this charismatic figure was loaded and obscured with rumours, which later on set the foundations for an entire myth.

That morning, I wanted to take some distance to make something. After all, my goal with this Fabulation workshop was to satisfy my (very selfish) cravings to create with materials, as in the design studio. I didn't want the thought process to take over what the hands can do, as they know their own version of how worldmaking develops.

Can we say that hands operate in very mysterious ways?

I didn't have anything in mind. Looking for materials in one of AHO's studios, I came across a pile of grey plastic bubble wrap that seemed like rubbish. I took it back to the gallery, found a corner, and began to work silently to try different ways of putting something together. Something sculptural. A garment. The wearable house of a witch.

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Røstvik

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Woytuk

In interaction design, considerable attention has been devoted to the importance of sketching as a thinking tool. I usually teach students how to sketch, and I stress the importance of using drawings as a communication tool. However, less attention is given to how materials manifest their affordances as we touch them. Making is a dialogue with materials, which is sometimes silent, and even blind, as we cannot see the result until it manifests itself. For those who have worked in the drifting rhythms of the design studio, we know we can let ourselves go.

I sat on the floor, moving this plastic pile from side to side, testing its properties.
I stayed there for one hour. The ground was cold. Maybe two hours...
Marie Louise helped me to find a mannequin. Whatever was happening there, I could wrap my attempts around this simulation of a body. It looked like "something."

And then, the safety pins, bringing the so much-needed punk vibe. Yes, we are talking about an activist here.

And cumulatively, step by step,
The witch was born. The wearable house. A tent and a fashion statement.
A pile of rubbish becomes the basis of a home. A treasure

When I put it on, I felt as if it had a life of its own. Another immigrant from the Global South...

An interesting anecdote: On a different occasion, I co-organised a workshop on nomadic bodies and the objects we carry as foreigners in the move. I had the chance to meet amazing people there, including my now colleague Yenika Castillo. She introduced me to The Vagabond, a painting by the Spanish surrealist artist Remedios Varo, depicting a man carrying his house. When I saw it, something jumped inside; maybe the witch is a time traveller, and has inhabited several parallel realities.

https://www.
remediosvaro.
art/paintings/
vagabundo

Film: Awakening

Film is one of the most culturally dominant media for representing narrative, whether fictional or nonfictional. It combines much of the qualities of scenario with collage, offering a completely engrossing experience. Editing strategies make the unreal seem plausible, even certain, and supported by soundscapes they draw a viewer into the world it represents completely. In the case of fabulation, film approaches offer orienting/disorienting footage that opens the imagination to the matters and context of a future condition. This footage can be narrative, telling a story of the future, or can be associative, helping a viewer to attune emotionally to a domain or setting. In both cases, the formal qualities of film offer a means of creating something that has rhetorical power, and it can invoke both intellectual reflection, empathy, and emotional self-exploration.

Reflection by Anna

With "Awakening" we explored the notion of bodily transitions and liminal phases through the method of fabulation through film as material. The short film (2 min.) was produced within approx. two hours. The day before the film production, Kamila and Siddharth made a flipbook made of coloured paper and ripped images from magazines based on the concept of exquisite corpse. Exquisite corpse is a tool for collaborative creativity invented by early 20th century artists in surrealism. The film imitates this structure of bodies divided into three parts: Head/chest, abdomen area/top legs part, and lower legs part/feet. Taking inspiration from some of the images from the flipbook, the short film "flips" across three human bodies who are all asleep in coffins and substitutes body parts surrealistically with everyday digital artefacts. At some point, the bodies transcend into a dreamy universe where the bodies become entangled further with nature and each other. In the dreamy sequence, three other bodies are represented by their hands across three different generations – a baby, a young woman, and an older man. This invokes a feeling of how vulnerable and at the same time precious bodies are, and that they naturally transition across different life stages.

Anna Brynskov

Kamila Dzierzak

Siddharth Nair

After the dream sequence, the film returns to the exquisite corpse concept, and finally one of the bodies awakens in the coffin, as if waking up on "the other side" of a transitional, liminal phase. The film's soundscape consists of an imperfect but insisting female soprano voice singing the Danish version of "Vem kan segla förutan vind". The song becomes an accompanying friend. It emits the message of how important it is to hold onto your loved ones and ensures that they will meet you on the other side of a solitary, bodily liminal phase.

We chose film as material because of its communicational and poetic qualities. We wished to make the audience audiovisually experience the vulnerability but also strength of bodies in transition. We also used the fabulation to communicate the proposal that future technologies pay attention to supporting human beings and their environments through difficult liminal phases, and not only promise perfection, optimization, and immediate 'cure'. The approach of fabulating allowed us to encapsulate a more dreamy, whimsical, and sensitive atmosphere.

Letters to/from the future

The letter is direct, it sets stakes down in the world. It asks the future how it is going; it tells a story of how things were before. Many of the making strategies for fabulation are implicitly a story of a time capsule, perhaps eliding how change was made and how futures were formed, enacted, and collaborated to create with one another. The letter brings together today and tomorrow; the concerns, fears, and dreams of the current world; the hope for an unknowable future.

This fabulation consists of two parts: An heirloom balcony garden box and a letter to a child of a future generation. The fabulation springs from the solarpunk, futuristic commercial "Dear Alice" by Chobani, in which the titular main character reads a letter written to her by her grandmother. The commercial and letter present a utopian future, where farmers and technology work in symbiosis, and where the importance of running a (capitalist?) business somehow co-exists with the notion of care and community.

In our version of the letter, we move from a utopian future to a protopia, focusing on small, incremental changes, compatible with the more solidly established infrastructures and constraints, such as population density in metropolitan cities, limited garden spaces and such.

Henriette Friis

Mai Hartmann

Tom Jenkins

Letter to the future:
Dear Vera,

So this balcony garden is yours now. It is limited and it can't promise you self-sufficiency, but a harvest is valuable however small it is. If you look after it, it will provide homegrown glimmers forever - it might even save you a supermarket trip now and then. Remember that some plants need help to survive winters and generations, treat them well and reserve parts of the harvest for replanting. Share your bounty, propagation brings prosperity and a plant only grows larger from being shared.

The plants in this little garden have contributed to family recipes for generations. These recipes are yours to do with what you want. There is reverence in keeping them relevant, changing ingredients does not take away the tradition and intention. The soul of these recipes are the tables they are served on and the people who share the meal.

Our job is to plant seeds so that our grandkids can enjoy the fruits. So eat well Vera, and keep planting those seeds. Because how we eat today feeds tomorrow.

Love, Grandma.

Reflection by Mai
When creating this fabulation, we collaged and stitched together nature imagery, crops, wild flowers and plants onto a trellis along with two footprints of the daughter of Mai. Adding this personal memento to the fabulation and further addressing the letter to her, made the fabulation feel intimate, vulnerable and very much real.

Outro

Outro

Why care? Why does care need interventions? Since the project started, until now, the world has been changing dramatically. Larger digital transformations have started permeating different aspects of everyday life, with AI hype fuelling a large expansion of cloud services with automation, surveillance, and "compute" sliding further into domestic spaces. In the Nordics, the futures and presents of care increasingly include digital technologies, robotics and preventative surveillance technologies.

The promises are tempting, in that technologies can indeed be solutions to problems formulated according to the current conditions of care. Or how we have formulated care to be. But we may be optimising a form of care that may not be sustainable in the long run. When all the costs are saved, care time has been optimised, where do we go? When we remove humans, automate care, individualise responsibility for care, who are we caring for, and who or what cannot be cared for in these ways?

This is why we sought to create trouble in the seemingly untroubled waters of technological imaginaries for care, according to whom we will all be cared for in effective, efficient, humane ways by benevolent technologies—once we get through the issues of ethics, governance and bias. This logic seems inescapable, and any attempt to challenge it seems irrational. Unless we shift towards fabulatory thinking, where we allow ourselves to be irrational and think outside the boundaries imposed by the futures already set for us. By whom? For whom? And for what purpose?

To do so, we gathered a group of researchers and designers engaging in topics of care, health care, intergenerational care and environmental stewardship to understand how exactly the topics we concentrate on are defined and articulated in our research. What have we achieved? We cannot claim to have uncovered novel definitions of care, but each materialization, each north star, each tactic and manifestation points at ways of thinking about care differently, providing openings that we found generative in imagining forms of care for bodies, environment, intergenerationally, across time and space. In these materialisations of forms of care, none includes AI, prediction, or personalisation. Instead, if we don't put these explicitly on the table, designers and researchers choose to articulate forms of relating to one another, to themselves, to the environment in rich and varied ways via senses, textures, and games. In the end, once we structure workshops around fabulation instead of techno-solutionism, researchers do not invent technology, but invent instead creative ways of relating, of playing the boundaries of relationships, stretching them across time, or making them very close.

The speculative fabulations presented in this book differ from other forms of doing design, even in speculative or critical modes, because they include an explicit element of mapping, an analytical step, in order to surface and articulate aspects implicit in our ways of thinking, the narratives that animate our habits of doing design. We call those aspects Gatherings, where we gather and surface narratives, figures,

stories, and values that we may not have been aware of. These approaches are heavily inspired, copied, and remixed from strategies which Science and Technology Studies, participatory, and post-humanities scholars have developed and applied in their fields.

In performing this mapping, we privilege post-qualitative forms of engaging with data and traces of reality. With diffractive sharing and mapping rather than attempting to create a model of reality, our aim is to intersect the aspects of the present, current events, spaces, theories, values, with one another and find alternative ways of tackling the issues.

All practices we share in this book are meant to be done in groups. Rather than thinking that a single person can see their own bias, a hero story, we do the mapping together. The composition of the group will partly determine what figures and stories are brought forth. Additionally, the practices in this book are meant to be accessible to practitioners, academics, and students of all levels of experience with critical analysis, or with design. They may look like play, and indeed they are playful, but the outcomes are serious. We have shown how costumes, anchors and conjuring devices can be useful to engage participants in imagining otherwise, structuring conversations in ways that explicitly steer us away from pre-defined, pre-packaged futures and societal ideals. It is only where we start to remember, to imagine, and to cultivate alternative, forgotten, perhaps never really invented or fully formed ways of caring and relating to one another, human and non-human.

A book must contain an ending, but the task of reimagining care does not. Use what you want from this book and leave the rest by the wayside. Remix everything—or contest it. Learn what works for you, and for those you care for. But in that process, don't let any stone remain unturned, or let your imagination of care be constrained by the logics of the present. Keep expanding and learning about who you care for, and how you might care for them, and keep opening yourself to being cared for in return.
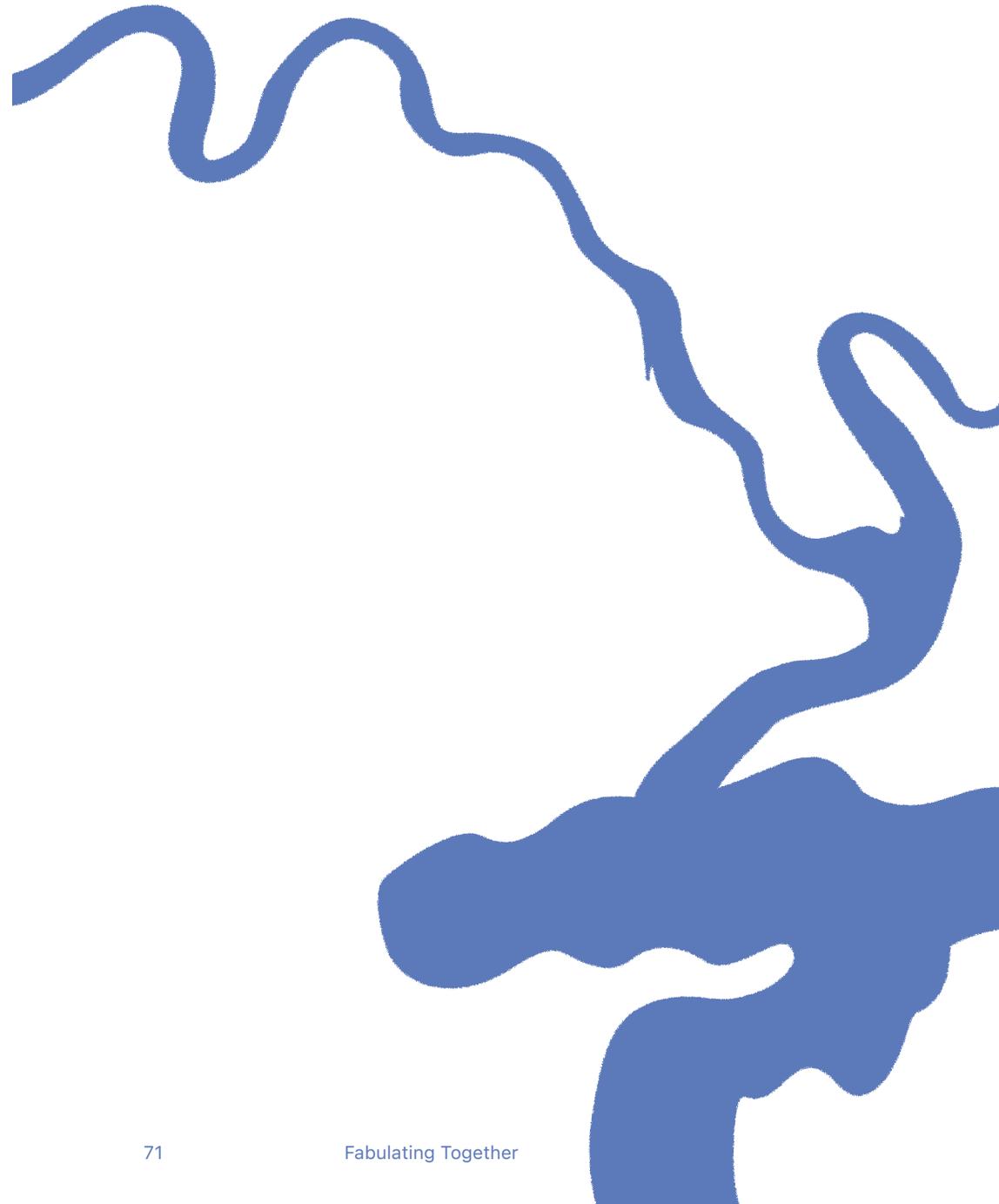
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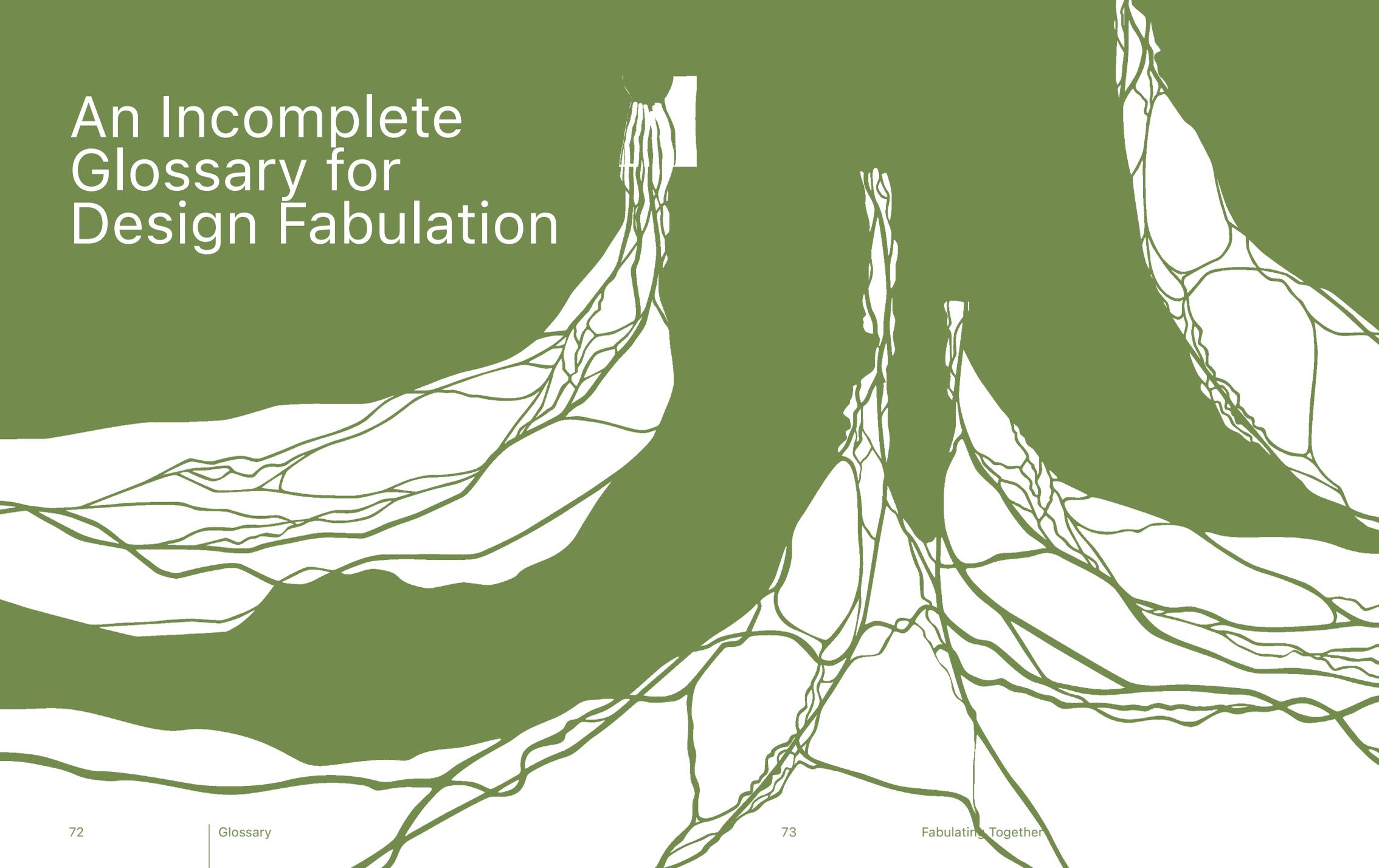
Accountability: We are accountable for the stories we tell and reproduce in our design work. Choosing to fabulate instead of conducting design work that reproduces harmful assumptions and power dynamics can be an act of **Reponsibility**, of worlding otherwise, of creating ethical possibilities for pasts, presents and futures.

Arpentage: A form of collective reading aimed at building a shared understanding of theoretical subjects. Useful to gather theoretical foundations of fabulation by inviting participants to read fragments of texts on fabulation. Results can be any form of networked arrangement of theoretical concepts and quotes from texts. These can be used for developing fabulations more directly connected to specific theories or concepts. Stimulates rhizomatic thinking and free association of concepts. **Care** must be taken to carry some of the context of the text, making sure it is not lost, which can be done through discussion.

Bodies: Human, More-than-Human, bodies of **Knowledge**. Always porous within and without **Boundaries**.

Boundaries: Rather than fabulating and imagining in silos, the fabulator makes the boundaries of the design process increasingly porous to many ways of being and points of view. Boundaries are the many ways we look in the seams and cracks, in how things might be different or similar, and in the many ways phenomenally different things overlap. Examples can be boundaries of bodies and environment, of self- or collective **care**. Requires a slow, deliberate process of being aware of, and negotiating spaces (see also **Time**).

Care: Present everywhere, but also very often omitted or generalized. Care worlds produced with Others- human and more-than-human. Needs maintenance, repair and reflexive thinking. Should not be taken for granted.

Center: (see also **Margins**)

Collective: As a noun, a group united by a cause or shared interest. Collects the motivation of the many into shared action.

As an adjective, a coming together. In either case, something that is practiced and created, not existing on its own.

Colonial: A system of domination that produces truth and history. Its narratives, gaps, silences privilege narrow ways of thinking. Pervasive to institutions and habits of thinking, colonialism may well be the site of intervention.

Community/ies: A fiction of uniformity and inter-connectedness. Can be defined internally, by its members, but it always contains trouble and heterogeneity. Or externally, which may do more harm than good. Nevertheless, communities can be strong starting points for fabulating, for if they contain affinity, they may hold the power to move from imagination to action.

Complexity: An acknowledgement of our inability to know it all. Yet, we act from positions of partial knowledge. A starting point for thinking about responsibility.

Courage: A goal to pursue. Stories should foment courage and light fires. The fabulator needs to have courage and be effective at resisting problematic ways of seeing, managing and caring for the world, and engage in the labour- and time-intensive process of imagining and developing alternatives (see also **Hope, Labour**).

Critique: The work of the design fabulator is not only to produce analysis and pushback against current relations that devalue caring, but to actively propose alternate ways of relating fueled by a critique of the status quo (mediated or not through technologies which themselves are both phenomena and apparatus). When using fabulation as an approach to imagining and developing alternative futures, it is not so important how novel, finished or perfect something you imagine and create as a possibility is, but how it aims to critique (or trouble) existing norms.

Data: Data is a particularly powerful type of discourse that gives the impression of mirroring reality almost perfectly,

and as such it can be used to shape it. Data, big data, massive data, and research data. Many factors can contribute towards something that remains unquantifiable, such as: 1) researchers having limited access to phenomena (e.g. secret, proprietary), 2) lack of access to spaces and people and resources, 3) phenomena being fuzzy, difficult to pin down, and describe, such as individual subjective experiences that are difficult to aggregate and compare. Can we find other ways to make these visible? Methodologically, we may need to develop ways of "listening to the silence(s)". We could also focus on finding other ways of engaging with the world, beyond data and representation. Should we un/data or should we instead re/data the world?

Empathy: A process and state that can only be acknowledged by the receiver. Instead of empathy, use affinity and sympathy (with trouble). Can we fabulate in relation, together with Others, out there? Whose Others? Porousness: creating ties and relations. Sharing control and authorship (see also **Boundaries**).

Ethics: (See **Feminist Care Ethics**). Tightly interconnected to the relation to power and hierarchy of humans and more-than-humans, e.g. how to communicate with multi-species (see **Power**).

Fabulation: One of many existing approaches that offers a set of techniques and orientations for developing alternative futures, focusing on storytelling: what stories we want to tell and what stories we are consciously omitting telling. It has ties with Science and Technology Studies (STS) and feminist technoscience, oriented towards alternative forms of critical and radical **worlding**. Fabulation has also been gaining ground in design research within HCI. It is not "one single and specific thing", but it can be seen as an approach of thinking, making, relating, and being which has strings and ties to many different concepts, theories, literature, critical and design traditions (including but not limited to design futuring, speculation, science fiction, string figuring, Afrofuturism). It foregrounds absent or neglected relations when imagining

alternative lifeworlds. It places less emphasis on designing/imagining technology and more on social and cultural relations, political tensions, and power hierarchies among human, non-human, environmental, and technology co-existence. It is not so important how novel, finished or perfect something you imagine and create as a possibility is, but how it probes, critiques or troubles existing norms/values.

Feminist Care Ethics: Considers ethics as always relational, contextually and culturally embedded.

Figuration/Figure: The tension of Hydra and the Crone as two figures of reproductive labour and **care**. The figure of the Witch reminds us of local knowledge and thinking otherwise. The healthcare system as the figure of the Monster, always within reach and always beyond reach. Find hidden figures in problems: reveal them.

Future: Connected to the **Past** and **Present**. A useful fiction, but needs to be used with caution, for it influences the present. Do not evaluate the future on its ethics, but rather on its effects in the now. Take over the future with imagination and care (see **Care** and **Feminist Care Ethics**), for it will influence the present (see **Hope** and **Time**). The future is an argument. As such, imagining futures is a foundation for the present day. We can subvert prevailing future narratives by drawing on alternative histories and forgotten visions from the past.

Gaps: When we think of how humans and technology (in the broad sense) relate and interact with one another, we should also discuss the relationship between e.g., global standards of health and personal stories of menstruation and chronic illness. What gaps are there in global data flows, and what should we do about them? What would it mean to fill the gaps? Or perhaps we should widen the gaps and create silences? (see also **Scale**).

Hero: They solve a **Problem**. A sometimes-useful oversimplification. Look for heroes in the **Margins.** Look for counter-heroes. Read the Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction by

Urula K. Le Guin, where she shows that the Hero story often centers the perspective and knowledge of those who are at the **Center** and hold many privileges (see **Margins**).

Hope: A form of relation to the future. It can have different temporal scales (see **Scale**), i.e., hope for today, hope for the next century). We need to create a language for hope. Hope, like **Scales**, should be troubled. Hope is experiential. When you evaluate the things you build and imagine, which **Horizon** are you considering?

Horizon: (See **Time**). What is the horizon of the **future** you are creating or imagining?

Human: (See **More-than-Human**) an abstraction of humans, ever-shifting and evolving across time and humans' relationships with other humans, more-than-humans, and with tools and technologies (see also **Future**). Who is the Human, and who is included/excluded from this? (see **Boundaries**).

Inaction: "I would prefer not to." Inaction can be ethically grounded. Going against the grain. Related to civil disobedience. Are we too blindsided by the need to act? We need stories to exemplify inaction as a virtue. A design team was hired to redesign an urban garden, but they left it untouched, believing it was already perfect. Was this a failure to design, or a success? Can we celebrate inaction, if it is ethical? How to do so in our practice?

Indigenous: something other and foreign, or native and ancient (see **colonial**). A label to use with extra care, with attention to the assumptions it carries and reproduces. Indigeneity may foster a closer connection to the places and ecosystems that we inhabit (see **Nordic, Local**). Becoming knowledgeable about the herbs, nature, culture, land of a country that is not your own can perhaps be a way of becoming native.

Infrastructure: Hidden systems undergirding our assumptions and what is possible. Infrastructure is durable up to a certain point. Use it as a backdrop. What does infrastructure do? What is durable, and what can change? What does durability mean? (See **Restoring**).

J

Knowledge: What is the role of knowledge? Always look for the things you do not know, those that have been omitted or overlooked. Knowledge is constructed based on the phenomena and apparatuses that are available to us. There is not one objective knowledge. What is the knowledge that we de-prioritize (e.g. what is not funded by institutions, and where do we not look?). We reflected upon our role in perpetuating silence(s), and the fear of failure if we embark on "risky" research (see **Data**). Knowledge is situated and often comes from the body (within) (see **Body**). Exchange knowledge with Others.

Labour: It is important to acknowledge the labour involved in fabulating. As nothing is "given" when crafting alternative lifeworlds, and when putting to the fore narratives that escape predominant norms, one can feel exhausted. This can also lead to losing **Hope**, or **Courage**. Developing an **accountability** of such feelings and mental and bodily states, for the individual fabulating and/or for a group fabulating collectively is important.

Local: (see **Scale**) Possibilities for everyday mundane actions in the "here and now", everyday care, moving across horizons for small-scale interventions of self- and collective care. When something becomes hyper-local, hyper-ritualistic, and shifts from the "I" to the "we", to being entangled with **Bodies** and **nature**. Fabulation and storytelling can be mobilized towards articulating alternatives ways of knowing and caring, across different scales. This can be used to problematize the notion of local knowledge (see **Indigenous**).

Margins: Make sure to highlight voices from the margins, who are typically excluded from conversations about the center/dominant/canon. Instead of looking at the **Center**, what **Future** visions are missing, excluded or peripheral? These could be past future visions that never got to be, or that were forgotten or ignored. Counter-examples of **Center** future visions manifest utopias of how futures could be different, including different ideologies, values, and intentions for change. We changed **Center** to **Margin** (and **Care**); proposing not a stable fixed center, but a plural patchwork of caring utopias from the margins that embody resistance to the dominant forces.

More-than-Human: Animals, technology, organisms, nature. The "rest." This framing of entities is imbued with **Ethics**, **Power**, and hierarchy, especially when viewed in relation to humans. Do we sometimes use the notion of the more-than-human to represent many different things we do not have a good understanding of placing them in one big basket? More-than-human is full of trouble, for the term **Human** is a shifting and narrow term (see also **colonial**). Can be used as a placeholder that allows us to see things from another perspective. Part of a constellation of terms, including non-human, posthuman, and to different epistemologies. Once the more-than-human is embraced as a placeholder, discussions can revolve around the Pluriverse, as an approach/viewpoint/stance towards the world, which already encompasses the idea of "other than human persons".

Narratives: Complexity is always there, and the elements are not presented as either good or bad, anything can come up to the surface. There is not a "good" narrative. A fabulation can work with the relationships of multi species multi-environment polyversal thinking through elaborative narrative building, in which different actors, human, non-human, technical, spiritual, ecological and environmental, merge, blend, swim, fly, and traverse this polyverse. Every artifact, installation or system has narrative potential. Predominant narratives can be shifted through un-naming, among other tactics. Look for inspiration in narratives and materials, both locally and in different countries and cultures.

Nature: A term used to separate human lives from the lives of others. We are here, they are there. The split is made to make alienation seem natural—We are of them, they are of us.

Nordic: A polite fiction based on geographic convenience. An identity that emerges in relation to elsewheres. "Nordicness" is hard to grab a hold of. Is it a country club? Is it a coincidence? Mountains, forests, water, welfare states, wealth, whiteness? More than this, surely. But possibly not. At least, a context and situation for speculating how **care** works from "here".

Nurturing: An individual and collective effort to develop the conditions for something. Start in the present, learn from the past, and aim for inclusive futures. Nurturing Nordic **care** infrastructures of health, means access to the healthcare systems in the Nordic countries, accessibility and knowledge coming from bodies or others, e.g. doctors, plants, (non)local cultures.

O

Past: Connected to the **Present** and **Future**.

Present: Connected to the **Past** and **Future**. You are here.

Problem: Identify for whom a problem is a problem. Fabulation is useful to work with the complexity of the multiple "problems" and their **Boundaries**. Seeks to reclaim design from a capitalist problemist framework. Rather than attempting to solve them with one big **Solution**, think in ways that allow to explore several options (especially if problems or stories are framed with the Hero story, look for the counter-hero); often we can see better and more from the **Margins**, therefore other perspectives and knowledges are needed (see **Knowledge**).

Power: A pervasive relation that produces specific disciplines, narratives and truths. Always present, therefore never ignore it (see also **colonial**).

Q

Responsibility: (see **Accountability**). Related to our ability to respond to the world in all its **complexities**, accounting for **more-than-human agencies**: a response-ability (ref. Haraway) This is also predicated on our ability to forge relationships with the world.

Restoring: To restore, we could stop designing (see **Inaction**) and focus on **Undesign/Unmaking** and abolitionist approaches (e.g. "let humans die out" was also discussed). Relates to co-living with Others (see **More-than-Human**).

Scale: Information and communication technologies are used across all scales (from individual bodies to global networks) and indeed they in many ways produce and link said scales conferring power to those who control the flows at a larger scale. Think of the liminal spaces of scales. This may mean reflecting on the ways that different forms of **Care** relationships intersect with and draw from each other across scales. Examples: how do church and state forms of care influence each other; or how are these reproduced in everyday care relations? And vice-versa? How is global policy enacted and affected locally? Where is the meso? Subvert scale, invert scale, create new ones.

Surveillance: Knowledge is often invoked as a pre-condition for caring. Researchers do it all the time: "We need to know more about a vulnerable **Community**". Care and surveillance become closely intertwined when we equate one with the other. This dynamic is visible in how states invoke the need to care for their citizens to justify implementing national security and social surveillance, a practice historically extended to colonized and occupied territories. It is also seen in eldercare agencies, which use the promise of independent living to justify constant monitoring through sensors and cameras, blurring the lines between providing support and maintaining control. Can we care without knowing, without surveillance?

Sustainability: The notion of **Restoring** should replace "sustainable/sustainability", as the latter is often used to justify maintaining the status quo, as seen in the concept of "sustainable development." The focus should instead be on actively restoring what has been damaged or depleted.

Time: (see **Horizon**) We relate to one another through time, whereas analysis of relations (think of actor-network theory for example) focuses on the present mostly. Think of relations across different time **Scales** when designing. Our relations are never fixed, but always evolving. How does your action/inaction change the relations of the actors you care for, across time?

Undesign / Unmaking: A design practice that is not only of adding the new and more, but of re-enlivening, maintaining, repairing and caring for the aftermath of that which has already been made.

V

Worlding: Collaborative, ongoing process to think about how multiple, interconnected "worlds" are co-created through a **complex** network of relations that involve not just humans, but also other non-human species, technologies, and the environment.
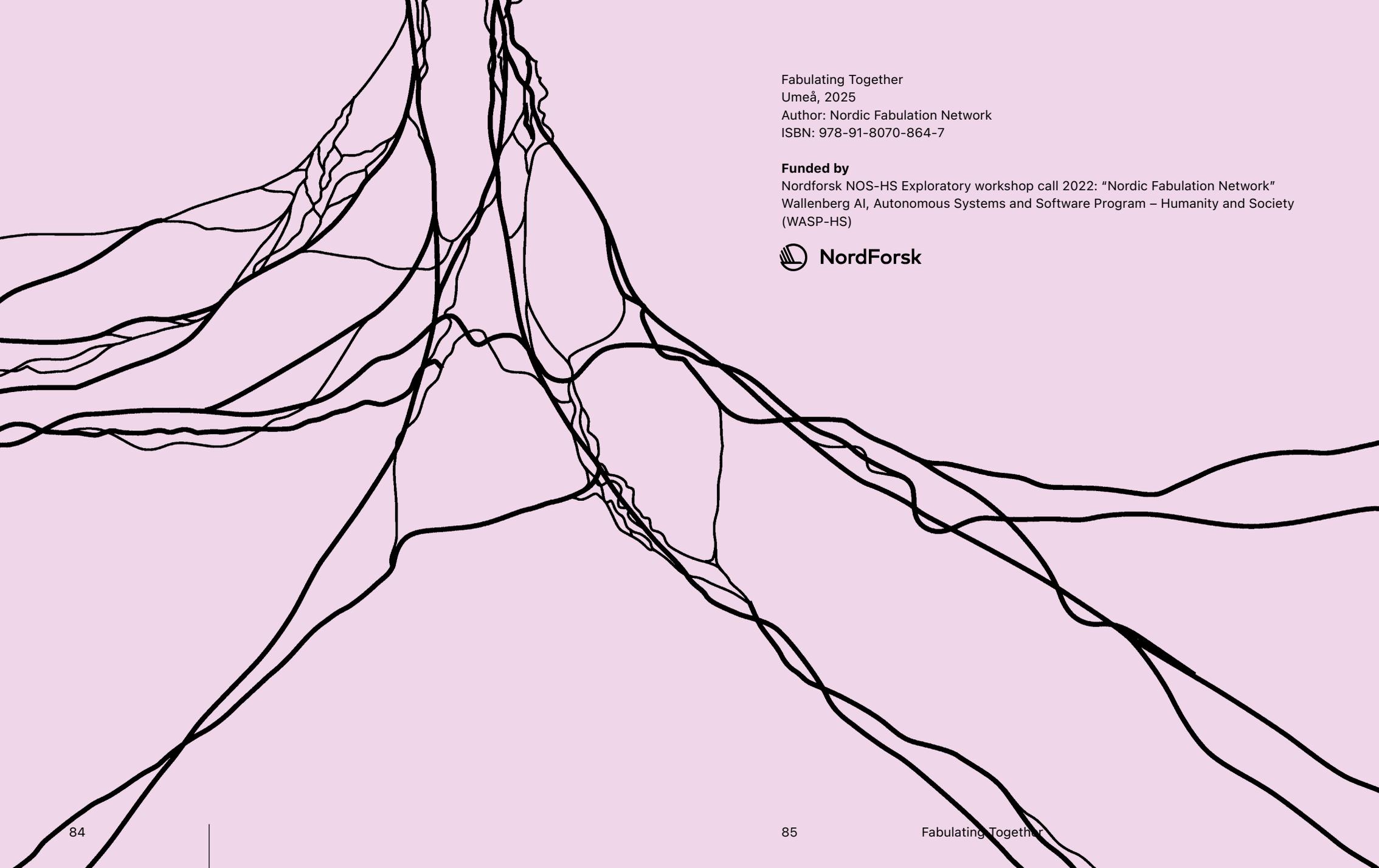
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