

Master's Thesis – Master Sustainable Development

# Experiencing Nature in Food Forests in Utrecht

Building connection, affect, and emotional attachment with the more than human world



*Figure 1 Example of Forest Garden, n.d.*

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## Summary

Food forests can serve many functions, one of which is addressing nature estrangement in (semi)urban environments. The problem of nature estrangement is not so much caused by technology, urbanization, or even having less contact with nature, but by over-rationalisation, objectivization, suppressed emotions, and anthropocentrism. To reshape our relation to nature we must first change the way we think about and perceive it. Therefore, I sought to answer the following question: *in what ways can experiences of nature in food forests in Utrecht provide opportunities for creating connection, affect, and emotional attachment with the more than human world?* To answer the research questions, I first conducted a literature review to explore the various theories and debates about the influence of environmental aesthetics on the perception people have of nature and their encounters with the natural environment. Somewhat simultaneously, I started working in a food forest near Utrecht. Through these personal experiences working in the natural environment, I could apply the theoretical concepts I had learned and build a framework from that, and guide my literature review based on my new understandings of the food forest. Lastly, in order to see if I could make the framework useful and applicable to others, and try to gain further insights to deepen the framework further, I conducted three focus groups. In these focus groups I attempted to share my insights in a way that would enable the participants to engage in emotionally meaningful encounters with their environment. Through the focus groups three main criteria or circumstances were identified.

To conclude, the imagination framework I used was useful in facilitating emotionally meaningful encounters with the more than human world. In addition to the framework, focusing on fostering ‘**openness**’ and ‘**willingness**’ in **designing** or shaping encounters with nature, proved essential for making these encounters successful in creating connection, affect, and emotional attachment. This dialogical aspect of the encounters, being both open to receiving and communicating on nature’s terms, and the willingness to take an active role in exploring and reaching out to the environment, demands a great deal from the people concerned. Therefore, special attention to how the design of these encounters can invite and aid in creating respectful, autonomous, and safe experiences is required. Only when these criteria were upheld and fostered was there an opportunity for creating connection, affect and emotional attachment with the more than human world around them.

**Key words:** Human-nature relationships, environmental aesthetics, food forests, imagination

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## 1. Introduction

A food forest is a diverse, perennial garden that mimics a forest ecosystem and patterns in nature. In recent years there has emerged more of a focus on food forests and forest gardens in (semi)urban environments. Research has shown that they can act as a way to both produce food closer to the consumer, combat pollution and excess rainwater, increase biodiversity, and improve social cohesion. (Riolo, 2019; Verbeek, 2019). Additionally, they can serve another function in providing valuable and accessible opportunities to address nature estrangement in a (semi)urban context through, for example, the more complex physical structure and biodiversity. This “stimulates the sense of wonder, exploration, curiosity, and observation” (Riolo, 2019, p.11). This aspect of food forests is important because, the way people’s relationship with nature is described nowadays (especially in Western and urban areas) tends to be one of alienation or estrangement, both on the individual and societal level. The narrative is that past generations were closer to nature and that we have become disconnected due to modern developments such as urbanization and technology (Dickinson, 2013). For example, in an article from *The Guardian* (Monbiot, 2012) it is lamented that since children nowadays spent more time indoors and behind screens it is less likely that they will care about the current destruction of the natural environment. The article mentions multiple statistics on how much, or little time is spent in (‘wild’) nature now compared with a few decades ago. In this way, nature is seen as something from which we have recently fallen and need to return to (Dickinson, 2013).

However, this way of looking at our relationship with nature is not necessarily conducive to restoring it. The assumption that past generations were closer to nature ignores the long history of environmental degradations and disconnection, thus creating a less-than-ideal point to ‘return to’. Additionally, the attempts to solve this estrangement usually include providing people with more encounters with nature. Adults are encouraged to spend their free time outside, and when it comes to children this can be done through school trips or activities. These activities often rely on a natural science lens and involve naming practices. An example of this would be striving for students to remember as many names and properties of plant species as possible (Dickinson, 2013). While these activities can create embodied and sensory experiences, their reliance on science, cataloguing, and naming, creates distance and downplays emotional responses or connectedness with nature. As a consequence, the emphasis in these practices is on objectification and consumption (Parsons, 2018). Furthermore, a lot of attention is placed on ‘pure’ nature and spending time in forests or nature reserves. Nature is a concept that means many different things to many different

people, but often, in the Global North, it is defined as something external to, or existing independently from, the human world (“Definition of Nature,” 2023: *nature*, 2023). This deemphasizes the nature that is around us in everyday life and that we come in contact with on a more regular basis (Brady & Prior, 2020). These modified natural environments can range from the patch of flowers or grass in front of your house to city parks, communal food forests, and the kitchen garden you keep in the backyard. By focusing on these more everyday instances of nature encounters we can move away from the idea that where humans are there can be no nature. Indeed, since many have a rather narrow idea of what ‘nature’ is, at least in many Western countries, it has been proposed to use the concept of the ‘more than human world’ when discussing relationships to natural environments (De La Bellacasa, 2017). More than human “speaks in one breath of the nonhumans and other than humans such as things, objects, other animals, living beings, organisms, physical forces, spiritual entities, and humans” (De La Bellacasa, 2017, p. 1). This more all-encompassing scope can help move away from the dualism that puts humans and society in one box, and nature, devoid of humans, in another box.

Additionally, Dickinson (2013) argues that “the core issue lies in how psychological, interpersonal, and cultural practices promote disconnection in the first place, creating the assumption that nature is something outside of humans who suffer from decreased contact with it” (p. 328). The problem of estrangement from the more than human world is not so much caused by technology, urbanization, or even having less contact with ‘nature’, but by over-rationalisation, objectivization, suppressed emotions, a decreased sense of place, and anthropocentrism. What is most important is not what people do during these encounters with the more than human world but the mindset and assumptions underneath. To truly reshape our relation to the more than human world we must first change the way we think about and perceive it (Chang, 2019; Dickinson, 2013). As Cronon (1996) describes: “To protect the nature that is all around us, we must think long and hard about the nature we carry inside our heads” (p. 22).

For that reason, in this research, I want to look at how we can change the way we think and engage with the more than human world so as to make it a more engaged relationship. Though the design of food forests often already invites a more engaged encounter with the environment, extending that engagement to all kinds of everyday nature requires a better understanding of how we can influence our response to the more than human world. In order to do so I will make use of the concept of environmental aesthetics. Aesthetics refers to the science of sensory cognition and multisensory responses (Brady & Prior, 2020) and is

concerned with the ways aesthetic experiences are part of everyday life. It deals with how aesthetic responses emerge through people's perception of qualities of the world and how relative goodness or relative badness is ascribed to certain parts of the world. For example, we might look at a fallen tree in a park and think of it as unordered and messy when compared to the visuals of the rest of the park, not noticing all the insects and fungi that have made it their home and the ecological value that brings. When it comes to environmental aesthetics it looks at the active engagement between self and environment through ordinary, everyday activities. This focus on both the material reality of the environment and how it gets interpreted in people's minds makes aesthetic experiences well suited for exploring how encounters with the more than human world could be made more engaged and meaningful.

Aesthetic experiences are often dismissed for being too subjective or too difficult to measure and are thus not considered alongside ecological, cultural, historical, or economic values when discussing landscape states (Brady, 1998). Yet, individual aesthetic experiences, though grounded in their own particular contexts and backgrounds, are not only private expressions of taste. Aesthetic judgments and aesthetic values are often based on, practiced, and developed in a public context (Brady & Prior, 2020). One example of this is the status of the grass lawn in some parts of society. Having a well-maintained grass lawn indicates status, since not everybody has the time and resources to maintain a lawn like that, and tells others that you are a good neighbour, because you show them that you take good care of your own property (Weigert, 1994). Additionally, the power of aesthetics can be used both intentionally for a certain goal, and emerge unintentionally in the unexpected consequences of our collective and cumulative aesthetic decisions (Saito, 2010). Aesthetics are, for example, frequently used to further a political agenda. Think of the argument against building wind turbines because they are considered ugly and would ruin the aesthetic experience of a landscape. Thus, improving our understanding of how aesthetics influence how we make decisions or relate to an environment is necessary to ensure that the influences our aesthetic responses have on how we shape and perceive the quality of our (collective) lives are appropriate (Saito, 2010).

Aesthetic valuing of the natural environment has so far been mostly absent from (fieldwork) research on human-nature estrangement. This knowledge gap is especially apparent when looking at modified natural environments that are not classified as 'wilderness', where most of the human population encounter 'nature'. A modified natural site that can shed light on these aesthetic responses are food forests. Instead of focusing on 'wilderness' this research will focus on the 'wildness' we can find in modified natural

environments, specifically food forests in the area of Utrecht, as sites for encounters with the more than human world in (semi)urban environments. Since aesthetic valuing lies at the heart of how we respond to our environment, or any changes in it, the aim of using this concept in this research is to come to understand the mechanisms that underly these responses and the ways in which focusing on, and knowledge about, aesthetic experiences in modified natural environments can address western society's estrangement from 'nature'.

### 1.1. Research question and societal relevance

Thus, the research question is: in what ways can experiences of nature in food forests in Utrecht provide opportunities for creating connection, affect, and emotional attachment with the more than human world?

- SQ 1: How can knowledge of environmental aesthetics and aesthetic valuing of the more than human world be used to create a framework that facilitates emotionally meaningful encounters with the more than human world?
- SQ 2: In what ways do encounters with the more than human world in food forests influence or disrupt the aesthetic responses to the landscape state?
- SQ 3: Under which circumstances can encounters with the more than human world in food forests create connection, affect, and emotional attachment with the more than human world?

In answering these questions this research aims to understand the ways in which our view of and connection with nature and the more than human world could be altered in such a way as to promote a more engaged relationship. This is not only important for people's individual well-being but is instrumental in building a more sustainable society as a whole by critically examining, and exploring ways to change, the distanced and extractive relationship upon which our understanding of the natural environment is built. And maybe, by shaping encounters with the more than human world in a way that encourages connection, affect, and emotional attachment, our transition towards sustainability is more likely to take into account the interests of the more than human world, and, hopefully, be more just.



## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Research site

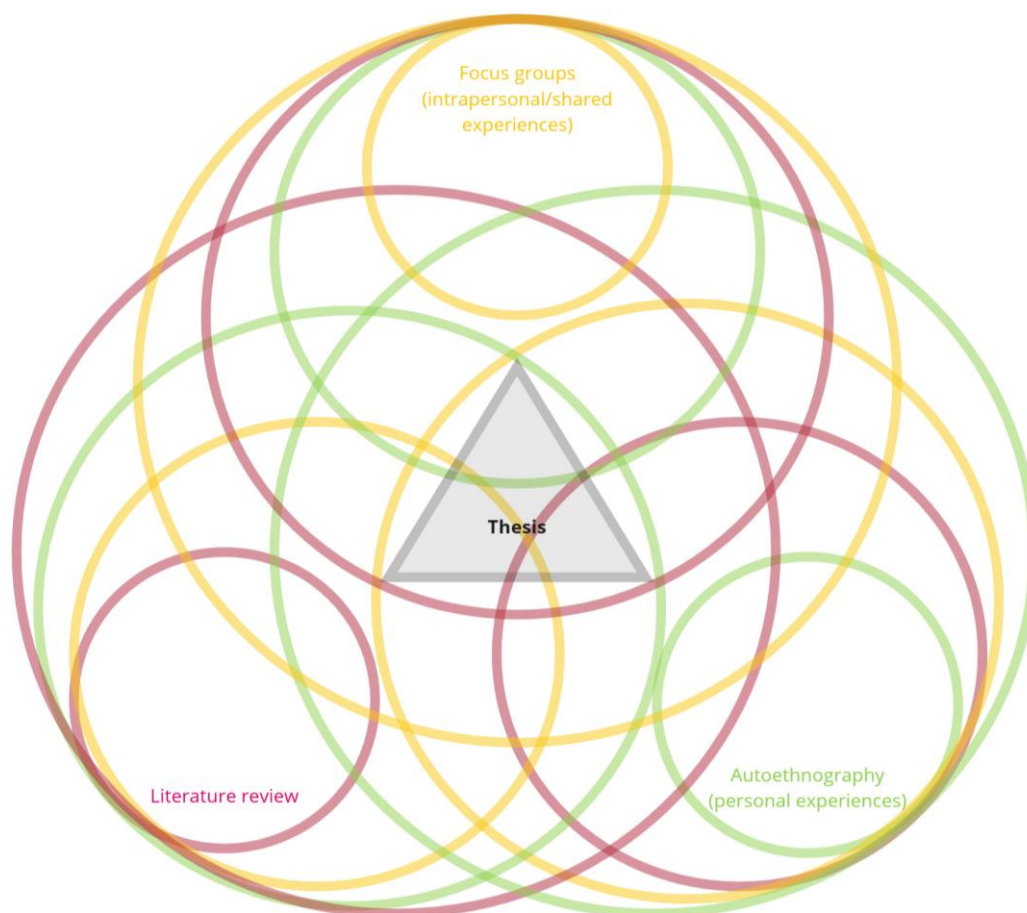
The main sites of the research are two food forests in the area of Utrecht, one near Maarssen (Voedselbos Haarzuilens) and one near Driebergen (Natuurplaats Binnenbos). They are similar in size (4 and 5 hectare respectively), but have different approaches. Natuurplaats Binnenbos functions more like a regular farm with regular farming practices, though they are open to the general public through an appointment and work with organisations like Leger des Heils. However, the aim of the food forest is not to become profitable but to serve as an example for alternative farming practices for farmers in the surrounding area. Additionally, the site is used by both Leger des Heils and Naburen to invite vulnerable people in our society to help on the land and enjoy nature (*Over ons | Natuurplaats Binnenbos*, 2022). Most of this work happens in the vegetable garden, which is also present on the land of Natuurplaats Binnenbos. Voedselbos Haarzuilens functions differently in that they allow their subscription members to come pick and collect fruit and vegetables themselves at different times in the year. Their subscription members mostly consist of various local restaurants and chefs (*Lekkerlandgoed*, n.d.).

Both sites can be classified as ‘modified natural environments’ in the sense that they are not true wilderness but still provide more opportunities for actively interacting with the more than human world than other (semi)urban environments. I chose this as my research site(s) in order to be able to spend considerable time in a place and get to know it, while also being able to work there and interact with the materiality of the environment. In this way, this research would not become an entirely cerebral endeavour, but would also be grounded in (my own) practical experiences.

I worked as a volunteer at the food forest at Natuurplaats Binnenbos for about one day a week between January and June. The work consisted of helping Kaat, the project manager of the food forest, with planting new plants, pruning the grass around small plants to provide them enough light, monitoring the health of the plants, sowing seeds and watering them, putting protection material around vulnerable plants, and various other activities. I visited Voedselbos Haarzuilens more sporadically since they were not looking for volunteers at the moment. On average I visited about once or twice a month and spend my time walking or trying to figure out if I could eat certain plants or not.

## 2.2. Research strategy

Given the research subject and the type of research questions, I realised that I would need research methods that were suitable for exploring existing theories about human-nature relationships, personal experiences with environmental aesthetics in food forests, and ways of sharing the insights gathered with others. To be able to achieve this, three methods were used: literature review, autoethnography, and focus groups. However, because each sub question, building towards the main research question, would be influenced by both previous and new insights, it was important that the methods used would be able to be brought in conversation with each other. Additionally, since the research topic (and subject to a certain extent) includes not only people but the more than human world as well, a research approach was needed that takes into consideration the difficulties that can come with that. So, the choice for a diffractive research approach was made, since engaging in diffractive research comes from the understanding that doing research is necessarily a way of interfering with the world. The researcher not only affects the world, but is also affected in equal measure (Mellander & Wiszmege, 2016). It works from the idea that knowledge is not produced from a distance, but by interacting with and from within the world, it is something that emerges through disruptive processes. Diffraction presumes that objects or subjects do not simply exist, but are continually enacted by practices that are social, cultural, and material. The goal is not to create a reflection of a phenomena, but the record of a passage (Haraway, 2000). Therefore, the research uses a diffractive approach that mixes literature review, autoethnography, and focus groups (visualization figure 2). So, instead of a linear research process, in this research the different methods used were meant to interact, influence, connect, and merge to create an understanding of the underlying patterns of environmental aesthetics and responses in modified natural environments.

**Figure 2***Diffraction Research Approach**2.2.1. Literature review*

The literature review focused on knowledge and perspectives on (environmental) aesthetics and human-nature relationship from various disciplines and backgrounds, with the main goal of coming up with a framework that could be used to help design and shape encounters with the more than human world. The literature review was conducted throughout the research process. However, the purpose of the literature review evolved throughout the months. In the first phase of the research the literature review was the main research method and there was a heavy focus on building a preliminary understanding and framework that was to be assessed during the second phase. During the second phase the literature review was less of a focus and used as a means to adjust the framework in response to findings from the fieldwork and autoethnography. Then, during the third and fourth phase, the literature was used to help interpret and place the findings in the greater theoretical debate. An overview of the different

research phases can be found in figure 3. Relevant literature was found through both searching the UU catalogue in WorldCat for relevant terms and using a (restrained) snowball and citation search. During the writing of the proposal a tentative start set of papers was identified through searching for keywords. These were then used to look at the reference list and the articles that cited the paper in order to find new relevant articles. After reading through either the abstract or the entire paper I decided which were relevant for my research and included them (Wohlin, 2014). However, to keep the data collection manageable and within the scope of the research, the sampling rate was limited (Lecy & Beatty, 2012).

### 2.2.2. *Autoethnography*

Autoethnography is a research method that takes methods of conventional ethnography and applies it to the experience of the researcher themselves. It is “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis et al, 2011, p. 273). With ethnography the aim is to study and systematically analyse a certain community with the goal of gaining a deeper understanding of a group’s shared culture, conventions, and social dynamics (Gobo, 2008). Ethnography uses several related methods, such as personal and continuous contact with participants, following them in and focusing on their daily lives, observing, and listening to what is going on, and asking questions. In the end the researcher produces a richly written account that recognizes the irreducibility of human experience (O’Reilly, 2009). Autoethnography builds on this further by making use of personal experience to illustrate how cultural experiences are shaped/changed, and, in the process, makes these cultural experiences familiar for both insiders and outsiders. The advantage of this method is that it allows for articulating both what we know and what we do not know, thus enabling the discussion and debate to continue moving in conducive directions (Dauphinee, 2010). It is an opportunity for writing transparently about the discovery process of doing research and situating the research as an interested participant instead of only in an observer role. As with conventional ethnography the data collected with autoethnography consist mostly of written (thick) descriptions and reflections. To be able to write a thick description is to be able to “create a rich, contextualized description of an event to increase verisimilitude and transferability of the findings” (Freeman, 2014, p. 827). With autoethnography the credibility, validity, and generalizability of the accounts largely rely on the credibility and ability of the researcher. For example, the ability to write about their findings in such a way that gives readers “a feeling that the experience described is lifelike,

believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true” (Ellis et. al, 2011, p. 282), and the ability to write unfamiliar experiences in such a way that it speaks to the readers, are crucial for writing a good autoethnographic account.

In this study, I worked and participated in the food forest at Natuurplaats Binnenbos, and used these personal experiences to gain a deeper understanding of the way environmental aesthetics play a role in our connection to the more than human world. The data collected consisted mostly of journal entries based on experiences working in the food forest. These entries were made up of short notes jotted down during or immediately after visiting the research site, or took the form of longer, written-out narratives of observations and conversations. These entries were used to help discover and test findings from the literature review by providing an initial analysis and connection to theory within the specific context of the food forest. As Freeman (2014) puts it:

We see, and understand, in contexts – physical, emotional, geographical, political, personal, social, cultural, and historical. We do not employ contextual features to organize our seeing, rather we see within the multiple spaces that come alive and are brought forth in the complexity of existence.

With the help of my autoethnographic accounts I was able to experience which parts of the theory resonated and came alive for me while working within the materiality of the food forest.

### 2.2.3. *Focus groups*

While autoethnography as a method is useful to personally explore the various ways in which aesthetics play a role in my connection and relation to nature, the aim of this study was to find ways in which this could help create connection, affect, and emotional attachment with the more than human world for people other than myself as well. To do this the autoethnographic accounts had to be put in conversation with both the relevant literature and the experiences of other people. In order to place the data gathered with the autoethnography approach in conversation with others, multiple focus groups were organised.

Focus group research is useful for collecting (qualitative) data from a small group of people through informal group discussions. Usually, these group discussions are about a specific topic which makes it useful to collect data from multiple individuals at the same time (Wilkinson, 2011). An advantage of focus groups is that they can be less threatening to many

participants than a one-on-one interview would be. This environment is helpful for participants to discuss perceptions, ideas, opinions, and thoughts with peers in a socially oriented environment. Furthermore, the sense of belonging to a group can help create a sense of cohesiveness which can make participants feel safe to share information that they might otherwise not have felt safe to share. Lastly, an important part of the data collected is about the (spontaneous) interactions that happen between participants, which you would not get through most other research methods (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

For this research focus groups were used at the end of the fieldwork period in order to test and further expand the initial framework and understanding that was developed during the earlier stages of the research. The focus group consisted of seven participants who got together three times in the month of May. During all three focus groups participants were asked to do an imagination exercise with the help of an audio recording (appendix A). Afterwards, during the first session, they were asked to write down their thoughts and reflections on the exercise. The second session started with a collective moment to reflect on the experiences of the first session. At the end of the second session another moment was provided for participants to talk about the imagination exercise and how their experiences differ or are similar. In order to collect insights from the participants about the imagination exercise, the third session consisted of discussions in smaller groups based on preprepared questions and a longer discussion with the entire focus group. I will go into the precise contents of the focus groups in the results. The data collected from these focus groups consisted of written reflections by the participants, observations made by the researcher, and recorded conversations with and between the participants. In order to analyse the data a combination of note-based, transcript-based and tape-based analysis was used (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). After every session a short report or overview was made and sent to the participants to allow them to go over the findings. The purpose of this was to provide participants with the opportunity to add or remove certain data, in order to allow them to respond, acknowledge how they feel about what is being written about them, and give them the opportunity to talk back to how they have been represented in the text (Ellis et al., 2011). A more in-depth explanation of the set-up and process of the focus groups can be found in chapter 4.2.5.

### 2.3. Research framework

A visualisation of the research framework can be found in figure 3.

#### 2.3.1. Phase 1

The first phase focused heavily on literature review in order to come up with a preliminary framework and understanding of human-nature relationships and environmental aesthetics within and beyond western theories. At the end of the first phase this framework helped build a list of questions or problems that provided initial inspiration and gave direction to the autoethnography in phase 2. Phases 1 and 2 had some overlap since my work at the food forest start earlier than initially planned. However, this turned out to be advantageous, because I could tailor the literature review to the specific experiences the food forest yielded from the start.

#### 2.3.2. Phase 2

Phase 2 consisted of mostly fieldwork in food forests in Utrecht, and focused on developing ways to incorporate findings from the literature review in fieldwork experiences. These generated new kinds of experiences which in turn informed the literature review that was conducted. This approach was cyclical and diffractive in nature, in that both the fieldwork experiences and literature influenced and disrupted each other, and that the emphasis lied on the discovery process. Based on the findings during the interaction between fieldwork and literature review, design principles for phase 3 were developed and an executable plan for the focus group was worked out.

#### 2.3.3. Phase 3

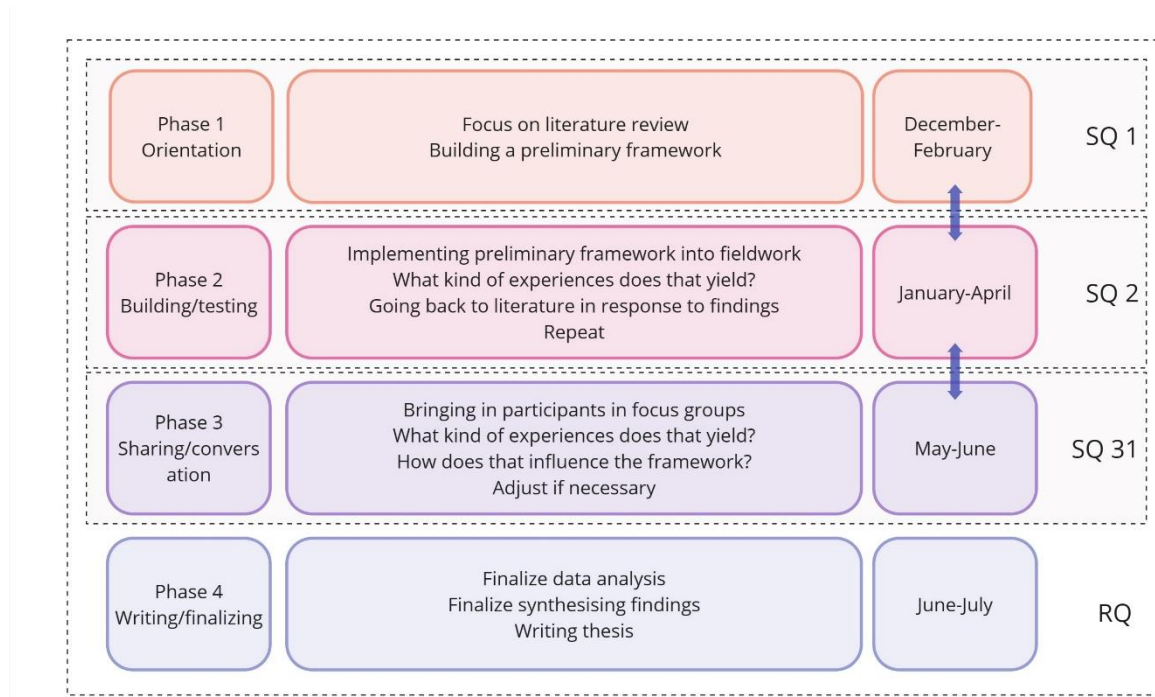
In the third phase the focus was on bringing in participants from outside the world of the food forest. The aim was to explore in what ways the experiences and data gathered so far are conducive for creating opportunities connection, affect, and emotional attachment with the more than human world. Therefore, these participants came to food forest Haarzuilens multiple times during phase 3 and participated in focus groups designed for this purpose. The makeup of this group of participants consisted of people in their 20s. The goal of these focus groups is to bring their experiences into conversation with the data from phase 2 and allow them to influence and disrupt each other in order to let new patterns of experiences emerge.

### 2.3.4. Phase 4

The fourth phase is dedicated to writing and finalizing the thesis, as well as finalizing the data analysis.

**Figure 3**

#### *Research Framework*



*Note.* This represents a somewhat simplified version of the research process with each phase contributing to answering one of the three research sub questions. In reality each phase contributed to the design and actualisation of the other phases and influenced the answers to all the research questions.

## 2.4. Data, consent, and privacy

During the focus groups, data was collected about the experiences and reflections of participants through open conversations and written reflections. The conversations were recorded so that the researcher could listen to them later. The written reflections were shared with the researcher. This data consisted of various things such as personal experiences, feelings/emotions, memories, etc. Participants were made aware beforehand that philosophical or religious beliefs could possibly be discussed.

This data has been stored for the duration of the study. After that, the written reflections and transcripts of the recordings will be kept anonymous for the sake of scientific integrity. The recordings are not saved. The data will not be shared with anyone other than the



researcher. All participants will remain anonymous in the final study. However, due to the nature of the sessions, privacy between participants could not be ensured.

Both Kaat, the project manager of the food forest, and the participants were asked whether they agreed to participate in the research beforehand, and signed an informed consent form. In the informed consent forms the goal of the research, a description of what the research would entail, information about data and privacy, and the rights of the participants were included. I explicitly asked permission from Kaat to be able to use her name and have her be identifiable in the research. The location of the food forest at Natuurplaats Binnenbos was so essential to the experiences I have had there that having to anonymize the location in order to not have Kaat be identifiable would have been a disservice to the research as a whole. The template of the informed consent forms can be found in appendix B.

### 3. Theory

During the first phase of the research process I conducted a literature review focused on both western and non-western knowledge and perspectives on human-nature relationship, with the goal of coming up with a framework and understanding of human-nature relationships and environmental aesthetics. This chapter focuses on the relevant literature I used in framing my own experiences in the food forest, and that helped me design the focus groups in phase 3. The specific framework used and how it relates to my own findings will be further explained in chapter 4.1. and 4.1.1.

#### 3.1. Looking at nature and nature discourses

This idea that nature is something from which we have become estranged is not new, though the consequences of the way our perception of nature has influenced our society and economy have become more obvious in recent decades (Dickinson, 2013; Escobar, 1999). The dichotomy between nature and culture has caused our treatment of the natural environment to be one defined by extraction, consumerism, and passiveness. An obvious example of this would be the deforestation practices that have decimated, or are set to destroy, large parts of the world's forests (Hickel, 2020; LaDuke, 2017). 'Nature' is not valued unless it is useful for extraction of some sort or humanized through some (historical) human act. Think of a field that is deemed important to a community because an important battle was waged there a couple centuries ago. The (natural) site is celebrated, but only through celebrating our own historical and cultural event, not for the sake of the natural environment itself (Saito, 1998b). Even the word 'nature' nowadays has this connotation of being something separate from (western) human society and history (Moore, 2013). Using the concept of the 'more than human world' when discussing relationships to natural environments can help change this perception (De La Bellacasa, 2017). More than human "speaks in one breath of the nonhumans and other than humans such as things, objects, other animals, living beings, organisms, physical forces, spiritual entities, and humans" (De La Bellacasa, 2017, p. 1). This more all-encompassing scope can help move away from the dualism that puts humans and society in one box, and nature, devoid of humans, in another box.

This is further exemplified by the focus on the visual design of a landscape or object (form, colour, or light etc) without taking into account any nonvisual ways the environment might be 'speaking' or expressing itself. Other senses or sensations such as smell (that of the wet earth after a rainstorm) or touch (the smoothness of a pebble in a stream) are not valued equally (Saito, 1998a; Saito, 1998b). This goes back to the (lack of) distinction between

‘wilderness’ and ‘wildness’ in a lot of discourses about nature and our relationship to the natural environment. Wilderness is a place or space that is characterised by the absence of human influence (insofar as that is still possible). These include, for example, nature reserves where rewilding efforts are taking place or certain remote areas in the Arctic circle. Wildness on the other hand puts the focus not on the absence of humans but on the ability of nature to be autonomous. Autonomous in the sense that things occur in the more than human world because of their own self-expression, without relying on human intervention to be able to flourish. The flowers in front of your house will grow and the stars in the night sky will continue to shine, largely regardless of what we do (Prior & Brady, 2017). This distinction is useful in that it allows for the understanding that wildness also exists in urban and populated places, and that this nature is not necessarily any less ‘wild’ than one found in a nature reserve. It also means that by focusing our attention on, experiencing, appreciating, and connecting to the everyday nature we have in our lives, tackling this estrangement from the more than human world might not be such a monumental task as it seemed before.

### 3.2. Environmental aesthetics

Historically, the study of aesthetics has mostly taken place in the field of philosophy and art (history). It is a study focused on human perception and the senses by looking at human experiences involving feeling, affect, and imagination and how these experiences influence the relative ‘goodness’ or ‘badness’ we ascribe to certain things in the world (Brady & Prior, 2020). A well-known example of this aesthetic bias is what is called the ‘beauty bias’, where we typically ascribe good and aspirational traits to people who are considered conventionally beautiful, and do the opposite with people who are considered conventionally unattractive (e.g., Bascandziev & Harris, 2013; Ramsey & Langlois, 2002; Sarwer & Magee, 2006). Generally, when it comes to art, the aesthetic experience is informed by certain features of the artwork and information we know about the artwork or artist. These include the colours used, the shapes being depicted, but also the knowledge we have about what is being depicted (Brady, 1998).

Similarly, as with aesthetic appreciation of art, aesthetic experiences with the environment emerge when actively engaging with that environment through all kinds of everyday activities (Brady & Prior, 2020). However, when it comes to the more than human world and the natural environment there is a less clear inherent direction for our aesthetic experience (Brady, 1998). Objects and subjects in nature are understood to not have an artist that produced them or a context in which they were deliberately produced (Saito, 1998a), at

least in most non-religious and non-spiritual circles. Even when considering a ‘creator’ of some sort, it is difficult to deny that there is a certain level of agency or autonomy in the natural environment that a piece of art does not have.

It is already difficult to collectively decide what a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ way to look at art is, but because of the lack of (clear) boundaries or guidelines when it comes to appreciating natural objects aesthetic value is often dismissed as too subjective and too difficult to measure. Currently, two ways have been identified to frame our aesthetic experience and valuing of the more than human world; the science-based approach and the nonscience-based approach (Brady, 1998). The science-based approach is based on the idea that knowledge of the natural sciences and their common-sense predecessors is a necessity for appropriately appreciating the aesthetics of the natural environment (Carlson, 1979; Carlson, 1981; Saito, 1998a). This approach argues that we must appreciate an elephant or a horse as part of the right category. If we appreciate a horse while thinking of it as part of the elephant category the size of the horse would seem abnormal, which might influence our perception of the animal incorrectly. If we place that which we are looking at in the right category, our aesthetic appreciation would be more appropriate because these aesthetic judgments based on knowledge are more likely to be true, and because it allows for appreciating any object on its own terms and independent from human involvement (Saito, 1998a; Saito, 1998b). This approach is also the basis for many ‘nature programs’ that focus on teaching people scientific knowledge about the environment or natural objects in the hope that this will increase both people’s understanding of, and connection to their environment.

However, as Brady (1998) points out, having that knowledge can certainly be beneficial for expanding the aesthetic experience, but it is not always necessary: “I can appreciate the perfect curve of a wave combined with the rushing white foam of the wave crashing on to sand without knowing how waves are caused” (p 140). Additionally, Hepburn describes the ideal aesthetic experience as

a rich and diversified experience, far from static, open to constant revision of viewpoint and of organisation of the visual field, constant increase in scope of what can be taken as an object of rewarding aesthetic contemplation, an ideal of increase in sensitivity and in mobility of mind in discerning expressive qualities in natural object. (Hepburn, 1984, cited in Brady, 1998, p. 141)

Only scientific knowledge is not enough to comprehend the full extent of the aesthetic experience. Instead of a science-based approach, Brady (1998) argues that (different kinds of) imagination are essential for expanding and enriching aesthetic experiences and appreciation. Imagination in this sense is not something that we are innately good at, but something that is learned and needs to be practiced in order to master. Doing imagination ‘well’ involves seeing aesthetic potential, grasping what it is to look for, and knowing the boundaries of imagination. This builds a framework that makes use of distinctly aesthetic concepts such as perception and imagination and can make aesthetic experiences and values distinct from environmental values like ecological and cultural values.

### 3.3. Imagination, compassion, and practical wisdom

Brady’s (1998) non-science based model draws on our perceptual and imaginative capacities to provide a foundation for aesthetic appreciation of the more than human world. Appreciation of aesthetic qualities is directed by what you perceive, but what you pick out for appreciation depends to some extent on the effort you make with respect to engaging your perceptual capacities. Imagination encourages a variety of possible perceptual perspectives on a single natural object or a set of objects, thereby expanding and enriching appreciation. Brady (1998) identifies four distinct modes of imagination.

First, exploratory imagination is most closely tied to how we initially perceive an object and helps the percipient to make an initial discovery of aesthetic qualities. This can be done by exploring the sensual qualities of an object or scene, focusing for example on what it smells like, feels like, or sounds like. Second, projective imagination involves imagining "on to" an object such that what is actually there is somehow added to, replaced with, or overlaid by a projected image. This involves deliberate "seeing as," where we intentionally, not mistakenly, see something as another thing. An example of this that most people are familiar with is looking up at the clouds in the sky and trying to see shapes in them. Third, ampliative imagination is the most inventive of the modes of imagination and is imagination in its most active mode. It amplifies what is given in perception, reaching beyond the mere projection of images onto objects. Ampliative imagination enables us to expand upon what we see by placing or contextualizing the aesthetic object with narrative images. Brady (1998) gives the example contemplating the smoothness of a sea pebble and how she visualises “the relentless surging of the ocean as it has shaped the pebble into its worn form” (p.144). Last, revelatory imagination. Where ampliative imagination leads to the discovery of an *aesthetic truth*, Brady (1998) calls this imaginative activity revelatory. In this mode, invention stretches the power of

imagination to its limits, and this often gives way to a kind of truth or knowledge about the world, a kind of revelation in the non-religious sense. Again, Brady (1998) gives an effective example: “When my alternative contemplation of the valley, glaciers and all, reveals the tremendous power of the earth to me, a kind of truth has emerged through a distinctively aesthetic experience” (p.144).

There are certain constraints or pitfalls when it comes to using imagination as a framework for aesthetic experiences. For one, not all imagination has the same value. Imagination let loose can lead to manipulating the aesthetic object for one's pleasure-seeking ends. How do you make sure that this kind of imagination does not lead to incorrect or inappropriate encounters? This leads to the question of ‘imagining well’. To imagine well a certain level of detachment from self-interested concerns and the valuing of practice becomes important. This detachment from self-interested concerns means that we do not imagine just for our own enjoyment or pleasure, at least not most of the time. Imagining with compassion or empathy means that it becomes possible to share “others’ joy or satisfaction and not only the negativity of their sufferings or misfortunes” (Li & Ryan, 2017). Engaging with something ecologically means to be able to feel compassion for all life, human and non-human. Compassion is a kind of human ability and sensibility based on ecological ethics, which exemplifies the aesthetic intersubjectivity between human beings and non-human life. For this purpose, Li and Ryan (2017) introduce the concept of *yijing* in environmental aesthetics. *Yijing* parallels the Western concept of ‘empathy’ and signifies ‘the melding of the appreciating (or creating) self with the appreciated (or created) object’. *Yijing* is an aesthetics in which ‘reason dissolves completely into the emotions and imagination, and loses its independent character to become a sort of unconscious or nonconscious player’. *Yijing* puts emphasis on human emotional experience – or internal spiritual expression – and the actualisation of harmonious interrelationships between a subject (person, appreciator, percipient) and an object (scene, element, organism).

The ability to use your imagination is something the majority of people possess. However, it is not something everyone is innately good at, it is something that has to be fostered through learning and practice. It involves knowing what to look for in the first place, being able to see what has aesthetic potential, and realizing when enough is enough (Brady, 1998). This practicing of imagination can, if done right, lead to the revelation of aesthetic truths. These do not always have to lead to a ‘call to action’, but when it does it can help figure out “the right way to do the right thing in a particular circumstance, with a particular person, at a particular time” (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010, cited in Xiang, 2016, p. 54). Xiang

calls this ecophronesis; ecological practical wisdom. Phronesis is a term dating back to the ancient Greeks. According to Aristotle, phronesis is the intellectual virtue, or “the (human) ability to recognize and actualize whatever is best in the most complex, various, and ambiguous situations” for the good; and it is distinct from, but no less than, the other form of wisdom, sophia (theoretical wisdom), which pertains to universal truth. Ecophronesis involves both reflective practice and the ability to improvise so that action is both intelligent and effective.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Developing the imagination framework

In January the food forest Natuurplaats Binnenbos hosted five volunteering days. For these Kaat mainly used her own network to reach out and find people who wanted to participate. Though I had planned to start my fieldwork only in February I decided to attend these volunteering days already and get a first impression of the type of work I would be doing and the type of people I would meet there. Since I started going to the food forest earlier than planned, I had not had time to develop guidelines or questions based on the literature yet. I found this helped me immerse myself in the work without worrying too much about collecting specific data already. Instead, I took my time figuring out what the food forest was all about, what my initial reactions to it were, and what the best way would be to explore aesthetic experiences in this setting.

The first time I came there it looked like an empty field to me at first glance. It is a young food forest still, but even so, because of the size of the plot and how young the plants are it looked like a regular field where I'd expect cows grazing. But walking through it with Kaat and her pointing everything out to me it became clear that there was actually a lot there. And while she didn't remember everything from the top of her head, she took time and care to go over most plants we passed and check their health.

However, the first few times I still got the impression of emptiness when I'd just arrive there. It was only after I started seeing change in the landscape that I knew where to look to make it not seem empty. Suddenly I started hearing more and other birds, and the lack of them before in winter was striking. I saw my first bumblebee queen in early February and started looking out for other insects. Just over a month later, with the temperatures rising, there were bees flying around. The first flowers and buds started appearing in late February already and I looked forward to seeing which ones would be flowering this week.

I find it difficult to determine how much of this was due to the seasons changing - the world with its plants and animals does simply look less alive in winter and explodes with life in spring when everything starts growing again – and how much of it is me learning where and how to look. The youth of the food forest does help in seeing these changes. I already had to pay close attention to the surroundings to see some of the smallest plants, so I noticed small changes quickly. Had the food forest been more mature and the plants a lot bigger it seems to me that noticing small changes spread out over months would have been more difficult to



notice. It was not until I realised that these changes were always happening, regardless of whether I was paying attention or not, that I was able to give direction to my theory research.

#### Figure 4

##### *The Food Forest at Natuurplaats Binnenbos*



*Note.* The photo on the left shows part of the food forest in February. On the right is the asparagus plot and the various plants that surround it, photo taken in May.

I realised I would need to develop guidelines or guiding questions that would help me pay attention to what was right in front of me, to look at both small and big things in the environment, and to develop an emotional attachment to what I was seeing. At first, I spent time trying to look at the environment more intentionally, focusing on all of my senses individually. Additionally, I sought to explore connections I noticed when I was paying more attention to the environment. Sometimes this would involve exploring memories I have of similar environments, or some object would remind me of a totally different thing. However, this did not lead to a feeling of attachment to the environment, it just helped me place it in my head with similar environments I have experienced in the past. Through focusing on my senses and past experiences there was nothing that helped me go further than appreciating from afar, nothing to help me explore a wider variety of perceptual perspectives. In my search for a framework or model that would help me do that I discovered how our perceptual and imaginative capability can be used to provide a foundation for aesthetic appreciation of

nature. I decided to use the non-science-based model of aesthetic appreciation proposed by Brady (1998) as a starting point that would guide me through my imagination in order to develop emotional attachment to the environment. I used the following list of questions that I developed using both Brady's initial model and my own experiences to guide my observations when I went to the food forest.

While thinking of these questions I kept coming back to the concepts of empathy and compassion and focused on the answering of these questions on how sharing others joy, satisfaction or suffering would give me a more emotional understanding of the object. Sometimes all or most of them would be useful and sometimes I would linger on only one or a few. Often, I would go back to a certain object or scene multiple times to see how it changed over time and I would add or remove certain questions based on whether they proved useful or necessary.

#### 4.1.1. Imagination framework

- What am I seeing/noticing right now?
- What am I hearing?
- What am I smelling?
- What am I feeling (hands, feet, face etc)?
- What does this remind me of?

**Exploratory**

- How does that affect how I am thinking of this object/scene?

- Try to see the object/scene as something else (like how we look for shapes in clouds)
  - What do I imagine?
- What would it be like to exist/grow in these conditions or circumstances?

**Projective**

- Why does this look the way it does?
  - What did it look like in the past?
  - How did it end up in this state now, what might its experiences have been like?
- Zoom in or out, how does this change the way the object relates to the rest of the environment?

**Ampliative**

- Have these questions made me think differently about the object/scene? How?
  - How does it make me feel?
  - What has it revealed to me?
  - How has this changed/impacted me?
  - What does it ask me to do or not do?

**Revelatory**

Throughout phase 2 I started shaping and organising my observations and reflections based on this imagination structure. In the following section a few examples of this will be included.

## 4.2. The imagination framework in the food forest

In this section I will give some examples of how the imagination framework has helped shape my encounters in the food forest. These are a few examples of the type of encounters that I thought give a good example of how the imagination framework can help move beyond a purely pictorial or passive lens. In the first two examples I have colour coded the parts of the imagination framework that I am using to make the distinction between the four types of imagination clearer (i.e. the colours in the text match the colours in the framework on page 25). However, in the other examples I have chosen not to do this. These encounters are multifaceted and to some extent the four types of imagination blend into each other in ways where untangling them makes the whole encounter less impactful. This is also the way I used the framework when working in the food forest myself; after I had gotten used to the type of questions to ask myself, I usually did not go over all the questions one by one in the right order all the time. Instead, I sometimes lingered on just a couple questions for an extended period of time, or I did not even actively think about any of the questions in that moment and tried to think of my encounters in terms of this framework afterwards. Through this, I found that neither adhering strictly to the structure of the framework, nor applying it completely after the encounter had already ended, worked best for me. Instead, I used some mix between the two extremes, based on what that specific encounter called for.

### 4.2.1. *Pollarded willows*

There is a row of pollarded willows along both ends of the field, which look familiar. They can be found throughout the country, including the street where I grew up, and usually look very similar. They have rough bark and a thick trunk with many smaller branches shooting up from it. This makes them look stunted and imbalanced. The roughness of the bark and the way they lean away from me over the adjacent water has always made them not feel approachable. Because of their familiarity, I do not pay attention to them at first, they are just part of the landscape, something I have seen a million times before.

It is only after I find some of their roots well over ten meters away while digging and Kaat explains to me how old they likely are that I notice them being present. The realisation that the roots have continued growing while the tree has been cut down every few years for at least 100 years adds to the sense of imbalance I already had. The reason the tree grows the thinner branches so quickly every time they're cut down is that the tree is trying to balance itself. It needs enough leaves to produce sugar to sustain the roots underground. However, the willows will never be able to find that balance because if people stop tending to them the

weight of the new branches will become too much and tear the tree apart. I can already see some willows with massive tears down the middle that look even more like they are about to fall over. It is a dependent cycle and relationship between willow and human, and not one that is even necessary anymore. Historically these young branches would be used to make a variety of products but most of them are not used anymore. Nowadays the reason the willows are still attended to this way is because they are a protected cultural landscape, not because they serve a specific purpose.

Looking at the trees in the neighbouring forest I realise that this is what the willows would look like without human influence, what it would grow to be. I am confronted by the realisation that what I always assumed was the way certain willows grow is actually meticulously altered by humans over centuries at this point.

#### 4.2.2. *Roots*

I never realised how many different looking roots there are. Over the course of two months we have planted more than 4000 plants and none of them had roots that looked the same. Some are hair thin, others thick as my fingers. There are white roots, red roots, brown roots, some roots with a combination of colours, and all of them have a different texture to them. At some point, they will become as thick as some of the young trees are right now. They remind me of rivers and their tributaries, feeding the main river (or plant) and providing it with nutrients. Though, it is not a one-way relationship, in return the leaves of the plant provide the roots with sugar and nutrients as well. So maybe not entirely like a river after all. Every time we had to dig a hole for a new plant to go in the question became how much energy to spend on digging and to what extent it was okay to fold some of the larger roots in order to fit them in the hole. While we struggle to dig our way through the thick mud and clay, I am confronted by the power these roots must have to be able to burrow through them. I might decide where to put them in the ground and in the future decide the shape and way the plant will grow, but the plants themselves decide where to grow underground and we will have no way of knowing unless we dig them up again. It does not matter how we influence the growing of the plants above ground (except killing them off entirely), they will decide where to grow their roots.

#### 4.2.3. *Deer*

The deer are always present in the food forest, even when they are not there. I have not actually seen them at any point, but they are mentioned at least once every time I am there. I

notice their influence on the landscape through their tracks, how they have nibbled on the fresh leaves, and how they used the bark of young saplings to scrape their antlers against. When I first started going to the food forest these signs were not even there and I would just hear about them through Kaat's stories and warnings. They were the reason we had to hurry to put protection material on some of the plants, they would start appearing soon. They exist mostly in my head, I can imagine them standing there at the edge of the field or picking their way through the plants in the night looking for the freshest leaves to eat. I see the marks they leave but I wonder, when I imagine them in my head, am I actually imagining a realistic deer or only my idea of what a deer is based on pop culture.

They are a menace in the way they destroy so many of the plants we have planted with care just a couple of months before. It looks wholly unnecessary the way they have ripped a young tree completely from the ground, roots and all, and it is sad to see plants that are doomed to die with their bark completely scraped off. At first, I kept wondering how they would be able to keep the deer out in a humane way, but after a while I started thinking about the larger area where the food forest is located, where they could go if not here. They are part of the surrounding park and forest, and it is easy to imagine the food forest providing them with some sanctuary from the nearby roads and plenty of young plants to enjoy. There is not a lot of space left for the deer in the surrounding area, with how many buildings, fences, and roads there are. So, while we have to find ways to deter the deer enough to keep the food forest functioning (should we put a fence around the field after all?), I wonder where they will go instead. It must be an existence full of uncertainty. Where are they actually welcome to behave as deer always have?

#### 4.2.4. *Soil*

I always work with gloves on when I am in the food forest. It makes sense because there are plenty of ways to cut yourself, get a rash, or stick your hand into something vile smelling. But it also means that I do not feel the soil when I stick my hands in the mud. On the occasion that I do feel the soil barehanded I notice the slipperiness of it, how much it feels like pottery clay. The particles are so tiny that they are hard to make out. The ground in the food forest consists of a heavy river clay, incredibly dense and strong. And when it has been raining it is most of all incredibly wet and soggy. It is not so bad in most of the food forest because there is grass growing everywhere, keeping the ground together, but when walking to and from the area the mud makes the journey a lot more difficult. The wheelbarrow gets stuck every few meters and if you step in the wrong area your feet slip out from under you. But when the weather

becomes drier the mud goes from one extreme to another. The clay looks completely dried out and has massive cracks running through. I thought the slippery wet clay was hard to dig through, but I quickly realise how much harder it is to try to dig through the rock hard, dried out clay. The weight of it all must be immense, existing so close together, all stacked on top of each other (claustrophobic). But it was not always like this. All these tiny particles used to be part of much larger rocks and only after centuries did enough erode away and travel the long distances to form this soil I am now standing on. What difference there must be between the initial state, the journey by water, and the conditions it now exists in.

#### *4.2.5. Preparation for phase 3*

Towards the end of phase 2 I felt like I had refined the guiding imagination questions enough that they adequately helped me enrich my aesthetic appreciation of the environment. The division of questions in four distinct categories helped with structuring my experiences and guided me towards a revelatory aesthetic experience. However, in order to ensure that the framework is useful, suitable, and applicable for others as well I decided to share the framework with a small group of people in the way of a focus group that would meet a total of three times in order to test and further deepen the initial framework. Additionally, the focus group would serve as a test to see how well my findings so far could be conveyed to others.

The focus group consisted of seven participants who got together three times in the month of May. While designing the focus group I chose to format the framework as an audio recording that participants could listen to while being in and exploring the (food) forest. During all three focus groups participants were asked to do an imagination exercise with the help of this audio recording. In this recording participants were asked to go through the imagination framework step by step, based on the questions used on page 25. Additionally, after having explored the environment and their senses, I asked them to focus on a specific object or scene for the remainder of the recording. The Dutch and English transcript of this audio recording can be found in appendix A. I made the choice to use an audio recording, because this would allow the participants to get familiar with and use the imagination framework, and allow them to walk through the environment without having to look at a piece of paper or stay close enough to listen to me go through the questions. Of course, this does mean that the participants would not be able to hear their surroundings as well. To make sure that all sense would be used during the exercise, the participants were asked to go through the audio recording at least once, but they were free to wander the area without the audio recording after that. The participants consisted of people from the ages of 21 to 26, four of

whom were working either full-time or part-time at the time of the focus group, and three of whom were full-time students. I made the choice to invite participants that I either already knew personally or who I had met at least a couple times before in order to make sure that there was already some bond of trust between me and the participants. I made this choice since the focus groups would only meet three times, and I felt like this would help the participants trust in the unfamiliar process I was guiding them through. However, this also means that this group was not representative of the Dutch population, or even representative of students in general. At this stage in the research I made this decision, because I placed more importance on testing whether a framework like this could be shared and communicated to, and used by, people that were previously unfamiliar with it, rather than being able to make the framework applicable to the widest possible audience. Thus, the choice for a smaller and familiar group of participants was made consciously as to not make that first step from theoretical to practical framework too ambitious, and to have the opportunity to deepen the framework further.

### 4.3. Deepening the imagination framework

#### 4.3.1. *Focus group 1*

Before the start of the focus groups participants were told about the topic of the research and a general overview of the main concepts that would be relevant to them. However, during the first focus group participants were left free to fill in the exercise how they wanted to, as long as they listened to and answered the questions presented to them in the audio recording. This was done on purpose in order to see what participants, who were not used to using imagination as a framing device in their nature experiences, would think of the exercise. As a result, five out of the seven participants said they felt ill at ease with the exercise. However, even though participants tended to be unsure of their own capabilities, a wide range of revelations were collected after the exercise. After the focus group I went back to the various recordings and written reflections of the participants and collected the feelings and revelations that they mentioned. An overview of these revelations can be found in figure 5. In the figure each participant is represented by a specific colour. Though some overlap can be found between participants, the range of experiences and focuses was large. I made this overview after the focus group had ended by listening back to the recorded conversations and going over the written reflections. After making the overview I sent it back to the participants for them to go over and offer suggestions. The overview was seen as accurate by most

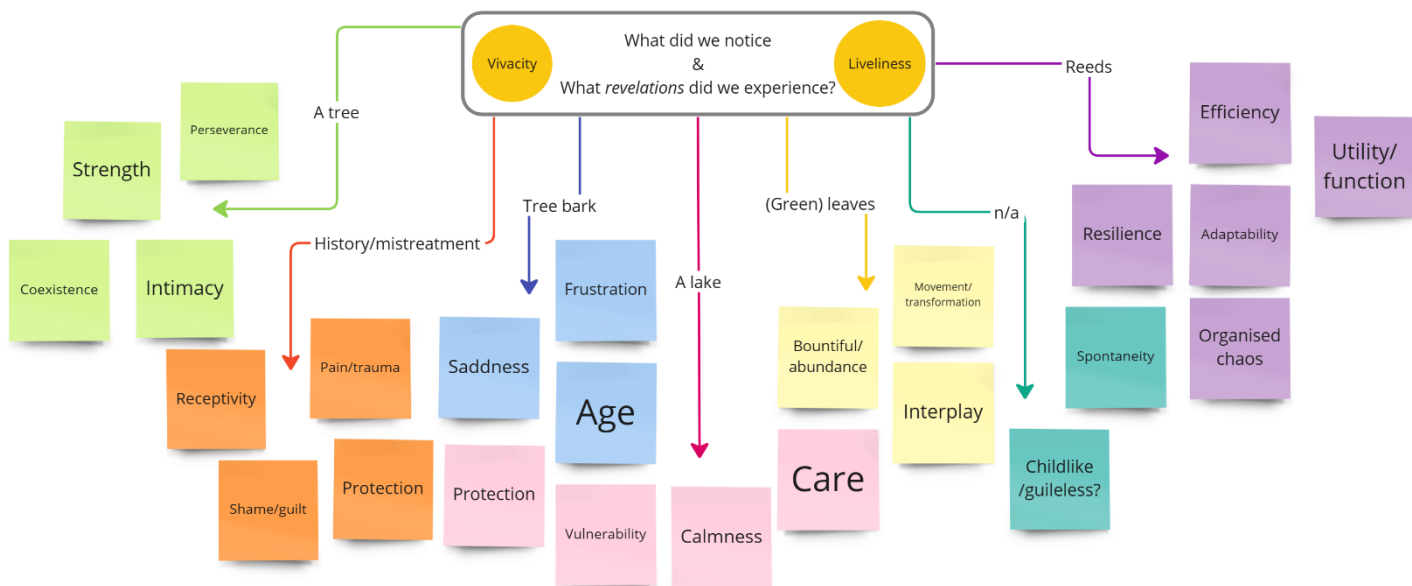


participants. One of the participants reached out to me and asked if we could have a quick chat about her part of the overview. She wrote in her reflections that she struggled with picking a specific object to focus on, so she felt like she had had trouble committing to the exercise fully. As a result, her part of the overview was rather sparse compared to other participants. However, when looking at the experiences of the other participants she felt like she had actually gone through most of the exercise without entirely realising it. Looking back, she could identify several ‘revelations’ she had and that she would like to be incorporated in the results. After including these new additions I sent the updated overview to the entire group again. No new suggestions were made.

An overall revelatory theme among the participants can be found in the focus on how “alive” and full of energy the environment was perceived to be. Especially when looking in or paying attention to places participants usually would not. However, for three of the participants there was also a strong focus on the harm that they could see is being done or has been done to the environment. While the other four participants mostly expressed wonder at this revelation of vivacity, these three were more preoccupied with feelings of frustration or how to protect that which they were seeing.

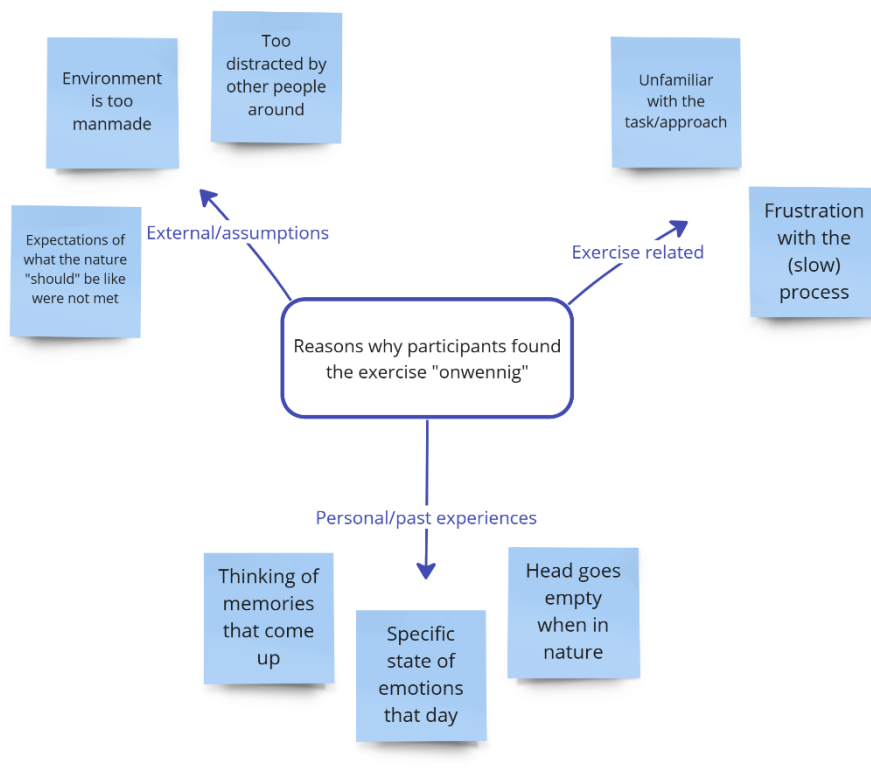
One of the participants focused on the reeds she saw in and surrounding the food forest, first the ones alive next to the path, and later the ones that had been mowed down to make the path. When walking along the path she noticed two reeds, side by side, one of them almost snapped in two. It looked broken. However, when she took a closer look and saw how the wind influenced the reeds, she noticed that the bottom half of the broken reed was still just as resilient as the other ones, moving just as well with and against the wind. Then, noticing a butterfly settling down on the path she was walking on. The reeds on the path were dead, and she assumed that that meant they had become ‘useless’ compared with before. But then, when she took a closer look, she saw all kinds of beetles, spiders, ants, and other insects using the paths the stems of the fallen reeds created to get where they wanted to go. The entire structure made her think of city infrastructure with highways and metro lines etc. This experience helped her appreciate the utility and adaptability of these reeds in whatever state they are in.

**Figure 5**  
*Overview of Participant's Revelations in Focus Group 1*



miro

Most participants also wrote reflections of the exercise itself, rather than only focusing on the contents of the exercise (figure 6). The Dutch term ‘onwennig’ is used, meaning both unfamiliar, uncomfortable, strange, or ill at ease. These reflections help show how participants existing assumptions about, and relationship to, nature and the natural environment influence their encounters with the more than human world.

**Figure 6***Reflections on the Imagination Exercise After Focus Group 1**4.3.2. Focus group 2*

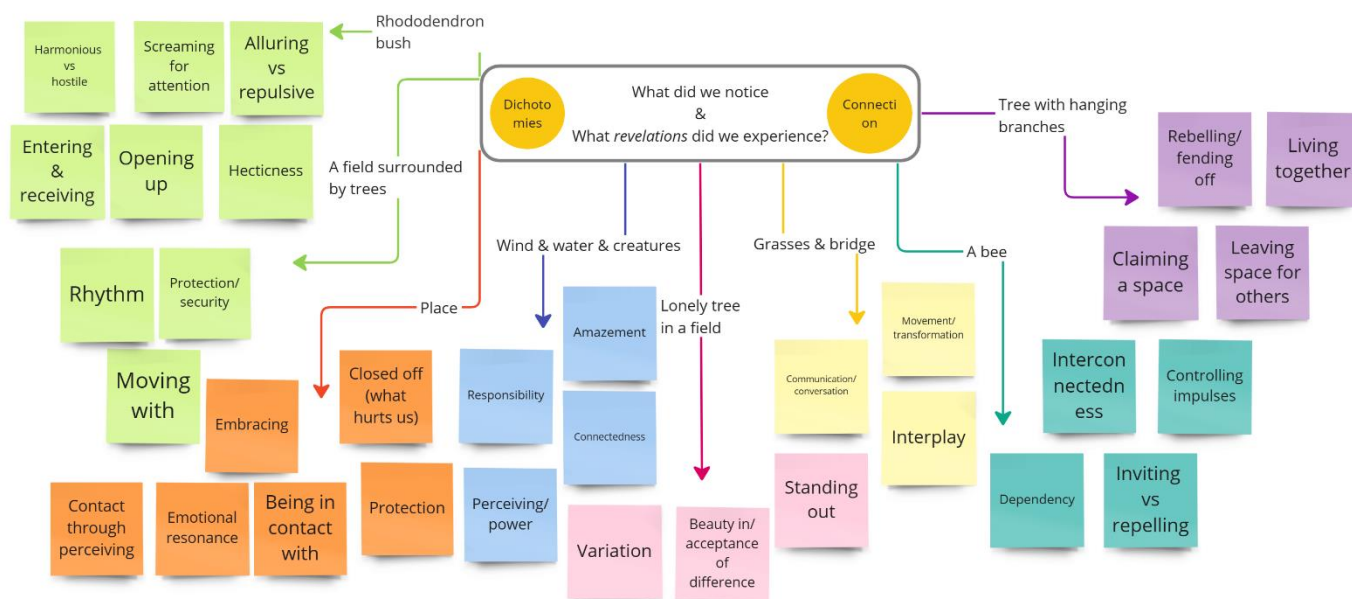
At the start of the second focus group more context was provided about the imagination structure and underlying theory. This was done while reflecting back on the experiences of the first focus group and the revelations that came out of that. Afterwards, the participants were asked to go through the imagination exercise again. At the end of the focus group, we spent time reflecting on how the exercise was experienced this time, also in comparison with the first time. Generally, the exercise was perceived to be more successful and impactful the second time. Participants felt like they were better able to open up to the experience and realise how their own expectations or past experiences were either hindering or helping them in connecting to their environment. An overview of these revelations can be found in figure 7. Again, this overview was made after the focus group and sent to the participants to give them the opportunity to make suggestions. Two participants indicated that they wanted to add a revelation to the overview. After adding these, in consultation with the two participants, the updated overview was sent to the entire group again. No new suggestions were made.

Again, the revelatory themes participants experienced were diverse. However, revelations connected to communication (of all kinds, both verbal and non-verbal) were explicitly brought up by four of the participants. Additionally, the experience of apparent contradictions or juxtapositions was also shared by four of the participants.

As an example, one of the participants focused (part of) her experience on a rhododendron bush where bumblebees were interacting with the plant. At first, she noticed the beautiful flowers that the bush displayed. Usually, she admitted, she would have noticed the flowers and probably have walked on, but this time she decided to take a closer look. She noticed that the flowers kind of looked like mouths with very long tongues and appendices that beckoned the insects to come closer. Additionally, when she saw a bumblebee enter one of those flowers, she experienced a sense of calmness that was not there before. But, on the other hand, when the bumblebee would leave the flower, she felt like all the flowers were screaming for attention again. Until another bumblebee showed up and the calmness was restored. She experienced this as a very intense experience where she decided to leave to come back to the group at some point because it became overwhelming. Afterwards, she shared that this had changed her perceptions of flowers. Normally, she would say that flowers are some of the most beautiful things in a natural environment, but this time she experienced them as very intense and harsh. But, on the other hand, she also experienced the calmness that the bumblebees brought the plants that made her appreciate the interconnectedness of the environment even more.

Figure 7

## Overview of Participant's Revelations in Focus Group 2

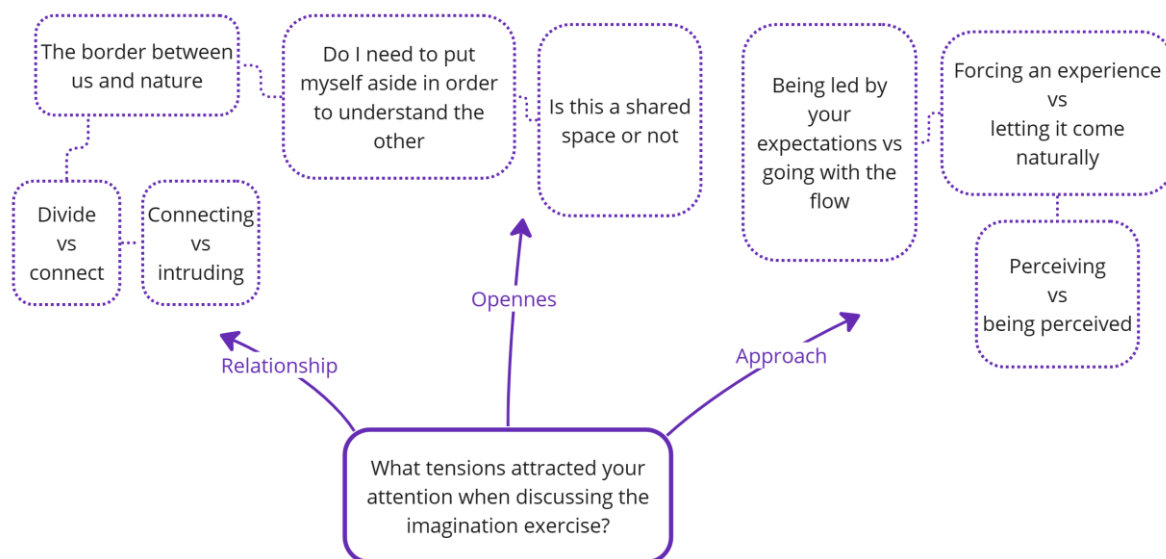


## 4.3.3. Focus group 3

In the third focus group I asked the participants to go over the overviews of the first two focus groups in pairs. Because of the size of the group, there was one group of three. To guide them in their discussion I prepared questions that they could answer that were made with the aim of letting the participants free in what they chose to focus on. Afterwards, all participants came together to discuss their deliberations as a group. In the first part of the discussion, we went over the tensions they had experienced while doing the imagination exercise. An overview of these main tensions can be found in figure 8.

**Figure 8**

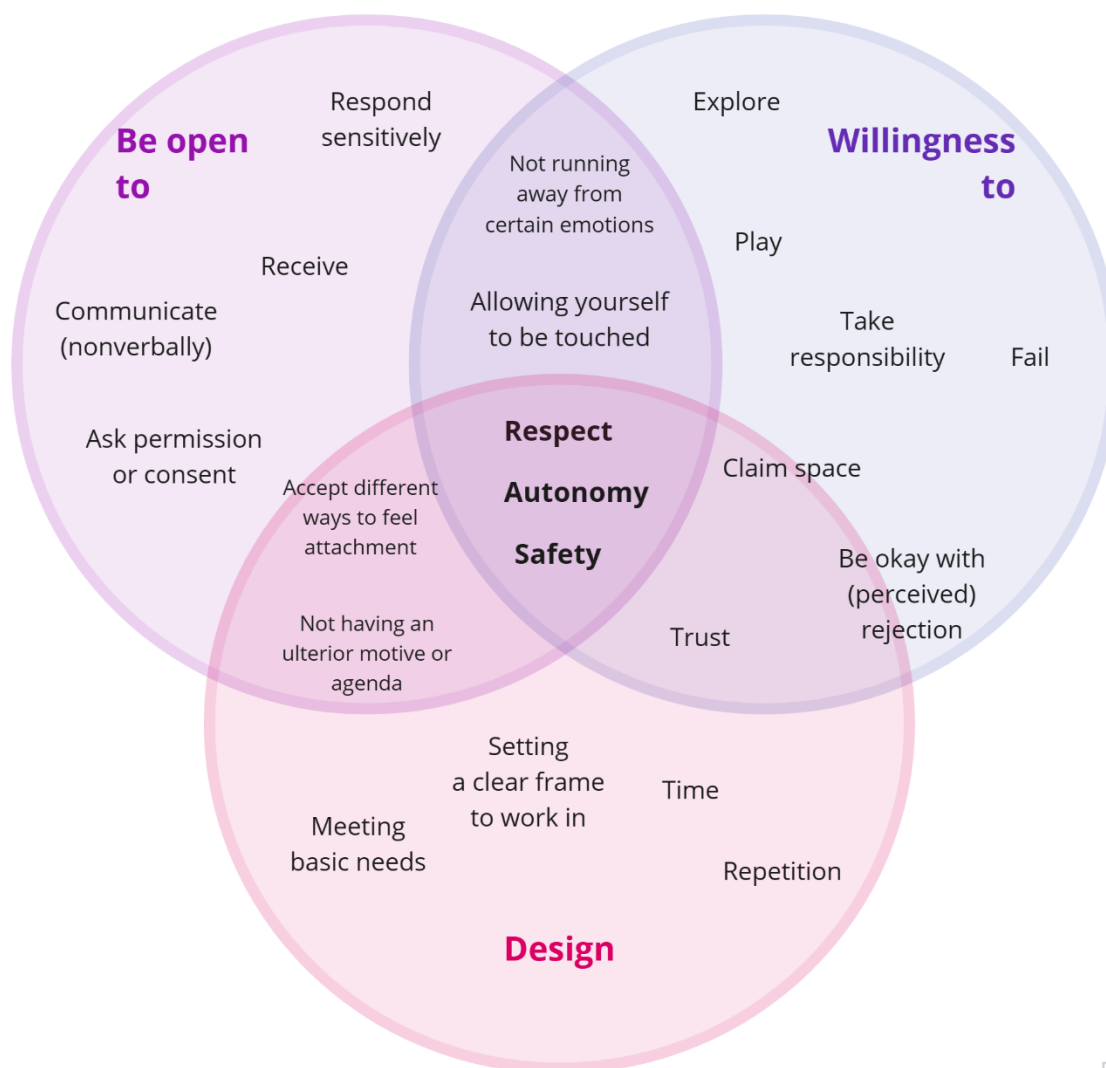
*Tensions Identified by Participants in Focus Group 3*



After harvesting these tensions, we continued to discuss the following question: Following this imagination exercise, what do we need to ensure/create interactions with compassion, connection, and emotional attachment with the more-than-human world? The aim of this discussion was to find patterns in the circumstances that participants felt were needed in order to facilitate encounters that encourage connection, affect, and emotional attachment. An overview of the circumstances and factors can be found in figure 9. Though there were many emotions, worldviews, mindsets etc discussed, the participants found these were most important for creating connection, affect, and emotional attachment. While the participants identified all these circumstances and factors, I put them in this figure that I felt most accurately depicted both the things that were talked about and the interconnected nature of how the participants talked about them. Afterwards, I send these main findings to the participants, asking them to tell me what they thought of the overview, if they were missing anything, or would visualize things differently. Other than one suggestion to move ‘allowing yourself to be touched’ from the ‘openness’ part to the overlap between ‘openness’ and willingness’, the participants expressed that they agreed with the visualisation and placement of concepts.

**Figure 9**

*Circumstances and Factors Identified by Participants in Focus Group 3*



At the core lies autonomy, respect, and safety. This means respecting nature's autonomy and being aware that nature is neither something entirely separated from us nor something we can use without regard for its own self-expression. However, to be able to respect the environment's autonomy like this there needs to be a level of safety surrounding the encounter so as to make sure that any reactions or thoughts do not come from a place of fear. This does not mean that the natural environment is inherently 'safe' and that it cannot hurt us, but rather, that this awareness of the dangers means that we do not unnecessarily avoid any encounters with nature or that we do not misinterpret nature's doings, or response to our presence.

Additionally, through the discussion in the last focus group, three main criteria for creating these safe, respectful, and autonomous encounters were identified: openness, willingness, and the design. To 'be open' meant slightly different things to different participants, but in all cases came down to taking in what was in the environment and how the environment was trying to communicate. This may sound straightforward enough, but this is also the part of what the imagination exercise asked of them that felt most unfamiliar to them. 'Willingness' is a related criteria in that it actively asks something of the participants, it asks them to allow themselves to sincerely be in a specific place in a specific moment. This can cause participants to be confronted by emotions that they would rather not deal with at that moment or face rejection after seeking contact. Lastly, the design criteria have to do with the more external aspects of encounters with the natural environment, such as whether all the basic needs of the participants have been met at that time and how much time is spent in that specific environment.



## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Theoretical implications

At the time of the focus groups, I had been reading about and working with aesthetics and imagination for months, so I had become practiced in engaging with these imagination questions. Sharing them with the participants and hearing them talk about how they engaged with the imagination framework gave me the opportunity to both take a step back and see what others experienced, and join them in deepening the framework further. As a result, I was able to formulate several criteria through which encounters in natural environments could provide opportunities for creating connection, affect, and emotional attachment with the more than human world.

In response to the results, I went back to the literature to see whether something there could help interpret them. The concepts of ‘openness’ and ‘willingness’ can help foster compassion and empathy through focusing on the intersubjectivity between humans and the more than human world, and by melding (to a certain extent) the boundary between us the observers and the appreciated environment. In some ways this parallels Li and Ryan’s (2017) concept of *yijing*, that puts emphasis on human emotional experience – or internal spiritual expression – and the actualisation of harmonious interrelationships between a subject and an object. Yet, a complete melding of any boundary between subject and object was not something participants aspired, since they feared this would lead to a perceived conflation of our interests and those of the more than human world. However, most people feel empathy quite regularly with other humans without losing themselves in the process. If you see a loved one in pain, it is normal to share in that person’s pain and feel empathy for them. The amount of empathy and the way it is expressed is dependent on a variety of factors such as facial expressions and cultural background, but the underlying response is still to share in that other person’s experience (Goubert et al., 2005). So, perhaps this fear of losing the boundaries between us and the rest of the world out there is something we have to become familiar with and move past to a certain extent. This role of empathy is acknowledged, or even utilised, in the literature about environmental aesthetics and nature engagement (Cheng, 2013), but the ways in which people should become or strive to be comfortable with this ‘blurring’ of boundaries in their everyday lives is yet to be properly explored.

Through the discussions in the focus group the importance of ‘disinterestedness’ that Brady (1998) emphasises became apparent. Participants found this detachment from self-interested concerns both one of the more challenging aspects of the imagination exercise and

one of the most important. This is clearly reflected in Figure 9 in the importance placed on not having an ulterior motive or agenda when coming into the exercise. Of course, it is not possible to completely disregard yourself in these experiences, but making a conscious effort to at least try to look past your own interests was highly valued. However challenging, this disinterestedness was again something that they felt was improved on by practice and repetition. Like both Brady (1998) and Xiang (2016) emphasise, imagination or ecological practice is not something you are innately good at but something that is expanded through repetition and practice. However, this research has also identified several requirements for fostering these types of (repeated) encounters in a safe and respectful manner, such as meeting people's basic needs first and providing enough time for people to become comfortable and familiar with the environment.

Additionally, one of the main observations that came out of the focus groups was the dialogical character of the participant's encounters with the more than human world. Repeatedly, questions of whether someone felt like they had a right to be in this specific place, or struggles with having to both listen or perceive and project or talk back to at the same time came up when discussing participant's experiences of the imagination exercise. This is reflected in Figure 9 in the concepts of 'openness' and 'willingness': to be both open to the encounter and maintain healthy boundaries at the same time, to be willing to play and explore but at the same time feeling safe enough to engage with the environment through that. This indicates that something in the imagination framework that I used to design the focus groups is missing this focus on the dialogical aspects, and that 'imagining well' entails more than following the four types of imagination Brady (1998) set out. Taking environmental aesthetics and the imagination framework out of the academic sphere and applying them to real life situations requires a further understanding of how people practically engage with their environment, something these results can contribute but definitely do not have the last word about.

## 5.2. Limitations and further research

One of the obvious limitations of the research is the small sample size, both in the autoethnography and the focus groups. On the one hand I experienced this as an advantage to the research, since it allowed me to linger on certain aspects a lot longer than I usually would and helped me internalize what I had been learning, which in turn helped me convey that information or knowledge to others. Especially because, while there is plenty of literature on the topic of environmental aesthetics and even a decent amount on the role of imagination in

engaging with the environment, there was a lack of research done on how to apply the framework in a practical sense. Similarly, in the focus groups, the small sample size meant that each participant had enough time and opportunity to be able to get to know the exercise and become familiar with it. However, this also means that this group was not representative of the Dutch population, or even representative of young adults in general. I made this decision, because I placed more importance on testing whether a framework like this could be shared and communicated to, and used by, people that were previously unfamiliar with it, rather than being able to make the framework applicable to the widest possible audience.

Though I stand by that choice, it is crucial for further research in this area to test the applicability of the framework for a larger/different audience, a variety of places, and different cultures. By doing this it can become clear how a framework like the imagination framework needs to be adapted and can become useful in all kinds of different contexts. Continuing to move the debates around environmental aesthetics from the academic world into practical applications can expose ways in which the framework needs to be adapted in order to make it useful for people in everyday situations, and new areas in which further research is needed. Additionally, more practical design principles based on these results could be developed that can aid project or people with the goal of improving human-nature relationships in designing similar exercises or experiences. The circumstances and criteria I identified in this research can already help in this area, but could be made more useful in practice.

Future research should also examine and delve into the consequences of this dialogical nature of encounters with our environment further, as well as in which ways safety, autonomy, and respect can be fostered when applying the (theory-based) imagination framework to real life and material realities. Additionally, integrating the imagination framework with other methods of engagement could yield even better results. Combining imagination with some level of scientific knowledge will result in different types of encounters or exercises that may ask for other criteria to be met. Or, instead of experiencing these encounters mostly internally, facilitating expressions of these encounters through art could reveal further (aesthetic) revelations.

An additional direction for further research which I did not anticipate in advance has to do with fear, and how to take away the fear someone might have for a certain environment without disregarding the healthy awareness that everyone should have about the possible dangers that environment might bring. Lastly, though I have addressed it in my research, the topic of empathy is still relatively unexplored when it comes to how it influences our reactions to the more than human world. The empathy we feel towards people around us is

often based on the human expressions and characteristics of those people. Pets are also usually included in this capacity of empathy, it is easy to see the joy or pain these animals express. However, what shape empathy will have to take if we want to apply it to other aspects of the more than human world remains something to be discussed.

## 6. Conclusions

Through this research I sought to answer the following question: “in what ways can experiences of nature in food forests in Utrecht provide opportunities for creating connection, affect, and emotional attachment with the more than human world?” To be able to build towards an answer I first research the following sub questions:

- SQ 1: How can knowledge of environmental aesthetics and aesthetic valuing of the more than human world be used to create a framework that facilitates emotionally meaningful encounters with the more than human world?
- SQ 2: In what ways do encounters with the more than human world in food forests influence or disrupt the aesthetic responses to the landscape state?
- SQ 3: Under which circumstances can encounters with the more than human world in food forests create connection, affect, and emotional attachment with the more than human world?

In order to answer the research questions, I first conducted a literature review in order to explore the various theories and debates about the influence of environmental aesthetics on the perception people have of nature and their encounters with the natural environment. Then, and somewhat simultaneously, I started working in a food forest near Utrecht. Through these personal experiences working in the natural environment, I could both experience whether I could apply the theoretical concepts I had learned about, and guide my literature review based on my new understandings of the food forest. Going back and forth between the literature I needed to answer SQ 1, and the real-life experiences I used to explore SQ 2 ultimately led me to the imagination framework of Brady (1998), which I used and adapted to my own experiences. Lastly, in order to see if I could make this framework useful and applicable to others, and try to gain further insights to deepen the framework further, I conducted three focus groups with a group of participants. In these focus groups I attempted to share the insights I had gathered over the course of 4 months of fieldwork in a way that would enable the participants to engage in emotionally meaningful encounters with their environment. Through the focus groups three main criteria or circumstances were identified that aided me in answering SQ 3. Going through this research process and finding answers to these sub questions then helped me answer the main research question.

To conclude, I found the imagination framework I used, based on Brady’s (1998) article, to be useful in facilitating emotionally meaningful encounters with the more than human world. However, in addition to the framework, focusing on fostering ‘openness’ and

'willingness' in designing or shaping encounters with nature, proved to be essential for making these encounters successful in creating connection, affect, and emotional attachment with the more than human world. This dialogical aspect of the encounters, being both open to receiving and communicating on nature's terms, and the willingness to take an active role in exploring and reaching out to the environment, demands a great deal from the people concerned. Therefore, special attention needs to be given to how the design of these encounters can invite and aid in creating respectful, autonomous, and safe experiences. Only when these criteria are upheld and fostered did people feel there is an opportunity for creating connection, affect and emotional attachment with the more than human world around them.

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## Appendix A

### Transcript audio recording guided imagination exercise

#### **English**

Before you start exploring your surroundings, take a few deep breaths. As you do this, feel the connection between your feet and the earth. Keep breathing in and out calmly, give yourself time to relax.

When you're ready, you can start. Concentrate on your movements. What are you doing? Notice which muscles contract and relax, how each part of your body moves as you go. While you're at it, we can begin to use our senses to help stay present in this moment. Start with what you can see. Try to look around you with a more purposeful and deliberate gaze. You may see the bark on the trees as you pass them, the vibrant green of the grass, or the feathers of a bird. What does this remind you of? Allow every new thing you see to bring you back to the present moment.

Now we're going to start noticing what we're hearing. Maybe the sound of the birds, the crickets, the passing cars. Again, let each new thing you hear while you're at it bring you back to the present moment. Take the time to listen more carefully than you normally would. Are there any sounds you've heard before? Or are there sounds that are completely new to you? Now we move on to our sense of touch. Maybe you can brush your hand over a tree as you walk by. Or maybe you focus on what you have in your hands right now. You may even notice the texture of the clothes you are currently wearing. Focus on that sensation and the connection that touch creates. What memories does this evoke? While you're at it, allow each new thing you touch to bring you back to the present moment.

And now on to what you can smell. Maybe the breeze in the air, or the plants and flowers around you. Allow each new thing you smell to bring you back to the present moment.

Now that you are aware of your senses, I ask you to think about what you have noticed. Is there anything that requires extra attention? Try to focus on a specific object or scene. What does this remind you of and why? Again, focus on your senses one by one. Look closely and notice what normally remains hidden from you. Is there a sound or feeling that you have a strong association with? How does this affect how you feel about this object or scene?

Now that we're done exploring, let's move on to projecting. Keep calm and carry on with what you are doing. Take something to drink or eat if you need it.

Go back to what you were doing and focus on your specific object or scene again. Did you ever stare at the clouds as a child and try to recognize shapes in them? Or have you ever looked at the night sky and searched for constellations? That's what we're going to do now. Intentionally try to see a different view of this object or scene. What does the shape remind you of? What do you imagine? Let your imagination run wild, see where it takes you. Now try to consciously empathize with what you see. What would it be like to exist or grow in these conditions? What qualities would you need to be able to live or exist like this?

Now that we're done projecting, let's start amplifying our imagination. Before you go any further, take a moment to go back to your body and your senses. How do you feel? Do you need a moment to sit down and rest for a while? Or if you are sitting, do you have problems with your back or legs? Walk around and change position before continuing.

Continue your activity and refocus on your specific object or scene. What you see probably hasn't always looked like this. Or felt, or smelled, or made this sound. Why does it look the way it does? What did it look like before? Try to empathize with the experiences the object or scene has gone through to end up in this state. Take the time to zoom out, take a look at the rest of the environment. What relationship does the object or scene have with the environment? How does it affect the environment and is it affected by the environment? Does this relationship change when you zoom in or out?

It's okay if you realize you don't know certain things. How exactly a certain stone ended up here, for example. It is about using your imagination to come to a new (personal) revelation.

With this, we move from ampliative imagination to revelatory imagination.

Think back to the questions you've asked yourself. Do you feel the need to use your imagination even further? Take the time to rewind if necessary to listen to the questions again. Or take the time to go on in silence before listening to the last few questions.

When you feel you have explored every part of your imagination, you can move on. Reflect on the questions asked of you. Have certain feelings come to mind? Use this moment to think about where these feelings might be coming from. What does this say about you and about the object or scene?

How did these questions make you think differently about the object or scene? Take this time to reflect on what revelations you have experienced. Did you discover something new using your imagination? Or do you feel that you yourself have changed or been influenced?

Again, take the time to go back and listen to the questions again. If you have time, sit or stand for a while to enjoy your surroundings. Slowly become aware of your surroundings and the people around you.

### **Dutch**

Voordat je begint je omgeving te verkennen, adem een paar keer diep in en uit. Terwijl je dit doet, voel je de verbinding tussen je voeten en de aarde. Blijf rustig in en uit ademen, gun jezelf de tijd om tot rust te komen.

Als je er klaar voor bent, kun je beginnen. Concentreer je op je bewegingen. Wat ben je aan het doen? Merk op welke spieren samentrekken en ontspannen, hoe elke deel van je lichaam beweegt terwijl je bezig bent.

Terwijl je bezig bent, kunnen we beginnen onze zintuigen te gebruiken om te helpen aanwezig te blijven in het huidige moment. Begin met wat je kunt zien. Probeer met een meer doelgerichte en opzettelijke blik om je heen te kijken. Misschien zie je de schors aan de bomen als je ze passeert, het levendige groen van het gras, of de veren van een vogel. Waar doet dit je aan denken? Sta elk nieuw ding dat je ziet toe om je terug te brengen in het huidige moment.

Nu gaan we beginnen op te merken wat we horen. Misschien het geluid van de vogels, de krekels, de voorbijrijdende auto's. Nogmaals, laat elk nieuw ding dat je hoort terwijl je bezig bent je terugbrengen in het huidige moment. Neem de tijd om aandachtiger te luisteren dan je normaal zou doen. Zijn er geluiden die je eerder hebt gehoord? Of zijn er geluiden die helemaal nieuw voor je zijn?

Nu gaan we verder met onze tastzin. Misschien kun je je hand over een boom laten vegen terwijl je voorbij loopt. Of misschien focus je je op wat je op dit moment in je handen hebt. Je kunt zelfs de textuur opmerken van de kleding die je op dit moment draagt. Focus op die sensatie en de verbinding die die aanraking tot stand brengt. Welke herinneringen roept dit op? Terwijl je bezig bent, sta elk nieuw ding dat je aanraakt toe om je terug te brengen in het huidige moment.

En nu verder met wat je kunt ruiken. Misschien het briesje in de lucht, of de planten en bloemen om je heen. Sta elk nieuw ding dat je ruikt toe om je terug te brengen in het huidige moment.

Nu je je bewust bent van je zintuigen wil ik je vragen na te denken over wat je hebt opgemerkt. Is er iets wat om extra aandacht vraagt? Probeer je te focussen op een specifiek object of scene. Waar doet dit je aan denken en waarom? Focus opnieuw een voor een op je zintuigen. Kijk goed en merk op wat er normaal verborgen voor je blijft. Is er een geluid of gevoel waar je een sterke associatie mee hebt? Wat voor invloed heeft dit op hoe je over dit object of scene denkt?

Nu we klaar zijn met verkennen gaan we over naar projecteren. Ga rustig door met wat je aan het doen bent. Neem wat te drinken of eten als je daar behoefte aan hebt.

Ga weer door met wat je aan het doen was en focus je weer op je specifiek object of scene. Heb je als kind wel eens naar de wolken gestaard en geprobeerd vormen erin te herkennen? Of heb je wel eens naar de nachtelijke hemel gekeken en sterrenbeelden gezocht? Zoiets gaan we nu ook doen. Probeer opzettelijk een ander beeld over dit object of scene te zien. Waar doet de vorm je aan denken? Wat stel je je voor? Laat je verbeelding de vrije loop, kijk waar het je naartoe leid.

Probeer nu bewust je in te leven in wat je ziet. Hoe zou het zijn om te bestaan of te groeien in deze omstandigheden? Wat voor kwaliteiten zou je nodig hebben om zo te kunnen leven of bestaan?

Nu we klaar zijn met projecteren gaan we beginnen we met het versterken van onze verbeelding. Voordat je verder gaat, neem een moment om terug te gaan naar je lichaam en je zintuigen. Hoe voel je je? Heb je een moment nodig om te gaan zitten en even te rusten? Of als je als zit, heb je last van je rug of benen? Loop even rond en ga verzitten voordat je verder gaat.

Ga verder met je activiteit en focus je opnieuw op je specifieke object of scene. Wat je ziet heeft er waarschijnlijk niet altijd zo uit gezien. Of gevoeld, of geroken, of dit geluid gemaakt. Waarom ziet het er zo uit zoals het eruit ziet? Hoe zag het er vroeger uit? Probeer je in te leven in de ervaringen die het object of scene heeft meegemaakt om in deze staat te belanden. Neem de tijd om uit te zoomen, kijk naar de rest van de omgeving. Welke relatie heeft het object of scene met de omgeving? Hoe beïnvloed het de omgeving en wordt het door de omgeving beïnvloed? Veranderd deze relatie als je in of uit zoomt?

Het is niet erg als je je realiseert dat je bepaalde dingen niet weet. Bijvoorbeeld hoe een bepaalde steen hier precies terecht is gekomen. Het gaat erom dat je aan de hand van je verbeelding tot een nieuwe (persoonlijke) openbaring komt. Hiermee gaan we van versterkende verbeelding over tot onthullende verbeelding.

Denk terug op de vragen die je je jezelf gesteld hebt. Voel je de behoefte je verbeelding nog verder te gebruiken? Neem de tijd om eventueel terug te spoelen om de vragen opnieuw te luisteren. Of neem de tijd om in stilte nog even door te gaan voordat je naar de laatste paar vragen luisterd.

Als je voelt dat je elk deel van je verbeelding hebt verkend kun je verder gaan. Reflecteer op de vragen die aan je gesteld zijn. Zijn er bepaalde gevoelens in je op gekomen? Gebruik dit moment om na te denken over waar deze gevoelens vandaan zouden kunnen komen. Wat zegt dit over jezelf en over het object of scene?

Hoe hebben deze vragen je anders doen denken over het object of scène? Neem deze tijd om reflecteren op welke openbaringen je hebt ervaren. Heb je iets nieuws ontdekt aan de hand van je verbeelding? Of heb je het gevoel dat je zelf bent veranderd of beïnvloed?

Nogmaals, neem de tijd om terug te gaan en opnieuw naar de vragen te luisteren. Als je tijd hebt, blijf nog even zitten of staan om te genieten van je omgeving. Word je langzaam weer bewust van je omgeving en de mensen om je heen.



## Appendix B

### Informed consent forms

#### **Informed consent form project manager**

### Informatiebrief

Onderzoek titel: Experiencing Nature in Food Forests in Utrecht

Onderzoeksvraag: In what ways can experiences of nature in food forests in Utrecht provide opportunities for creating connection, affect, and emotional attachment with the more than human world?

Onderzoeker: Sabine Brander

Te bereiken op: +31646516339 / s.m.branders@students.uu.nl

Onderzoeksinstituut: Universiteit Utrecht

Opleiding: Sustainable Development

#### 1. Doel van het onderzoek

Voor mijn onderzoek kijk naar esthetische ervaringen die mensen hebben in de natuur en op welke manier deze ervaringen kansen bieden voor het creëren van verbinding, affect, en emotionele gehechtheid met de natuur. Centraal in het onderzoek staan esthetische ervaringen en verbeeldingskracht en hoe deze gebruikt kan worden om nieuwe belevingen los te maken.

#### 2. Beschrijving van het onderzoek

Tijdens het onderzoek doe ik (veld)werk bij het voedselbos Natuurplaats Binnenbos samen met de projectleider van het voedselbos, Kaat Biesemans-Hoogewijs. De werkzaamheden bestonden uit het helpen van Kaat met het aanplanten van nieuwe planten, het snoeien van het gras rondom kleine plantjes om ze voldoende licht te geven, het bewaken van de gezondheid van de planten, het zaaien en water geven, het aanbrengen van beschermingsmateriaal rond kwetsbare planten en diverse andere activiteiten.

#### 3. Informatie over data en privacy

Tijdens het veldwerk werd data verzameld over de ervaringen en reflecties van de onderzoeker aan de hand van de ervaringen in het voedselbos en geschreven reflecties. Hierin

wordt gebruik gemaakt van informatie over de omgeving verteld door Kaat Biesemans-Hoogewijs om de reflecties. Deze data bestaat uit informatie over planten en dieren in het voedselbos en eigenschappen van de omgeving etc. Persoonlijke informatie wordt niet gebruikt.

Deze data, in de vorm van geschreven reflecties, wordt opgeslagen voor de duur van het onderzoek. De reflecties zullen daarna bewaard blijven ten behoeve van wetenschappelijke integriteit. De data zal niet gedeeld worden met andere personen behalve de onderzoeker zelf. Echter, door de aard van het onderzoek is het niet mogelijk Kaat Biesemans-Hoogewijs anoniem te noemen in het onderzoek. Mocht er andere personen gerelateerd aan Natuurplaats Binnenbos genoemd worden in het onderzoek zullen deze volledig anoniem blijven.

#### 4. Rechten van de deelnemer

De deelnemer is vrij om te bepalen wat zij wel en niet delen aan de hand van het veldwerk en deelnemers kunnen het altijd bij de onderzoeker aangeven als zij geen toestemming geven om gedeelde informatie te gebruiken in het onderzoek. Deelnemers kunnen op elk moment van de studie hun persoonlijke data inzien en corrigeren. Deelname is geheel vrijwillig en deelnemers kunnen zich op elk moment terugtrekken. Weigeren om deel te nemen heeft geen negatieve gevolgen.

Deelnemers kunnen contact opnemen met de ethische commissie (indien van toepassing) voor vragen over de opzet van de studie. Deelnemers kunnen contact opnemen met de onderzoeker, de privacy afdeling van Universiteit Utrecht ([privacy@uu.nl](mailto:privacy@uu.nl)), of de Data Protection Officer van Universiteit Utrecht ([fg@uu.nl](mailto:fg@uu.nl)) – in die volgorde - voor het uitoefenen van hun rechten en voor vragen en klachten. Deelnemers hebben het recht een klacht in te dienen bij de Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens.

## Toestemmingsverklaring

Ik heb de onderzoeksinformatie gelezen en begrepen. Ik heb vragen kunnen stellen over de studie en mijn vragen zijn naar tevredenheid beantwoord.

Ik stem er vrijwillig mee in om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek en begrijp dat ik kan weigeren vragen te beantwoorden en ik kan me op elk moment terugtrekken uit het onderzoek zonder een reden op te geven.

Ik begrijp dat deelname aan het onderzoek inhoudt dat

- informatie die ik vertel over het voedselbos gebruikt kan worden in het onderzoek en dat deze informatie in de vorm van geschreven reflecties bewaard zal blijven.

Ik begrijp dat de informatie die ik verstrek zal worden gebruikt voor het schrijven van een master scriptie. Ik begrijp dat persoonlijke informatie die over mij is verzameld, zoals waar ik woon, niet zal worden gedeeld met anderen behalve de onderzoeker.

Datum:

Naam deelnemer:

Ik ga hiermee akkoord:      ja      /      nee

Handtekening onderzoeker

## **Informed consent form participants focus group**

### **Informatiebrief**

Onderzoek titel: Experiencing Nature in Food Forests in Utrecht

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Onderzoeker: Sabine Brander

Te bereiken op: +31646516339 / s.m.branders@students.uu.nl

Onderzoeksinstituting: Universiteit Utrecht

Opleiding: Sustainable Development

#### 1. Doel van de studie

Voor mijn onderzoek kijk naar esthetieke ervaringen die mensen hebben in de natuur en op welke manier deze ervaringen kansen bieden voor het creëren van verbinding, affect, en emotionele gehechtheid met de natuur. Centraal in het onderzoek staat verbeelding en hoe deze gebruikt kan worden om nieuwe belevingen los te maken. Hiervoor heb ik eerst een tijd veldwerk gedaan bij een voedselbos in de buurt van Utrecht. Uit de data die ik daar heb verzameld aan de hand van mijn eigen ervaringen heb ik een eerste versie gemaakt van een lijst vragen voor een 'guided imagination', een beetje zoals een guided meditation maar dan met een focus op verbeelding. Voor de volgende fase van mijn onderzoek wil ik deze guided imagination delen met anderen en gezamenlijk kijken in hoeverre dit framework voor andere werkt.

#### 2. Beschrijving van het studie

De eerste twee sessies waar deelnemers aan participeren bestaan uit een zelfstandig en gezamenlijk deel. Tijdens het zelfstandig deel krijgen deelnemers een opname om naar te luisteren terwijl ze in het voedselbos Haarzuilens/Amelisweerd zijn. Tijdens het gezamenlijke deel daarna worden ervaringen tijdens het zelfstandige deel gedeeld en opgeschreven. Het doel hiervan is om deelnemers zowel tijd te geven hun ervaringen te laten bezinken en de mogelijkheid te hebben op een later moment te reflecteren op hun ervaringen. De eerste twee sessies duren beide ca. 75 minuten. Tijdens de derde sessie word er gezamenlijk gekeken naar de reflecties om onderliggende patronen te ontdekken. De derde sessie duurt ca. 120 minuten.

Alle sessies nemen plaats in voedselbos Haarzuilens of in park Amelisweerd. Dit betekent dat deelnemers blootgesteld kunnen worden aan onaangename weeromstandigheden. Indien het weer dusdanig slecht is zal er worden uitgeweken naar een andere locatie.

### 3. Informatie over data en privacy

Tijdens de sessies wordt data verzameld over de ervaringen en reflecties van deelnemers aan de hand van open gesprekken en geschreven reflecties. De gesprekken worden opgenomen zodat de onderzoeker deze later terug kan luisteren. De geschreven reflecties worden gedeeld met de onderzoeker. Deze data kan bestaan uit uiteenlopende dingen zoals persoonlijke ervaringen, gevoelens/emoties, herinneringen etc. Ook filosofische of geloofsovertuigingen kunnen besproken worden.

Deze data wordt opgeslagen voor de duur van het onderzoek. Daarna zullen de geschreven reflecties en transcripties van de opnames geanonimiseerd bewaard blijven ten behoeve van wetenschappelijke integriteit. De opnames blijven niet bewaard. De data zal niet gedeeld worden met andere personen behalve de onderzoeker zelf. Alle deelnemers zullen anoniem blijven in het uiteindelijke onderzoek. Echter, door de aard van de sessies kan er niet worden gezorgd voor privacy tussen deelnemers.

### 4. Rechten van de deelnemer

De deelnemers zijn vrij om te bepalen wat zij wel en niet delen aan de hand van de sessies en deelnemers kunnen het altijd bij de onderzoeker aangeven als zij geen toestemming geven om gedeelde informatie te gebruiken in het onderzoek. Deelnemers kunnen op elk moment van de studie hun persoonlijke data inzien en corrigeren. Deelname is geheel vrijwillig en deelnemers kunnen zich op elk moment terugtrekken. Weigeren om deel te nemen heeft geen negatieve gevolgen.

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Ik stem er vrijwillig mee in om deel te nemen aan deze studie en begrijp dat ik kan weigeren vragen te beantwoorden en ik kan me op elk moment terugtrekken uit de studie zonder een reden op te geven.

Ik begrijp dat deelname aan het onderzoek inhoudt dat

- mijn deelname aan de groeps gesprekken opgenomen wordt en dat deze opnames gebruikt worden voor het onderzoek. Ik begrijp dat deze opnames na afloop van het onderzoek vernietigd worden en alleen getranscribeerd en anoniem bewaard blijven.
- mijn geschreven reflecties gebruikt worden voor het onderzoek. Ik begrijp dat deze reflecties na afloop van het onderzoek anoniem bewaard blijven.

Ik begrijp dat de informatie die ik verstrek zal worden gebruikt voor het schrijven van een master scriptie. Ik begrijp dat persoonlijke informatie die over mij is verzameld en aan de hand waarvan ik kan worden geïdentificeerd, zoals mijn naam of waar ik woon, niet zal worden gedeeld met anderen behalve de onderzoeker.

Datum:

Naam deelnemer:

Ik ga hiermee akkoord:      ja      /      nee

Handtekening onderzoeker