

Peer Review Article

Cabbage, Curation and the Convivial:

Relational Systems Change through Artist Residencies, Sympoietic Rituals and Liberatory Practices

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Abstract

This article explores an artist-led research residency centred on a participatory cabbage fermentation ritual as a lens for systems change. Drawing on arts-based and postqualitative methodologies, the work engages with food, ritual, and

somatic knowing to cultivate relational awareness and collective sense-making. Using fermentation as a material, culinary practice, and metaphor for systemic shifts, the residency created a space for experiential inquiry into questions of ecological restoration, racial justice, and cultural transformation.

Participants engaged with food as sustenance, and as a site of memory, care, and co-creation. Through slicing, salting, storytelling, and stillness, the cabbage becomes co-curator and teacher, activating sympoiethics as a co-creative ethic rooted in interdependence with the more-than-human world. Three *sympoethic* inter-relationships manifest: curating the convivial as an aesthetic of care, ritual as a liberatory praxis for relational sovereignty, and the artist residency as a vital habitat for emergent and situated transformation. This work affirms that systems change can be enlivened through embodied, intimate, and sensory engagement where thinking, making, and sensing are inseparable. In the fermenting jar, the sharing of food, a listening circle, and the relational gesture, a different future is unfolding.

Keywords

arts-based research, artist residency, convivial, curation, fermentation, food ritual, experiential sensemaking, postqualitative inquiry, sympoiethics, Ubuntu, relational sovereignty

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Introduction

The *Tasting Ubuntu* Artist Research Residency, held over three weeks in early 2024, formed part of a longer-term programme of exchange between Living Justice,¹ a UK based cultural agency, the Centre for the Study of the Afterlife of Violence and the Reparative Quest (AVReQ)² and the Centre for Sustainability Transitions (CST)³ at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, and Stellenbosch University Museum (SUM).⁴ Commissioned by AVReQ and in collaboration with

¹ <https://livingjustice.earth/>

² <https://avreq.sun.ac.za>

³ <https://www0.sun.ac.za/cst/>

⁴ <https://www.sun.ac.za/english/Museum>

CST and SUM, Living Justice was invited to curate experiences and dialogues around the inter-twining arenas of food and racial justice. With their research partners and with the generous involvement of Earth Lore Foundation,⁵ they devised a sequence of encounters, knowledge-exchanges and *Tasting Ubuntu* cabbage fermentation food ritual.

The residency was developed to explore the intersecting fields of food justice, ecological repair, and cultural transformation through situated, arts-led research. Commissioned and supported by these institutional partners, Living Justice was invited to design and facilitate a series of experiential inquiries and community dialogues. These included participatory practices, artistic interventions, and listening circles culminating in a cabbage fermentation ritual. With the involvement of an organisation specialising in indigenous ecological knowledge and community sovereignty, the project curated a sequence of making listening and thinking encounters and knowledge exchanges rooted in storytelling, collective memory, sensory engagement, and liberatory aesthetics.

We reflect on three inter-twining contributions that emerge from the residency. The first is the concept of curating the convivial as an aesthetics that centres an everyday ethics of care and co-creative world-making within systems change (Fabre Lewin et al., 2015). The second is contemporary ritual as a responsive and liberatory praxis within which to experience our personal agency as part of a participatory consciousness, our relational sovereignty as defined by Living Justice (Fabre Lewin, 2019). Our third contribution is highlighting the value of the artist research residency as a spacious time, exploratory and enlivening habitat for cultivating emergent, context-sensitive responses to complexity (Fabre Lewin, 2019).

Our inquiry aligns with the emerging field of awareness-based systems change (Scharmer, 2018), which emphasises the cultivation of inner capacities such as attention, presence, and collective sensing, as foundations for transforming outer systems (Pomeroy et al., 2025). Within the residency, awareness is seen as relational and embodied attunement (Hayashi, 2025) becoming both method and outcome. Our process of harvesting unfolds as an ongoing diffractive exchange of entangled interactions and *intra-actions* (Barad, 2012). Through image, material engagement and a poetic narrative, we give voice to the sentience of the cabbages grown within the nearby food garden of an eco village, to the multiplicity of air-borne yeasts, and to the subtle intelligences of the body in relationship with the matter and processes of life (Barad, 2003). This opening to a resonant field of co-inquiry holds space for the agency and vibrancy of matter as a pathway for sensemaking towards systems change (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2025).

⁵ <https://earthlorefoundation.org>

We invite the reader into the context, lineages, evolution, gestures, and insights of this situated residency and food ritual.

Contextual Groundings and Living Practice

The Artist Research Residency, *Tasting Ubuntu*, originated through encounters between Living Justice and research partners in Stellenbosch, South Africa. The connective threads wove together an understanding of art as a relational modality of intervention with the potential for cultivating a politics of consciousness through food rituals which surface how racial, social, ecological and food justice (Goodchild, 2021) are intertwined. The dialogue between Living Justice, AVReQ, CST, and Stellenbosch University recognized the value of experiential knowledge and embodied co-creation as integral to decolonising practices around food sovereignty. The fourth partner, Stellenbosch University Museum, came forward to offer an accessible and spacious studio within an annex building on the Museum site and at the centre of the university campus. For the Museum's curatorial team, there was benefit in a residency embodying the participatory philosophy of Ubuntu as part of marking 30 years of Democracy in South Africa. The residency was an opportunity to explore how situated artistic practices offer relational ways of knowing, being, and becoming within entangled human and more-than-human ecologies (Goodchild, 2021). Drawing on enactivist thought, the residency embraced thinking, making, and sensing as a dynamic mode of inquiry where understanding arises through material engagement (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007). This is work which calls for a shift from detached observation to participatory enactment and transforms, rather than complements, intellectual inquiry by centering felt experience and relational co-constitution.

Living Justice's body of work is dedicated to the restoration of art, ritual and the artisan for coming to know through collaborative engagement with our bodymind's intelligences in co-existence with the vibrancy of matter. Sympoiethics offers a relational awareness of this nature-cultural worldmaking wherein we experience our humanity as a responsive and reciprocal becoming-*with* the other-than-human world (Fabre Lewin & Gathorne-Hardy, 2021a; Haraway, 2016).⁶ This invitation to make-with each other and the matter of life enlivens and integrates the sacred and the political, the embodied and psychological, the ecological and cultural, all within a responsive ethics of care in the everyday (Fabre Lewin, 2019; Fabre Lewin & Gathorne-Hardy, 2021b). Central to these enlivenment methodologies (Weber, 2019) is the role of somatic and imaginal work (Hayashi, 2025). These are practices which assist in uncovering and attending to both the conscious and unconscious ways in which

⁶ Sympoiethics as a relational praxis emerged through on-going collaborative explorations of Fabre Lewin's sympoietic ritual methodology that she developed through her practice-based doctoral research (Fabre Lewin, 2019).

dominant ideologies, such as white supremacy, marginalise and exclude people from actively contributing and shaping cultures and food ecosystems (Fabre Lewin, 1990; Fabre Lewin, 2012).

Within a socially engaged practice, Living Justice engages with food and food rituals as a vital ground for sympoiethic practice. Through the soil-food-web of growing, cooking and sharing food we as humans are part of a cycle of intimate, life-giving connections to each other and the more-than-human world. The process of thinking-making-with the matter of ecologically grown produce within the bounded form of a thanks-giving ritual food highlights how our co-existence takes place within extensive and relational experiences. As Goodman (2013) reflects, “given the embodied nature of food, whether eaten, grown or husbanded, different practices and different ways of ‘being with food’ provide the space for different food relationalities that then give rise to possible, transformative political openings” (p. 2).

This experiencing of the matter and processes of food as a connective aesthetic (Gablik, 1992b) aligns with and draws inspiration from the wisdoms of Ubuntu cosmology and philosophy from Southern African indigenous cultures (Murove, 2012). Core to its ethos is an understanding of individuality as an *inter-becoming* through intricate inter-dependent relationships between humans and non-humans (Ramosé, 2003). As a way of living, it aspires to interrelatedness, cooperation, and working together towards a common goal, all as “a fundamental part of the human experience, shaping our interactions, relationships, and responses to the complex and ever-changing world around us” (Carstens & Preiser, 2024, p. 7). What it means to be human emerges from a participatory consciousness of “teachings, interactions, experiences and intuition” (Carstens & Preiser, 2024, p. 7).

Tasting Ubuntu as the title for the residency engages us in the intention that considers the relational ethics of Ubuntu consciousness through the senses of touch, taste, smell, feeling, as well memories and biographies associated with food. The focus of the residency was a ritual of cabbage fermentation which engaged the participants within processes of co-production, skills- sharing, and the creating of a health-giving food, all of which offered a small scale, domestic experience of biodiversity, and a potent metaphor for cultural transformation. As Mara Miele writes “taste has emancipatory powers” (Miele cited in Goodman, 2014, p. 272). Being-with the cabbage, with each other, and with the culinary interactions of salt and air-born microorganisms offered us an experience of our relational sovereignty inviting in refreshed forms of knowing and sense-making. As a participant expressed, “I sense the Ubuntu in my body through the fermenting of the cabbage” (Participant A, 6 March 2024).

While this paper offers a textured account of the residency, our methodological commitment remains to foreground the *processual* and *relational* dimensions of knowing rather than to represent individual participants. The residency was intentionally designed as a safe and experimental space in which participants could explore creative and embodied forms of inquiry without the

gaze of observation. To honour that trust, we have resisted ethnographic narration, personal profiling, or the impulse to evidence change, and have instead sought to evoke the collective atmospheres, gestures, and resonances through which relational learning unfolded. In doing so, the focus remains on process rather than personhood and on the sympoiethic dynamics of *curating conviviality* that made the work possible.

Figure 1 brings the fermenting cabbage into view, a presence whose voice we wanted to bring in here to include the materiality of the more-than-human agency that enlivened the practices of conviviality.



Figure 1: Purple cabbage in mid-ferment: a living symbol of transformation, interdependence, and the slow choreography of care.

In the beginning we touch, holding the head of cabbage between our palms. We listen. And what we hear the slicing through layers of leaves, through the salt massaging, is song. A green and purple bodied archive of soil and water, sun and ancestry, microbial life and seasonal rhythms, the cabbage becomes our teacher, ritualist, and co-curator.

As the cabbage softens and begins to bubble in glass jars, so too do the boundaries between ourselves dissolve. Microbiota becomes metaphors for community, for resilience, for the fact that we are, quite literally, made of multiplicity. Biodiversity in a bowl and cultural diversity in a room.

Through the cabbage, Ubuntu ferments... slow, moist, alive. We begin to sense that knowing arises from the hands, from mind, from membranes, from the tang of brine, and the patience of waiting. Cabbage teaches us about entering into living cycles of Kairos time, re-composition, transformation, the enlivening taste of care.

As a culinary, cultural, and microbial process, cabbage fermentation is a health-giving and transformative activity through which care, intimacy, and healing manifest materially. As a living process and as a participatory ecology, fermentation links the health of the human body with environmental cycles, harnessing the biodiversity of bacterial cultures with cultural traditions of wellbeing. Raw cabbage is turned into a food medicine which promotes good gut bacteria in human beings. It also contributes to low carbon living and food security, and supports practices in food sovereignty.

Emplacing the Residency

The three-week Artist Research Residency *Tasting Ubuntu* took place between late February and early March 2024. During this time, Living Justice catalysed a participatory model of research-in-practice through iterative, emergent, and documented dialogues within the University Museum studio, across campus research centres, and through interventions at local food and farming venues. The title *Tasting Ubuntu* emerged from the residency's intention to make the philosophy of Ubuntu tangible through the senses. Ubuntu is a Southern African philosophy and ethical worldview originating in Bantu languages and cosmologies. Rooted in the expression *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which translated means that a person is a person through other persons, it articulates a relational ontology in which human existence is constituted through mutual care, interdependence, and community (Carstens & Preiser, 2024; Chilisa, 2012). The act of tasting evokes a slow, intimate mode of knowing: one that requires presence, attention, and trust in embodied discernment. To *taste* Ubuntu is to encounter relationality not as an abstract ethical principle but as a felt, multisensory experience of interdependence. Through shared food, smell, touch,

and memory, the residency invited participants to sense how belonging, care, and transformation ferment through everyday gestures. Naming the work *Tasting Ubuntu* thus honours the relational ethics and sensory epistemologies at its heart gesturing to an invitation to know *with*, rather than *about* one another (Peers, 2024). True to a participatory and collaborative methodology, these cycles of improvisation with the unknown were welcomed and engaged as part of an approach that embraces the emergent and responsive, the serendipitous, and the intuitive (Haraway, 2016; Haugen, 2011).

The open and accessible studio environment provided time and space for a range of activities, including art-making with found objects, collaborative pair work, mark-making, presentations, and convivial exchanges focused on deep listening. It also hosted the *Tasting Ubuntu* cabbage fermentation ritual and culminated in a residency exhibition. Throughout, the presence of the cabbage and the microbial agents of transformation served as guiding forces and companions in the process. These encounters contributed to a pedagogy of liberation and consciousness-making that expands beyond individual cognition into collective, ecological, and equity-based awareness (Roszak, 1976). Responsive and process-sensitive in nature, the residency welcomed a diverse group of participants to co-create and share in these experiential, intercultural, and relational interventions. These included students, chefs, curators, artists, researchers, local residents, gardeners, food growers, activists, policy makers, local government representatives, and Museum staff.

The *Tasting Ubuntu* fermentation ritual, co-hosted as a day-long event with visiting collaborator Method Gundidza of EarthLore Foundation, took place toward the close of the residency. There were 26 participants from diverse backgrounds welcomed into the studio, including longstanding collaborators and new connections drawn through informal networks. Around the walls and along a washing line were drawings, writings, images, posters, articles, and other printed material generated during the previous weeks of the residency. Once participants had introduced themselves and shared the soil of their birth, Method Gundidza offered his experiences of thanksgiving food rituals as cultural spaces for honoring our interdependence with the elements of soil, air, earth, and water. The fermentation ritual was then opened by Miche Fabre Lewin by the lighting of a candle and the lifting of a tablecloth under which were arranged 26 red and green cabbages, wooden boards, chopping knives, and bowls. The ritual unfolded through a series of participatory moments: a time of silent contemplation as each participant was invited to hold a cabbage in their hands, a hands-on exchange of fermentation practices, the shared preparation, and the filling of jars filled with fermenting cabbage. The ritual closed with the placement of the filled jars alongside the candle and the extinguishing of the flame. The ritual was followed by a celebratory sharing of a lunch of local and seasonal food, and, in the afternoon, a closing circle for listening and reflection, creating space to attune to the resonances of the experience and the relationships it fostered.

During the ritual, participants were invited by Miche Fabre Lewin to engage viscerally with food through actions such as slicing, salting, massaging, and tasting. Memories of soil, family kitchens, ancestral recipes, and personal stories were recalled and shared. These spacious interactions, layered with conversation, silence and reflection, reconnected us to lineages of care that are often rendered invisible by colonial and capitalist food systems (Penniman, 2023; Salami, 2020). The room became a space for communion and co-creation rather than consumption and control. The process echoed forms of intergenerational healing that often elude discursive language. In the space shaped by ritual, gut feeling, physical gesture, and relational gaze were given priority over speech and grammar, allowing participants to access a different mode of sensing and knowing. Moments of laughter and silence, the scent of salt and cabbage mingling with body heat, became data of another kind that offered felt traces through which the research came alive. The residency was lived through the pulse of everyday gestures: the shared bowl, sound of cutting, the cleaning of the knife, the washing of hands. These small acts grounded the conceptual language of transformation in the body's own ecology and biography. A short series of participant reflections collected informally after the ritual underscored this visceral texture. One participant described the experience as “research that smells of earth and salt” (Participant A, 6 March 2024). Another spoke of “feeling the theory in my hands” (Participant B, 6 March 2024). Such fragments remind us that the residency's knowledge production unfolded through pulse, breath, and proximity, informing a material epistemology of lived experience.

Tasting Ubuntu engaged the three intertwined movements of transformation as mentioned by O'Brien & Sygna (2013): the practical, political, and personal. In the residency these were manifest through the embodied and iterative experiences of sensing and presencing. These spheres unfolded through studio emplacement, slow attentional practices such as holding the cabbage to experience it sensuously before working with it. Through the physical gesture of the fermenting process we shared the tactile, the smell of brine, awaiting the bubbles, hearing the creaking sound of cabbage being massaged. With these embodied connections, presencing expanded. Together these processes trace a living arc that connects the personal, practical, and political. These inner shifts of awareness through convivial, sensory practice prefigure broader institutional and policy imaginaries, inviting systemic change within embodied, relational, and everyday acts of care (O'Brien & Sygna, 2013). *Tasting Ubuntu* contributes to a *gastrosophy* (Lemke, 2007) as a food politics and philosophy experienced through taste and touch, anchored in lived, sensory truth. By opening to new understandings of food as a participatory consciousness, participants shared feelings of being “viscerally moved,” “reconnected to something old and real,” and “reminded of home in a way I didn't expect” (Participants C, D, E, 6 March 2024). The ritual was at once a living archive and an experiment, an embodied space where the convivial could surface, circulate, and be consciously cultivated.

Curating the Convivial | An Offering

Tasting Ubuntu, as an arc of encounters and a fermentation food ritual, invited convivial engagements in which curation emerged as an intentional practice of care—a sequence of offerings and invitations with the potential to touch, educate, and transform those involved. Participants were able to be with themselves, to work in pairs, silently or in conversation, to ask questions and offer insights and support – all as hands massaged fresh leaves, as pinches of salt were added to bowls, as smells emerged and slices of cabbage secreted their fresh juices. This generative and iterative unfolding is what we refer to as curating the convivial. It is a sensuous choreography of movement, gestures, and exchanges oriented toward a shared intention. It is a living conversation and an exploration of how we live well together. Conviviality, in returning to its etymological roots, becomes a relational ethic. It calls us to treat matter and, in this case, cabbage, with the same tenderness we offer to our own head (Dōgen, 1237/2005), to tend to one another, and to honour the sentient, animate world in which we are embedded.

This ethic of care is a foundational element of being human, as illustrated in the Roman myth of Cura (Pogue Harrison, 2008). In the story, Cura shapes a human body from clay. Jupiter grants it spirit, Earth claims the substance, and Saturn names it *homo*, derived from *humus*, or soil. Saturn decrees that while the body lives, it will be held in Cura’s care. Upon death, its spirit returns to Jupiter, and its body to Earth. The myth reminds us that to care, or to curate, is to act from Cura’s lineage. It is to allow life, transformation, and relational integrity to unfold in their own time. Care is not peripheral to curatorial practice; it is its very ground (Haraway, 2016; Mathews, 2003; Tronto, 1993). Within this framing, curatorial work becomes a living, breathing art of care. The fermentation ritual involved shaping spaces that offered welcome, safety, and belonging. Attention was given to how people entered and moved through the studio, how objects were encountered, the acoustics, furnishings, walls, and places of interaction. During the ritual, each participant was invited to and found their own way to contribute, to express themselves within the rhythm of a collective endeavour. Curation involves this conscious designing of the psychological, material, and built conditions through which people can relate to themselves, each other and the more-than-human world.

Conviviality is defined as “amiable, intimate sets of relationships which carry a notion of peace and equality” (Overing & Passes, 2000, p. 14). It resembles the interdependent dynamics of a biological system. Derived from *con* (with) and *vivere* (to live), it describes a way of being in relation, of living with and alongside others. Convivial sociality requires and nurtures both emotional and cognitive capacities. “To live a moral, social existence,” write Overing and Passes, “requires that there be no split between thoughts and feelings, mind and body” (2000, p. 19). Illich adds that conviviality is “the autonomous and creative intercourse amongst persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment,” rooted in interdependence and imbued with ethical value (Illich, 1973, p. 17). A convivial life is inherently creative and relational. It must be

cultivated, co-created, and cocurated. It also requires containment where spaces are designed with care for comfort, memory, rhythm, and ease of movement. For conviviality to take hold, it must grow from situated, attentive engagement with the material and relational ecologies we co-inhabit—a commitment embodied by the *Tasting Ubuntu* cabbage fermentation ritual, as well as through other informal food sharing moments and artistic explorations during the residency.

Curating the convivial is thus a way of making space for connection. Drawing from Illich's vision of autonomous and creative interplay, we understand curation as both aesthetic and ethical. The convivial lives in the gestures, interactions, and exchanges that unfold within consciously held and collectively shaped space. It holds the possibility of sacred encounter, where ritual, art, and the everyday converge in a resonant moment. The residency was devoted to this: curating the convivial to nurture connection and foster practices of living well together. Through everyday rituals of harvesting, cooking, eating, and composting, life rhythms and relationships were honoured (Ballantyne-Brodie, 2018). *Tasting Ubuntu* and the wider residency sought to create a container where we could practice being and becoming-with in a carefully crafted and co-created space made sacred. In this way, the fermentation ritual and other invitations and processes—collage making, sitting with objects, listening circles—offered forms of artful knowing capable of dissolving boundaries between mind and body, theory and practice, nature and culture, art and academia, matter and spirit (Seeley, 2011).

For conviviality to take root, we must attend to the context and address the *out-of-placeness* created by patterns of alienation, disconnection, and dispossession. Genuine relational encounters require that curation be oriented toward connection rather than separation. For one of the group, this collective ritual experience “birthed the deep sense of reverence, connection, and groundedness which I have been longing for” (Participant F, 6 March 2024). Curating the convivial is about enlivening the conditions necessary for living well together. This potential for expanding relationships with ourselves and each other, arises when hospitality is intentionally cultivated, and the warmth of welcome is felt as genuine care. Indeed, the choreographed gestures created for dialoguing in the presence of cabbage fermentation catalyse our ability to know ourselves and each other more deeply. In curated encounters with food in the unfamiliar setting of the studio, participants are invited into exchanges that enliven selfhood and deepen mutual understanding through embodied experience (Weber, 2019).

Ritual Methodology | Becoming-with Food

The second offering to the reader is contemporary ritual as a responsive and liberatory praxis for experiencing relational sovereignty (Fabre Lewin, 2019; Fabre Lewin & Gathorne-Hardy, 2021). Ritual-making and art have been embedded within the making of nature-cultures since the birth of humanity. As long-standing cultural practices, rituals have shaped human societies by

choreographing bodily gestures, handling objects, and honouring present time, ancestry, and future generations (Bell, 1992; Grimes, 2013; Somé, 1998; Turner, 1969). Fox and Sheldrake (1996) highlight the cohering role of ritual in society through which we connect to the whole. They write of ritual as a form of visceral education that needs to get “into our bloodstream” with the participation of our bodies and breath and visions (Fox & Sheldrake, 1996, pp. 146–147).

It is in the making of ritual that we practice consciousness and respect our interdependent origins with the Earth (Fabre Lewin, 2019). Healer, theorist, and ritual-maker Malidoma Patrice Some discovers in his healing workshops and seminars in Europe and North America that people are longing for connection, there is a hunger for community (Somé, 1998). For the regeneration of human cultures, he frames a cultural practice where we can be dwelling in radical ritual for healing (Somé, 1998). Suzi Gablik writes of a “remythologizing of consciousness through art and ritual as a way that our culture can regain a sense of enchantment” (Gablik, 1992a, p. 48). Both choreograph forms, gestures, and processes through the handling of matter and artefacts, and both stimulate the movement of the body. Additionally, the impulse of art and ritual encourages the practice of gratitude as well as nurturing the sensibility for a feelingful life. Both engage humans in inter and intra-ctions vital for keeping alive our dynamic relationship within the ecosystem.

These practices invite participation in an animate, sentient world (Haley, 2016), sustaining a dynamic connection between human and more-than-human communities and nurturing a feelingful, responsive existence within Earth’s ecosystems (Macy, 1991). *Sympoiesis*, coined by Beth Dempster, names the co-creative and interdependent nature of ecosystems (Dempster, 2000; Haraway, 2016). Fabre Lewin and Gathorne-Hardy (2021a) expand this into *sympoiethics* to name an ethics of care practiced through participatory worldmaking. Aligned with Ubuntu philosophies, sympoiethics affirms human sovereignty as relational, grounded in mutual respect for sentient matter and the habitats we share. As Fabre Lewin (2019) describes, the artful bodymind as an instrument for intuiting and knowing modes of being-with the world, operating in a *sympoietic* dance with psyche, soma, and the imaginal processes. Corbet (2024) echoes this, framing the bodymind as an ecological whole, constantly attuned to its context through dynamic, relational flow. The art of *sympoiethics* values this integration of sensation, memory, imagination, and matter as vital for nurturing natureculture relationships. Holdrege’s *living thinking* (2013) complements this by describing a mode of inquiry shaped by vitality, flexibility, and openness. Fermentation becomes a material expression of this thinking. It slows us down, connects us to process, and brings attention to the entanglements between hands, cabbage, bodyminds, and environment. Preparing and tasting fermented cabbage together became a catalyst for epistemic healing, affirming how transformation begins in embodied, shared actions rather than abstractions.

The shared etymology of *art*, *ritual*, and *artisan* in the Sanskrit word *rta*, meaning cosmic truth or dynamic order, points to their origins in attunement

with life's flow (Haley, 2016). This expansive understanding aligns with Ubuntu cosmology, affirming that human creativity is part of a co-creative process with the living Earth (Gablik, 1992a). At the heart of the *Tasting Ubuntu* residency and cabbage fermentation ritual was a commitment to *rta*, the unfolding process of being-with. The artist-researchers engaged with the studio as a transformative container where thinking, making, and sensing converged into an integrated way of knowing. Fabre Lewin's concept of the *artful bodymind* (2019) captures this ontological stance, where psyche and soma, imagination and emotion move in co-creative relation. It recognises human beingness as embedded within an interdependent ecology of life.

In this way, art, ritual, and the artisan create conditions for remembering diverse ways of knowing rooted in interaction with others and the more-than-human world. A jar of fermented cabbage remained in the studio throughout the residency, as well as jugs and glasses of fresh water, a bowl of soil from the site, and baskets of seasonal fruit for people to enjoy. The elements and found objects with all their multiple cultural associations were always present and honoured within the space, as were people's written words and drawings. In this regard, we find deep kinship with the work of Zayaan Khan, a South African artist and food justice practitioner whose practice activates *food, seed, and land* as living archives of memory, resistance, and relation (Khan, n.d.). Through material storytelling, fermentation, and embodied ritual, Khan's work also enacts what we call *tasting Ubuntu*: a sensorial ethics of interdependence. For her ritual practices with food and land are acts of reclaiming political agency. Her fermentations and gatherings make visible how nourishment itself can be insurgent as an act of re-remembering and restoring power to the hands, soils, and communities from which it was taken. In this sense, ritual becomes both a politics and a poetics of repair through engagement with material processes in everyday life; it reconnects inner and outer, felt and formed, mundane and sacred.

Within the ritual of fermentation, the ancestral and the ecological become extended sensory and memoried intelligences nourishing us while reconnecting to the living world. Many stories were shared during the *Tasting Ubuntu* fermentation ritual that connected us to ancestral knowledge, forging links between the past, present and future. The word *culture* itself recalls its roots in agri-culture and culinary traditions of nourishment. Through this lens, fermentation becomes a way of cultivating ecological consciousness as an everyday alchemy. Embracing both preservation and transformation, fermentation as matter and metaphor, is a process that holds the tensions between stability and change. It reminds us that biodiversity is necessary for ecosystems to thrive, and essential for the health of the internal ecologies of our bodies. It reconceptualises an understanding that the lived experience of everyday practices, such as food making, becomes an emancipatory arena for cultivating and inspiring a politics of consciousness. Rae Johnson (2009) suggests that everyday practices such as food preparation and ritual hold untapped potential for fostering both personal growth and socio-political change. While

feminist and activist movements have often focused on large-scale institutional reform, these embodied, poetic engagements with the simple rhythms of life may offer a powerful, overlooked pathway toward both self-actualization and transformative action. Engaging in fermentation reclaims culture as an everyday, participatory practice.

Embodied and ecological rituals with food and culinary practices offer a solution to our disembodied living and disconnection from each other and the animate world. Fermentation as Julia Skinner (2022) notes, enhances a food's nutrient profile as well as fostering relational renewal. Here, the food ritual becomes a site of reconnection thus addressing intergenerational trauma, ecological disconnection, and reminding us that care, transformation, and collective becoming start with how we live and nourish together. In our contemporary and commodified cultures, there is the potential for ritual to offer a channel for bringing together diverse and intangible elements of culture and life and restoring the lost wisdom that we humans are naturalcultural creatures within a sentient world (Haraway, 2016).

In Figures 2-7, we depict the intentional and practical movements of fermenting cabbage on 6 March 2024.



Figure 2: Green and purple cabbages placed on a cutting board prior to preparation for fermentation.



Figure 3: Hands cradling a purple cabbage, inviting an early moment of encounter before its transformation through fermentation.



Figure 4: Slicing fresh cabbage to prepare it for dry-salting and fermentation.



Figure 5: Hands massaging cabbage together, marking the start of the embodied, microbial work of fermentation.



Figure 6: Massaging the salted cabbage breaks cell walls and releases liquid, creating the natural brine needed for lacto-fermentation.



Figure 7: Ritual attunement to the jars of fermenting green and purple cabbage held in place by water-filled glasses.

Artist Residency | Sympoethic Habitat for Worldmaking

The frame of an artist research residency and its methodology of curating the convivial with ritual practice, together offered a safe container for honouring the experience of the entangled, living processes of sympoiethic worldmaking (Tsing et al., 2017). This concept of a residency as a radical refugia for innovative thinking-making has its precursor in the concept of Artist Placement Group (APG) (Flat Time House, n.d.), where artists were placed within organisations to pioneer change and progression as well as enhancing the capacities of a site. Founded by Barbara Steveni and John Latham, these residencies championed the role of artists in decision-making and fostered participatory, collaborative projects between artists, students, teachers, researchers, staff and workers, evolving into opportunities for alternative learning and creative exploration.

There are many artist residencies across the world. While it is a well-established concept, the form that residencies take is experimental and emergent, encompassing many different kinds of activities and engagements that invite processes of reflection, research, presentation and production (Fabre Lewin 2019). During a residency the artists explore the multi-layered nature of their practice and are supported to engage new materials or immerse themselves a new locations and communities.

Tasting Ubuntu embraced the spirit of place, preparation for, and careful attention to the particularities of context. This contextual awareness to the politics of place, the people, the material, and the more-than-human presences and its specific relational textures were the ground for creating the conditions for meaningful interaction to unfold. Such emplacement included tuning into the surroundings of the studio, building on existing relationships, opening the space

to visitors, making time to be with situational processes, discovering new elements, sensing into their resonances, and researching histories and relations.

These practices made possible by being in residency also point toward what Maclaren (2018) terms *ontological intimacy*—a condition in which we are inevitably transgressed by, and transgress upon, each other. This is being and becoming-*with*: we shape and are shaped by the orientations, gestures, and intentionalities of others. The enactive perspective held within the residency illuminates how thinking and knowing arise from doing and being, interactions that require time and agency within a generative habitat (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007). Within this ecology of mutual influence and interrelation, memory and imagination became felt senses; knowledge became movement; care became a choreographed practice of relationality. The residency enacted awareness-based systems change through inner somatic shifts in collective awareness. The cabbage ritual served as an anchor for presencing, a slowing into felt connection where future possibilities could be sensed and offered a way of transforming relational fields from within.

The studio, furnished with art-making materials, armchairs, plants, a nature-culture shrine and fresh herbal drinks, becomes a place to welcome, dwell, listen and co-inquire into what was needed. As the days passed, connections and conversations extended with students, growers, community activists, researchers, policy makers and local residents, all with a personal commitment to engaging in difficult conversations around food, insecurity, trauma and racial justice. Being in residence and hosting *Tasting Ubuntu* ritual along with the recollection of its textures, smells, and stories opened up a space for such intimacy to be acknowledged and metabolised. It revealed how freedom and understanding arise not from distance or detachment, but from an entangled relationality in which care is both given and received over time. This engagement with the spirit, ecologies, and life of place included the sourcing of locally grown cabbages and finding local tree trunks to use as chopping boards. The studio within the residency thus became not just a time and site of production, but an expanding relational field for ethical attunement and epistemic intimacy.

Intimacy here is emotional closeness as well as shared attunement that allows for becoming-with an ethical condition of openness to transformation. The power of art and food rituals invite encounters of connection which nurture an awareness of our interdependence and re-orient us to worldmaking as something within which we are continuously co-constituting (Haraway, 2016; Tufnell & Crickmay, 2004). Sharing a deep and everyday relationship to food opens us toward what contemporary theorists define as an ethics of care in the everyday (Curtin & Heldke, 1992; Eliasson, 2016; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). As reflected by a participant in the “care, connectiveness, and inclusiveness expressed in this event we are cultivating an holistic approach, a culture of love, of many things coming together to support the whole” (Participant A, 6 March 2024).

The iterative and emergent engagements within the 3-week residency affirmed the value of slow, situated scholarship (hooks, 1994). Rather than

extracting conclusions from participants, the residency cultivated spaces in which insight could surface gradually unfolding in rhythm with lived experience. The cabbage, once fermented and shared, became more than a symbol: it was a medium through which connections to place, ancestry, kinship, and care were palpably felt. In this way, the studio moved beyond its role as a site of production and took on the character of a crucible, an alchemical space for cultivating relational intelligence, affective depth, and collective meaning-making. This approach affirms the premise that embodied, convivial practices can function as a living aesthetic with rigorous and responsive modes of research, particularly when working across the porous boundaries of art and reparation, belonging and dispossession, ecology and pedagogy. By foregrounding *thinking–making–sensing* as an entangled mode of inquiry, the residency positions art not as an outcome, but as a vital, life affirming process through which the intangible becomes tangible, the invisible becomes visible, and the everyday becomes a ground for transformation. Returning to sympoiethics, we remember our human sovereignty as relational, one which respects the integrity of each, one which flourishes through the *we*, one which is interdependent with the sentient matter of our Earth and the habitats we dwell within.

Conclusion | An Aesthetics of Care

Through the unfolding of *Tasting Ubuntu*, we came to recognise how convivial encounters with food cultures, mediated through the artful bodymind, offer a vital ground for cultivating an everyday ethics of care. These embodied rituals and practices invite a deeper attentiveness that reawakens our felt sense of connection with the more-than-human world. Art-making, ritual, and artisan practices become vessels not merely of expression but of relational intelligence: living processes through which we come to know ourselves as part of an interconnected ecology. What unfolded can be read as awareness-based systems change through artistic means: a re-patterning of perception that allowed participants to experience systems not as structures to be fixed but as relationships to be felt.

Engaging with fermentation, soil, and the shared preparation of food amplified the subtle intelligences of the body such as gut, hand, breath, and intuition. These multisensory practices entwine thinking with doing and sensing, drawing knowledge out of abstraction and into touch, taste, movement, and memory. In re-embedding the arts into the rhythms of daily life, we begin to restore social and ecological relationships rooted in presence and participation (Lederach, 2005). In the collective rituals, we encountered food not merely as nourishment, but as sacred substance: a mediator of memory, affect, and ancestral presence. The fermentation circle, for example, became a vessel for multidimensional connection. It allowed us to apprehend the complex interweaving of soil, microbial life, cultural heritage, embodied skill, and interpersonal exchange. Within the liminality of the ritual, we became attuned to the genius loci of place, to the felt presence of lineage and land, and to the

layered textures of collective and personal transformation. The ritual form, held with care and intention, offered a space for re-remembering what it means to belong bodily, emotionally, ecologically.

These experiences affirmed sympoiethics not only as a conceptual framework but as a lived aesthetic, a way of becoming-*with* the world through acts of mutual shaping and sensing. The art of sympoiethics invites us into postdisciplinary territories where environmental activism, multispecies kinship, relational aesthetics, and embodied ethics converge (Fabre Lewin & Gathorne-Hardy, 2021b). It gestures towards a plurality of thinking that values the interdependence of affect, contextual knowledge, and relational experience as essential to cultural and ecological renewal (Braidotti, 2022). By translating theoretical commitments such as sympoiethics, Ubuntu, and awareness-based change into micro-practices of hand, word, and presence, the residency wove concept and practice into a single fabric. What emerged was the application and emergence of theory from life lived together.

Thus, sympoiethics is not a method but a murmuration, a responsive, choreographed movement with matter, story, and spirit. Sympoiethics situates art, ritual, and the artisan as ethical and relational modes of world-making. Its ethics are not abstract but lived in the slice of a knife, the press of hands, the draw of microbes, and the choreography of encounter. It is grounded in everyday gestures including stirring, massaging, pressing, and noticing. It affirms our interdependence with the animate Earth. In growing this kind of attuned aesthetic consciousness, we also grow our capacity to be human differently. Within the group was experienced, “radical kinship with many—humans, more than humans, ancestral realm, multiple dimensions we find ourselves in” (Participant F, 24 March 2024). We are called to attune, to lean closer, not toward abstraction, but into the fibres of the real (Rendón, 2014).

An aesthetics of situated care rises from compost and brine, from the glisten of salt on skin. Here, the sacred crackles in the crunch of cabbage, loops in the laughter around a shared table, and ferments time itself. In this bubbling, biodiverse alchemy, transformation begins.

*In the presence of cabbage, something yielded.
A doorway cracked open. Not into another world,
but into this one, sensed differently.*

*As we tended the microbial, we entered myth.
In that slow stirring of what is alive but unseen,
we found ourselves not only making food,
but feeding a future... tangy, alive, still becoming.*

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethics Statement

This Residency arose through long-term collaborations, mutual trust and voluntary and self-elected participation.

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