Sympoiethics: *For the Love of a Field*

Miche Fabre Lewin and Flora Gathorne-Hardy

We are of and belong within nature. Human wellbeing and social justice are intimately entangled with caring for the places we humans inhabit. In exploring ecological citizenship, our arts collaboration Touchstones Earth asks the question "What is a truly *human* human being?" The concept of *sympoiethics* – a term that combines *sym* (with), *poieisis* (to make) and *ethics* – is the lodestar for our inquiry.[1]

A central thread of our arts practice is hosting ritual encounters with food and land to enliven the interconnections between humans and the Earth. As an "ecology of practices for cultivating response-ability" (Haraway, 2016: 34), these are sensuous and sense-making experiences which re-mind us of how our consciousness co-exists with the sentient world. These embodied ritual explorations are expressions of *rta* – a Sanskrit term which is the root of both *art* and *ritual*, and which can be translated as "the dynamic movement from which all arises" (Haley, 2016: 46).

Our on-going arts project *For the Love of a Field* is based upon exploring the thought "What a farm can be." Its genesis was in 2010 on an organic farm in Oxfordshire, UK. In 2017, it emerged as *FieldTable*, a ritual feast hosted on biodynamic land in South Africa. In 2020, the residency continues in Suffolk, UK, where we live and work. As guardians of an agricultural field of ten acres we are called to become *animateurs* of its transformation from a mono-cultured system towards regenerative landscapes of enriched natural-cultural diversity.

For the Love of a Field engenders an ecology of care with the *genius loci* of the field:

It all begins with the observations of a land healer.
A small wooden bridge on the verge of the field
is where we first meet and honour the land.
Here is a focus for shelter and sanctuary.
Here, on the margin, we plant a larch tree as a FieldShrine.
We conduct fire ceremonies during full moon, we offer rituals of gratitude;
we walk the field, we sit with it, we study its hedgerows;
we lie on it, talk with it, sing to it, grieve with it, light candles on it;
we draw, we photograph and film the changing seasons,
we make artworks and create writings;
we handle and dig and test its soil; we make sounds with its hard clods;
we picnic on it; we introduce our kin;
we trace the contours, we plot the waterways, we harvest its hedge fruit;
we inquire, we consult, we go on a research pilgrimage, we make a film;
we host a forum, we welcome conversations, ideas and inspirations;
we map a vision;
we disperse a preparation of gold, frankincense and myrrh;
we plant trees.
We share our love of the field.

For the Love of a Field re-encultures art and ritual in the everyday. It integrates the diverse sensibilities and multiple intelligences of the eco-bodymind – rational intellect, intuition, instinct, memory, the senses, emotion and imagination. An ethical life unfolds as a daily ecology of practices in care, a living mythology, a story of re-integration, of regeneration, of co-operation.

About the authors

Miche and Flora are artists and researchers dedicated to enlivening cultural and ecological diversity through socially-engaged arts. For more information, see www.touchstones.earth.

Citation

Fabre Lewin M and Gathorne-Hardy F (2021) Sympoiethics: *For the Love of a Field*. *The Ecological Citizen* **4**: 121–2.

Keywords

Agriculture; art; ecological ethics; ritual

> "The art and culture of sympoiethics engages with the intertwining of human oppression and planetary degradation."

The art and culture of sympoiethics engages with the intertwining of human oppression and planetary degradation through a continuum of living, loving, thinking, making, eating, cooking, knowing, not knowing, feeling, being, acting and re-imagining. We are in time for tuning into our ecological sovereignty with lives dedicated to human freedom and respect for the living Earth, all within the sacred web of interconnectedness. ■

Notes

1 For further discussion of Beth Dempster's concept of *sympoiesis* see Fabre Lewin (2019) and Fabre Lewin and Gathorne-Hardy (2021).

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