

## GLIMPSSING RELATIONALITY IN ACTION

### *Cultivating a Multispecies Perspective through Passionate Immersion with Photographing*

Zoë Koivu

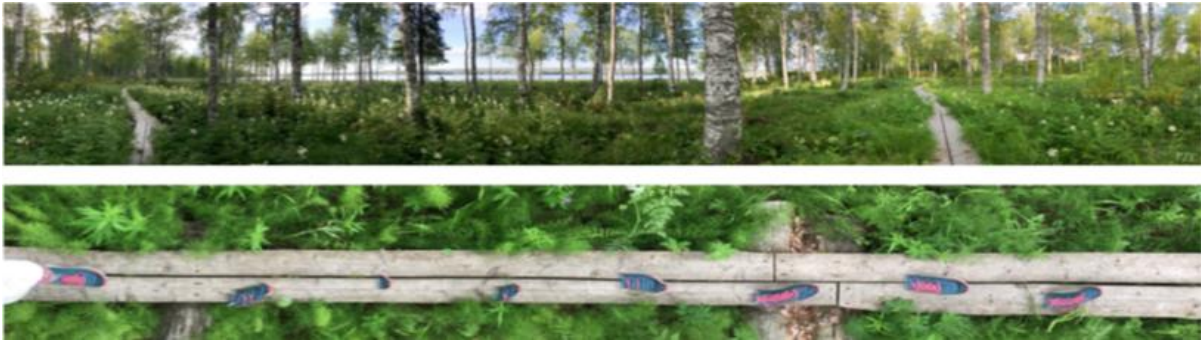
Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland  
zoe.koivu@ulapland.fi

#### ABSTRACT

Even standing still we travel at approximately 30,000 km/s as Earth circumambulates Sun. I call this *in-situ* travel. My research follows the seasonal spiral as manifested by the forested lakeshore outside my front door in Rovaniemi, Finland. I frequent this shoreline area daily with the practice of attuning with my surroundings, focusing on and photographing cultural and other-than-human noticings of the day – or night. I consider this a form of passionate immersion, which for me is the practice of being embedded in and attuned with the betweenness of sentient relationality. Along with the focus and framing of photographing, it has led to multispecies encounters and phenomenological insights while attending to the ecocultural rhythms of the high-latitude light-dark-light-dark pendulum. Evidencing the flow of the eight seasons of Lapland has honed my awareness, nurturing insight into the sentience of multispecies' ongoings. It has contributed to multiple dimensions of personal wellbeing and transformation. I have dipped my toe into more sensitive and reverential perspectives of Interbeing, coexistence, and the interdependence of everything. This has helped me to more deeply understand and connect with discourses dealing with multispecies perspectives and has nested my personal ontology in a context of spiritual ecology.

#### TRAVELLING IN PLACE

My research is a personal account of a multi-year *in-situ* journey along the seasonal spiral as manifested by the forested lakeshore area outside my front door in Rovaniemi, Finland. I have been frequenting this shoreline area daily since a boardwalk was constructed, allowing for ease of public passage alongside and to the lake.



**Figure 1**

*The lakeshore boardwalk*

Initially, I was entranced with the beauty of the area and then quickly became intrigued with the rhythm and rapid flow of the ecological and cultural changes that I noticed were tethered to the seasonal spiral. I decided to try to capture the changes in action with my phone camera; my approach to photography that is in-line with Ulrich's (2018) *Zen Camera*, which acknowledges photography as a way of seeing and learning. Subsequently, photographing cultural and other-than-human noticings of the day – or night – together with the practice of attuning with my surroundings has resulted in a praxis of 'passionate immersion' (vanDooren et al. 2016), which for me is the practice of being embedded in and attuned with the betweenness of multispecies relationality. Here, attunement is resonant with Sweetwater (2025) who describes it as being situational, relational, and vibrational, a practice of intimacy where one becomes permeable and empathic, to listen with all your senses, instinct and intuition to the co-mingling of information flowing *between* one's whole body with the "vibratory intelligence of that which you are listening to" (p. 16).

### Practicing with Proximity



**Rubber Boots Methods**



**Passionate Immersion**

**Figure 2**

*Ways of attending*

Thus, my study is a practice of embodied direct experience, of being embedded in and attuned with the betweenness of multispecies relationality. It employs the ‘rubber boots method’ (Bubandt 2022) of being attentive on location. It is an example of ‘practicing with proximity’ (Rantala et al. 2024), that is with physical, emotional, and spiritual closeness. The attentiveness cultivated through presence, noticing, and photographing is an outcome of attuning with ‘passionate immersion’ of becoming curious and entangled, to be affected and thus care.

As such, my curiosity was kindled by the rapid flow of changes in everything – ground cover, lake surface, water level, forms of precipitation, daily moods of the forest and lake, lighting, sounds, smells, taste, textures, flora, fauna, fungi, and human activities, too. In an attempt to catch the flow of change in action, I began to try to capture the noticing of my daily practice with my phone camera, a ubiquitous yet truly amazing pocket-sized techno-device with seemingly miraculous affordances. I agree with Ulrich (2018, p. 9) that photography can assist “in forging an authentic, resonant relationship with the world around you” and can help “occupy and interact with the present moment.”



**Figure 3**  
*The Freezing begins*

Being able to simultaneously live with stunningly beautiful surroundings in relative safety while living in a city is a privilege of residing in a region of low-population density and a striking specificity of place. The lakeshore path is located in Lapland, which is known for the extremes of its eight seasons, a product of its high-latitude and annual journey around Sun.

By default, as Earthlings we are constantly travelling through space while encircling Sun at about 30000 km/second. Due to the tilt of Earth’s axis in relation to Sun, we experience

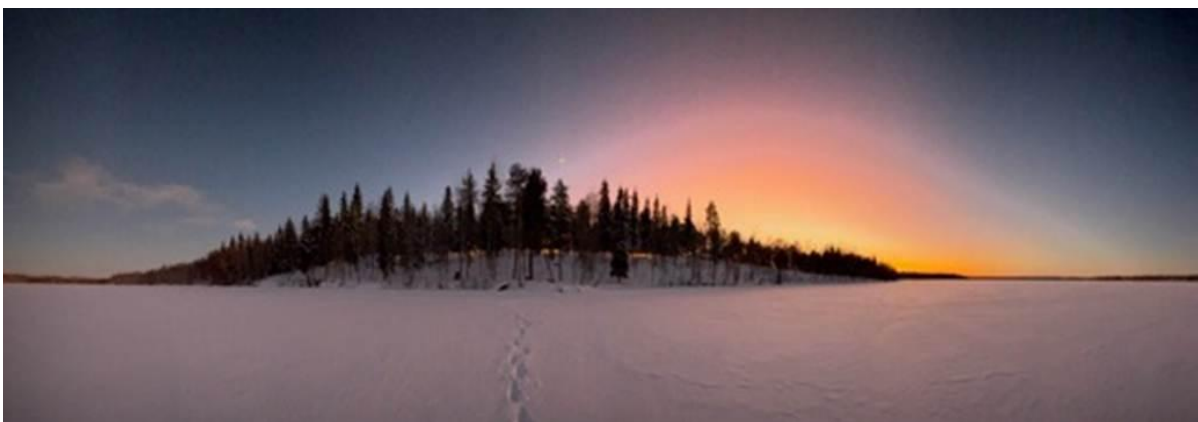
seasons, which are largely phenology based. They can be wet-dry, the four seasons of Autumn, Winter, Spring and Summer, eight seasons or more, or other depending on which type of season we consider, for instance, cultural seasons, animal seasons, plant, fishing, growing, harvesting, hunting, herding seasons, or seasons of life. There can also be seasons within seasons.



**Figure 4**

*The Eight Seasons of Lapland.* Adapted from <https://international.rovaniemi.fi/en/8-seasons>

As we circumambulate the sun, we are hosted by the seasons and the diverse affordances tethered to them. These rapid changes are, paradoxically, characteristic of this type of what might be called slow travel, which in this case occurs at the speed of the seasonal flow.



**Figure 5**

*Frosty Winter, February Sunset*

*Human-environment relationality*

Following, I offer examples of multilevel, multispecies ecocultural engagement leading to a sublime 'connection with'. My exploration has been a journey of enlightenment, immersion and is phenomenological in nature. It is rooted in real-world experience.

My noticings and insights will be familiar with some readers, especially those who have lived in Arctic conditions. Nevertheless, I would like to share my perspective with a spin around the seasonal spiral of the Arctic patch outside my front door. The photos are my own and have been moderately edited to accentuate the features that call to me:



**Figure 6**

*Ruska (Fin) – the time of autumn colours*



**Figure 7**

*Autumn Vibrancy*

Colours are vibrant on the ground and all around, for instance, in the sky and reflected on the water. These photos are taken at the same place and time – sitting in a canoe looking left (orange sun), and right (blue, full Harvest Moon).



**Figure 8**  
*First Snow Grace*

First Snow arrives suddenly or expectedly, usually gracefully, always with anticipation, mostly with relief for the reflective brightness it brings and as a reassurance that winter will come. Will it stay? It usually disappears to return as the subsequent First Snow.



**Figure 9**  
*First Snow*



**Figure 10**  
*The Freezing*

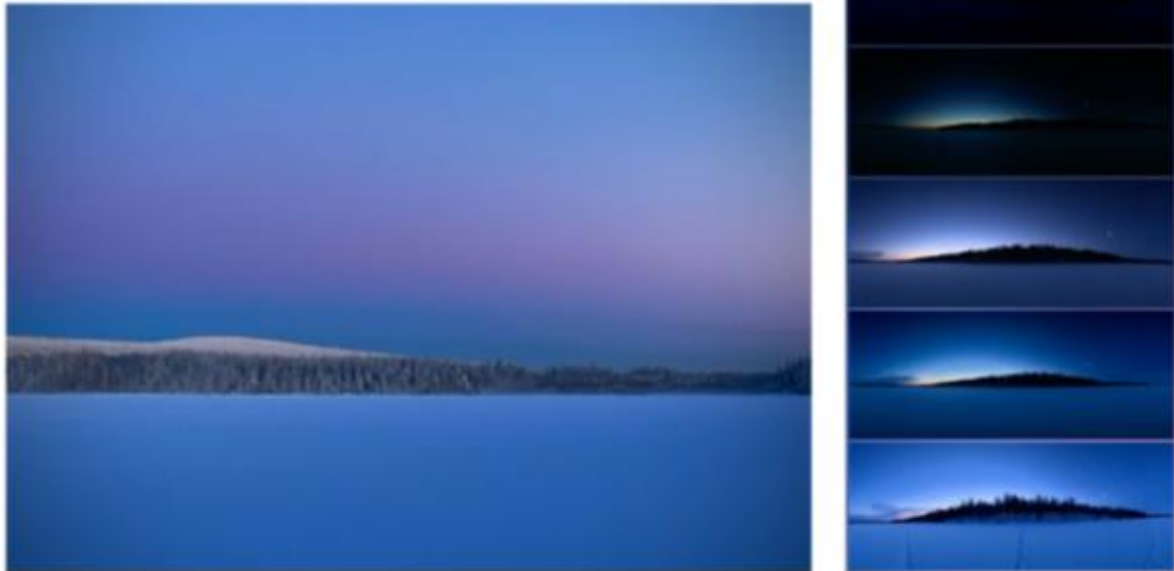
Soon after, The Freezing sets in creating a range of spectacular and dynamic ice formations accompanied with unique choruses of sounds. Jingling, jangling, hissing, clinking of surface ice along the shore or the shooting peeeuwing call of ice forming across the lake. How the ice forms is significant for having a ‘proper’ winter and ensuring its loadbearing capacity for passing over during winter and spring.



**Figure 11**  
*Freezing Formations*

Kaamos (a beautiful Finnish word) – Polar Night settles on the Arctic Circle with long, lingering colours of peace and harmony, often accompanied with a juxtaposition of take-your-breath-away beauty and breathlessness due to sharp dry air of extreme cold.

## Kaamos – Polar Night



**Figure 12**

*Kaamos (Fin) – The Polar Night*

Frosty Winter persists, sometimes with cold, dull bleakness, but often with awe-evoking treats of colourful and stunning beauty. For instance, Polar stratospheric ‘pearl’ clouds, crystalline moonlight sparkles, and sun or moon halos particular to Arctic conditions.

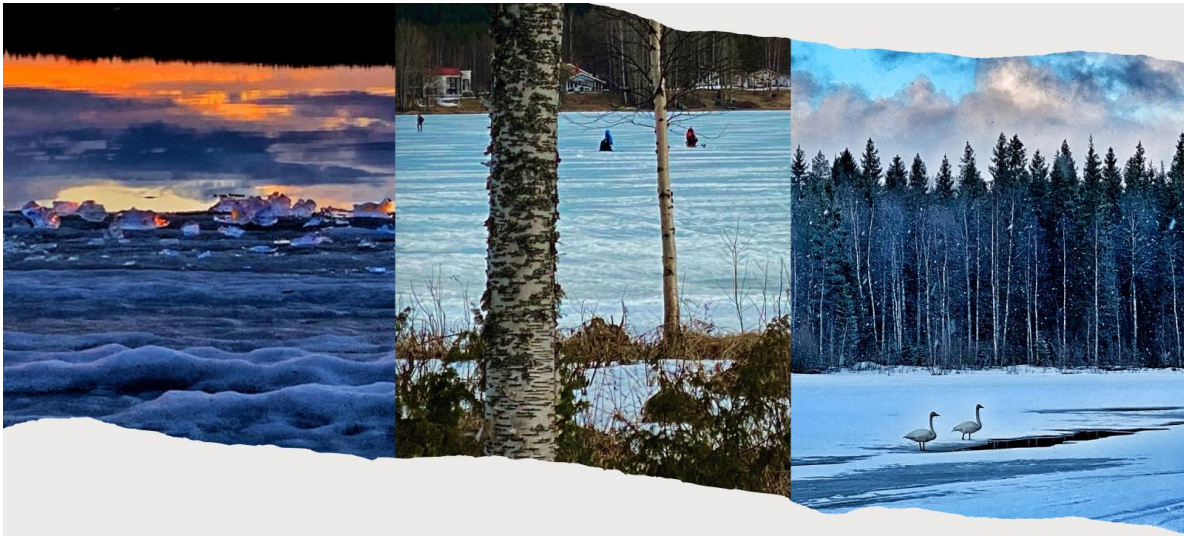


**Figure 13**

*Frosty Winter*

*Human-environment relationality*

Eventually, when Sun repositions overhead and warms the air, snow sublimates, ice dissipates, and swans return as soon as water patches open in the ice, ice fishers continue to sit on the lake until the last possible moment.



**Figure 14**  
*Departure of Ice*

Again, we can hear intriguing clinking, jingling, grinding and crashing sounds of moving ice.

Particularly in Big Snow years followed by sudden warm temperatures, floods occur. The photo on the left shows three weeks of spring; on the right, the surreal experience of canoeing through the forest above the boardwalk.



**Figure 15**  
*Spring Floods*

The water recedes revealing unfurling and flourishing. The universal spirit is ready to present in an infinitude of living forms.



**Figure 16**  
*Flourishing*

In an instant, everything is green, thriving in the long lingering light of Midnight Sun.



**Figure 17**  
*Unfurling*



**Figure 18**  
*Midnight Sun*

This activates Boaters and Mosquitoes. Our protein- and nutrient-rich blood offerings for mosquitoes directly embeds us in multispecies relations as blood supports the reproduction of more mosquitoes and thus the production of more food for other beings (including birds, bats, frogs, dragonflies, fish) to feast on. Thus, the circles and cycles of life continue.



**Figure 19**  
*Activation*

This is accompanied with Midsummer Flower Madness – a joyful succession of tiny delicate-looking but hugely strong, resilient flowers luminous with colour, looking pretty while attracting pollinators – and me! Often, I am drawn to what I refer to as Glances of Beauty, where a momentary sight of splendour graces my attention leaving me wondering whether it is gazing at me or vice versa. I suspect it is both: a relational encounter. Perhaps it is a form of kinning, of kindred intimacy, an opening to sacred permeability, becoming transpersonal, a doorway into ‘enlifenment’ (see Sweetwater 2025) and ‘enlivenment’ (see Weber 2019).



**Figure 20**

*MidSummer Flower Succession*



**Figure 21**

*Noticing*

While attention is also drawn to the in-your-faceness of mosquitoes, which might make them the most noticeable insects, a plethora of wildlife abounds in the form of other insects, bugs, and spiders thriving in and around the forest, lake and shoreline; the more you look, the more you notice.

And this is where my multispecies awareness has largely been awakened, where what might be seen as mundane becomes noticed, recognised as wonder-exuding magnificence. Being curious about what is just beyond vision, I use a wi-fi digital microscope to ‘explore the micro world’ (as it states on the product package). This exploration has led to many great adventures of discovering (for me) life-on-life along with close-up views of plants. I greet while hoping I am not overly nosey or invasive.



**Figure 22**

*Up-close Explorations*

The macro photos below were compiled for the Gifts from the Sentient Forest Project (GSF 2025) exhibition held in Rovaniemi during Summer 2025. I chose to call my contribution The Plurality of Oneness to reflect the diversity of the truly amazing world of flora and fauna, especially when approached at the macro scale. Together they are part of the great interconnectedness, the oneness of being. Here we have the surprising colours and pattern details of the bottom of a ripening Bilberry, the tiny two-eyed spirit living in a Twinflower, and the stunning colours of everyday Fireweed in autumn.



**Figure 23**  
*The Plurality of Oneness*



**Figure 24**  
*Fauna Community*

And, of course, larger fauna reside here, too – flying, climbing, swimming, burrowing, hopping, stealthy plodding. This hare is ready for snow, but with the new normal of a wobbly climate, the snow has not arrived yet, depriving it of one of its superpowers to camouflage in the snow, leaving it noticeable and vulnerable to prey (ermine and foxes live here, too). The squirrel is in harvest mode.

*Human-environment relationality*

There are many bounties of the lake and forest, including fish, berries and fungi among others harvested by humans and other-than-humans alike.



Bilberry



Lingonberries

**Figure 25**  
*Gathering Season*

Which brings us back to colourful autumn.



**Figure 26**  
*Colourful Autumn*

I hope this spin along the seasonal spiral, as manifested by the lakeshore habitat on the Arctic Circle of Rovaniemi, has provided you with an insight into my perspective of how the seasons express themselves and my way of nurturing numinous experiences of awe and wonder, witnessing noticings while travelling in-place on an *in-situ* journey of discovery.

This passionate immersion (akin to van Dooren et al. 2016) of attuning with my surroundings with open senses, being embedded in the multispecies enmeshment of relationality, has led to cultivating attentiveness, curiosity and creativity; features that stick with me. Thus, I have experienced an evolution in my personal perspective, perhaps even a transformation; I feel that beyond an intellectual understanding, I have experienced embodied glimpses into multispecies relationality, an insight of Interbeing, of feeling connectedness with everything; of belonging. This has helped me to more deeply understand and connect with discourses dealing with multispecies perspectives and has nested my personal ontology in a context of spiritual ecology, which can be thought of as "...the recognition of the universal spirit that imbues all living things – a recognition that must be embodied through conscious spiritual engagement with Earth." (Vaughan-Lee 2025, p.1). I think there are different ways to reach this perspective. For instance, through a spiritual lens, as in Vaughan-Lee, or from an Indigenous stance, where, as I understand it, the notions of being part of, of animate existence and sentience are embedded in an inherited worldview. Alternatively, I have come from a serendipitous route of curiosity followed by daily immersion, attunement, and photographing.

I hope this offers ideas for engaging with and contributing to sustainable naturecultures and multispecies futures.

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