

Back To The Land 2.0

John Thackara, Reader (June 2021)

INTRODUCTION

This reading list is for designers (broadly interpreted) on the annual summer course (<http://www.backtotheland.se/>) I run together with Konstfack, in Sweden. The focus is on food and relationships - social and cultural ones, as well as technical and business. The emphasis is on care, more than consumption. It's about connection to place. It celebrates contact between generations. It demands respect of other cultures. By the end of the course - with its readings, activities, and exercises - participants will have experienced: new ways to think about food and food systems; how to be as well as what to do, in a food context; who you need to connect with, and how, in order to intervene in a food system; how to reflect, in your journey ahead, as well as how to take action.

Week 1 Start

Week 2 Soil

Week 3 Farming

Week 4 Processing

Week 5 Eating

Week 6 Digesting (Workshop Week)

Week 7 Composting / Back to the soil (Reflection weeks)

JOHN THACKARA CONTENT

Blog, PPTs, Handouts: <http://thackara.com/>

Talks on video: <http://thackara.com/talks-on-video/>

Publications: <http://thackara.com/publications-john-thackara/>

Twitter: @johnthackara

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/thackarameetup>

WHERE WE ARE COMING FROM (BEFORE WE START)

Annie Proulx on Barkskins

Or, how we first got the idea that the earth's resources are limitless. Proulx's story begins with the arrival in "New France" – the vast tract of north America and Canada colonised by the French between the 16th and 18th centuries.

Two young men set out to earn their freedom by clearing an area of forest; they are soon awestruck by the imposing, often impenetrable and seemingly limitless extent of the forest.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jun/10/barkskins-annie-proulx-review-alex-clark>

The historical roots of our environmental crisis / Lynn White jr 1967

<http://www.zbi.ee/~kalevi/lwhite.htm>

Robert Woodford on the Deep Time Walk

The Deep Time Walk app helps people walk a story of Earth's evolutionary journey - a new story that can reorientate us to where we come from – our origins, our purpose. A story that combines the latest scientific insights with the deep reverence inherent in our perennial traditions that bind us

to life and the cosmos. The Deep Time Walk is experienced as a 4.6km walk, inspiring wonder and reverence for Earth, and galvanising positive action needed in our times.

<https://www.deeptimewalk.org/blog/walk-new-story/>

A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet"

Jason W. Moore and Raj Patel.

Nature, money, work, care, food, energy, and lives: these are the seven things that have made our world and will shape its future. In making these things cheap, modern commerce has transformed, governed, and devastated the Earth. Bringing the latest ecological research together with histories of colonialism, indigenous struggles, slave revolts, and other rebellions and uprisings, Patel and Moore propose a radical new way of understanding—and reclaiming—the planet in the turbulent twenty-first century.

<https://www.versobooks.com/books/3139-a-history-of-the-world-in-seven-cheap-things>

WHERE WE ARE HEADED

Fred Provenza on “Nourishment: What Animals Can Teach Us Rediscovering Our Nutritional Wisdom”

When people’s knowledge becomes detached from the acts of growing and harvesting foods, people little understand or appreciate the biological or cultural origins of their diets. Nor do they realise when those norms change, as they have in the past century, in ways that are harmful. By raising our level of awareness of the knowledge we’ve lost, we can redesign ‘grazing circuits’ that better enable the health of herbivores and humans and the landscapes we inhabit.

(see Twitter thread: <https://twitter.com/fleroy1974/status/1126381773611577345>)

Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary

From commodities, to communities. Frugality. Courage. Marginality. Magic. Generosity. Accessibility. Collaboration. Care for place. Care for people. Indigenous traditions and world views have long understood that everything is inter-connected and has its own life force. The one hundred short entries here (it’s free to download) elucidate many paths to a social transformation that places empathy with humans and non-human beings first. The visions and practices here honour cooperation rather than competitiveness as the norm.

<https://www.ehu.eus/documents/6902252/12061123/Ashish+Kothari+et+al-Pluriverse+A+Post-Development+Dictionary-2019.pdf/c9f05ea0-d2e7-8874-d91c-09d11a4578a2>

Simone Weil

“Place is a doorway into caring. Rootedness in a place is the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. Love of place unleashes the personal and political will needed to make profound change. It can also unite people across diverse ideological spectra because place is what we all share: it is the commons that allows

people to call themselves a community. Caring about place is powerful motivation to take action locally, but caring about any living entity without understanding how it works can lead (and has led) to well intentioned but ultimately damaging interventions. Each particular place... is the continuously evolving expression of a highly complex set of forces—inanimate and living—which become integrated into an organic whole. Places are alive, characterised by all the fluid, dynamic and multi-level relationships that shape all living beings, and understanding them presents a special challenge.

<https://www.schumachercollege.org.uk/blog/revealing-the-story-of-place>

‘The Overstory’: Nick Hunt in conversation with Richard Powers

Richard Powers, author of ‘The Overstory’ (recent winner of the Pulitzer Prize) writes about tree-consciousness, cultural epiphanies, a world going up in flames, and what lies beyond despair. “The idea, quite plainly put, is that there is no separate thing called humanity, any more than there is a separate thing called nature. The great insight is that there are only reciprocal processes and networks between the agencies and agents and actions and actors of life, and that this entire capitalist, individualist, anthropocentric, commodity-driven, private-means-driven culture is based on a fantasy, an ephemeral fantasy that starts in the wrong place and is going to end disastrously.... Now, when we look at a forest, instead of seeing this justification for an archaic understanding of evolution and the survival of the fittest, we see a highly cooperative and interdependent system that you can almost think of as a superorganism”.

<https://dark-mountain.net/older-than-writing/>

Carolyn Steele on “Hungry City: How Food Shapes Our Lives”

The gargantuan effort needed to feed cities across the world on a daily basis has a massive and vastly under appreciated social and physical impact on people and the planet.

<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/3520169-hungry-city>

http://www.ted.com/talks/carolyn_steel_how_food_shapes_our_cities

Carolyn Steele: Sitopia

From our foraging hunter-gatherer ancestors to the enormous appetites of modern cities, food has shaped our bodies and homes, our politics and trade, and our climate. Whether it's the daily decision of what to eat, or the monopoly of industrial food production, food touches every part of our world. By forgetting its value, we have drifted into a way of life that threatens our planet and ourselves. Sitopia is a provocative and exhilarating vision for change, and how to thrive on our crowded, overheating planet.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/mar/12/sitopia-how-food-can-save-the-world-carolyn-steel-review>

Agroecology Resetting the Design Intention Lynne Davis @OpenFoodNet @AgroecologyNow

We need food system infrastructures that: are open, not closed; replace order, control & uniformity, with diversity; allow unexpected things to happen, by design.

<https://www.agroecologynow.com/21st-century-agroecology/>

Soil Care Network

How to pay attention to soils so as to create caring relations? Soils are reclaiming their place as the foundation of survival for humans and other than humans on a fragile earth. Relegated to the margins for decades by advances in agrotechnologies, today soils are being attended to by farmers, environmentalists, and scientists alike. Diverse groups are reclaiming the importance of 'dirt' as the lynchpin of biotic and abiotic processes on which a variety of life depends.

This 'rediscovery' of soils calls for a rethinking of conceptual and practical frameworks for knowing and acting in a more-than-human world that goes beyond scientific realms and traditional spaces of soil practices. As a result, scholars are giving renewed attention to soils and their fascinating characteristics: omnipresent but invisible; ancient yet constantly re-made; globally significant yet heterogeneous; mundane yet unknowable; indispensable but de-valued; deeply inter-related with human labour but simultaneously independent of it; kept locally but with global effects. Founded by Dr Anna Krzywoszynska, their newsletter is excellent. <https://www.soilcarenetwork.com/workshop-1>

Facing Gaia:

Eight Lectures by Bruno Latour (pdf)

<https://grattoncourses.files.wordpress.com/2019/06/bruno-latour-facing-gaia-eight-lectures-on-the-new-climatic-regime.pdf>

Maria Puig de le Bellacasa,

When the word for world is soil –

The Understory of the Understory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bfNSPx24f2I>

WEEK 1 SOILS

James Merryweather, It Starts With The Soils

Ninety-nine percent of all food comes from our soils. As home to an enormous variety of organisms – from bacteria, to mammals – soil health determines the metabolic health of all terrestrial ecosystems.

<http://saveourwoods.co.uk/articles/expert-articles/soils-biodiversity-by-dr-james-merryweather/>

Soil and Soul, Alastair Macintosh

Communities governed by a sense of reverence and mutual responsibility. But right relationship can be restored, he suggests, by learning from the bardic tradition to create a new harmony of soil, soul and society.

<http://www.alastairmacintosh.com/soilandsoul.htm>

The Neurology of Soil @SimonSublime (Photography)

<https://exploringtheinvisible.com/2019/05/30/the-neurology-of-soil-planetary-scale-connections/>

Thinking Soil (exhibition)

<https://ccanw.org.uk/soil-culture/>

Our Living Soil

<http://ourlivingsoil.art>

Soil Tasting Ceremony (Experience)

<http://thackara.com/transition-and-resilience/what-does-this-soil-taste-like-how-does-this-forest-think/>

Mapping the microbiome of cities

<http://www.sciencefriday.com/videos/swabbing-new-york-citys-subways-for-art/>

Edaphic Factors: soil formation, profile and characters (PPT)

<https://www.slideshare.net/bhanupriyaR3/edaphic-factors-122623775>

Feral Atlas. Tsing et al

<http://feralatlas.org/>

Urban-Rural Exhibition, China - Soil Zone (PPT)

The slideshow (link below) explains how the story was told in words and images.

1. The soil, and us, are one system. The health of the soil, and of people, are one same story.
2. “From the Soil” (classic Chinese text)
3. The ecological restoration industry (Society of Ecological Restoration).
4. Most Ecosystems Can Recover in One Lifetime. Example: Loes Plateau, China
5. The Ten Elements of Agroecology: At its heart, the idea of a farm as a whole system.
6. The ClimateTech wiki, and the AgTech
7. Soil Restoration: Four indicators of healthy soil: structure | microbial life | nutrients
8. Five farming methods
9. Five Citizen Actions

https://www.slideshare.net/johnthackara/urbanrural-exhibition-shanghai-november-2019-john-thackara-personal-slides?qid=7d8c9ff8-5a17-431e-a0e2-da7fbd2ce354&v=&b=&from_search=1

Composting as Relating (Markus Wernli)

“Transitioning from the unsustainable dependencies of an urban consumer, to a resilient way of life will require the sensory and bodily involvement of every person. The shared practice of fermentation in the urban context – fermentation-powered practice of self-reliant biomass composting – offers an investigative mode of place- and person-based research. The study explores ways in which the realm of aesthetics intersects with life-affirming forms of more-than-human relatedness.

<http://markuswernli.org/>

Camargue Rhizosphere (online book)

Regenerative Empathy is a Studio Report from the Fall 2018 semester at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design based on the option studio “Rhizosphere,” taught by Teresa Galí-Izard. The investigations and drawings here reveal new potential assemblages for La Camargue in France, proposing new forms of association between the people, animals, and plants that inhabit the region. The projects touch on geological and climate data, research on food production, and surveys of scientific literature into drawings focusing on the “rhizosphere”

<https://issuu.com/gsdharvard/docs/regenerativeempathy>

WEEK 2 FARMING

It’s not (just) about diet

A focus on ‘diet’, in isolation, can be so harmful to the health of living systems as a whole. This calm and informative critique of the EAT Lancet report points out that “diet was the focus of their message, conveniently placing responsibility on consumer choice over agri-business”

<https://triedandsupplied.com/saucydressings/eat-lancet/>

Agroecology

One definition is that agroecology as the study of the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment within agricultural systems. Consequently, agroecology is inherently multidisciplinary; it includes knowledge from agronomy, ecology, sociology, economics and related disciplines. Agroecologists do not unanimously oppose technology or inputs in agriculture. Instead, they assess how, when, and if technology can be used in conjunction with natural, social and human assets. As a component of any Green New Deal, Agroecological practices require public goods such as extension services; storage facilities; rural infrastructure (roads, electricity, and information and communication technologies) for access to regional and local markets; credit and insurance against weather-related risks; agricultural research and

development; education; and support to farmers’ organizations and cooperatives. Agroecological practices are knowledge-intensive and require the development of both ecological literacy and decision-making skills in farm communities.

http://p2pfoundation.net/Six_Proposed_Policy_Principles_for_Scaling_Up_Agroecology
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agroecology>

Agroecology | Union of Concerned Scientists

Agroecology combines the best of two time-tested disciplines, ecology and agriculture, to pursue solutions for a healthier world. Bear in mind that 97% of all farms in world are less than two acres in size; 70% of active farmers are women; and 50% food world eats comes from smallholder farms - that, between, them, use 20% of the the world’s arable land

<https://blog.ucsusa.org/marcia-delonge/the-abcde-of-agroecology-what-is-it-all-about-926?Xnc>

Relational Ecology

By focusing on the relationships that interconnect us, relational ecology is a proposal to reintroduce spaces of understanding and sharing between humans and non-humans. By doing so, it enables us to refresh our knowledge about the links between societies and their environment, and to focus on territorial diversity in order to provide relevant responses to social and ecological crises.

<https://aesopyoungacademics.wordpress.com/2019/02/06/relational-ecology-rethinking-relationships-between-man-and-the-natural-environment/>

Relational Coffee

Africa produces 75% of the world's cocoa but gets 2% of \$100b chocolate market revenue. Ratio for coffee are similar. But few of us in the North know much about the 25 million families that grow and produce this valuable bean. In a system that can involve as many as eight transactions to bring the coffee to market, coffee farmers receive less than two percent of the price of a cup of coffee sold in a coffee bar or roughly six per cent of the value of a standard pack of ground coffee sold in a grocery store.

<https://www.womenincoffee.org/>

Social Food Atlas

Launched in Italy in 2019, entries in the Social Food Atlas include municipal gardens and urban farms; community meals; social harvest festivals; farmer-to-farmer meet-ups; food waste platforms; community kitchens; community baking and brewing sites; care farms; school gardens; street food festivals; cooperative grain growing; farm hacks; regional gatherings; farm tours; and many more - from Austria to Ukraine. They

<https://www.mammamiaaaa.it/en/atlas/>

Social Food Green Paper

Social food curators met in Matera for the launch of the Social Food Forum. A two minute video is here. We discussed the different kinds of value created by social food projects. In particular, they create 'public goods' in the form of social cohesion, public health, territorial development, food sovereignty, farmer livelihoods, learning, innovation, and biodiversity.

<https://www.mammamiaaaa.it/en/green-paper/>

WEEK 3 - PROCESSING

Farm-2-Table

Food Hubs / Open Food Network

A sustainable and resilient food system needs to reconnect producers and consumers. The Open Food Network (OFN) (now in 13 countries) is a global, open-source community collectively developed and maintained by food activists and software developers around the world. As a platform cooperative, users of OFN become members and owners of the network. The OFN's flagship project is an open source software platform that makes it easy to create innovative, independent, community food enterprises. The software can be used by farmers to set up their own online stores, or by communities to create food collectives, manage food hubs, or take their farmers' market online with pre-purchases to give stallholders more secure sales, and more.

<https://www.openfoodnetwork.org/>

11 resources for developing thriving local food movements

From the UK, a very good checklist of what is needed for a local food system to succeed

https://www.sustainweb.org/blogs/jul20_ten_building_blocks_good_food_movement/

Mapping The Edible City (Viljoen, Bohm)

Traditional mapping practices have drastically changed in recent years. Often, the new mapping enables a new way of approaching urban issues. Urban food practices, a topic of increasing interest, are also prolific in uptaking new mapping styles. These papers explores the young history of food mapping.

<http://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/pulr/2020/09/21/mapping-the-edible-city-showcases-the-diversity-of-urban-food-mapping/>

Biocanteens

Farms can play a major role in transitioning the economy, and also create new economic incentives. Ans Rossy, an educational ecologist, explains: "We have to start by changing the ways we see the farm and relate to food, and that begins with education," she concludes. "In Germany farm pedagogics is a lot farther developed than in Belgium, the Netherlands or France." In the French town of Mouans-Sartoux, on the French Riviera, a thousand organic and mostly local meals are served each day to local school children. The meals are 100% organic - and because they are mostly composed of local products, the drastic reduction of food waste thereby fully compensates for the higher cost of switching to organic products. Biocanteens reverse the trend for school meals to be provided by catering services managed by large companies serving low-quality food based on ready-made products transported from central kitchens. This industrial model implies limited local employment, increased transportation costs with the subsequent impact on the environment, and centralized decisions. In France, the Centre for Sustainable Food Education (MEAD) is on a municipal farm of 135 hectares the development of local agriculture, supports with subsidies the installation of new organic farms and a potential of 50 to 100 new jobs in the sustainable food-related local economy.

<http://restauration-bio-durable-mouans-sartoux.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Brochure-Mouans-Sartoux-english-version.pdf>

Food Systems Design Curators

Food system projects do not organise themselves. They happen thanks to the work of food system producers or curators. These individuals identify opportunities such as projects, places, or individuals - and design ways to bring them to life. They connect these neglected assets in events and enterprises. Their work is connective; they enable a wide variety of stakeholders to work together. They do this in five key ways:

- map actors and resources
- curate activities and outcomes
- make service prototypes
- test new business models
- assemble co-operation platform

As collaboration experts - people who connect people - their most valuable skills are hosting, convening, facilitating, animating, and co-ordinating. Their work is a form of social infrastructure.

<https://www.slideshare.net/johnthackara/bee-or-designing-for-more-than-humans-2020>

I posted some images of food system maps and storyboards.

When designing your food system intervention, the most important word is “story” : your task is to explain to a stranger what action or project you propose to undertake. This explanation *may* include fancy visuals - but it can also be super simple - like the first slide here.

<https://www.slideshare.net/johnthackara/back-to-the-land-2020-food-systems-maps-and-storyboards>

Circular Economy for Food (Ellen Macarthur Foundation)

“The ubiquity of food waste has sparked the interest of designers and industries in its potential as a new (and abundant) raw material. One burgeoning area of interest is the use of the by-products generated by specific food sectors to engineer new materials. Design research projects have explored such topics as turning propolis (bees/honey) into glass; extracting yarn from orange juice production (‘pastazzo’); bioplastics from coffee grounds; packaging made from artichoke residues in Genoa. Hundreds of similar experiments are happening out there. Common to these experiments is the idea of managing a city’s materials flows as a metabolism, or circular economy - not just a linear production line.

https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/assets/downloads/CCEFF_Full-report-pages_May-2019_Web.pdf

Mold Food Waste Special

<https://thisismold.com/process/materials/material-futures-mining-food-waste-in-the-anthropocene>

WEEK 4 EATING

The multiple meanings of urban food

End your urban farming definition stress! This rather wonderful text by the late Wayne Roberts explains that city planners and managers need (with our help) to embrace and enable a multitude of different urban agricultures.

<https://medium.com/@wayneroberts/the-ways-and-the-way-to-urban-agriculture-digging-into-three-new-books-29d43b84c585>

Peer-to-Peer Restaurants, how restaurants are surviving the pandemic

Pre-Covid, nearly 60% of new restaurants failed within the first two years of being open. One of the main reasons was the tremendous amount of debt that many restaurant owners accumulate from the start (the building itself to the furnishings to the cooking equipment, the ventilation system, marketing, branding). Running costs once open are also high (managers, servers, kitchen staff, bartenders and a host. With their small profit margins, these restaurants survived, in the past, on profits from alcohol.

<https://civileats.com/2020/04/22/restaurants-are-transforming-into-grocery-stores-to-survive-the-pandemic/>

Restaurant of the near future (from NYC)

https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/10/19/spicy-noodles-and-gossip-at-public-village?utm_campaign=falcon&utm_brand=tny&utm_social-type=owned&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&mbid=social_twitter

Dan Barber, How restaurants will survive

New York State and much of the United States has been in lockdown for months. Chef Dan Barber reacts to the topic on everyone's lips – whether restaurants will survive the coronavirus pandemic and what they may look like once they reopen. He explains the different ways he's looking to save independent farmers and protect independent agriculture

<https://www.theworlds50best.com/stories/News/dan-barber-fixing-local-food-systems-how-you-can-help.html>

Street Food Vendors

Fabulous short films on some of Asia's best #streetfood and the struggles street-side chefs face. Eight workers from three continents to give you a broader portrait of the daily lives of these workers

<https://medium.com/wiego/netflixs-street-food-shows-the-real-struggles-of-the-working-poor-8-stories-confirm-the-harsh-da2cc847df97>

MORE JOHN THACKARA CONTENT

Urban-Rural PPT

<https://www.slideshare.net/johnthackara/urbanrural-exhibition-shanghai-november-2019-john-thackara-personal-slides>

Urban-Rural Video (20')

<https://youtu.be/PoK1lHmupNA>

Bottom-Up Biodiversity (text, 1,500w)

<http://thackara.com/place-bioregion/bottom-up-biodiversity/>

Relational Ecology and Design (Video, 45')

https://youtu.be/gqjfPuLV0_w

Ten Food System Interventions PPT

<https://www.slideshare.net/johnthackara/back-to-the-land-20-food-system-interventions-john-thackara-slides-220620/1>

How To Thrive In The Next Economy, John Thackara book (PDF)

Below the radar of the mainstream media, a replacement economy is growing from the ground up.

<http://thackara.com/thackarathrive/book/>
http://thackara.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/PDF-Thrive-Press_Copy.pdf

Bioregioning: Pathways to Urban-Rural reconnection (John Thackara in She Ji)

My 6,000 word paper in China's design and innovation journal, She Ji.

Main points:

A metabolic rift runs through the economy and culture. | The reconnection of urban and rural is an enabling condition for system change. | Bioregions reconnect us with living systems, and each other, through the places where we live. | The design of social infrastructure enables the emergence of new enterprises. | Knowledge ecologies, not transmission channels, are the key to bioregional learning.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405872619300012>