



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

## **The Vicissitudes of Becoming**

Holding Space among a community in Tākaka

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## Abstract

This thesis represents embodied practices in everyday life in an intentional community, facilitated by a visionary, feminist and a peace activist Sunshine Appleby in Aotearoa New Zealand. Established in 2018, the New Directions Connections Learning Centre is rooted towards spiritual awakening, community building, commensalities of healthy eating and zero-waste living. Holistic and utopian by its nature, the community building experiment is run at her home; opened to visitors, residents and participants in the different programs and activities. Nevertheless, the community, rooted in the spirituality of the New Age, is deeply affected by the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and mandates that leads questioning the government, safety and wellbeing.

In an attempt to understand the meanings encoded in the organization of a community and why a woman in her late 70s chooses to share her daily life with a bunch of strangers, I dive in to living with them for 3 months during the winter 2021. The research is, however, based on my year and a half (August 2020 to February 2022) living between Nelson, Golden Bay and Wellington while studying remotely throughout the period. As a *becoming* ethnographer, I explore the peculiarities of Golden Bay; predominantly one, the practice of holding space.

This thesis is my attempt to elucidate the observed and the experienced by having been the *space-holder* myself. It is an audacious attempt to understand the novelty of New Age in relation to the re-emerging conspiracy theories and what has holding space to do with it. Is it exploited in activism? Do people actually believe in the conspiracies or is it a political stance of *dissensus*? Or aesthetical, perhaps?

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## Introduction

I first heard about Sunshine Appleby in 2020 when I was living at the Sustainable Living Centre in Tākaka Township. Here, in the heart of Golden Bay, stories about her travelled through the village at the speed of her electric bike. Somehow, everyone seemed to know something unique about her ways of living. During hours of gardening, I was told stories about the unique community that she had created. I learned about her kindness offering help to single parent families. Being the first-responder for the mental health support, getting out of her loft bed in the middle of the night, was her job. Occasionally, there were complaints from someone struggling to follow the governed way of living together leaving the wet bathmat hanging under the sign, saying, “wet bathmats outside”. Knowing that this was the gateway to further connect with the local community, I chose her as the main subject of the study and the protagonist in my ethnographic film. After all, why would a woman in her late 70s choose to live with a bunch of strangers? Why would someone focus on helping others so much? I had so many questions. With all of that in mind, I decided to live with her for three months and make an ethnographic film.

During the second day of my fieldwork, I was introduced to the concept of “holding space” and it became the focal point ever since. I started asking everyone what it was and how to do it. Soon I found myself becoming a *space-holder* as I was engaging in the conversations with my interlocutors in a non-judgmental manner. This thesis is my attempt to analyze the holding space practice that I encountered with my people.

*What is holding space? How is that practiced at Sunshine’s community? Why do people hold space? What is so distinctive about the people and the place in Golden Bay in the context of space-making and space-holding? How are such practices embodied and embedded in people’s daily lives?*

These are my main research questions. I begin this thesis by introducing the complexity of Sunshine’s unique nature, *herstorically*.<sup>1</sup> By describing her inside world, the projects and the

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<sup>1</sup> *Herstorically* is an emic term commonly used by Sunshine to address the historical perspective of a female. It is implicitly used as a feminist term to provoke the language dominated by male gender, obviously playing with the word historically.

principles that she has established at her commune,<sup>2</sup> I describe the nature of the locality and its social dynamics. Then, I refer to the context of the outside world and how the emergence of alternative lifestyle-seekers finding their way to Golden Bay, developing alternative ways of living. After contextualizing, I look at the New Age ideologies that promote self-knowledge, embedded in looking inside one-self by using different healing and teaching practices that are being offered at the commune with Sunshine and in the local Golden Bay community.

Being a prominent practice, healing is often mentioned during the reflections about holding space among my interlocutors. I further conceptualize the concept by using empathy as an important tool to consciously hold space for the other person without trying to help, fix, or try to *positivity* out of it. I describe the holding space as a reciprocal process where the empathizer is intentionally being with the other person in a reflexive exchange of emotional, social and physical interaction offering him/her/them a safe-place to be, by letting them experience their feelings in the space that we are holding. I further look at how holding space can be used in activism by looking at the connection with the re-emerging popularity of conspiracy theories.

In the chapter on methodology, I reflect on the classical tool in doing ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, and how that helped. Furthermore, I look at how becoming a “documentarian” as described by my people, affected the lives of others. The use of the camera helps to capture the moments to be later re-created, re-lived and re-interpreted. However, it also prompts changes in peoples’ behavior. Subsequently, the camera opens a space of sharing stories that would otherwise not be. Furthermore, I reflect upon the impact of the chosen commandments in Visual Anthropology and how they affected my filming and our social interactions. Lastly, in Chapter 5, I open up a discourse upon the holding space practices, drawing my theoretical conclusions from my findings and readings after fieldwork.

Furthermore, I shall point out that the environment that I lived in, represents a very culturally complex habitat that encompasses many current debates. Climate change, migration, *alternativism*, globalization, gender issues, *conspiritorialities*<sup>3</sup>, utopia, creation of self, New Age Spiritualism and

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<sup>2</sup> The use of the word “commune” is arbitrary and represents the etic point of view. “Community”, from the other hand, has the emic representation as is steadily used in the colloquial language.

<sup>3</sup> *Conspiritoriality* is a neologism that has originated among the literature of the New Age Spirituality combined with the emerging popularity of the conspiracy theories among them. Such a word has however not once been used among my subjects.

mindfulness and so on. Consequently, it is a lot to cover for a master thesis and has certainly become a field of interest for my further research. This thesis, however, is structured in the way to give a comprehensive understanding of my people, complementary to the documentary *Holding Space* that I constitutes the second part of my master thesis. Trying to understand holding space as a concept that is commonly used in colloquial language in Golden Bay, I placed myself as the *space-holder* and was captivated by the trust and stories that people shared in their vicissitudes of becoming.

# Chapter 1: THE INSIDE WORLD

## 1.1 Herstory

Growing up in a conservative part of the United States of America (USA) outside Washington DC was not easy for her. Born in the 1943, Sunshine Appleby became rebellious at an early age due to her turbulent and inquisitive nature along with some other unfortunate, loathsome events that were unfolding just in front of her premature eyes. In the 1960s the hippie counter-culture was emerging along with the Cold War and protests against the Vietnam War. That was the milestone in Sunshine's teenage years, as she rioted against her parents' envisioned dreams for what they thought was the best for her.

At the age of 18, her parents' wanted to give her a coming out party that is a tradition in the family when a daughter is introduced to the males and the society. *"They had in mind for me to go to university, get married and have 3.3 children"* Sunshine remembers, *"Not to forget a white picket fence, two cars in a garage, chicken and a roasting pan."* Sunshine saw it as slavery and protested against the androcentric culture. *"I saw it as if I was put on a slave block"* she points out. *"I told them I was not going to have it. I would strip naked and embarrass them. They believed me, as I threated to strip. It was preparing me for the world I didn't want to live."* She became an antagonist of her own family and continued to breach the suppositions of the dominating patriarchal society. Her audacious and frenetic nature paid its price when she *came out* to her classmates as bisexual at the age of 16.

Sunshine remembers *"That was not a good idea in the late 50s. I was a subject to lots of bullying and getting my locker sprayed."* After lots of crying, her parents changed the school. *"This culture was so strong on gender prison if you will, classification, limited way of thinking even the teachers did not speak out against bullying; there was no one advocating for me, when I come home crying, month after month..."* The sexual identification was hugely advocated; however, it did not stop her insurgent nature. At the age of 17, Sunshine brought home her girlfriend for Christmas dinner. Her parents, however, did not let them in the house. *"Then, in my early 20s, I brought home my first boyfriend. As he was black, my family did not let him in the house,"* Sunshine continued *"my parents said they knew what the best for me was."* It took her a long time to honor her sexuality



and beliefs as the biases towards homosexuality by her parents practically invigorated her insurgent nature. After all, it was the late 50s and the same-gender relationships were perceived as bigotry in the dominating society. Sunshine's exceptional ways of storytelling and the way she constructed them, made an impression of her stubbornness and rebellious nature, guiding her through the action she took later in her life.

During the later years, while she studied to become a nurse she continued combating sexual prejudices. *"When I was at the university, and there were 200 women in the class and only one male professor, he addressed us as "guys", so I stood up and asked if he was talking to himself. He said that he was talking to us."* Sunshine continues *"then, I asked why you are calling us "guys" when there is a room full of girls?"* Later, to emphasise her point, Sunshine explained a counter-situation when she addressed a group of only boys as "girls". *"The boys asked her not to call them "girls", so she asked, why?"* Sunshine explains *"They said, because we are not "girls", we are "guys!"* She finds the word "guys" to be a very male identified word. While Sunshine was sharing the story, she became furious. I could notice a slight aggression in her voice and bodily expression as it had triggered her past experiences and hardship of growing up as a bisexual feminist in a male dominated society. *"I just take it as a word that is originally a male word that is simply become so used in our current culture that there is no flinching. I personally experience the word "guys" as quite exclusive."* It is very obvious how important the rhetoric is for her. Anyone using the word "guys" while addressing a group of both genders will get the correction to "welcome you, folks" or "welcome you all" whenever in her company.

People construct meaning through the language that they use (Hall 1997, 15) and the social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistics and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others (Hall 1997, 25). In colloquial and everyday language, by referring to the objects or things, Sunshine uses "she/her" as her main pronouns. As a feminist and a spiritual person, she experiences the heart of the universe as a creativity that combines the mother/father spirit. *"To me "she" is all inclusive. I experience this as a very personal universe in which spirit is fully alive and we are in all her splendor. She guides me even in this moment, every day I give thanks to her who breathes through me, through all of us, actually."* The use of the female pronouns has a constructed meaning that she has created in her rhetoric that she communicates to others.

It was not only gender and the human rights that troubled her. Reminiscing of her father's announcement at the breakfast table before he headed to work, Sunshine recalls "*and so he said that there might be a nuclear attack on Cuba today (Cuban Missile crisis) and that might destroy us, and we might not see each other anymore, but he would get up and go to work.*" Her father, who was a dedicated businessman was also her whole universe, which was being taken away in the eyes of a young girl. Sunshine could simply not bear to never see him again. The Cold War certainly left some scars in Sunshine's early upbringing, but also further marked her glorious career as a peace and human rights activist. She dedicated many years of her life in this dreadful battle with many near-death experiences, as she also explains it in the film. She claims to have been under arrest 92 times, although according to the FBI, only 12 times (Appleby 2012). Sunshine continues "*I have actually had an encounter with a military man holding a machine gun in front of me,*" as she goes on, "*he said, if you move, I have to shoot you!*" Explaining her bravery, Appleby continues "*I entered this space of love and compassion and was moved to speak to the soldier. I left the soldier there crying and climbed over the fence...*" After 18 long years of struggle, accompanied by her fellow companions, who fought against these dreadful and atrocious powers in the result of Cold War, the factory for the *Concord Naval Weapon Station* was finally closed down. She further explains this accomplishment in the film (07:07 time-code).

Sunshine spent many years traveling and living in different communities around the world. Although she had a degree as a registered nurse, she enjoyed studying Spanish and teaching English as she travelled and visited various indigenous communities in Mexico, Costa Rica and other places hitchhiking. Her travels however were interrupted by the need to take care of her dying parents. As she returned to the USA, she went back to working as a nurse. Burying her own parents was a huge wakeup call towards understanding her own mortality. After working 60-hour weeks for many years, she was dreaming to retire in a small village in Ojai valley in the south of California. Here, Sunshine moved in a mobile home, was growing a vegetable garden and was enjoying the idyllic beautiful nature surrounding her. Until the birds started dying. The rest of the story she shares in the film (19:05 time-code).

Sunshine is in exile in Aotearoa New Zealand. She fled USA to what she thought was a tropical island surrounded by coconut trees with girls and young women dancing hula. She arrived without any research of the climate. "*I landed in Auckland in the middle of July in my silk t-shirt, with my*

*bicycle, and my mother's frying pan.*” The safety guards recommended her to dress up as she exited the airport in the middle of a winter. Her storytelling seems to be very transparent, genuine and shameless. At the same time quite performative and well shared. Sunshine spent the next six years living in the North Island where she got married to a Kiwi<sup>4</sup> woman and became a resident. Sunshine dedicated the time to recover her health by participating in different projects connected with learning where the food comes from; educating other people about a healthy diet and the importance of supporting locally grown produce. She became very connected with the local indigenous Māori tribe and their spiritual world, known as *wairua*. Sunshine also learned how cold the winters were as she would be wearing two hats and winter-ski pants throughout the cold season once she moved down to the South Island. *“Fortuitous. Now I have winter clothes and I wear them 12 months a year.”* Sunshine shares that it has been an adjustment of living in Aotearoa New Zealand and that to get through the frosty winters, she only takes off her hats at night and uses heaters most of the time.

In 2015, Appleby decided to revisit some friends in Nelson. Here, she learned about a place called Golden Bay from her friends, who recommended not to leave the sunny coast before having been *over the hill*.<sup>5</sup> Once Sunshine visited Tākaka Township, the sunny village that at the time already had a vast group of migrants who had set up their new homes, she knew she was here to stay. So, she decided to buy her own property.

When I asked Sunshine how it all got started, she responded:

*“It went back to 1963 when I found myself (at the age of) 18 (should have been 20) and lost. Vietnam war, Marshall law had been declared multiple times in Washington D.C. It was a difficult time and I did not have people to turn to. I made several attempts of starting a community but in Washington DC in the 60s there was not cultural context for it. I spent the next 30 years looking in other communities how they did it. Then I got very involved after those years of travel and school, I got very involved with my job. It wasn't until I came to New Zealand I had much more*

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<sup>4</sup> Kiwi, meaning a person from New Zealand, has derived from the flightless national kiwi bird and in a colloquial language is associated to a New Zealander.

<sup>5</sup> *Over the hill* is used emically to describe the opposite side of the hill in this case Golden Bay. It is isolated by a serpentine drive that used to make the 104 km journey from Nelson up to 2-2.5 hours long. However, the ongoing recovery of the damaged road that was being re-built over a period of 4 years has concluded, removing the time spent sitting in the 15 minutes red traffic light queued behind a long line of the weekend getaways waiting for their time to cross the road constructions. Among Sunshine's community, it is basically used to describe the rest of the world. People would often try to avoid going over the hill and if they know anyone going over, the person would often be asked to bring something that is rarely purchasable locally.

*space and time to explore other possibilities. I met many people who were living in the communities, but I didn't meet anybody who was teaching people how to do it, and who was actually taking this whole reflective process of what are we doing together, and what is the quality of our life together. What do we do that does not work with each other? Those questions never got asked. I had in my mind that I would start a community and would find people that I want to live with and we dig in together. This thing evolved organically.”*

## **1.2 New Directions Connections**

Human beings are not, by their nature, solitary individuals. They have lived in the company of others for as long as the human race has existed, and for thousands of years some have withdrawn from wider society to form focused communities of like-minded persons, groups that today we call intentional communities. Members of such communities often share a common vision and they have some degree of economic sharing. The community consists of at least five adults not biologically related to one another, and the members share living spaces (Miller 2013, 14-15). Communes also depend on a suspension of disbelief and on ideological commitment, whose members must adopt wholeheartedly a set of not-always-rational or scientific principles, value faith and have unquestioning acceptance. Therapeutic groups attempting to make people open and vulnerable and sensitive to one another will value direct expression of emotion. All groups concerned with struggling for their creation and survival will value doers more than thinkers (Kanter 1972, 223).

The shared vision at the NDC is:

*NDC is an ongoing residential teaching-learning experiment in nomadic community building; it was co-created by local visionaries seeking to find ways to nurture and further inspire visionary 'seedlings'; whether you are an intern, a 'flat-mate', a guest or a retreatant, we are breathing together in common space; we are committed to learning old-new ways of being that we intend to make a beneficial contribution for this larger "Eath Home" we share (Appleby 2020).*

Sargisson and Sargent (2004) created an enormous work on researching and categorizing communities in New Zealand, a country with a special place in the history of utopianism. A land

of opportunity for settles with dreams of a better life, they claim that New Zealand has, per capita, more intentional communities than any country in the world, compiling in their work more than fifty communities. Environmentalist communities such as eco-villages, rural communes and communal organic farms develop the spiritual aspect of *ecologism* and *deep ecology*,<sup>6</sup> combining practical environmentalism with a spiritual outlook (Sargisson and Sargent 2004, 113) which Sunshine also uses at the NDC. The vision has been developed from her years of experience of living together and she claims to have accommodated approximately 300 people ever since the existence of the place, sometimes up to 10-12 at the same time.

In 2015, Sunshine purchased a three-bedroom dwelling in Tākaka Township. A recently approved job as a mental health nurse assured Appleby was eligible to a mortgage. She also had savings and, as she said in the film, she sold everything she had back in the USA. However, she had a very modest budget for the sale and no room to negotiate. To increase the chances of her offer being chosen, she promised to the owner of the house a deal for free life-long massages and to be a great member and a support to the local community. That is how the sale was made. I must admit, Sunshine is in fact a great member to the local Golden Bay community, which I knew before even having lived with her.

Sunshine started slowly by taking in helpers to work at the gardens and help to renovate the house in exchange for free accommodation and food. Such arrangements in colloquial language are known as *wwoofing*<sup>7</sup>, and the place was soon turned into a retreat which became quite popular. To accommodate more people, Sunshine, with a support from locals and retreatants, built four new sleepouts in the front and back of the house allowing overall capacity for six to eight people to live comfortably.

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<sup>6</sup> *Deep ecology* is an environmentalist approach towards understanding of the Earth and the human beings as a holistic co-existence. In Golden Bay there are occasionally organized workshops to promote such an approach. I participated in some during my stay in Golden Bay.

<sup>7</sup> *Wwoofing* is an acronym for a member of the WOOF (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farming) experience. The word is however outworn by the other voluntarily programs that attempt to avoid the latterly mentioned work for free accommodation and/or food exchange. This is due to WOOF is currently requiring a visa and contribution to the inland tax payment revenue in New Zealand.

In 2018, Sunshine completed the Sustainable Living Course<sup>8</sup> that inspired her to follow her dream in creation of an intentional community that was focusing on teaching and learning. Although, there were already a few communes in Golden Bay, and Sunshine had also stayed in different communes throughout the years of her travels, she never came across one that focused directly on teaching. That is when the Learning Centre was officially realized and Sunshine continues to share her abundant knowledge about cosmic connections, gardening and ecological sustainability by organizing workshops, classes and various meetings weekly. This is one of the fundamental approaches at the NDC and resonates clearly with the New Age ideologies mentioned in Chapter 3.

When entering the house, the most significant procedure is hand washing. On the pantry door, there is a sign “wash your hands before entering”, with a sink next to it. In the pantry, there are more signs on the wall. One of them is the original “United against COVID-19” sign, however changed with yellow sticky notes. “BE INFORMED. Use alternative MEDIA” and “United against government conspiracies”. After washing the hands, the door leads to the spacious kitchen that is designed in a manner enabling anyone to find the way. Labels are there to guide people and remind them continuously where to place or find things. Whether “cups”, “plates”, “pots” or “cutlery”, one can locate them without asking. There is a label on every container, and another on each of the shelves indicating the type of food. For composting, there is an artistic drawing of what can the worms eat; what goes in the bokashi bin; where the egg shells go etc.

It does, however, require an attentiveness and willingness to follow the guidelines no matter how descriptive they are. These labels are not only a practicality of a management in a versatile environment but also an implicit embodiment of mindfulness. It requires attention to notice the signs; to read and interpret them; to keep looking for the right ones in order to place or find things. Such practices not only follow the established principles “the sanity for the chef” but also cultivates self-awareness. Labelling is a comprehensive approach to make sure things go back where they belong. Teaching is however given if one has not done it accordingly.

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<sup>8</sup> The Sustainable Living Course is run by the Sustainable Living Centre, previously known as the Organic Community Gardens in Tākaka. The course offers a 10-week long learning permaculture design, well-being, earth building, organic food growing, community resilience and many other great opportunities. The course has become an essential part for many locals; whether tutors, chefs, or other members of the Golden Bay community, with the well-established structure of the program supporting local organic growers, farmers, and other sustainable businesses.

Although Sunshine did not want to be a public entity, she felt the urge of *waking people up*. She was drawn to form an internship program that invites people to join her community and realize that we need to start doing things together. The application for the internship program encloses a descriptive guidance of the principles, a four-page questionnaire and even a character reference requirement. The weekly cost of the internship program is \$70 in addition to 16 hours work Monday to Friday work. After completion of the application process, there is a 3-day trial period when the new intern may be asked to leave if not being able to follow the principles and participate in the daily program. This trial period is not followed strictly and from my observations, people can be asked to leave at any time, if not fitting in with the establishment.

The weekly routine is explained at the Monday house meeting where the daily schedule is provided. This is the time where frustrations, feedback and feelings are shared, as visible in the film. On Tuesdays, everyone joins a collective *Hour of Power* voluntary cleaning session. After picking from the bucket which a space to clean, everyone joins together cleaning the physical and the *morphogenetic field*<sup>9</sup> mindfully. The liquids used to clean are either a baking soda or a vinegar mixed together with water. There are no artificial chemicals used in this household.

The working hours are mostly spent gardening and cooking. Thursdays are the *Cyclone*<sup>10</sup> days as the interns are looking after Sunshine's adopted grandchildren. Child-care is included in their working hours when the interns are hanging out with the twins, teaching their knowledge or hobbies. After picking the *Cyclones* up from school, Sunshine enjoys being in the kitchen on her own. She would cook the dinner for the kids and would often refuse our offer to help.

Preparing meals is also a part of the intern hours, providing one hour of working time for making the lunch, which is normally the biggest meal of the day. It is 30 minutes of working time hours to prepare the dinner, which apart from Thursdays, is usually soup. On rainy days, the interns work indoors, dehydrating fruit, tidying up, and baking cookies that Sunshine likes to call *bikkies*. Typing the recipes on the computer is another rainy-day activity as NDC has its own collection of

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<sup>9</sup> *Morphogenetic field* is meant as a field of energy as looking at the group of people living together as influencing each other. In the application Sunshine explains it as as a group of musicians coming together with an aim of a harmonious concert of an uplifting nature. The term morphogenetic is originally used in Biology where a group of cells take part in formation of an organism which can implicitly be implied by Sunshine in the choice of such a term.

<sup>10</sup> *Cyclone* is an emic term to describe adopted grandchildren through the program "Grandparents With Hearts" that Sunshine established in support of single-parent families in Golden Bay. Ostensibly, the choice of the word is due to their vigilant, boisterous and sometimes stormy nature.

recipes collected from interns. Food in general is one of the most essential parts of the NDC; it is given without any limitations of use. The only limits are what the garden can provide since, due to lack of members, it can become overgrown and appear abandoned. But where does it come from?

In the kitchen, there is a shelf that holds all the most important books; the dietary preferences of the NDC; the recipe books written by the other visitors or interns; the Reflection Booklet. There are many informative materials in the cupboard, including booklets about which foods interfere with digestion; why to soak grains, legumes, seeds and nuts before use etc. The main diet at the NDC is gluten-free and mostly vegetarian. To ensure that there is an abundance of food and to avoid waste, Sunshine makes large size bulk orders. In order to refill the containers from the storage room, people need to register in the Accounting Booklet that is later monitored by an accounting program. Instead of buying goods imported at the local supermarket, the fresh vegetables and fruit are purchased from the local market; organic food from *Kokalitos* on Wednesdays and a regular vegetable market on Fridays. Once a week, the local mushroom grower delivers 1 kg of home-grown Oyster mushrooms and puts them in the main fridge. When I asked what the price of the mushrooms was, Sunshine commented “\$60 per kg. *I want to support the local business, so I buy it!*”

The internship program, however is not the only project that is run at the NDC. *The Path Forward*, as explained in the film, emerged in early January of 2021 and was originally run for only one person. Fern is one of the few Kiwis forming part of my fieldwork. Originally from the North Island, she moved to the South Island during her adult life to establish her home in Christchurch. She worked as an artist and had a happy, successful life. Unfortunately, she lost it all during the devastating earthquake in 2011, which had a huge impact on her frail existing mental health condition. In recent years, Fern moved to Golden Bay and bought a house in Tākaka. She has been getting financial support from the mental health system. She has a son who also lives in Tākaka whom I briefly met during a lunch. However, he was not very chatty, seeming slightly uncomfortable at the dining table and left soon after the meal. His girlfriend, on the other hand, is good friends with Fern, and visited the house occasionally when Fern was present.

The program was run Monday to Friday from 11 am to 1 pm. On Mondays they would attend a craft class and return for lunch. From Tuesday to Friday the program consisted of: making a celery



juice, Epsom salt footbath with chakra lights cleansing, visualizations, non-dominant hand writing, meditation, 15-second laughing therapy, a warm meal and a short walk. All these practices resonate well with the New Age movement that I will look into in Chapter 3.

Fern was the main participant in the program, devoting herself to attending the program every day for seven months, with Sunshine often present, co-facilitating the program. During the time of my fieldwork, Fern was undergoing some issues with finding a new flat mate which seemed to reflect poorly on her mental health. As Fern recovered, she soon began to do small jobs such as paper and inventory work. Her urge to be a part of the community left a sense of ambivalence. Although not being a resident, she would join our little group of people in various tasks which felt supportive, nevertheless her need for attention and support from the other community members sometimes left us high and dry, and it only went downhill, when another person joined the program.

Kerry (Kez) together with her three-legged friend named Toast moved in with us. Unlike Fern, she became a resident and received a private housing contract. Kez struggled to fit in at first. Besides the ongoing grief from the loss of her daughter, she had recently split up from her long-term partner in Christchurch where they lived together at their farm. After the break-up, Kez converted her van into a home and hit the road up north to visit her friend. As we later found out, it was the same friend that I had met a year before, living at the Sustainable Living Centre. Upon her arrival at Farewell Spit, the picturesque cliff (31:07 time-code) on top of the South Island in Golden Bay, Kez was shaken badly by all the sadness and memories of her loss. She was heartbroken, as the end of the relationship had also taken away those last places where she had shared her memories with Grace. At Farewell Spit (34:24 time-code), where both Kez and Grace had spent a summer holiday together back in the days, Kez entered a spiral of suicidal thoughts that lead her to pick up the phone and call the mental health support line. “*Hello, this is Sunshine,*” said the voice on the other side.

Sunshine wanted to step back from facilitating *The Path Forward* and let Fern take on the leadership of the daily program. Considering that Fern was still unstable, Kez found it inappropriate to follow Fern’s guidance. There were also some private issues between them that made Kez withdraw from the program. Because she was not in a mental space of doing the internship program, Kez was left with no option other than moving out. Sunshine, on the other hand, did not negotiate and later explained that Kez did not fit into the community energetically

and was not able to do the work that was required for her to stay. Kez’s way of sharing grief revealed some essential aspects of the holding space practices that encouraged me to further explore this. When I asked how she would recommend holding space for someone grieving (30:28 time-code), I entered a space of transformation. In my whole life I was never told to talk about the dead and her response took another turn when I stuttered to ask about Grace (34:15 time-code). After moving out, Kez visited her grandson and returned to Golden Bay where she settled down in the village nearby where she still lives. *The Path Forward* program was soon shut down due to confidentiality issues that arose between Sunshine and Fern.

### 1.3 The principles

31<sup>st</sup> of May

*The Curious Mind*

*During the meal, Fern was talking about how she was trying to understand the tragic history of the World War II. She wondered of what they were thinking to commit such a tragedy (referring to genocide), as she questioned their action. Shou, who was sitting next to me, snapped immediately, “Well! Genocide is genocide!” Fern, for the first two times, ignored her comment and continued making her point about how she was solely trying to understand where they were coming from. After the third time, Shou repeated the same thing, Fern gave her a neutral feedback about the way she interrupted her story and did not let her continue. Shou was trying to argue that was how she was, by snapping back to her. I stepped in to explain to her what this community is about, as she had just recently moved in with us. Shou however, had no will for hearing us out. This was definitely the first direct confrontation I experienced on such a deep level. I opened up myself up very vulnerably at this meal and said that I have been feeling unwell by having those two-hour long conversations<sup>11</sup> daily during every meal. Shou responded something along the lines of “Yeah, honey, it is hard to hear the truth! I know how you feel.” I responded that it was not about that, as I could notice tears coming into my eyes. Here, Fern joined again to validate her previous discussion about her attempt to understand where these people were coming from and bringing up the question to think differently. Shou got defensive and said “this is how I am.”*

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<sup>11</sup> It was conversations from Bill Gates putting microchips into the vaccine, aiming for the mass extinction and us being the “dummy run” to the impact on our health by having the cell-phone towers and the 5G technology, and much more!

*She fired up and left the table and started cleaning up the dishes loudly. Shou just could not accept that we did not validate her opinion as we were simply talking about having a curious mind.*

Something very unique to the household, is the practice of giving and receiving feedback in a neutral manner. This is one of the most important criteria for living together and must be followed at all times. These principles have been established after investigating the conflicts and the “Reflections On Shared Living” booklet was created to write down any upsets that would be reviewed at the following house meeting. As seen in the given example of “The Curious Mind” entry in my diary, it is a principle that is very difficult to follow and can trigger different reactions, depending on many things such as mental health, trauma, emotional state, self-knowledge and reactivity.

Contemporary communities around the world are experimenting with new forms of participatory democratic governance and conflict resolution. They are finding ways to balance privacy, individualism and diversity with community involvement, social cohesion and unity of purpose (Meltzer 2001, Lockyer 2007, 31). Guidelines to communication and conflict resolution are commonly used across many intentional communities. Some of the other principles are self-explanatory, such as “everything in its place, each item with its place”, “conservation of natural resources”, “health and safety”, “consideration for the next person”, “guarding, preserving and protecting of resources, including each other”, and the last, but not least “act as if there is a seventh generation<sup>12</sup>” that Sunshine explains (Appleby 2020).

*“Setting clear intentions, learning to communicate as if you and I were not separate entities, but one; learning gentleness, diplomacy, and at the same time setting clear boundaries kindly communicated, learning to live together harmoniously, finding ways we can support each other and doing so, minimizing our consumption of single use items such as plastic wrappings. Learning to garden together. Growing our community consciousness. Living as if there were a tomorrow and we could create a positive outcome for the grandchildren beyond the seventh generation.”*

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<sup>12</sup> Sunshine explains it as living for tomorrow and thinking about the grandchildren of the seventh generation coming after us. In other words, being mindful of our actions today and how these actions will impact the generations to follow.

Another fundamental principle practiced is creating “consciousness of giving”. A large part of the internship program is connected with helping other people. Appleby points out:

*“People are here to learn principles; being on the planet as an effective human being; building community; looking at our food sources; carbon footprint. We are also looking at how we are with our neighbours. Lot of disabled people who need help. One day a week we go to Ana’s garden. Three days a week at the Community Gardens getting a clear foundation what it means of having a huge garden, and once a week we work here at our garden.”*

## 1.4 Social dynamics of everyday life

Throughout the three-months that I lived at the NDC, the dynamics of the relations changed thoroughly. After the couple who had lived there for over 10 months finally moved out, and left Sunshine heartbroken. Although she tried not to show her sadness, it was evident. Especially when she started planning the future of the community and looking for someone to take over her role as a facilitator. She wanted to retire to be a resident and not have to worry about the daily management.

For three days, it was only Sunshine and I living at the NDC. The period of being alone with Sunshine was quite relaxing, and it partly seemed that she enjoyed the change and the silence in the household. At first, I was feeling timid and apprehensive of how it was going to be, staying alone with my main protagonist, but it worked out well. On 17<sup>th</sup> of May, I wrote in my diary:

*Day 17<sup>th</sup>, Gratulerer med dagen, Norge*

*After Jessie and Pablo left last night, I prepared a soup and roasted veggies for dinner. As we sat down at the table, our conversations started flowing. We talked about her friend, how he can sometimes be so arrogant. Sunshine suggested to give him feedback if he is like that within this community.*

*“After all, this household is a Learning Centre; a place for awakening; we cannot miss time giving each other feedback to let ourselves grow” she explained. I shared with her how from my meditation practice, I was taught not to attempt to change people but rather accept who they are and give space for them to transform. “I need to accustom to the new principles,” I said.*

*Sunshine said she has only 27 years left on this planet and every minute counts. She has no time for driving him to his boat (parked at Pōhara wharf 7km from Tākaka where he lived at the time) because he lost his car keys at our house the night before. Her time is more precious than that.*

*It seemed to me that he has been interested in living in this household, however Sunshine says there is no space, which I find strange as we are only two at the time. “There are more people coming” she said.*

*She also told me about the self-esteem workshop that she taught in Nelson a while ago. She was teaching young women to become more confident through applying different practices.*

*For instance, by finding a characteristic that you always wanted to have and trying to wear it as you would put on a new dress. One of the woman she met there was going to come and stay with us.*

*As I had cooked, Sunshine said she will do the dishes at some point. The house rule is who cooks, does not clean. This morning the dishes were still dirty.*

*I am going to propose to do some recipe book typing to get some more hours. Also, I might freeze some feijoas and do some house work, if necessary.*

Very soon, Yuki joined our community with a new energy, and a lot of laughing. A professional in martial arts, Yuki spent most of his life attending fighting competitions, which to my mind, seemed puzzling. Originally from Japan, where he spent most of his life, Yuki started traveling in 2020 when he arrived in New Zealand and started learning English. Once he arrived in Golden Bay, he did not want to leave. His calm presence and kindness to me, knowing very little about martial arts, did not connect with the fighting competitor's personae. Yuki and I bonded quickly, although I was sometimes impatient with him. His poor English would often require repeating things many times over, and even then, he would not admit that he did not understand us. However, his charming personality uplifted our spirits as my patience expanded rapidly. He ended up staying with us for a month. Later he moved in with his Sri Lankan friend in a rental place where they continue living to the present day.

Our idyllic little group was soon joined by Shou, who was the second Kiwi to our multicultural group of people. Shou had heard about Sunshine through a friend in Golden Bay and I found it rather strange that a woman in her late 50s would join the internship program that was established for rather youthful people. Half Pākehā<sup>13</sup> and half Māori, Shou had spent most of her adult life in Australia working various jobs, but mostly with horses which she grew a lot of knowledge and passion about. Especially about alternative medicine and diet of the animals, and very soon she started helping horse-keepers around the village in Tākaka. Sunshine called Shou her soul-sister as she connected together through their similar views on the acrimony towards government responses to dealing with Covid-19. If only she had known what she was getting into. Her anti-authoritarian personality was often triggered as most of the conversations concerned acts against

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<sup>13</sup> Pākehā refers to New Zealanders primarily of European descent and in the colloquial language is used to differentiate from Māori people.

the government, 1080 poison<sup>14</sup> or other political conversations. The new intern completely changed the social space, especially the atmosphere in the dining room; the space of learning about the amusing stories of Sunshine rioting back in the days or our daily encounters from the gardening beds, turned into a despise of the vaccine rollout and aversion towards people who chose to take it. It escalated rapidly, and the energy of the place transformed. Very soon, it was all we could hear about. I found it interesting that throughout all the time we lived together, Shou never asked anything about me. Meanwhile, she was so obsessed with sharing her opinion with everyone, often humiliating people, if they did not agree with her. I found it fascinating how self-absorbed she was. Kez, from the other hand, was so curious about everyone and asked a million questions. The reciprocity and dynamics we shared were as fluid as the Tākaka River down the road. The depth of the conversation that Kez was able to hold was exceptional. Soon our daily coffee routine (26:19 time-code represents only a grasp of it) became the favourite part of my day; something I was very much looking forward to. We bonded quickly as we both liked talking and asking the questions. We knew how to hold space for the other person, as much as how to be held in space. We knew how to be vulnerable with each other and how to internalize our presence.

During the next month there were people coming and going. Sunshine invited a friend to move in. It was the same friend who she earlier complained about having to drive him to his boat. Unfortunately, he only lasted living together with us for 12 days. They had a conflict due to their extremely different lifestyles (he owns a microwave) and world views. One day, as I was sitting in the intern room having a conversation with Fern, a long bearded young man knocked on the window. He was sticking in the 20 *Sunshine Dollar*.<sup>15</sup> He asked where he could find Sunshine while waving the bill. We explained that she was out and about and that he should return later. The next day Titus moved in with his freshly buzzing vigilance, however heartbroken he was from the recent split up with his partner. Sunshine called him “an earthling”<sup>16</sup> and was charmed by his radiant aura. Although Sunshine had a rule to no longer take in *woofers*, Titus only had \$9 in his pocket and was soon accepted for the 20 hours weekly work in exchange for the accommodation

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<sup>14</sup> 1080 is a pesticide poison, used to eradicate introduced mammalian predators such as rats, possums and other pests in New Zealand. It has raised a dispute of the impact on nature among my interlocutors, that is expressed even in the poems. See the Appendix Titus poem.

<sup>15</sup> Sunshine dollar is an energy exchange unit that Sunshine has established as an alternative to the New Zealand dollar. It is used to exchange the work among her friends, acquaintances and travellers in Golden Bay and was sometimes used at the NDC to pay for the meals.

<sup>16</sup> *Earthling* is an emic term often used among greetings between Sunshine and the other members of the community. The putative connotation that I would assign is someone with a deep affectionate connection to the Earth.

and food. It was now Shou, Titus and I left as the interns. From Wednesday to Friday we continued going to Sustainable Living Centre and learning about gardening, guided by Elliot. Titus and I were hanging out often, and we practiced giving and receiving feedback quite regularly.

As the time for my fieldwork was coming to an end, I began to worry about the cooking schedule. In the past (when the old interns were still present), the responsibility for cooking was shared evenly, without even asking people to cook. However, Shou and Titus were deliberately avoiding cooking, taking advantage of Sunshine and I who stepped up when no-one else did. This was later solved by me giving feedback to Titus. Fern kept visiting the NDC from Monday to Friday until the program was stopped. So was their friendship. Due to the confidentiality issues, the friendship between Fern and Sunshine ended abruptly. It seems to me that Fern betrayed their friendship by sharing some private matters which were very upsetting to Sunshine.



## Chapter 2: THE OUTSIDE WORLD

### 2.1 Tākaka and Golden Bay



Figure 1. **Map of Golden Bay**

Mohua is the Māori name for Golden Bay and it stretches from the Abel Tasman National Park in the south east to the Kahurangi National Park in the north west, with Farewell Spit forming on a map the shape of a long beak of a kiwi bird. With just under 5 000 inhabitants, Golden Bay has a vast mix of nationalities, predominantly Pākeha. The peculiar isolated location has been attraction to many; often seeking for a different, rather alternative, way of life.

The historical background has something to say about the formation of the “alternative” place as such. During the 1970s, many “alternative lifestylers” established intentional communities to escape materialism and the pressures of the dominating society. They were attracted to the beautiful environment, mild climate and cheap land prices. The Rainbow Valley community up the Anatoki River valley was set up in 1974, and the Tūi Community in Wainui Bay in 1984 (Walrond 2010, 8) and are still active to the present day. The geographical isolation also paid its role towards their non-conventional ways of life, meaning that many were exposed becoming self-employed, picking up the crafts or establishing agricultural small businesses.

The status of “local” could take more than a generation to earn, and there was a divide between the earlier residents and the new arrivals. The hippies often eschewed full-time work, choosing freedom over economic security. Many turned their hands to crafts to make a living, and marijuana cultivation was common. Since the 1990s, a different type of “lifestyler” – wealthy people from Germany, the United States and other countries – attracted by the climate and environment, have bought coastal land in Golden Bay and Tasman Bay (Walrond 2010, 8). Golden Bay is also known for having a high population of elderly people. In colloquially language referred to as “retirees”, they moved to Golden Bay for their retirement. More recently with a large growth in retirees and a looming wave of older people. Skyrocketing housing prices combined with a low-wage economy have, for many years, made it difficult for young people to remain or settle in Golden Bay (Vandeskog, Vandeskog and Liddicoat 2012, 4).

Farming has been an essential part of life for the locals. Small butter-making factories opened in rural areas from the 1880s and a dairy factory was built near Tākaka in 1894. In the 1940s the number of dairy farms dropped but their average size increased. Golden Bay, with its high rainfall, has long been a dairy-farming stronghold. In the 2010s milk powder was produced at Tākaka for export while the region’s drinking milk came from Canterbury. The plant employed nearly 50 staff, pumping \$3 million in wages into the Golden Bay economy (Walrond 2010, 9). “Farmer”, is a common word used is in colloquial language in relation to not only the diary-farmers but also to crop-growers.

Tākaka, being the most inhabited township in Golden Bay, certainly has a lively social life with many social platforms that supports the local community. The Sustainable Living Centre, run by *Te Wharerangi Trust*, which Sunshine is on board with, is an important platform that endeavors that teaches sustainable living and organic growth practices. The course brings many new people to Golden Bay many from who end up staying. There are many other important activities happening regularly at the premises promoting organic eating, growing and are generally established for educational processes, and Sunshine visits it almost every day.

The seasonal change is very contrasting in Golden Bay. During the summers, the village as well as the bay gets overpopulated by the holiday-makers and yoga-retreat seekers in an escape from mundane city life. Dreadlocks, mullets, bare-feet and colourful skirt are all welcome here and one can find an array of cultural mixes, somewhat similar to what is known of the counter-culture of

the 60s. Here, however, I do not mean to be a reductionist, and am only intending to give a variety of the surrounding environment without a judgement or comparison of hippies per se. During the festival season, the crowded Village Market is visited by many Kiwis and *backpackers*<sup>17</sup> that have come out of the bush after a weekend rave party. Many are also found at the local climbing crag and the swimming hole in the Tākaka River while laughing away, playing ukulele and enjoying the Kiwi summer magic.

During the winter, there is a local market held in front of the “Fresh-choice” supermarket. Homegrown organic vegetables and fruit, organic meat, freshly baked bread, savories and sweets, fresh beverages, homemade soap, and some odd drawings or paintings. Regardless of the cold winter breeze, the locals or passing by travelers would pop by the market, if not to buy anything, at least to catch up over a freshly made cup of coffee.

As the spring comes, the market gets livelier again, and is soon crowded by the Kiwis during school holiday break. For many local farmer-growers, the market is the main income as they return every week. Some of the growers even come from over the hill during the high season, from places such as Motueka and Riwaka, and even Nelson, to sell their products.

I have enjoyed looking at the local notice boards across New Zealand while traveling, as it represents what is needed and offered within the local community. One of the most colourful encounters is the one in Golden Bay. By solely reading the advertisements offered by the local visionaries, healers and gurus, I can learn so much about the embodiment of the spiritual connections and offerings towards all sorts of self-transformations. Titus poems would stand out, of course. I will now further specify a few of the posters.

“The Mohua Rage Club,” that is a course offered by The Possibility Management,<sup>18</sup> is providing a space for cathartic emotional explosions, teaching people how to exploit conscious anger into a

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<sup>17</sup>*Backpackers* is a word used emically among the interlocutors. It is normally associated with overseas travelers, often those living out of their vehicle; picking up casual work at the orchards; doing *woofing* jobs as they travel across the country. The term is also well used among the farmers who exploit the labor of the travelers in filling up seasonal job positions that the locals are unwilling to take.

<sup>18</sup> See more: <https://possibilitymanagement.org/about/>.

“pure form” of energy that can be harnessed as “rocket-fuel” for living a fuller life.<sup>19</sup> A woman, who also facilitates the *Rage Club*, is passionate about holding space and creating transformational change. She offers skill-building practices to sharpen and deepen peoples’ abilities to hold and navigate authentic, transformational and edge working spaces. She has run a *Death Café*<sup>20</sup> in Golden Bay since 2016 (Hindmarsh 2021). I have personally participated at the *Death Café* event in late October 2020 where unsurprisingly I also came across Sunshine. Sunshine has also participated in the *Rage Club* activities and has been a great supporter of their form of teaching through the workshops.

“The Full Moon Dance and Cacao Ceremony” is held at the Kotinga hall just outside Tākaka Township. The time of a full moon is described as a potent time to release and let go of the old and make space for the new to manifest into your life. A cacao ceremony is a wonderful opportunity to connect within, open your heart and get clarity and guidance on answers you may be seeking. As the *Ceremonial Cacao* starts to take effect, the music leads seamlessly into some shamanic downbeats building steadily to a crescendo of ecstatic, inspiring and positive dance beats. As the energy rises and intensifies, so do the bass lines and it amplifies the magic of the cacao and creates a synergistic endless flow of energy (Eventfinda 2021).

There are many more examples to describe the spiritual journey that is performed in Golden Bay as well as other platforms that enclose such offerings. “Golden Bay Noticeboard” on *Facebook* has just reached 11 000 members and there are around 10 posts daily about anything imaginable. However, as there are many elderly people in the bay, the local newspaper *Golden Bay Weekly* (*GB Weekly*) is well used and published every Friday.

## 2.2 The pandemic

From March 26 to May 12, 2020 Aotearoa New Zealand was in national lockdown and the public was ordered by the government to “stay home”, unless shopping, exercising or providing essential

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<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, he points out that the unconscious anger has a bad reputation in the modern culture, and that it shows up in subtle ways like blaming, gossiping, over-working and revenge. In less subtle ways, the unconscious anger leads towards domestic violence, fighting, threatening, dominating and war (Hindmarsh 2021).

<sup>20</sup> The *Death Café* is a social gathering that is held at a café-type setting where people are invited to meet up to talk about death. The purpose of the event is to increase awareness of death and is practiced around the world widely.

See more: <https://deathcafe.com/what/>.

services. This followed by the borders getting shut for the next two years, leaving many heartbroken families separated by the ocean. New Zealand citizens, however, were allowed to apply for a *lottery-type* quarantine that made it almost impossible to get a place among the tens of thousands of other Kiwis trying to get back home.

Aotearoa New Zealand has been globally recognized for its Covid-19 response and eliminating strategy which was promoted by clear and supportive communication. The 1 pm Covid-19 media briefing announcement became “the new favorite show” (Downes, 2022) and there were posters promoting the pandemic response as a collective project, emblazoned with messages of positivity and national unity: “be kind”; “we got this!”; “we’re all in this together”; “Unite against Covid-19” (Trnka, 370). *The Covid Tracing App* was introduced among the five million to be used in order to track any activity in the public space. Combatting Covid-19 was portrayed as a unified, national effort, forward looking while historically resonant (Trnka, 370).

After lockdown, spread of the virus was eliminated, and life went back to some sort of *normality*. Borders being shut, unpicked fruit left to rot, and empty beaches and huts, there was a lot of ambivalence towards to the new *normal*. Especially when online communities started spreading the anti-vaccination propaganda amongst the emergence of other conspiracy theories. Social media platforms very soon were creating hybrid *rabbit holes* supported by *The Real News*<sup>21</sup> print that circulated in Golden Bay among many. The conspiracy re-emergence generated jolly discussions about certain ideas, overlapping between some New Age and far-right,<sup>22</sup> so by the time of Christmas, *The Survival Guide to Holiday Hell* (see Farrier 2020) really came handy.

It was not until the second lockdown in August 2021 that Covid-19 actually started spreading in the country, which generated more fear and anxiety. However, the vaccine had arrived in New Zealand and soon offered a sense of freedom and safety; but not so to everyone. In October, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced teachers and workers in the health department would need to be fully vaccinated against Covid-19 or would otherwise be made redundant. “Vaccine passes” were soon introduced, limiting many of the public spaces to vaccinated only. This had a strong *aftershock* among many thousands of people, who joined a three-week long occupation of the parliament in the capital of New Zealand, protesting against the vaccine mandates that were

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<sup>21</sup> See: <https://therealnews.nz/>.

<sup>22</sup> See: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/sep/22/leftwingers-far-right-conspiracy-theories-anti-vaxxers-power>.

banning the *unvaxxed* from any bars, cafés, movies, national park huts, festivals, hairdressers, and many more places. Sunshine had lost her job to the vaccine mandate and soon along with other representatives from Golden Bay joined the gathering. As I followed “Voices for Freedom” *Instagram* (@Voicesforfreedom\_nz) stories continuously, I observed how many people were travelling from all across the country to join the community and I wondered how the promotion of the stories being shared encouraged more people to join the gathering. I also wondered how it had gone too far.<sup>23</sup>

Anti-mandate protests were also held in Tākaka, sometimes gathering over one hundred people (GB Weekly 2022). The protests occasionally escalated into civil-disobedience, protesting against a rule change which meant local libraries would require vaccine passes. Displeasure was expressed by smearing saliva through the Council building (Roden, 2022). In Collingwood, a village close to Tākaka, I found protests against the vaccine mandates and speeches about sovereignty at the *Stay Awake Café*. Previously known as the *Mad Café*, the locality gained popularity by allowing employment and entrance solely to the unvaccinated. This opened up a space for socializing among many who had been pushed away due to their vaccine status.

Some responded humorously to face mask mandates and were later found pictured in a local magazine above the title “Only in Golden Bay!”



Figure 2.

<sup>23</sup> See the picture of Jacinda being compared to the Christchurch terrorist: <https://www.webworm.co/p/lookingback?s=r>.

*“On 5<sup>th</sup> of September a 68-year-old local male was issued with a \$300 Covid-19 infringement for failing to wear a face covering, having previously been spoken to by Police” (GB Weekly 2021).*

I kept wondering about how the *Stay Away Café* in Collingwood was staying open by changing their status to a private club under the so claimed “common law”.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, across the road, there were free vaccine shots being offered by joining the Golden Bay *Tiki Tour* with drive-through clinics. Reading Smith (2022) letter in *GB Weekly* under the title “A time to heal” proved that a community divide was definitely noticeable. Encouraged to respect each other’s opinions and by looking inwards, the fraction in the community start to heal, reminding each other that this is still the best place in New Zealand to live.

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<sup>24</sup> See more: <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/lifestyle/2022/01/golden-bay-cafe-owner-opts-out-of-traffic-light-system-by-claiming-to-operate-under-common-law.html>.

## Chapter 3: Making sense

### 3.1 My positionality

As a female from Europe in her early 30s; a feminist who was “stuck” on the other side of the world due to the Covid-19 pandemic, studying remotely worked towards my advantage and allowed me to make the most of my time in Aotearoa New Zealand. Apart from staying up at nights to *Zoom* in to classes due to the time difference, of course. Becoming an owl was the challenge, as I carried on living out of my vehicle while traveling from orchard to orchard; picking fruit and berries to buy filming equipment for the upcoming fieldwork. I was not taking my situatedness for granted and did not make much of an attempt to get back to the Arctic Norway whatsoever.

There was certainly some sort of *self-exploration* going on as I was grasping on each corner for a new opportunity for self-growth. While ticking off the *backpacker's* pocket-list, moving over the hill and learning about organic gardening seemed to be an obvious thing. Having created a profile on a *Helpx.net* social media platform, a representative from the Sustainable Living Centre in Tākaka reached out to me, offering to park my van at the Community Gardens and working 16 hours in exchange for free food and accommodation. Here, I began the introduction to sustainability, *zero waste*, *deep ecology*, and foremost, living in a community-style environment. I learned about the *non-violent* communication in conflict resolution and nurturing empathy by expressing observations, needs, feelings and requests. There were certainly many useful skills that I picked up for my tool box while living at the Sustainable Living Course. Here, I met Sunshine often along with her “Sunshine crew” (emic term used at the Sustainable Living Centre to address interns at the NDC) gardening at their allotment. This is where I heard the most amusing stories about her established community, which became the starting point towards her becoming the main protagonist of the film. Ultimately, from the gardening beds, as I mentioned at the start. The reason I say this is to clarify my background interest in this alternative way of life as I continued pushing myself towards learning.

A silent *Vipassana* retreat prior to my fieldwork seemed like a must do. I should mention that calling it a retreat is far over exaggerated, as it requires sitting in a silent meditation up to 11 hour a day for 10 days straight to “tame” one’s own mind. I was grateful for having done that prior to



my fieldwork, as some extra headspace was definitely needed. Three month later, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2021 I wrote in my diary.

*Day 1, Greetings, earthling.*

*“Welcome. I will show you how to have an amazing life here. I will assist you in changing your life; making a shift. So, once where you saw despair, you will see joy and possibility. Be prepared for the ride of your life. Come, I will show you your space, and I will give you your pee-pot.”*

Finally, I must say that coming from a rural area myself I did not flinch when Sunshine handed a pee-pot upon my arrival after giving her speech. I just thanked her and left it outside my caravan, covering it with the clean towel I was handed. In the following morning I emptied it in the compost-pile, just as Shou did in the shot in the film that followed Titus relieving his bladder.

### **3.2 New Age movement**

*“New Age religiosity and alternative health practices abounds. Vegetarianism is outspread, yoga and meditation likewise. Periodically there are arranged workshops that offer health-promoting practices or new forms of spirit, god or cosmical energy worshipping”* (Vandeskog 2001, 192).

Perusing through Vandeskog’s thesis (1994) feels like being thrown back in time. Although a whole new generation has grown up since then, and many of the practices, such as yoga and meditation, have become well established, I have observed that some of it has not changed. Full moon ceremonies, workshops, alternative healing practices are well established and continue to be offered on the Golden Bay Notice board. Golden Bay certainly inhabits its own peculiar environment that has been described in other ethnographies as “alternativism” (Vandeskog 2001, 189), “alternative lifestylers” (Jones 2011, 149) and with many Germans (Bönisch-Brednich 2002).

The term “New Age” - together with similar formulations such as “new times”, “new era” or “new world” - is typically used to convey the idea that a significantly better way of life is dawning (Heelas 1996, 15). As anti-authoritarian and subjectivist (Collins 1998, 95), optimistic, celebratory, utopian and spiritual form of humanism (Heelas 1996, 28), “New Age” has entered the standard vocabulary in discussions about ideas and practices regarded as alternative vis á vis

dominant (Hanegraaff 1996, 1) cultural trends, especially if these ideas and practices seem to be concerned with “spirituality”. The movement became conscious of itself in its cultic milieu in the 1970s (Hanegraaff 1996, 522) influenced by the Findhorn community in Scotland where the writer of the book “A Vision of the Aquarian Age”, Sir George Trevelyan along with David Spangler became the shapers of New Age philosophy (Chryssides 2007, 8).

Rejecting all that is offered by the capitalistic modernity, the dawning of the New Age essentially has to do with experiencing *the best of the inner world* (Heelas 1996, 30). Channeling, healing, circle dance, invocations and hugging (Kemp 2004, 66) are given the opportunity to appreciate that all is far from well with their lives (Heelas 1996, 18). New Age however should not be mistaken with the hippie counter-culture, that was rejecting “The Establishment”, the US involvement in Vietnam, and their favorite slogan “make love, not war” (Chryssides 2007, 8) as it was rooted in use of drugs and sexual freedom but was however short-lived.

Healing and personal growth is fundamental to New Age. “Alternative therapies” as described by Hanegraaff (1996, 42) are also Sunshine’s approach. She used to have her own environmental doctor (at least in the past), grows her own medicine and avoids anything to do with the conventional healthcare. Chinese acupuncture, martial arts like *Tai Chi’I* and Aikido, unorthodox western systems such as polarity therapy and *Reichian* bodywork, and more recently popularized systems such as *Reiki*, all conceive of the body in energetic terms: a healthy body is one in which the flow of life-energy is unimpeded (Ivakhiv 2007, 281). Sunshine’s weekly schedule is filled with various kinds of appointments; yoga; meditation; acupuncture. These practices attempt to connect the mind and the body as a whole by “looking inside one-self”. A new *consciousness* is also essential since, according to Heelas (1996, 29), it opens the way to experiencing the spirituality of other people or the natural order; this alone provides the resources for fulfilling the potential of the planet. Heelas however, is skeptical to this controversial topic.

“New Age healing is a precarious undertaking (...) many healers are not making the right judgement. Many who are seeking to be healed are unable to transcend those disequilibrium or blocks which are causing sickness” (Heelas 1996, 209). While mainstream society and culture was dominated by the materialism, competitiveness (Heelas 1996, 18) and as we learned in Chapter 1 as Sunshine described her upbringing, how the indoctrinated way of living caused resistance, for New Agers self-responsibility as Heelas (1996, 25) points out is strictly autonomous existence.

New Age spiritual seekers endeavor to make their living by engaging in practices which are good for nature (and the soul) (Heelas, 86). They might live – as much as possible – directly off the land, working small-holdings, practicing permaculture or living in green communities, green consumption, get involved in local exchange or “barter” schemes (Heelas 1996, 87). Apart from the fact that Sunshine prints her own money, which circulates within the local community and was the reason why she met Titus (as explained in the Chapter 1), there has been an alternative currency that for decades was used in Golden Bay; H.A.N.D.S. (How About Non-Dollar System).

H.A.N.D.S. is a complimentary currency system to exchange energy, services and goods among the locals. It was dormant for a long while but with help of volunteers the H.A.N.D.S. market was held on 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2020. I enjoyed the Maypole dance and beauty of the local *Autumn farm* where the market was held. There were few stands selling their crafts, arts, natural products, drinks and food. The weekly volunteer meetings were usually organized on Tuesdays. A small group of locals gathered in the lounge at NDC in attempt to build the new strategies and promotions towards the its revival. Here, I learned about a new emerging alternative system called “Time-bank” that seemed to be a virtual way of keeping the worked hours saved and shared. From my observations, the weekly meetings were rather significant as a social construction in community building by a group of friends and acquaintances gathering together to share something in common. After delegating tasks of responsibilities followed by a *potluck*<sup>25</sup> dinner since Sunshine enjoyed having people around. Hosting the group was giving another contribution to the local community, which cherished sharing some of her great wisdom.

Counter-cultural New Agers seek new ways of relating to the environment: ways which will save the earth from the ravages of capitalistic modernity, as seen in the film (8:30 time-code). Among other things, this entails the adoption of forms of life (Heelas 1996, 84). Sunshine, as the follower of Gaia, the Mother Earth, that regards the planet can be studied as a self-regulating organism (Eriksen 2007, 129) focuses on teaching at the NDC. *Deep ecology* and *radical responsibility*<sup>26</sup> that has been followed not only at NDC in Golden Bay generally. Sunshine uses a “Gaia” online platform to watch documentaries. Gaia has become a provocative shorthand for a holistic theory of the biosphere, and, for the spiritually inclined, it is an image representing the divinity of the

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<sup>25</sup> *Potluck* is a commonly used concept used to share meals by each of the attendees bringing something to share.

<sup>26</sup> *Radical responsibility* is a workshop that Sunshine held for all the members of NDC to teach how to take responsibility of ourselves and the garbage that we create.

Earth. Many women have found Gaia to be an empowering image, while environmentalists have found it useful as a personification of a revalorized relationship between humans and Mother Nature (Ivakhiv 2007, 280). If the Earth is identified as Gaia, then it is reasonable to suppose the life-energy flows through its body, and that there will be place, chakras or energy centers, where this flow is more intense and the energy more concentrated than elsewhere – Gaia’s erogenous zones, so to speak (Ivakhiv 2007, 281). New Age teachers such as gurus, trainers, masters, facilitators – are typically highly skilled. At the same time, however, New Age teachers are not immune from the lures of the ego (Heelas 1996, 211).

Furthermore, the guidance of the spirit is often mentioned among the New Age practitioners.

*“I believe that spirit is directing me, what gets me up in the morning and get me go to bed in the evening is totally being directed by spirit, by the love energy, when a total stranger shows up with my dollars so and so sent me I need to talk to you, I drop what I’m doing and give my total attention to this person I have regard to the person who sent him, spirit acts in odd ways is not concerned about my personal schedule, I do believe everyone who is sent here comes here for a reason. If they want to pretend I am part of the reason, then I am fine with that. That’s example by being spirit driven. What’s the gift here... everyday I’m swimming in gratitude by the gifts I receive.”*

It is a hotchpotch of different religiosities, practices and dogmas. Its distinctiveness can now be further emphasized by showing how it compares with two of the key utopian ideologies of modernity; the Enlightenment project and the theistic utopianism (Heelas 1996, 37). The concept of utopia has been imbued with pejorative connotations. On the one hand, utopianism is viewed as hopelessly romantic. In this view, utopians are dreamers and visionaries. They imagine schemes for social perfection, but their utopian visions lack appropriate methods for analysing current problems and practical means of moving forward. On the other hand, utopian visions are seen as dangerous because they are employed in the promulgation of totalitarian projects (Veteto and Lockyer 2008, 9). Now, looking back at the theistic utopianism, Heelas juxtaposes it to the Christian traditions and no wonder the New Age is such antagonistic to the dominating religion of the world. As Heelas (1996, 37) describes the dichotomy between the Christian and the New Age ideologies; the Christian, valuing knowledge of texts, heeds Biblical commandments; the New Ager, valuing experience, heeds the voice within. The Christian seeks salvation through worship, prayer, obedience and discipline, all in connection with that which is infinitely higher than the

person; the New Ager seeks actualization through context-setting and 'work' - working on ego-attachments typically in settings orchestrated by those who master what it is to go within. Indeed, a number of words, including "worship", "sacrifice", "prayer", "Messiah", "belief", and "faith", lose much, if not all, of their positive significance within most New Age settings (Heelas 1996, 37-38).

### **3.3 Importance of self-realization**

The concept of self is highly problematic, and alternativist and "New Age" ideas of self is definitely worth a separate study as Vandeskog (1994, 81). It, however, deserves a separate paragraph for the further reflections. As Vandeskog (ibid.) points out self-realization consists of both self-knowledge, which implies self-exploration, and self-improvement. As an example of the importance of self-realization, I will present the certification of Jessie's graduation that Sunshine presented at the graduation ceremony.

*"Now trained as a yoga instructor*

*Now trained in the school of feelings and sensations, laughter and tears*

*Now emotionally flexible and deepened by the river of curiosity newly discovered and protected*

*By love herself being found and seized*

*Touched by Joy and becoming Joy*

*Now freed by oughts and shoulds, ably walking into*

*BEING HERE NOW*

*Now exploring and verifying her skilled artistry claiming herself as an artist."*

Taking every opportunity of continuous self-realization through self-exploration (the school of feelings) and self-improvement (being trained as a yoga instructor and claiming herself as an artist) represents similar patterns observed in my fieldwork. Similarly, as I write in the Chapter 1, Sunshine encourages to give feedback as we cannot miss time towards awakening and growth. The ideal of self-actualization involves not only psychological and spiritual aspects, but physical labour, and some people do physical exercises, yoga being a definite favourite (Vandeskog 1994, 81). The wholeness with the body and self-care is certainly dominating at the NDC.

The food sources and the time spent in producing food, is exceptional. I may add that ideals towards self-sufficiency are fundamental and strictly encouraged.

At the beginning of the alternativist movement, self-sufficiency was perhaps the most important of all ideals. It may be seen as constitutive of the entire movement; a total repudiation of western society and a firm conviction to manage without it, and all its destructive ways (Vandeskog 1994, 81). Environmentalism and anti-consumerism is also found among the other ideals of the Golden Bay alternativists (Vandeskog 1994, 85-86). Having the ideals is very important to Sunshine. It is a part of her self-realization, however unsuccessful sometimes. We were offered a “radical responsibility” workshop where we were taught how to build a house from eco-bricks, which basically is a house built out of recycled plastic bottles. The idea, however splendid, is utopian. During the workshop, one of us suggested to begin by building a small chair, and Sunshine responded, “*in front of which we will build a house.*” However skeptical, such workshops taught us awareness of where the rubbish goes, with Sunshine vigorously talking about Mt. Eden, the mountain of rubbish where all the trash goes. Whether it was writing a letter to the companies that are selling single-use plastic products or building eco-bricks with plastic that is non-recyclable these ideas are a part of who Sunshine is.

### **3.4 Conceptualizing holding space**

We have so far learned about the importance of the best of the inner world; about the different healing practices, which promotes self-realization and restorative connection with the mother Earth, that are found both within the NDC and the local community. It is evident, that the people that I lived with were also experiencing life in a *transitional stage*. Each of us had our own stories of the obstacles encountered; some sorts of underlying issues, conscious and unconscious. I will underline some clearer examples as this sounds ambiguous. Titus and Kez were healing from a heartbreak; Fern was left without a roommate; Shou was caught between Australia and New Zealand with deep underlying issues and Sunshine was taking every opportunity in her life towards spiritual awakening. By following my conversation with Kez (30:00, 34:00 time-code), I will now look at the complexity of the empathy since it is related to the understanding of holding space.

Empathy has been a, important topic in anthropology not only through studying it among the interlocutors in the field (see Hollan and Throop 2011), but also in terms of the classification of

what empathy is (Wikan 1992, Husserl 1959, Halpern 2001, Bubandt and Willerslev 2015) as well as what it is not (Throop and Zahavi 2020). I will avoid extending the discussion and to start with describe it as a source of self-knowledge (Throop and Zahavi 2020, 23) being-there-for-one-another-reciprocally (Husserl 1959, 136-137) when the empathically grasped other is given as a center of intentionality, as a different perspective on the very world that I also inhabit (Throop and Zahavi 2020, 10). In other words, being with the other person in a reflexive exchange of emotional, social and physical interaction.

Hollan reflects on how people attempt to participate in the feelings and ideas of others in Toraja villages in Indonesia through the eyes of empathy. He describes it:

“Empathy is a highly complex social and emotional process, involving conscious forms of reflection and understanding, that can only become manifest through particular idioms of expression and within highly particularized cultural and moral contexts” (Hollan 2011, 196).

The anthropologist looks at how different life experiences influence the way villagers empathize. Those who lost important attachment figures, regardless of the cultural context, may be sensitized or hardened to the losses of others, depending on how their own grief experiences were interpreted and responded to. Here, I can juxtapose two of the main characters in the film, Sunshine and Kez. When Sunshine was holding a panel discussion<sup>27</sup> she openly said, “*I am not good at feeling my feelings.*” Looking at the stories she shared in Chapter 1, being neglected in her young adolescence; *coming out* as a bisexual as well as the other vicissitudes of her becoming who she is. We shall however not forget that she is an experienced registered nurse who has been answering the phone in the middle of nights for years to support people with a mental health crisis. This does not necessary mean that Sunshine is “hardened to the losses”, to use Hollan’s words. Kez, on the other hand, spent a big part of her life looking after her daughter, who had mental health issues. She did not conceal her emotions and feelings and would openly be vulnerable and transparent about the way she feels.

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<sup>27</sup> At the Sustainable Living Centre Hui on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, 2021.

See more: <https://www.gbslc.org/events-1/sustainable-golden-bay-hui>.

*“One must have empathy to hold space”* said Kez when we shared one of our many coffees together. *“Holding space can be having a coffee together with a friend.”* Holding space is a conscious choice to not only have a coffee together, but to be there for the other person, being a *space-holder* unconditionally without trying to fix the other person. In other words, letting the space-holders ego-go. In order to hold space for someone, one has to choose *“to not try helping or use positivity”* as in the sense Kez shares it, it is toxic.

By using Kez’s words, empathy is something one must have to hold space. I will take it further by looking at this imaginary space where the reciprocity is happening. The empathizer given a cumulative transitional space that is created by intersubjectivity. *“Space-holder, by offering a safe place to be, is letting the other person to enter an emotional healing process,”* is how one of my subjects explained it. When I asked how it feels being held in space, she responded, after taking a deep reflective breath, *“feels like having the space to explore myself, with potential guidance from somebody else; somebody else to help me find my own way.”* It is essential here to emphasize on somebody else who is helping her to find her own way. The way this help is offered is simply by holding a space for her to let her find her own way. The somebody else acts as a guardian of the space.

In observations among the Black Americans in a wellness café in Brooklyn, USA, where a PhD student Symone A. Johnson (2019) conducted her fieldwork on modes of healing among urban spaces, the researcher noted that creation of the sense of belonging is essential and is maintained through intersubjective exchanges between healers, proprietors, and community members. The healer may also be a guardian of space and hold it for whom it is intended. It is a radical exercise of sovereignty on the part of the healer to assert that *“this space is ours”*, that *“our bodies are ours”*, and to fortify Black communities from potential harm against the body by way of the micro-aggressive behaviors of the well-being (Johnson, 2019). The scholar explains that guardianship over the safe space is an attempt to control that which brings the sighs about – a kind of preventative healthcare. Similarly, Elliot emphasises on distinction between the spaces, saying *“the guardianship where you will make distinctions what you are allowed to come in the space”* then he corrects himself in the use of the word *“allowed”*, *“not allowing, but being part of a creative process; guardianship process; inspiration; building community; holding the space for a specific principle to occur in the space.”* He also explains about *space-holding* as guarding against some principles by not letting them occur in the room. He calls them *“shadow principles”*.



I will now give an example of a situation that I observed without directly participating in the conversation where I find that these “shadow principles” could have been useful.

*16<sup>th</sup> of May, The Craft Class*

*Sunshine had arranged for me to join a craft class along with her and Fern. Although it was considered for only certain people to be allowed in the class, I was allowed to join it this one time. We helped to set up the tables creating a circle and soon we were pre-occupied with our own projects. I was offered an abundant choice of options; Treasure Maps, Knitting, sewing, crochet, drawing etc. The woman sitting next to me was passionately engaged in crocheting slippers for the upcoming winter and she seemed to be willing to teach me how to make them. I accepted the challenge and sat next to her.*

*Our tranquil winter morning was very soon ceased by a rather disturbing situation. Fern had been going through some issues with her bank and by the time we all had our heads down and hands on, the rather pleasant silence was interrupted by her frustrations. I was observing Sunshine’s devotion to Fern as she non-judgmentally supported her by openly discussing the situation that had occurred. Sunshine even called to the bank as Fern was unwilling to speak on the phone. I found it rather frustrating that the peace of all the other 5 people was shaken by this unnecessary act. I thought to myself “you don’t come to a craft class to solve your bank issues” as I learned how to crochet slippers and observed the facial expressions of the other members of the class that were rather disturbed. The two hours went by and Fern folded the fabric of jeans that was untouched as we drove her back to NDC for the meal and the person who had been in charge of the class did not intervene in it.*

I am aware it is rather unscrupulous to analyze the mental state of someone who has been dealing with their mental health issues for 27 years. What I am emphasizing on is the relationship between these two women and that humility of the way Sunshine held space for her with no attempt to intervene or tell her to stop. On the other hand, if there was a principle that did not allow private issues being discussed, the experience for everyone else would have been different. So, I wonder, am I using my ethnocentric beliefs to analyze the situation based on my subjective ideas of how I think things could have been better handled? Was Sunshine consciously choosing to not tell her to stop sorting these problems during the class? Can the *space-holder* be exploited in some sorts of manipulation?

However, I shall not forget, that healing can be precarious undertaking as Heelas (Heelas 1996, 2009) expressed earlier as the New Agers practice self-responsibility and the failure can be explained away by not being in adequate contact with their natural Selfhood and later explaining the recognition of this inadequate experience as another act of learning.

### 3.5 Conspirituality

The use of conspiracy theory as a categorization of the ideologies against my subjects' beliefs about the current Covid-19 pandemic, is an etic point of view. Such descriptions were not used in the colloquial language while staying at the NDC. I shall, however, apply this epistemological approach to further describe my encounters with the conspiracy related experience. Although I have no intention to extend this chapter into the broader spectrum of the politics, it is however inevitable to mention it. For that reason, I will use the significant work of anthropologist Giovanna Parmigiani who, as a professor of New Age Spiritualities and the Anthropology of Magic, and Religion and Healing, did her research concerning Italian Pagans response to the pandemic, which seems to fit my context. But before that, here is a brief explanation:

“Conspiracy theory is assume that everything has been planned and nothing happens by coincidence; they divide the world strictly into the evil conspirators and the innocent victims of their plot; and they claim that the conspiracy works in secret and does not reveal itself even after it has reached its goals. (...) nothing happens by accident; nothing is as it seems; and everything is connected (Butter and Knight 2020, Fuchs 2021).

I underline that nothing happens by coincidence as it resonates with the spirit-driven exposition. For instance, when Sunshine shared her first meeting with Titus, whom she believed was sent for a reason. Conspiracy-believing could be understood as an aesthetic (sensory and artistic) practice with performative effects. In this sense, it might be considered as an expression of *dissensus* by a *community of sense* that not only looks for visibility but, rather, wants to feel and be fully acknowledged, recognized, and legitimized in their “participatory” – or “magical” – way of inhabiting the world (Parmigiani 2021). Jacques Rancière (1999) defining politics, looks at the connections and tensions between the political and the emotional, between power relations and sensory/aesthetic experiences (Parmigiani 2021, 509).

According to Rancière (1999):

“Politics is a partition of the sensible, of the visible and the sayable, which allows (or does not allow) some specific data to appear; which allows (or does not allow) some specific subjects to designate them and speak about them. It is a specific intertwining of ways of being, ways of doing and ways of speaking.”

Parmigiani (2021, 508) writes that some are animated by *anti-vax* stances, others against the introduction of the 5G technologies and installing a microchip under our skin so that we can be controlled. Covid-19 was created to financially speculate on the vaccine; and Covid-19 is created or accelerated by 5G technology. In support to similarities of what I experienced in my fieldwork during the 3 months, I use some of Sunshine’s (Appleby 2021) reflections from the Freedom Vigil<sup>28</sup> at the Village Green, a local gathering place in Tākaka centre.

*30.09.2021 Building a chain-link fence to keep out a mosquito*

*Very challenging to imagine there is something bigger than the Covid terror taking over the entire landscape as it has. What if, in increments of days, months, and advertising pressures from many sources, there was a reprogramming of the populace going on? On the one hand: belief in the main stream narrative, acceptance of the experimental gene therapy as a good thing, great trust that the government is our main source of truth; on the other hand, and occupying the same body, is lack of trust in the directions the current government has taken, a mistrust of the ordinary media spell cast, an investigative attitude and a questioning of what is being posited as truth.*

*Fascism pretending to be polite: is this what we are seeing? How to silence the masses and turn people one against the other? Demoralisation of the spirit, destabilisation, crisis, (sometimes followed by a violent change in government), a big brother government in place promising many goodies.. (problem, reaction, solution)...*

The “what ifs” represent her ways of being, doing and speaking as she ambiguously questions the government plans of the Covid-19 response, comparing it to building a chain-link fence for a

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<sup>28</sup> *Vigil* means ‘staying awake’ in a direct sense, often in a quiet place or at night. Among activists, it is used for peaceful gatherings, protests or to pray. ‘Staying awake’ can also be interpreted being conscious and critical to the political authority as at the Freedom Vigil.

mosquito. Her self-representation is aesthetically amusing just as the scene in the film (28:00 time-code) by keeping the phone in the unplugged microwave that assumedly helps against being tracked from *the unknown*. Similarly, Titus has expresses his concerns about Covid-19 pandemic and 1080 pesticide poisoning poetically (see Appendix 1). The tension between the political and the emotional, is also visible in her the following writings.

28.09.2021 Freedom Vigil *Tākaka Village Green*

*The most recent information regarding the nature of this Experimental Gene Therapy in your body is that it is followed by "shedding", so that my body is impacted by what is going on in your body, post injection. Whether or not this is true, since this is an Experiment still in its trial stages, is not known to me, but is information that affects me, and changes my perception. Is it my imagination that around the Injected, I notice in me a bodily weakness, an achiness, a coldness? The imagination is a powerful tool, a friend tells me. I often feel caught in the larger net of opinions, mine and yours, going around in my head endlessly. It is quite possible that I too am a prisoner of my beliefs and opinions which are no less important to me than yours to you.*

## Chapter 4: Methodological reflections

*It requires us to dive into the sea of other people's lives and find a way to swim with them. It requires commitment, endurance, constant improvisation, humility, sociality, and the ability to give oneself up to and for others. It entails the ability to retrieve oneself and be prepared to rethink, from this position, everything one thinks one knows. And then it needs one to swim back to the shore and be prepared that this shore is almost always going to be different from the shore one began (Shah 2017, 53).*

### 4.1 Learning the hard way

The method of participant observation is a common tool in doing the ethnographic fieldwork. It is also an invisible tool that we always have in our pocket, no matter where we go. We cannot just leave it at home on our *imaginary* day-off while hanging out with our interlocutors *just as friends*. It is at the back of my mind even after the fieldwork as we meet again *just as friends*. Am I failing as a friend by subconsciously analyzing her? Am I exploiting our friendship towards my ethnographic findings? It is an exhaustive but fruitful praxis that requires the levels of hardship, patience along with empathy in order to find the balance in the work we do.

As Shah (2017, 47) points out, it made her question her fundamental assumptions and pre-existing theories about the world; it enabled her to discover new ways of thinking about, seeing, and acting in the world. As I was living at the NDC throughout the time, I had access to consistently observe the events unfold and to participate in the way people handled those events. I often had the dirt under my nails as I learned best by doing. The exhilaration of fieldwork, by the active use of the body and escaping from the mundane armchair into the dramatic adventure, helped to integrate the means of knowing (Okely 2012, 108) have incorporated my findings by using this revolutionary tool thoroughly. In this chapter I will reflect upon doing the participant observation with a camera.

I was already known as the “documentarian” upon my arrival so I decided to use the camera immediately. By using such an approach, I would introduce the elephant in the room promptly, familiarizing everyone with its presence. After all, our basic relationship was already established, and I soon learned that my 3-month ethnographic fieldwork was primarily perceived as making a documentary.

On top of that I was attracted to the rhythm and the busyness of the people and the place, that I soon started running around like a headless chicken. Which obviously had its cost. At the end of my second day filming, I dropped my camera and damaged the sound input. This pressured me to re-evaluate my approach. Would it have been better to have started by solely using participant observation? Getting to know the place and the surroundings? Well, I had paid the price for my fear of missing out. It cost humility to reach out to a friend and borrow the \$ 850 that I did not have to cover the costs of repair. On the other hand, the next 20 days taught me a lot about my subjects, the surroundings and made me re-evaluate my approach. The bottom line was that I was at the Learning Centre and was kindly comforted with the words such as “*don’t beat yourself up*”, “*be kind to yourself*” and “*this is a learning for you*”.

Sunshine would often talk to camera provocatively and share her concerns about climate change, current government lockdowns, misinformation about *the experimental jab*<sup>29</sup> etc. Her behaviour changed as soon as the camera was present. I felt ambivalent when she was talking directly to the camera lens (not to me) with an attempt “to distribute” her ideology. I felt self-conscious because I had not expected such a behavior and questioned my position in the field. Should I give her feedback by following one of the principles? Should I leave it, since it was her natural behavior? I learned a lot by this experience as I was finding my own way of doing things.

Subsequently, I decided to place the camera on a tripod while having meals or conversations to create a more natural environment for everyone. I was also concerned that some of the people might not be comfortable being filmed. People were very open minded and supportive. For some of my subjects, it offered a space for creativity. Titus loved sharing his poetry and would insist to share it on the camera. I sometimes noticed how people began performing. I trusted that they were expressing another part of themselves, which otherwise would have been dormant. These performances, motivated by the presence of the camera, can be highly revealing, bringing to light aspects of personal identity, attitude, belief or fantasy that could otherwise remain hidden or unexpected (Henley 2004, 138). Once, when I overheard a conversation that included “*you should do that while the documentarian is still here*”, I decided to put my camera away for the rest of the day. It eased the air and I started feeling in control of my project again.

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<sup>29</sup> *The experimental jab* is an emic term used to describe the Covid-19 vaccine with the connotation of being experimental.

Filming was revealing and challenging. First of all, it helped me to learn the content of the conversations that I had filmed. I would go through the material at the end of the day and would be able to re-live the experiences and learn the content of the conversations along with the shots that I needed to follow up. It was necessary because in the moment of the filming, I was too focused on the focusing, as well as overwhelmed with the framing, sound and light that I had to often manually adjust due to my light weight mirrorless camera that was not suitable to keep up with such vigorous people. Secondly, I used it to dissemble in the situations that I struggled with. Although I had established a close relationship with Sunshine, there were parts that I had to withstand for my own mental health. I was dreading of being asked of my opinion about *the experimental job*. I became more and more introverted. Consequently, the use of the camera distanced me mentally as I chose to enter my own performance of a visual ethnographer; still participating and observing, however drawing an imagined boundary from *the experimental job*.

I was consciously following some of the established commandments by P. Henley's that Andy Lawrence (Lawrence 2020, 22) had saved from his unpublished teaching notes such as no scripts; no direction or virtuosos images; no narration; my style of filming was limited. Occasionally, I missed some moments that would have been valuable for the film, however, I chose not to recreate the scenes. Similarly, I avoided asking people to stop for the shots. Instead, I followed their daily path uninterrupted; even if that meant more work for several days to capture one envisaged sequence. The attempt to not interrupt their daily flow cost a lot of energy and planning.

As Bill Nichols points out:

“A documentary does not address the fictive space of classic narrative but historiographic space, the premise and assumption prevail that what occurred in front of the camera was not entirely enacted with the camera in mind. It would have existed, the events would have unfolded, the social actors would have lived and made a presentation of themselves in everyday life irrespective of the camera's presence” (Nichols 1991, 78).

Nevertheless, I did question how the events would have unfolded irrespective of the camera's presence. For instance, when I asked about the funeral planning after the first and the second funeral meeting were cancelled, Sunshine was reaching out for her phone to call for the third meeting. I had no intention to provoke her actions with my words as I simply wanted to follow up.

Overall, using the camera in my ethnographic research taught me to expand the horizons in search for the material; to become more poetic; to look for the representations of the place in a broader context. For instance, the way I created the scene with the *Qi Gong* practice (17:50 time-code). The film as a tool also helped me to see the different sides of the people; their representation of self. Which part of ourselves we wish to be portrayed? What does camera presence do to us? I certainly stepped out of my comfort zone, especially when letting myself be in the film. I personally experienced that the film was a reminder of being more present; to be conscious of my own self and to choose my words wisely while being in front of the camera. I learned more than anything else how to collaborate with the people that I lived with and how to offer them a safe space to share and make their stories important. Which, of course, was followed by the hardest choice yet to be made – which story am I going to tell?

Going through the material for 10 weeks in the editing room helped me to shift my focus towards the holding space as a practice. I started seeing things that I did not see before, due to the overall density of the fieldwork material. That made the post production work very demanding. By cutting 46 hours of the material, I had to make some serious decisions. How can I tell a story that represents the different aspects of the life at New Directions Connections? How to be critical, but not offensive? How to present such a complex character? What will I leave behind? Finally, I remembered what one of my dear friends from Collingwood said, “*what makes the film is what you choose to leave behind.*”

The most important thing I learned in the editing is how I am able to expand and broaden the story I am writing about by using the audio-visuals. The deep meaning behind the holding space practice was transformational and the possibility to share it in an audio-visual only validated how strong it was. I shall, however, add some criticism here. Although I was lucky that people wanted to share their stories in front of the camera, it might not always be the case. The use of the camera in anthropological research can leave some of the stories unseen, being overshadowed by charismatic and audacious storytellers such as Sunshine. This does not necessarily mean I had a walk in the park. Contrary, because the people I chose to film enjoyed sometimes being *tickled* by the camera, I decided to get to know them also outside the filming process. That required way more time than I had. To my advantage, I had already lived and visited the field within the first ten months before my fieldwork. I was also able to return to the field regularly within the next seven months after finishing my fieldwork, when I was writing up the notes.



By having made some important connections, I was able to get to know local people. It would not have been possible with the 3-4 months given for this. In other words, at the time I had to cook a vegetarian meal for eight people or share my first prayer of “yumm” as a member of the NDC, I had already done it while I was staying at the Sustainable Living Centre down the road, so I had more capacity to notice deeper aspects due to my previous knowledge.

Time-space efficiency is important to do mere qualitative data collection and there are many compromises we need to prioritize (Shah 2017, 46). Navel-gazing should be mentioned as a possible threat for anthropological knowledge. Being overly occupied with our own selves and seeing the world solely through our ethnocentric eyes can reduce our ability to observe. But how does one keep it balanced by swimming in the waters without losing the shore?

## **4.2 Reflexivity**

I consciously chose to avoid preconceptions, biases and labeling of any whatsoever categorizations or ideologies. I learned to navigate between my different roles, one as an intern continuously giving and receiving feedback, the other as an ethnographer, diving in into the sea of other people’s lives. Finally, even if I had the best intentions of giving feedback, it would create conflicts with some people, as they were not able to receive it due to their sensitivity towards it. But it taught me to hold space for people.

Sometimes, I found it arduous to express my feelings when I was overly exhausted from conversations about anti-vaccination and anti-government matters during the meals. I could not disregard positioning myself into a space where I was observing and learning about the others to the extreme, withdrawing completely from how that made me feel in the moment. “I am an anthropologist, this is a fieldwork” is a classic form of the use of a method to drain anxiety from situations in which we feel complicitous with structures of power or helpless to release another from suffering; or at a loss as to whether to act or observe (Behar 1996, 6). After all, there is no one else to guide me through my fieldwork. I am on my own, and I have to stop the thoughts racing through my head “*What if they ask what I think of the vaccine? If I get the jab, will I never give Sunshine a hug again? Do I actually want to get vaccinated?*” And foremost, “*What is the truth and where to find it?*” This is where the camera was really handy as I was able to *withdraw* from

being exposed to these vulnerable questions. On the other hand, the camera was used to hold space along with my interlocutors. I will now share a collaborative *space-holding* example with Elliot below.

I am filming Elliot and having a conversation about what has he learned at Sunshine's (10:40 time-code), after a silent break, he takes my camera, turns it around and confronts me:

- How is it for you experiencing Sunshine's and documenting this extraordinary environment. What's happened with you?
- I've grown immensely. I've definitely learned how to set my boundaries. To stand up for myself (...) That it's easy to hide behind the screen when I need to. When I don't want to express how I feel or what I think. It's been convenient as a documentarian. Sometimes I struggled not going and expressing my opinion. I've struggled as an intern following the internship program and giving feedback to people continuously; that's what I'm expected. Then, as a researcher, doing a participant observation, being there to observe. Sometimes I notice I really want to give feedback, but I also want to observe what's going to happen if I wasn't there.
- So, being caught between the two identities.; a participant, and a researcher, says Elliot.
- It's very reflexive when you do a fieldwork. You can't hide that you are there, and you don't have to. That's what we study at the program. In this particular fieldwork, I am continuously expected to give my feedback, but then I also want to see what happens if I don't, and how people would be without me there.
- I felt a little bit of sadness when you said how it would be without me there, Elliot suddenly points out.
- You felt sadness?
- Yeah, I felt a bit of sadness. A shrinking almost, he says.
- Ohhh.. I said, empathetically.
- What if you are there? He responds.

Apart from reflexivity, what is very important here is how Elliot responded that he felt sadness when I said *without me there*. He reflected on his emotional state, noticing the arising emotions, observing them and then sharing with me how he felt.

### 4.3 Holding space as an ethnographic tool

Many anthropologists have argued that empathy should be consciously used while doing ethnographic research (see more Behar 1996, Svašek 2010). Whether managing our emotions could be a part of our research strategy (Jackson 2010) opening the new departures in anthropology as being cross-disciplinary (Beatty 2019). Re-reading Behar's speech (1996, 161-177) only validated how much debate and scolding Rosaldo (1989) received after his most celebrated work among the *Ilongot headhunters*, discarding the concept of culture as spectacle (Beatty 2019, 265) as he vulnerably shared the rage and grief he experienced during the tragic death of his partner in the field. There are personal limitations or advantaged that cannot be taken for granted as the human agency and our reflexive capacity is the exploited tool towards building the anthropological knowledge.

I would like to suggest utilizing the holding space as a conscious approach in doing ethnography. I have no doubt it has been practiced before. When the anthropology we do is often heart-breaking and suppressing the feelings is not something I have learned among the people I lived with. Aminata Cairo has described holding space in her own anthropological research. As a transformative research tool when researchers spend time *being with* studied groups, holding space for their stories, and being responsible for the stories they put forth. Her approach is similar to mine when she describes "*I start with the premise that we are all connected and that for a short period of time, I would 'be with' and join a community in order to unearth a story or stories that can be a benefit for all of us*" (Cairo 2022). Cairo continues describing her recent research where they joined a marginalized community to explore solidarity in the times of the Covid-19 pandemic. "*We engaged in a journey with the community. What started as a pursuit for counternarratives to the existing negative public stories shifted and became an exercise in holding space for all the stories that existed in this community, whether positive or negative*" (Cairo 2022).

Being surrounded daily by people with mental health issues had a strong impact on me. I noticed how some of the people were using my attention to talk about their problems as I continued holding space for them. It was challenging at times, especially living in a community that seldomly allowed you to be alone.

However, as Paul Henley (2004, 133) would have said, holding “a stance of humility before the world” that I implicitly acknowledged; the subjects’ story is more important than the film-maker’s however heart-breaking. It was difficult to imagine of no longer being able to join Sunshine’s glorious meals when my vaccination status came in the way. I took the fear of *shedding* seriously. This also meant some sort of *coming out* as being vaccinated, which was very intimidating. I had no doubt of telling her, despite the various unethical comments along the lines “*just don’t tell her*”. Approaching the field non-judgementally can be challenging at times, but one must sacrifice one’s own ego and leave the question “*but what about me?*” at home.

## Chapter 5: Discourse upon holding space

Holding space is simply an exchange of emotional and social measures by consciously engaging with each other in a non-judgmental manner. This means being there for the other person without trying to help, fix, or try positivity out of it. Simply to consciously choose “doing nothing” but hold space empathetically by letting the other to experience and express feelings that lead to a transitional space; a potential space for healing. It is a reciprocal process where the empathizer is intentionally being with the other person in a reflexive exchange of emotional, social and physical interaction. For that reason, I have looked at empathy as being the essential tool towards holding space as a reciprocal practice. It is impacting the empathizers’ emotional and experience/state and can result in different ways as we have seen in my diary entries above.

I will now explore the *space-holding* practices among the people at the NDC. Apart from the obvious and the most powerful scene of Kez and I holding space while talking about grief; Sunshine runs an alternative healing for mental health, i.e., *The Path Forward*, as in the opening lines of the film.

*“I’m holding the space for people to come here and learn about their cosmic connections; learn about their connections to the Earth. It is a specific skill set based and there is nothing casual about it.”*

There is in fact nothing casual about it. The reason why these strong words are at the beginning is because they set the framework of the film. The space that Sunshine has created, outlives its own rhythm and nature. However, it has its own influence. The preconditions of the place and the governing rules are established by the certain principles being allowed in the space. For instance, the principle of giving and receiving feedback. It requires a certain skill and courage to be able to confront someone. To be able to check in with one’s own feelings and to confront someone in a neutral manner, i.e., with the intention of “being present”, is even harder. Especially if one is expected to do it in the moment, which was not the case in the situation I will use as an example. *“When there are conversations about the experimental jab three times a day during the meal, I feel anxious.”* It took me a couple of weeks to express this. It was taken seriously by Sunshine as I shared it with her in private. In her response to my feedback, such conversations were moved to

the lounge. But not for long. I got the *aftershocks* as one of the interns started using it in a passively-aggressive manner. When Shou was about to start to talk about it at the table again, she stuttered, but continued, “*I will do it anyway*” while looking at me in a provocative manner. It was difficult to hold space for her, especially when she was ego-driven; not very present, presumably. At some stage, after having tried different ways of engaging in conversations with her (see *The Curious Mind* diary entrance in Chapter 4), I had to set my boundaries and choose to engage in a different manner. I consciously chose not to connect with her emotionally and maintain a superficial day-to-day relationship. This instance could be criticized by, first of all, the aspects of emotional state of the anthropologist being harassed; secondly, the criticism to not being able to further explore the *space-holding* practice with this person due to the first aspect; thirdly, the knowledge that is “lost” because of this instance by not only engaging in the field but also in the post-fieldwork that can be influenced due to an emotionally difficult experience. Although I was aware of these complex processes and could already tolerate a lot, there was a line that I had to draw.

The reason I am analysing this example, is that such an approach is implicitly teaching self-knowledge. It is a learning process; an opportunity to grow; heading towards the “awakening” as Sunshine explains. In this introspective process of reflections, when we are nurturing the self-awareness. It is certainly fortified by living in “an intensity of the community”, to use Elliot’s words. If such a principle of giving feedback was not applied in the first place, I would not have experienced the confronting situation. At least, not in the way I consciously chose to address it, regardless whether it was in the moment it happened or later in the room with her.

To take further the governing rules and principles, let us look at the sign “This is Experimental-Jab Free Environment”. Sunshine admitted that she was uncertain if *shedding* was feasible, yet she put it on the outside door. Her large heart however still permitted organizing a farewell party for her vaccinated friend before he left overseas. The contradiction between the *realistic* and the *idealistic* was evident. From my observations, it was more “freedom of choice” to stand differently and to encourage their ideologies to the others by setting the invisible, as well as the obviously visible, boundary, i.e., the gate. However, the “freedom of choice” became a pervasive limitation to the boundaries of community itself. Furthermore, such prevailing practices has its own aesthetics that are expressed by the act of performance. Let’s look at the opening scene again. I was standing and simply filming the gate when Sunshine arrived. As she walked through the gate, she began to talk about the meaning of the gate, without me having even asked about it.

The aesthetics of the performance can also be rooted within the tension of the political and emotional. These ways of using the sensory experiences impose certain ideologies though “the guardianship of the space” which takes holding space practices towards the earlier mentioned activism. It is however, a silent form of an activism, also called a subtle activism (Terry 2015) which has been mentioned among the communities of *LGBTQ+*<sup>30</sup> activists. In August 2022 it will be a year since Sunshine started holding space at Village Green. She describes it as:

*“For me, it (holding space) is an energetic term. When I’m at the Village Green, I am holding the space for transformation; for people to be free everywhere. I have a vision of it; in the space that I am occupying. This is the way I am operating, as if I were a free being interacting with other free-beings.”*

The *community of sense* can be found present at the daily *vigiling*. First of all, the people who choose to be present at the *vigils* are the local friends, residents at NDC or Golden Bay and some *backpackers*. They often share “the spiritual path” of self-growth. A yoga or meditation teacher or practitioner, a member of the *Rage Club*, or some other sort, showing an interest towards their self-growth and self-knowledge. Certainly, not many of these people find conspiracy-believing as their piece of cake, however there is a certain *dissensus*. This can be validated by the peculiarity of the place and the alternative way of life which is in common among many of those who choose to stay in Golden Bay (see more Chapter 2).

Returning to the magical sensory experiences that are manifested by the *community of sense*, I would like to add the aesthetics of eloquence as an affective participatory measure. Even a derogatory, perhaps. At the holding space *vigil* at Village Green, it is publicly expressed in a very subtle manner, by using a small sign such as “When tyranny becomes law, resistance becomes duty”. However, when privately engaged in conversations about the politics of the government’s way of handling the Covid-19 pandemic, Sunshine even says “fascists” or, as in the film, “bio-weapon”. *Dissensus* is the moment in which the experiences “of those who have no part” – those who are not recognized by the majority and are not included in the political “distribution of the sensible” – are inscribed in society (Rancière 1999, 123).

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<sup>30</sup>*LGBTQ+* is short for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other; See more: <https://www.rappler.com/voices/ispeak/opinion-holding-space-form-lgbtq-activism/>;

There is a certain ambivalence to it. *As radically detraditionalized and anti-authoritarian (Heelas 1996, 22), does New Age exert dogmatic influence and occultic practice per se? How about emergence of the mindfulness?*<sup>31</sup> What used to be an ancient Buddhist practice, has become a billion-dollar-industry even prior pandemic, at least in the USA.<sup>32</sup> *Has holding space become activism of proclaiming the New Age ideologies by claiming the space and the power? Or has it been activism all along?* Parmigiani takes it even further, questioning *conspiracy-believing* as a “community builder,” and “a political practice” (Parmigiani 2021, 524).

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<sup>31</sup> Mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally (Kabatt-Zinn 1994, 4).

<sup>32</sup> Americans spend around \$1bn on self-help books each year, and \$4bn on mindfulness products and therapies (Whippman, 2017).



## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis represents of my attempt to conceptualize holding space practice that I encountered during my fieldwork. “*I am here. I am holding this space with you*” was the first time I heard about this concept from one of my subjects. I found it unique to the locality as it was often mentioned among my interlocutors as well as at the local yoga studios, *Cacao Ceremonies* or at *Rage Club* sessions. Nevertheless, I learned that it was done not by talking but through practice. So as a *space-holder*, I dived into the daily lives of Sunshine and her crew to explore and perpetuate her community in all its splendour and madness during the period of three months.

Having lived in Golden Bay prior to my fieldwork worked towards my advantage. I was already familiar with the environment and had some connections within the New Directions Connections. That encouraged me to use the camera as soon as I knocked at the door on 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 2021. Participant observation, on the other hand, complemented the use of the camera in the times I chose to solely observe the people’s behaviour or when having dirt under the nails. The use of the camera opened up an imaginary space where the stories wanted to be shared, and it provoked a different behaviour that otherwise would not have been experienced. It was a good counter-balance, offering a broader spectrum for gaining the anthropological knowledge, especially being able to learn more about my subjects and surroundings by re-playing and re-living the experiences during the post-production.

As I had intentionally attempted to avoid using any of my ethnocentric beliefs, I chose not to use concepts such as conspiracy theories or New Age during my fieldwork, concepts that were not used by my interlocutors. During writing-up, however, it was evident that the epistemologies of the New Age practices were intrinsic to the case. Holistic approaches such as healing, self-growth, teaching, yoga and meditation are all promoting self-knowledge, the characteristic to the establishment of NDC, The Golden Bay notice board and the New Age. Even the principles, such as “giving and receiving feedback”, are explicitly promoting the self-knowledge and can fail due to lack of conscious forms of reflection and understanding (*The Curious Mind* example). Empathy is an important source of self-knowledge and can limit one’s capacity to hold space due to the lack of reciprocity.

Despite the supporting literature, this research is based on my empirical reflections where positionality or situatedness play an essential role. Because I was a feminist on a self-explorational journey, often found among the colourfully dressed in a downward facing dog or cross-legged, I was able to connect deeper with my interlocutors. We often shared similar interests and hobbies.

Being able to notice the feelings and emotions arising, during the intimate and sometimes unpleasant conversations, let me to better empathize and hold space. However, the familiarity with the field can also lead to the misconceptions by the feeling of being familiar with it. I have kept this in mind by reflecting critically on my own position. I have given examples of observing the others holding space; asking about how it feels being held in space or as a *space-holder* and using similar ethnographies that resonated with my work. Nevertheless, the genuinely intimate discussions that Kez and I shared on the film, have become the pivotal source of understanding of what holding space is. In fact, I encourage other anthropologists to use holding space as a tool when entering the field. It is a versatile tool that can be used to gain more anthropological knowledge, avoid the navel-gazing, obey ethical matters, while keeping an eye on one's own mental health.

I have formulated holding space as an exchange of emotional and social measures by consciously engaging with each other in a non-judgmental manner without trying to help, fix, or try positivity out of it. It can also be a form of consciously choosing of *doing nothing*, but empathetically engaging by letting the others to experience their feelings. This can lead them both in a *transitional space*, a potential space for healing that has also been promoted locally by the Possibility Management in Golden Bay. After having asked Kez about how to hold space for someone grieving, I learned how to talk about her deceased daughter that further encouraged me to ask about her. This only validated the need for my own emotional healing as I never talked about those who had passed in my life.

Henceforth, holding space can also be applied in activism. Subtle and polite, the non-violent act of resistance was originally provoked by the second Covid-19 lockdown in Aotearoa New Zealand. As we read in *Vigil Musings*, the civil-disobedience provoked their “freedom of choice”, as the *earthlings* started gathering at the Village Green from Monday to Friday at 12 pm in joined silent meditation and reflections. Losing her job due to the vaccine mandate while borders were shut left Sunshine in a difficult position. There were no new *backpackers* finding their way to participate

in the internship program nor the Sustainable Living Course that would bring new people looking for places to stay. The *vigils* were soon joined by some provocative signs lying there while we were chatting away with each other.

The weekly gathering at the Village Green created a certain social group that was gathered together by expressing themselves in a *community of sense* which may no longer emphasize on *conspiracy believing* per se, but rather creating a sense of belonging; leaving the *conspiratorialities* as their connecting link. This can be my suggestion to the contradicting performance when Sunshine does not know who is tracking her phone or if *shedding* is real. Which makes me question whether finding the truth is more important than the act of performance by being together as a *community of sense*? Is it the destination that is important or is it their journey? And how does one get there in their vicissitudes of becoming?

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## Images

Figure 1.

Map of New Zealand. Te Ara. Story: Nelson Places. *The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*,  
<https://teara.govt.nz/en/map/29122/western-golden-bay>.

Figure 2.

Only in Golden Bay. "GB Weekly" Sep 10, 2002.



# Appendix

## 1. Titus Poem

On July, 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Titus is filling up dehydrator with persimmons and kiwi fruit. It's that time of the year to preserve the abundant harvest of the fruit shared by the local folk. Nothing else to do on Tuesday morning midst of a rainy winter day in Tākaka. I am filming Titus hands moving the cut fruit in the goddess of the conservation as we reminisce of the past week's poetry night. I keep "woowwing" about his astonishing performance that impressed many at *The Mussel Inn*<sup>33</sup> monthly event.

Both of his hands are covered in juice of the persimmons, as he says:

- You just say when you are ready, and I'll start.
- I am ready! *Thinking to myself, does he know the poem by heart?*

Sitting on a Village Green in Tākaka,  
Bright colors in front of me,  
I feel like a superstar!  
Don't get me wrong, I don't agree  
with superficial values in society,  
I rather stand up for individual variety.  
However, connected to the real life,  
And not for masks.  
Masks? What I mean, she asks.  
The masks people wear to please one another,  
Swim with the mainstream, and please don't be  
a bother.  
Just don't be out of the box,  
Don't wear your pants inside your socks.  
I stand up for the bordering wonderland,  
Making humans laugh, making them understand.  
Take them by their hand and walk hand in hand.  
Showing them, that we don't need to take from  
the soil,  
We are not dependent on oil.  
Neither do we need to cook with aluminum foil.  
We are not to rape ancient waters with the  
harvest of lithium,  
To create batteries for smartphones or electrical  
cars.  
We should rather focus on  
Healing our own scars.  
And realize what in fact we are.  
Every single one of us,  
A human superstar.  
A creator within a creation.

Experiencing oneself,  
Wandering from station to station.  
It's all in our head I bet,  
And in the heart, and in the gut, of course.  
So, what is that we really need?  
Food, shelter, clothing, and love, indeed.  
Abundance are there, let's open our eyes!

It is my dream to reach humans with words.  
And it seems to be my path  
Because I'm shedded by birds.  
Words and birds, I really like that one...  
No! This is not a joke, it's reality.  
Light years away from fertility.  
Day after day I am changing,  
It somehow feels like a long term arranging.  
Adjusting words and grammar to create rhymes,  
Continuing to write, lines after lines.  
Sometimes my words run deeper,  
Sometimes the stairs seem steeper.  
Keep on testing me, the mother Earth,  
Lead me through pain and make me earn  
The love I deserve.  
I take another sip from my cup,  
Epiphanies pop out.  
They appear easier than complicated,  
Surely is overrated.  
I stand up for the tiny and good things,  
Not global issues that try to disturb me  
From my divine links.

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<sup>33</sup> *The Mussel Inn*, is a local brewery/bar in a close proximity to Tākaka. For 30 years, it has been run by a lovely family promoting many cultural and social gatherings in a Kiwi hut-like platform bringing many musicians and other artists to the remoteness of New Zealand.

Look at me! I am sitting under a tree!  
And offer my poems ...for...coffee  
And *dubbies*...and *looove*.  
Village Green, here I feel home,  
Accompanied in my neckless sits a stone.  
It's for grounding.

This is new, and that feels old.  
I ache to jump in wild ocean  
Which is very cold.  
That won't help, though.  
I'm still going bold.  
And behold! The time of pure amusement!  
Laughter and abundance has come.  
I see it clearly in the fire and the sun.  
Fire and sun.  
Sitting in the eyes of others,  
And shining out of my tummy and roots.  
Left right, right left,  
Each foot wears a boot.  
In these boots I keep walking  
Reaching the top of the mountain.  
Waiting for me up there  
A magnificent fountain.  
It flows in every direction.  
All of them show  
Life in a friction.  
Instead of searching, I have found.  
Found out that there is no such a thing as a goal  
From the very birth of life,  
We have always been whole.  
A wholeness that's misguided by the voice of the  
universe.  
Onwards! It goes. Never reverse.

Is this our clarity, inside the insanity?  
Humanity? Standing above vanity?  
There is this urge in me to hug everything.  
Burst out my love all over, and start to sing,  
Wearing at least one invisible wing (*Titus*  
*imitates his right hand as flapping a wing*).

Not anymore am I building mind castles of...  
What *coulda*, *woulda*, *shoulda*.  
That distracting me from being just me!  
So much excitement! Now I need to pee!  
This all might sound very odd,  
To take it in could be more than a lot.  
But what actually matters,  
Is the present.  
And the present, I tell you,  
Is more than just pleasant.

I am down to the last sips of my beer.  
Just realized, they took away all of my fears  
Of speaking in front of an audience.  
So...(*Titus looking at his hands*) those hands are  
not for piano playing after all.  
These words are my true passion,  
And I am healing through this confession.  
This very generation has to choose  
Between love and hate,  
At this time, you may call it faith.  
A shift has been happening,  
it was prepared by the universe, in advance.  
Giving us a chance as human,  
once again to enhance.  
To rise from low frequencies, to ...  
(*damn, needing a rhyme here...*)  
Humble bumble-bees  
Or consciously advanced entities.  
Let's all be part in this parade of courage.  
We rise again, together as unbreakable chain.  
Love, peace, trust, and the healed mother Earth.  
It flows out and gives me shivers,  
Drinkable water from all our rivers.  
All of us strong, and nobody quivers.  
A hundred and forty-four thousand  
are about to be filled with unstoppable  
movement which ought to be spilled  
covering us all,  
humans of love stand,  
steady and tall...



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