Carefully reconnecting with the More-Than-Human

Affective experiences and care practices in Alternative Food Networks in Italy

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The picture on the cover page shows Orti Generali urban garden (Own photograph)

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Abstract

The pressures on conventional agricultural systems have led to the emergence of alternative food networks (AFN), that offer opportunities for biological, social, and moral reconnection within the food system. However, existing research on AFNs often focuses narrowly on humans and their structures, neglecting the potential for reconnecting with the more-than-human (MTH) dimension. This research, based on ethnographic fieldwork in Community supported agriculture schemes and urban gardens in Turin and Piedmont, aims to investigate how humans reconnect with the MTH world and how this inspires new ways of thinking and acting in relation to food. This reconnection is explored through an Ethics of care framework, used to identify care practices that foster a sense of ethical responsibility towards the MTH world. Moreover, the concept of affect is used to delve into how people's encounters with human and non-human others can impact attitudes and foster ethical commitments. The findings show that affective encounters and care practices play a pivotal role in fostering ethical responsibilities towards the MTH world, contributing to the development of a more sustainable food system. However, it also shows that care practices are riddled with ambivalences and the power of affect depends on the willingness and openness to be affected and be changed by encounters. Consequently, further research is needed to delve deeper into these complexities and explore to explore the extent to which affect, and care can engender lasting ethical commitments. This research highlights the significance of understanding and exploring the potential of affective encounters and care practices to foster interconnected relationship between humans and the MTH world.

Keywords: *alternative food networks, more-than-human, ethics of care, affect*.

List of abbreviations

AFN- Alternative Food Networks

MTH- More-than-human

CSA- Community Supported Agriculture

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1. Introduction

The dominant development trend of the past few decades in systems of food provision and consumption has mainly been characterized by an industrial based and a market-oriented agriculture. Wiskerke (2009) identifies three processes characterizing the current food system which are: (1) *disconnection* marked by loosened links and increased distance between producers and suppliers of goods and services on the one hand and the consumers and customers on the other hand. (2) *disembedding* of food by its places of production with a consequent loss of geographical identity for food; (3) *disentwining* and increased specialization in the supply chains which have disconnected the producers and suppliers of different goods and services from each other creating separate spheres of activity (p.371). Furthermore, the core characteristic of the contemporary global food system is the harnessing of science and technology to establish tight, usually vertical control over seeds, planting and harvesting (Dowler et al, 2009). Thus, agriculture and food systems became a major source of environmental destruction (FAO; 2011). The intensive nature of food production has taken a toll on the natural environment, causing soil erosion, extinction of pollinators, water nitrification and greenhouse gases emissions among others (Giraud, 2021). The disconnection between producers, consumers and nature contributes to the emotional, intellectual and cultural distancing which people experience in their understanding of and relationship to food (Dowler et al., 2009).

Alongside dominant modes of food production, so called Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) have emerged, with the goal of making food closer and more local, and with the intent of closing the gap between consumers and producers by building a closer relationship (Venn et al, 2006). Alternative food networks seek to create shortened and localized supply chains and refer to a wide range of food production, distribution, and retail activities. These represent alternatives to conventional food networks, including farmers' markets, direct marketing schemes, community supported agriculture, community gardens and food cooperatives (Corsi et al, 2018). As Dowler et al argue, one of the main features of the global food system is its "divorcing of foodstuff from the biological" (2009), namely food has been increasingly viewed as commodity, a product of global capitalism rather than sustenance. AFNs give the opportunity to reverse this trend by allowing a biological, social and moral reconnection that brings together different elements of the food system (*ibid*). Reconnection is not just in relation to structures and distance but embraces the 'biological' in food – namely soils, animals, seasonality; the 'social', in terms of feelings, perceptions, and the work of building relationships between producers and consumers over time; and the possibilities of 'morality' in drawing on explicit ethical values in specific aspects of living (*Ibid,* p.208).

Researching with AFNs, this thesis aims to explore and investigate the aspect of "biological" reconnection, here defined as reconnection with the more-than-human world (MTH) which is "the open spectrum of the interrelationships between the worlds of living and non-living beings and human societies" (Abram, 1996) namely soils, animals, humans, seasonality, climate, nature, plants, territory and land. This reconnection may promote concerns about non-humans and may inspire people to think and act differently when relating with food. Moreover, backed by an Ethic of care theory and its concepts, this thesis aims to focus on the aspect of MTH care and its affective dimensions which can inform an understanding of the interconnectedness of the world and can become the means through which we understand the MTH reconnection. Investigating these aspects provides an

opportunity to uncover the ethical engagements with food which are moved by the affective encounters with non-humans.

1.2. Problem Statement

Focusing on the biological reconnection, the aim of this thesis is to contribute to the academic debate around AFNs by turning to a more-than-human perspective. Alternative Food Networks in research are usually classified as a kind of social activism and the emphasis is on the resistant and oppositional forces, they provide against the dominant food systems (Barbera & Dagnes, 2016). Participants in AFNs may be concerned in wider political aims, as shown by the strong influence of an anti-globalization factor and wanting to support small farmers (Migliore et al., 2019). Direct selling initiatives, such as solidarity purchasing groups in Italy, are organized to achieve social justice by engaging in collective action and fostering social bonds (Graziano & Forno, 2012). Urban community gardens often raise awareness about food sovereignty and question the existing market-driven usage of and right for urban spaces, in favor of community-based, civic alternatives (Eizenberg, 2012). In addition, they might be concerned with the environmental sustainability of the supply chain or the environmental impact of their food choice (Barbera & Dagnes, 2016).

Although environmental sustainability is mentioned, research around AFN risks reducing the focus to a human-centered perspective- namely focusing on people and the structures they created- and gives little attention to the potential Alternative Food Networks have in reconnecting with the more-than human-dimension (Beacham, 2016). A perspective that encompasses the interconnectedness of humans and the natural world can enrich the understanding of AFNs, which are not only the place for social and environmental activism, but they can also give the opportunity to dive deeper into the experience of being connected with the MTH. Exploring this reconnection provides an opportunity not only to be conscious of the interdependency of all beings, but also to understand how the ongoing proliferation of AFNs might contribute to fundamental transformations of food systems (Sarmiento, 2016).
Research on various human-nature connection dimensions is still in its infancy. Recent studies have called for further exploration especially in the context of local food production and consumption (Artmann et al., 2020). This research thus responds directly to the call by Artmann et al. (2020) to further explore the dimensionality of human nature connection, here called more-than-human reconnection in the context of Alternative Food Networks.

1.3. Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to make sense of the more-than human reconnection in Alternative Food Networks and make contribution to food studies drawing from a MTH perspective. In order to do that, I will make use of an ethic of care framework and the concepts that can derive from it, namely affect and more-than-human care.

An ethic of care theory offers a framework for thinking through MTH relationships. Contrary to deontological and utilitarian moral theories which favor universality, individual rights, consequences, and justice, the ethics of care holds that moral action centers on interpersonal relationships and sees care both as a virtue and practice (Held, 2006). Care is a type of practical work which is the relational

practice of giving (Friedman, 2008). This practice involves attentiveness, sensitivity, and responding to needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility (ibid). As a matter of fact, the ethics of care starts from the premise that as humans we are inherently relational, responsive beings and the human condition is one of connectedness or interdependence (Gilligan, 2011). An ethic of care, as the feminist philosopher Haraway (2016) states, embraces a new ontology of being in the world, accepting the notion that everything is relational, and recognizing a mutual entanglement between the human and the natural. Thus, care for the humans can be expanded to a MTH care because care is something that traverses and intersects with entities, intensifying awareness of how beings depend on each other (De la Bellacasa, 2017). Ethic of care, unlike other moral theories, gives us the opportunity to enrich our interdependencies and to expand the act of care to the non-human world as well (ibid). Through a more-than- human care, communities may choose to re-learn to follow nature's patterns and its cyclical evolution and coevolve with it (Moriggi, 2020).

The recognition of the interdependency of all beings and mutual entanglement between the human and the natural allows to understand humans as attentive members of a living web, to which needs they respond through affective and curious interactions (Haraway, 2016; Moriggi A., 2020). Care is an affective force, and the ethic of care theory emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the emotional and affective dimensions which can be found not only in relationships among humans but between humans and the non-human as well (De la Bellacasa, 2017). As Weenink & Spaargaren (2016) argue, experiencing the world, being in the world, means to encounter objects and other beings. This experiencing of the world is necessarily emotional, in the sense that our engaging with the more-than-human is not disinterested or cold, but 'biased' instead (p.66). Affect can spur sensibility and concern for the well-being of others with whom we are relationally entangled (Singh, 2017). Thus, affect can inform an understanding of the interconnectedness of the world (Hayden & Buck, 2012) and it becomes the mean through which we can understand the more-than-human reconnection.

Moreover, studies show that for some consumers and producers within Alternative Food Networks, care can be an element that exists beyond the private home and intimate relations, making links between care ethics, the natural environment and non-human others (Cox, 2010). AFNs can be seen as spaces of caring relationships in which morality towards food and agriculture can be found (Toldo, 2017). Care is thus increasingly seen as a possible way to imagine a food system that cares for Others—both human and non-human (Sovová et. al, 2021). The Other expands to cover the more-than-human world that we inhabit and produce food within, extending to the level of the organismic (Tronto, 1993)., food systems before being places of commodification and economic transactions, are a web of connectedness, and of interrelated relationships between society and environment (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). Alternative food networks, with their attempts to organise food production differently, can enable us to 'share meaning and find ways of being together in the world' (Beacham, 2016).

1.4. Research Questions

Using a more-than-human perspective and following Beacham's arguments which see Alternative Food Networks as places that enact a more-than-human care (2016), the research central to this thesis examines the meaning of more-than human care as it has been operationalized by the participants in AFNs and considers how a reconnection with the more-than-human affects the extent to which members make ethical considerations about food. Turning Dowler et al. (2009) concept of 'biological' reconnection into 'more-than-human' reconnection, and drawing on concepts of ethic of care theory, with this thesis I explore the experience of caring for and being affected by the more-than-human other and the ethical implications that can result from this experience. In doing so, this research aims to improve the understanding of how more-than-human care and affect play a role in reproducing ethical engagements within AFN.

Based on the purpose defined above, this research is centred around the following question:

How do affective encounters and care practices with the more-than-human other foster ethical engagements among AFNs' participants?

The answer to this question shall be informed by the following sub-questions:

1. Who are the organizations and participants making part of AFNs?
- What are the reasons that motivated people to join or to start these AFNs?

These questions are mainly descriptive, and they help to provide an initial picture of the research's participants in terms of who they are and what are they involved in. They are necessary questions as they provide the starting point for understanding AFNs and they become the foundation to the following sub-questions.

2. What are more-than-human caring practices that manifest a more-than-human reconnection?

With this question, the goal is to explore and grasp caring practices towards human and non-human others that happen within AFNs. Identifying care practices helps to uncover how participants reconnect to the more-than-human and ethical engagements rising from this reconnection.

3. How are participants affected by the more-than-human other?

This question explores the affective experience of reconnecting with the more-than-human. The aim is to show encounters with human and non-human and how participants are affected by these encounters.

4. How do caring practices and affective encounters translate into ethical purposes?

This question aims to explore whether caring for human and non-human others may prompt ethical thinking and behaviors regarding food and the environment.

1.5 Context: AFNs in Italy and Piedmont

In Italy, Alternative Food Networks are a marginal phenomenon compared to large-scale organized distribution. Although complete data on the spread of AFNs in Italy are not available, recently these alternatives have become increasingly widespread (Barbera & Dagnes, 2017). Perhaps more than in other European countries, the Italian food culture is deeply founded on highly regionalized productions, with a long-lasting tradition in quality and direct selling (Dansero, 2013). In northern European countries – such as the UK, the Netherlands and Germany – the growth of AFNs "is often based on modern and more commercial quality definitions, stressing environmental sustainability or animal welfare, and on more innovative forms of marketing" (Sonnino and Marsden 2006, p. 186); in southern European countries, and in particular in Italy, food culture is based more on a highly regionalised production involving many small family run farms or agricultural holdings and a time-tested concern for quality and direct sales, either at the farm or in urban and district markets (Dansero & Puttilli, 2014, p.634). Thus, AFNs in Italy are often regionally embedded, with circuits of production and consumption organised locally and independently (ibid). According to Barbera & Dagnes (2017), the Italian context is particularly interesting also because it combines some innovative practices related to the agri-food sector (for instance, box schemes, community-supported agriculture, solidarity-based purchasing groups) with the renovation and the reinterpretation of some traditional supply forms, such as some kinds of on-farm and off-farm direct sales by farmers (p. 326).

In this context, Piedmont, a region located in the North-West corner of Italy, represents a favorable environment for the development of an alternative relationship with food (Dansero & Puttilli, 2013). It is a dynamic area in the food sector, in which national agricultural organizations such as Coldiretti and Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori are active in promoting an alternative food culture, with educational projects and events promoting direct farm sell (Barbera & Dagnes, 2017). Moreover, within the region there are many grassroot organizations working to strengthen local food systems and for the development of short food supplies (ibid).
For this research I chose Piedmont as research area because it is one of the Italian regions most affected by the increase in AFNs and the onset of initiatives to enhance "food culture" (Dansero & Puttili, 2013). I will specifically refer to region's capital, the city of Turin and the south of the region, namely the Cuneo province (also known as Langhe region) which is home to the Slow Food Movement and home to *Cresco,* the first Community Supported Agriculture of the region. It is worth noting that while CSA schemes are gaining popularity in Italy, with a current count of 20 CSAs according to Rete Italiana CSA, there is a strong tradition of Solidarity Purchasing Groups known as Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale (GAS). These GAS groups closely align with the common definition of CSA, as outlined by Demaldè et al. (2016).

Turin, Piedmont's capital, is the fourth biggest Italian city for population, in the last decades has witnessed important social and urban transformations and plays a leading role in the development of AFNs (Corsi et al., 2018). Thanks to important stakeholders such as the above-mentioned Slow Food movement, Turin has shifted from an industrial city to a vibrant urban area in which several initiatives and events aimed at promoting both local products and sustainable food systems made the city one of the recognized national 'capitals of food' (Dansero & Pettenati, 2014). Within Turin, food is an important cultural, social and economic asset which contributes to a regional development increasingly based on high-quality food

production (ibid). Thus, in a region and city where food plays such an important role there are many examples of practices that can be defined as alternative food networks making them a critical case study. AFNs are very popular in Piedmont and can include on-farm sales, which are very common, about 1,000 traditional local markets are regularly held in the region and there are not less than 170 solidarity-based purchasing groups (GAS- Gruppo Acquisto solidale) operating in the region (Barbera & Dagnes, 2017). Urban gardens in the city are common as well and recently a formal network called *Orme Torinesi* was established to gather about nine community gardens aiming at sharing knowledge and practices and act within the local public arena as a unique collective actor (Ormetorinesi.net). Moreover, within the region there exist two Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes, which are the pioneering *Cresco*, located in Cuneo and the more recent *Tavola Sociale* near the city of Turin. For the purpose of this thesis, the research will be conducted within Turin's urban gardens and the mentioned CSAs located in the countryside of the region.

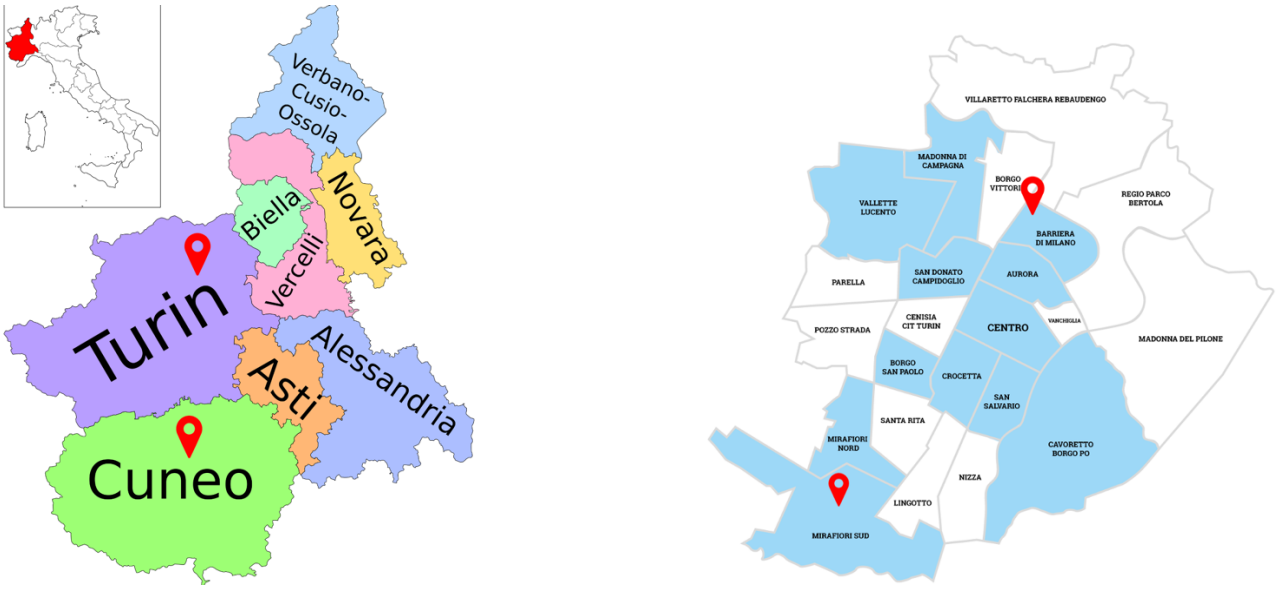


Figure 1. On the left: Map of the region of Piedmont with provinces, showing fieldwork's locations and the *Cresco* CSA in Cuneo area (Retrieved from Wikipedia); on the right: map of Turin showing the two selected urban gardens' locations (Retrieved from Torino Strategica 2013)

Figure 2. Map of the region of Turin with provinces showing *Tavola Sociale* location (Retrieved from Torino Strategica, 2013)

The thesis is structured as follows. First, the theoretical framework introduces and contextualizes the concepts that are central to the analysis of care practices and affective encounters in AFNs. I provide an overview of the Ethics of care theory, linking that to a more-than-human and the concept of affect. This is followed by the Methodology chapter in which the research design is outlined, the case studies are presented, and what data collection methods I used.

Subsequentially, in chapter 4 I present the findings of the research. First, I explore the motivations of my participants in joining an AFN, uncovering and introducing the three care practices that will form the subsequent sections.

In "Soil care" I describe the first caring practice exploring how participants treated soil with concern and empathy through caring methods of cultivation such as mulching or intercropping. This showcased their ethical responsibility in safeguarding the soil. In this section, I show how affective encounters with non-human others can spark feelings of connection, engendering ethical sensibilities. However, I also discuss instances where care for soil is driven by instrumentality, leading to neglect practices that prioritize human needs. Additionally, I demonstrate how the affective experience of caring for the soil influenced participants' perception of time, attuning to MTH temporalities and distancing from production centered ones.

In "Care about food origin" I explore the affective encounters participants have with food arguing that these can shape their interest in understanding where food comes from and the conditions under which it was produced. With this section, I demonstrate how participants visceral encounters with food encourage ethical ecological thinking and influence people to deal differently with it. Through the sensory experience of taste, I further show how participants' positive experience with the taste of a product can affect them in learning more about its origin. These affective encounters led participants to question and avoid conventionally produced food, showing how *feeling* the alternative (Carolan, 2015) can lead to reflexive behaviors and lead people to care more about food origin.

In "Care for community" I further expand on how affective encounters among humans can shape people's attitudes. Community is a space in which people can practice care for the common well-being, can affect each other and prompt ethical thinking and actions aimed at protecting humans, food and the environment. Participants were affected by relationships with other humans, and this moved their ethical commitments, becoming more aware of and reflecting on both agricultural and environmental issues.

In chapter 5, the discussion, I consider the implications of my findings and how they contribute to the understanding of how AFN can foster a sense of interconnectedness with the more-than-human and spark ethical engagements.

Based on my findings, in chapter 6 I conclude that affective encounters and care practices play a pivotal role in fostering ethical responsibilities towards the MTH world. However, one needs to be careful in considering that care is also moved by power dynamics. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that the extent to which individuals are receptive to being transformed by their encounters can impact their ethical commitments.

2. Theoretical Framework

"Thinking through and with care is a different epistemological perspective, an other-centered way of knowing the world" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2013)

This research is informed and inspired by an Ethic of care theory and the concept of affect and how they unfold within a more-than-human perspective. In the first paragraph I outline the concepts of Ethics of Care theory. In the second paragraph I make sense of a more-than-human perspective and a more-than human care in the context of Alternative food networks. Lastly, I elaborate on the concepts of affect and affective care.

2.1. Ethics of Care

Care has always been central to our existence and yet, historically, has been relegated to the private sphere, often taken for granted and thus devalued (Puig De la Bellacasa, 2011). The private sphere has been usually associated with the women's sphere, contrary to the public one which was mainly dominated by men (Jenkins, 2020). Within this sphere care became "women's work", as women are the ones that provide care for the children, the disabled, the sick and the elderly, with paid and unpaid labour (Jenkins, 2020).

However, in the 1980s, attempts to re-evaluate care and valorise women's perspectives on caring relationships have brought new opportunities for care and for its ethical possibilities (Jenkins, 2020). Influential feminist scholars such as Carol Gilligan, researched on a different ethic theory that would go beyond the dominant Western thought avoiding the abstract, impartial impersonal reasoning of deontologists, the utilitarian or the justice theorists (ibid). Gilligan research on identity and moral development led her in 1982 to write a ground-breaking book *In a different voice*, in which she identified a voice that joined self with relationships and reason with emotion (Gilligan, 2011). As she argued, an ethics of care directs our attention to the need for responsiveness in relationships, by paying attention, listening, responding. Its logic is inductive, contextual, psychological, rather than deductive or mathematical (ibid). As a matter of fact, in the ethic of care reason and logic are subject to a care done out of inclination, which is contrary to deontology where actions taken out of inclination are unethical (Noddings, 2013). In an ethic of care humans are inherently relational, responsive human beings and the human condition is one of connectedness or interdependence in which emotional connection and feeling for the other is intrinsic in a way that few traditional ethical theories conceptualized (Jenkins, 2020). The moral agents are envisioned as related, interconnected, interdependent—as opposed to the conventional portrayal of the agent as independent, equal and self-sufficient. The moral epistemology of care includes taking experiences into account, exercising self-reflections and sensitive judgments (Pettersen, 2011).

Gilligan's work brought care at the centre of moral theories creating the foundation for what we came to know as Ethic of Care, highlighting the affective dimensions of morality, the inevitability of dependence and interdependence and the importance of caretaking and healthy attachments in the

basic fabric of human well-being (Gilligan, 1982). She thus paved the way for other important contributions that came from Nel Noddings, Virginia Held and Joan Tronto. These scholars all opposed the mainstream notion of individuals as isolated and abstract entities as they proposed a new way of viewing the world, where human beings are fundamentally relational and interdependent members of a network of relationships on whose continuation they all depend (Moriggi, 2020).

Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* speaks of various characteristics associated with women's distinctive ethical voice, however she did not very often mention the specific idea of an ethics of care or caring (Slote, 2007). Nel Noddings in *Caring* (1986) not only mentions such an ethics but attempts to spell out in detail its characteristics and commitments (*ibid*). She provided a theory of care that challenged a wide range of moral theories by identifying relationships as basic to human identity and care as a universal human attribute (Jenkins, 2020). Thus, care is found in relationships and the origin of ethical action stems from the human affective response that is a natural caring sentiment (Noddings, 1986). According to Noddings, genuine acts of caring involve an emotional/motivational sensitivity to particular other people (Slote, 2007). This means that individuals are emotionally concerned about the situation a given person is in, and one's focus is on the individual rather than on abstract or general moral principles (ibid.) Thus, an ethic of care provides the opportunity to look at morality within a concrete and immanent context, rather than an abstract and transcendent one. In this context humans are not individual units, but they are found in an environment of interdependencies and relationships.

Virginia Held in *Ethic of Care* (2006) further contributed on the theory by interpreting care not only as virtue, motive or feeling but as value and practice. Care as a type of work is the relational practice of giving (Friedman, 2008). This practice involves attentiveness, sensitivity, and responding to needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility (ibid). Caring relationships are indispensable for human survival and an ethic of care recognizes that moralities built on the image of the independent, autonomous, rational individual largely overlook the reality of human dependence and the morality for which it calls (Held, 2006). Held, like her colleague Noddings, also argues for a centrality of emotions such as sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and responsiveness that need to be cultivated not only to help in the implementation of the dictates of reason but to better ascertain what morality recommends (p.10). Thus, Held put emphasis on emotionality and responsiveness to need, as sources of moral guidance. Furthermore, in *Ethics of Care* (2006), Held demonstrates the relevance of care ethics to political, social and global questions, proposing a more compassionate basis to ethic and politics (Friedman, 2008).

Another pivotal contribution came from feminist scholar Joan Tronto that joined feminist theories with political science. As she argued in her *Moral Boundaries* (1993) "care can serve as both a moral value and as a basis for the political achievement of a good society" (p.9). Tronto understands care not only as personal activity, but she expands it to the public and political domain. As a matter of fact, the political value of care could undermine the competitiveness and individualizing processes of neoliberalism and draw attention to the interdependence that shapes all our lives (Cox, 2010).
Furthermore, she points out that discussion of care overemphasizes the emotional and intellectual qualities and ignores its reference to actual work, arguing that activities that constitute care are crucial for human life (Tronto, 1998). Thus, Tronto, together with Berenice Fisher, defined care as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our World so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all

of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (Fisher and Tronto, 1990, p. 40). They described care as a 'species activity', a term to suggest that how people care for one another is one of the features that make people human, and they defined care as practice and action to 'repair our World', to indicate how care is not only an abstract moral principle (Tronto, 1993). Tronto and Fisher's (1990) definition of care goes beyond a moral stance towards embracing an "integrated act of care" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 4). That is, "a politics of care engages much more than a moral stance; it involves affective, ethical, and hands-on agencies of practical and material consequence" (ibid).

Taking Tronto's definition of care as point of departure, we can broaden the horizon of caring to include 'more-than-human' beings as both subjects and objects of care in a complex web of interdependencies (De la Bellacasa, 2017). Feminist scholar Puig De la Bellacasa recognizes how an Ethic of care, unlike other moral theories, gives us the opportunity to enrich our interdependencies and to expand the act of care to the non-human world as well, becoming more-than-human care (2017).

2.2. More-Than-Human Care in Alternative Food Network

"As eaters, we must enter into a 'conversation with those who are not "us"' (Haraway, 2008)

Before further delving into the concept of more-than-human care, I will briefly make sense of a more-than-human perspective, used here to appreciate the more-than-human entanglements that happen within Alternative Food Networks.

In recent years, scholars from the fields of science studies, feminist theory, anthropology, and environmental humanities have challenged the ontological divide between nature and culture, human and nonhuman. Established as a counterpoint to culture-nature dualisms, the concept of more-than-human refers to the worlds of the different beings co-living on Earth, including and surpassing human societies (Bernardes de Souza, 2021). According to the conceptualization of the eco-phenomenologist David Abram (1996), the more-than- human world is defined as the open spectrum of the interrelationships between the worlds of living and non-living beings and human societies, including the different cycles of animals, plants, water, air masses and rocks (Abram, 1996).
The concept has been adopted by several theoretical perspectives including eco-feminisms (Bellacasa, 2017; Tsing, 2015), and post-humanisms (Haraway, 2008; 2016). Haraway in her post-humanist approach, argues that modernity has established a human exceptionalism that legitimizes contemporary capitalist exploitation (2016). Confronting human exceptionalism means having to do with processes involving non-human beings and this necessitate an understanding of the arrangements and intertwining that exist within the web of life (Bernardes de Souza, 2021). As result, a more-than-human perspective invites us to rethink the diverse entanglements of human with other than human forms of life and allows to decentre the role of human beings. The more-than-human perspective opens the floor to think of our existence in the world as an entanglement of being, doing, relating, knowing, interchanging, influencing with all other beings (Campodonio, 2022).

Within a more-than-human perspective, an ethic of care embraces a new ontology of being in the world, accepting the notion that everything is relational, and recognizing a mutual entanglement between the human and the natural (Haraway, 2016). As Puig de la Bellacasa argues, care is a human trouble, but this does not make of care a human-only matter (2017). Thus, care for the humans can be expanded to a more-than-human care because care is something that traverses and intersects with entities, intensifying awareness of how beings depend on each other (ibid). Reframing Tronto's definition of care, de la Bellacasa argues that "we need to disrupt the subjective-collective behind the "we": care is everything that *is* done (rather than everything that "we" do) to maintain, continue, and repair "the world" so that *all* (rather than "we") can live in it as well as possible. That world includes . . . all that we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining Web. What the "all" includes in situation remains contingent to specific ecologies and human–nonhuman entanglements" (p.161). Humans are not the only ones caring *for* the earth and its beings—we are *in* relations of mutual care (p.161). Drawing attention to the diverse practices that recognise the 'concrete relationalities' between interdependent 'forms of life' serves to decentre 'human ethical subjectivity by not considering humans as masters of, but part of earth's living beings' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 152). Thus, the Ethic of care lens serves to problematise hierarchically normative ethical frameworks – which place the human at the top or centre – and instead proceeds with a vision of a horizontal web of interdependency between all matters, including the non-human (Beacham, 2018).

Thus, the more-than-human approach provides further depth to an ethic of care to better understand nature-based systems such as Urban Gardens and Community Supported Agriculture. Within this context, Alternative Food Networks can be seen as an entrance door to better understand more-than-human caring practices. As Kneafsey et al (2008) argue, food becomes a valuable lens to observe people acting with an ethic of care which connects food production with the natural environment allowing consumers and producers to think about, and care for, non-human others. As a matter of fact, with their attempts to organise food production differently, AFNs can enable us to 'share meaning and find ways of being together in the world' (Beacham, 2018). Cox (2010) claims that ethical consumption and production are an example of caring practice, which demonstrates the possibility of caring at a distance at multiple scales (p.6). This means that an ethic of care, in relation to food production, emphasises the need to care about the conditions under which food is cultivated and care for the vast array of nonhuman others implicated in the process, such as the soil and wider environment (Jarosz 2011). To care is to be connected (Carolan, 2014) and to practice care allows to deal with Others that inhabit the more-than-human world. The accent on more- than- human care allows to look at the reality as an interweaved web of life and to put emphasis on the acknowledgment of the interconnection and interdependency between humans and the non-human.

Indeed, AFNs strive to reconnect people with the social, moral and biological dimensions of food, namely they aim at reconnecting agriculture with society, moving away from an attitude of control towards the natural and social environment (Hassink et al., 2021). This practice of reconnection with the more-than- human world, involves care practices as it focuses on connecting to the local environment and enhancing people's attentiveness to other living beings, both humans and non-humans, such as animals, crops, soils and landscapes (*ibid*). The production and consumption of food in AFNs therefore are not seen as a rational manipulation of natural forces for solely human ends but as an engagement within a vibrant living world (Beacham, 2018). By fostering a reconnection with the more-than-human, AFNs have the potential to nurture care and responsibility towards other

beings, thus inspiring people to think and act differently when relating with food. To further explore the impact of engaging with the more-than-human on ethical values and actions, I turn to the concept of affect and its interplay with care.

2.3. Affective care

To care is the capacity to affect and be affected and caring emphasizes the importance of attending to the transformations that occur at emotional, visceral, affective, and embodied levels (Puig De la Bellacasa, 2010). To care is to be moved (in both positive and negative ways) and involves encounters that comprise sensuous and somatic experiences including listening, touching, smelling, and observing that can strengthen or reduce a subject's capacity to act or think (Coulson, 2016). As Coulson (2016) argues, ethical thinking is stimulated by the capacity of various forceful 'things', organic and inorganic, human and nonhuman, to move and be moved by others (p.65). As result, encounters with the more-than-human do not happen in a vacuum, as they can trigger some sort of effect (Archambault, 2016). Indeed, an encounter is defined as affective when it inspires, unsettles, troubles, moves, arouses, motivates or impresses (ibid).

The understanding of affective encounters is based upon the contemporary readings of Baruch Spinoza's Ethics in which affect is defined as the "power to 'affect and be affected'" (Massumi 2015). Unlike emotion, affect can be taken to refer to a force or intensity that can belie, disrupt, and ultimately transform the becoming of subjects and bodies (Carolan, 2015). To affect and be affected is to be open to the world and to the possibility of being transformed through this engagement with the material world (Singh, 2017).
Much of the literature on affect recognizes that the capacity to affect and be affected manifests through particular encounters, meaning meeting with someone or with something (Stewart, 2007). Human beings cannot - on Spinoza's view- avoid affecting and being affected by external objects (LeBuffe, 2013) and one always affects and is affected in encounter (Massumi, 2015). As humans are found in an environment of interdependencies and relationships (Gilligan, 1986), they cannot avoid being affected by encounters with others. Thus, dealing with affect means taking encounters with more-than-human others seriously, while paying careful attention to what such encounters produce (Archambault, 2016). As Singh (2017) argues, the self that emerges through these "affective socio-natural interactions, differs from the atomized individual subject of Western thought. This self includes a sensibility and concern for the well-being of others with whom it is relationally entangled" (p.760). Thinking about affective encounters helps to appreciate the important role of the more-than-human actors have in nurturing grounds for fostering what Haraway terms 'response-ability' – that is, our ability to respond ethically to the demands of the many others with whom we share this world (ibid). Applying the concept of affect to the ethics of care allows to look at care as an affective force, which recognizes the interdependence of all beings and acknowledges that our well-being and that of others are intimately linked (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Care goes beyond mere intellectual understanding or ethical obligation; it involves affective dimensions that shape our attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours. It can evoke concern, compassion, and a sense of responsibility, ultimately influencing how we relate to others (ibid).

With this research, I engage with the affective dimension of care as it opens new doors to go about the understanding of the experiences of practices of care and it offers new opportunities to discover

how meaningful affect is in prompting ethical actions and thinking (Pulcini, 2017). As result, this study aims to investigate how participants of Alternative Food Networks can cultivate ethical thinking regarding their relationship with food and the more-than-human through caring practices and affective encounters.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, I will provide a comprehensive overview of the research design, the data collection methods employed to address the research question, a concise explanation of the data analysis process. First, I will discuss the access to the field, and I will present the selected case studies.

3.1. Access to the field and research participants

For the purpose of this research, I got in touch with participants of different types of Alternative Food Networks within Turin and Piedmont. I adopted a purposeful sampling strategy to select my research participants. This is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices (Mawell, 2012). Moreover, purposeful sampling can be used to capture adequately the heterogeneity in the population. Finally, a sample can be purposefully selected to allow for the examination of cases that are critical for the theories that the study began with or that have subsequently been developed (ibid, p.235). I looked for some of my research's participants online and contacted them via telephone, so to establish a first rapport explaining who I was and the aim of my project. I later went for an informal visit to some of the organizations, to observe some of the participants in their settings, have an idea of their work and make myself known.

In order explore and reflect on MTH caring practices and affective encounters within Alternative Food Networks, I selected two urban collective gardens within the city of Turin, and two Community Supported Agriculture, one located in the Piedmont region near the mountains, and another located at the outskirt of the city.

I chose to work with urban gardens because urban agriculture can open up relationships with soil, plants and bugs offering encounters of liveliness and pleasure. This can inspire people to think differently about food, making them 'hotbeds of environmental, cultural and social activism and learning' (Donati et al., 2010, p. 220). Urban food production and associated practices, such as urban gardening have been proposed as potential interventions to strengthen more than human connections in cities (Artmann, 2021). Thus, urban gardens are full of potential as they offer opportunities to care for one another and the environment and they can become a useful case study to explore the reconnection with the non-human other and how this affect ethical engagements. I selected *Bunker* and *Orti Generali* urban gardens as case studies as they were the most popular ones in the city of Turin, hence I could get the chance to interact with more people even if it was wintertime.

Moreover, I decided to work with CSAs schemes because they can be seen as alternative spaces in the world of food which can serve to foster a more-than-human ethics of care (Beacham, 2019, p.

544). For this reason, CSAs represent a great opportunity to uncover the connections with a more-than-human world as they spur the recognition of the interdependency of all beings through a more-than-human ethic of care (ibid). *Cresco* and *Tavola Sociale* were the chosen CSAs for this study due to the fact that they are the only existing CSAs in the Piedmont region.

The following sections introduce the case studies, outlining local context and key characteristics.

3.2. Two urban gardens

Bunker- Garden 1

Garden 1 is a community garden called *Bunker* located in a secluded position in a neighborhood in the north of Turin called *Barriera di Milano,* a multi-ethnic neighborhood rich in diversity and culture but socially neglected as it is in a peripheric area and where most immigrants live. *Bunker* garden is coordinated by an urban garden project *Fiësca Verd.* A grassroots organization established in 2020 by four Turin's citizens, *Fiësca Verd* aims to promote urban regeneration and social inclusion. They achieve this by revitalizing neglected green spaces on the outskirts of the city. Their key initiatives involve providing garden rentals and offering urban agriculture courses (Fiësca Verd- Home, n.d.). The managing team is composed of an agrotechnician who coordinates organic gardening courses, a food technologist in charge of the Research and Development, a social educator managing the inclusion in the project of people in need, and a communication manager in charge of promoting the project and organizing events on urban gardening. *Fiësca Verd* runs three community gardens: *Bunker,* located in the north of the city; *Raffinerie Sociali*, located in the north of the city as well; and *Baraca,* located in the south of the city. As my research took place in autumn/wintertime- more specifically from 17th November 2022 to the first week of January 2023- activities were reduced and were mainly located at Bunker, which was the spot devoted to urban agriculture courses and the one in which the majority of gardeners were.

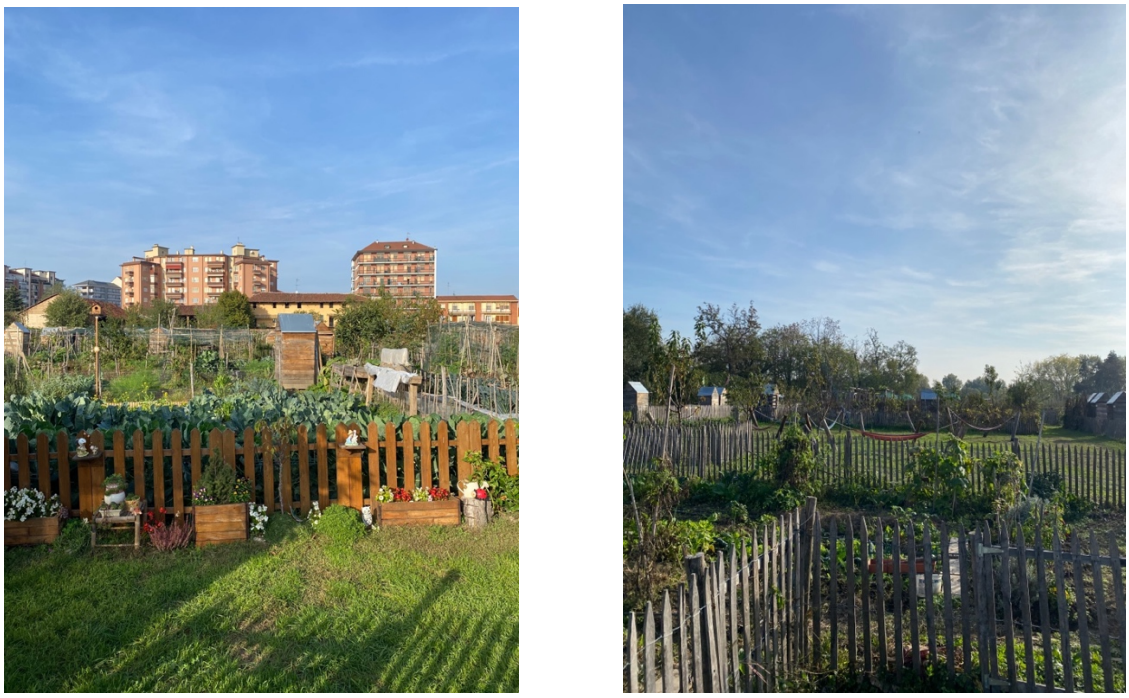
(**Figure 3**. Bunker Garden, personal drive, 18/11/22)

Before Bunker became a garden spot, it was a shelter used during the second World War. It later became an industrial area and finally it was abandoned for about 20 years. As nature took over the abandoned area, some citizens of the neighborhood started to abusively use a few lawn hectares to grow food, meaning they had no permit from the Municipality to legally grow food in a public space. "*It was totally anarchic and there were no regulation policies. Some gardeners used organic techniques, other used chemicals products*." (Simone interview, Bunker social educator). This was until in 2012, when the whole area was bought by the *Bunker cultural association*, a metropolitan cultural project which restored the area and transformed it in a 'multi-functional art space' promoting events such as exhibitions, circus, clubbing and sports activities (VarianteBunker website, n.d.). In 2015 it devoted 3.500 mq of green area to the establishment of urban gardens, which at first rented to some of the previous abusive gardeners. In 2020 Bunker finally turned to *Fiësca Verd* to help with the coordination of the garden area. Gardeners decided to join *Fiësca Verd* project as they did not want to leave the area and to keep their gardens, they were asked in return to cooperate with the communal gardening projects. In *Bunker Garden*, there are four private owned gardens, a communal managed area and a henhouse with some chickens owned by Bunker association but managed by the gardeners. Three of the private gardens are owned by local elderly gardeners, which already used the green areas before Bunker association started running it. The last privately owned spot was recently assigned to a young woman. Every Tuesday morning the project's coordinators give open organic gardening courses to citizens willing to join, working on the communal garden and learning how to grow food with the use of organic methods of cultivation, which are taught by the agrotechnician. Every Friday morning the social educator manages the communal area with the help of some gardeners and volunteers of the project. As *Fiësca Verd* aims not only at inviting people to learn about gardening but aims to take care of the neighborhood's community as well, it tries to include those people in need of social inclusion which join the project for social aid. As a matter of fact, the vegetables of the communal garden are shared among them, and some products are allocated to Bunker's African restaurant. Gardening in *Fiësca Verd* is thus seen as chance to grow food, create a community and support the neighborhood.

Figure 4. Aerial Plan Bunker. Source: *Fiesca Verd* website

Orti Generali- Garden 2

Garden 2 is a community garden called *Orti Generali*, located in the southern outskirts of Turin, in the Mirafiori neighborhood, an area that lived a radical change in the past years: in the '60/70s it was a poor area hosting factories of the Fiat car company and lived mainly by southern Italian immigrant workers; from the '90s the Municipality worked for its redevelopment with urban renovation projects, both social and structural, such as urban gardening projects. *Orti Generali* is located in a communal park, it is surrounded by residential buildings and the entrance is on a highly busy road. Nevertheless, once inside, the traffic seems far away, and it is very silent. It seems like entering in another world (Fieldnotes, 26/11/22). *Orti Generali* runs an area of three hectares that hosts 160 gardens and offers citizens the chance to own their spot to grow food as well as the opportunity to learn cultivation practices with tailored programs, labs on organic agriculture and other seasonal rural activities such as teaching how to prune fruit trees, learn about wild herbs or about beekeeping.
It was born from the Miraorti project, which comes from four years of collective planning including schools, organizations, gardeners and citizens of the neighborhood (Orti generali website). The project aimed at regenerating the territory and transformed the communal park in an agricultural park, legitimizing the existence of gardeners who were already informally taking care of the area and that happily joined the project: "*The park was already used by abusive gardeners and the project allowed them to legally grow food, so to keep their historic continuity and open the area to the rest of the citizens"* (Matteo G2, interview).



(**Figure 5**. Orti Generali, personal drive, 2/11/22)

After years of stalemate due to bureaucratic reason with the municipality, the project officially started in 2019 and is now a model of social entrepreneurship for the regeneration and management of citizens' agricultural areas (ORTI GENERALI website, n.d.). Orti Generali obtained the granting from the municipality to manage the place for the next 15 years and it is planning on expanding the area to allocate further gardens and allow more citizens to experience gardening. Together with the

local health service and other organizations related to social aid, it also runs garden therapy in the communal garden, which is the area where gardening courses are held, and it usually managed by young, disadvantaged people or people in need. The vegetables of the communal garden are allocated to them and to a local social canteen. Beside gardens, Orti Generali runs a hen house and it recently got custody of a couple of Scottish cows that gave birth to a calf, which is the first one ever born in a urban communal park in Turin.

(**Figure 6.** Scottish cow wih calf, Orti Generali, photo taken from Orti Generali Instagram page)

The chosen gardens are both grassroot urban interventions, which have transformed once neglected spaces, into communally cultivated productive food growing gardens for everyone to share.

3.3. Two CSAs

Cresco- CSA 1

Cresco is a CSA scheme which was founded in 2020 by two young citizens that started farming and later decided to build a community with local families and volunteers with the aim "to act in the little things, to protect the soil and Mother Nature's fertility" (Cresco - Future Is Nature, n.d.). Alessio, one of the founders, graduated in Environmental studies in Oslo where he got the chance to learn about the existence of Community Supported Agriculture as a virtuous alternative to conventional economies of food. When he got back to his territory to write the thesis, he eventually decided to stay. He later met his future partner, Tommaso, who had dropped his career as cook to devote himself to farming. Tommaso already had a small network of people that bought vegetables from him, so when Alessio introduced him the CSA experience, they decided to become partners and embark on the CSA adventure together. *Cresco* is now composed of two farmers, Tommaso and Alessio, 80 families and 4 local restaurants. They are located in a mountainous area within the south of the region of Piedmont, more specifically in the Cuneo province. They operate within three agricultural fields scattered around the area, which is a less favored area due to climate reasons. As it is in the middle of mountains

and valleys, the fields get less hours of sunshine and this can have a negative impact on crop production. However, *Cresco* can always count on a biodiverse production with 180 different types of products among fruits and vegetables, farmed in three different fields, which are enough to guarantee boxes for the 80 families of the community.
The CSA members weekly meet on Wednesday to harvest all together, and some of them help the farmers whenever they get the chance to. The help of the community becomes crucial as it would be more difficult to manage everything in two people: "*about the CSA production, if you do something wrong you can always count on the community which allows you to share risks. There are a few attempts you can try for a good season, and the only thing that works is to get support from the members and work together to make correct choices*" (Alessio, CSA farmer). The community is mainly composed of white and wealthy people, and the average age is between 30/40. Cresco is trying to expand his pool of shares to include less advantages people as well. They plan on doing this with a "*share auction, where each person is allowed to offer whatever amount of money he or she feels like to*" (Tommaso interview)

Cresco is founded on six key objectives:

1. Food: growing healthy and sustainable food, free from chemical pesticides, capitalist monopolies and labour exploitment;
2. Co-production: reclaiming the chance to grow food together with other people, in a community;
3. Transparency on the budget and actual production. Everything is for everyone
4. Care for people: contributing to revive the territory and allocate a few shares to people in need
5. Own a garden: chance to have a communal garden in which we can take care of our diet
6. Community: be part of a community which creates relationships through food and showing an economy which benefits people and not capital. (Cresco, website)

Cresco means "I grow" in the Italian language. When asked about the origin of the name, the organizer told me he values a lot the concept of growth:

"*To me growth is a very important thing, and it is a devalued term because of capitalism, almost as if the concept of growing were wrong. To me it is the only thing that matters, whether it is growth for plants, personal growth, spiritual growth, any growth […] it was the chance to reclaim a word which was exploited by capitalism, a word which holds a great importance.*" (CSA 1, Tommaso interview)

(**Figure 7**. Cresco's field, personal drive, 5/12/22)

Tavola Sociale- CSA2

The community supported agriculture called *Tavola Sociale* (Social Table in English, a.n.) is a project founded in January 2022 by the local grassroot *CiòCheVale* organization, in a rural city Chieri, located at the outskirt of Turin. *CiòCheVale* is a cultural organization dedicated to social and cultural promotion, favoring and sustaining people in need and environmental protection. They organize projects such as the development of bike paths, sustaining eco-friendly mobility or talk events on sustainable consumption. It was during some organization's meetings that people expressed the need to have access to healthy and sustainable food. From this need, they decided to join forces and include local organic farms to a local network aimed at supporting farmers, the local community and people in need. They thus decided to contact different local organic farms and start a cooperation with them. As the projects' coordinator explained "*in the last few years we built relationships with the numerous farms around the area, farms which believe in an organic agriculture and value local, natural and healthy food"* (Emanuele, CSA 2, formal interview). Nowadays *Tavola Sociale* has got 85 families who weekly collect their box of fresh vegetables, they cooperate with 11 organic farms, and they help 50 other families in need (CioCheVale, 2020). Beside attending two times the boxes collection day, I also visited two organic farms cooperating with Tavola Sociale, these were "Soffioni" run by Roberto and "Mompalà" run by Francesco.

Tavola Sociale is founded on three key principles:

- Supporting the local economy, which strives for a healthy, natural and organic agriculture;
- Having healthy, sustainable and short- food supply chain;
- Creating a supporting network including farmers, consumers, people in need through solidarity mechanisms (CioCheVale, 2020).

The aim of the project is to support local farmers through partnering with them, and to help people in need, who usually do not have access to food, all under the overarching aim to protect the local environment.
Every Tuesdays partnered farmers make deliveries to a local greenhouse, which donated a spot for their deliveries. "*Throughout the morning some of our farmers deliver the products they harvested the previous days or sometimes even in the early hours of the same morning. After that, a couple of volunteers* (available members of the CSA, a.n.) *prepare the vegetables boxes, which members will come to collect in the evening, or when they get off work.*" (Emanuele, CSA 2, interview).

(**Figure 8**. CSA 2 vegetables box collection spot, 22/11/22)

3.4. Research Design

For conducting this thesis research, I used a qualitative ethnographic design. This allows the researcher to actively participate in the group in order to gain an insider's perspective of the group and to have experiences similar to the group members (Kramer & Adams, 2017). The central aim of ethnography is to provide rich, holistic insights into people's views and actions, as well as the nature of the location they inhabit, through the collection of detailed observations and interviews (Reeves et al., 2014). As Hammersley states, "The task [of ethnographers] is to document the culture, the perspectives and practices, of the people in these settings. The aim is to 'get inside' the way each group of people sees the world." (1995).

Moreover, ethnographic fieldwork entails aspects of an embodied approach, used here to capture what it means to reconnect with the more-than-human and the participant's affective responses towards the

non-human other (Küper, 2016.) There is growing consciousness amongst ethnographers about the bodily practices that are involved in fieldwork and the embodied nature of the ethnographic research process (Thanem & Knight, 2019). As Yanow (2012) has pointed out, the researcher's body is 'the main instrument of ethnographic knowing' (p. 33), and there is an emerging literature on how we use our bodily senses when conducting ethnographic research (Pink, 2015).
Conventional methodological advice tends to position the researcher's body as peripheral or problematic in the production of knowledge. Consequently, researchers are advised to try to minimise the effects of their physical presence in any social setting they are researching (Thanem & Knights, 2019). However, it is impossible to remove the body from research settings; qualitative researchers in particular have sought to acknowledge its presence and potential (ibid). An embodied approach takes into account that "humans are not just mentally, but also materially and physically immersed in their immediate environments" (Cooke et al. 2016, p. 2). Thus, an embodied approach conceptualizes a reconnection with the more-than-human as an interplay between internal, external, human and nonhuman nature including mind, body, environment and culture (Artmann et al., 2021).

What makes this kind of knowledge distinctive and embodied is the importance of affect, which arises from being engaged in ways that enable the circulation of energy between people, through which we come to know or feel differently (Pink et al., 2010). As the emphasis in this research is on flows and entanglements that connect human and non-human entities, using an embodied approach allowed me to understand that we experience the world through our body and through our senses. Consequentially this method helped me to identify how AFNs' participants are affected by the more-than-human, by taking into account sensorial experiences.

3.5. Data collection methods and data analysis

In this section, I will outline the research tools that helped me to identify caring practices and affective encounters, which are participant observations and interviews. I conducted six weeks of fieldwork, visiting the two urban gardens and the two CSAs, and collected a total of 25 interviews, both formal and informal.

	Visits (17/11-6/01)	**Interviews (formal and informal)**
Soffioni (Tavola Sociale's farm)	1 (week)	2
Mompalà (Tavola Sociale's farm)	3	1
Cresco	1 (week)	5
Bunker	8	4
Orti Generali	7	7
Tavola Sociale (boxes collection point)	3	6

Figure 9. Table showing fieldwork's sites, number of visits and number of interviews conducted.

Participant Observation

Ethnographers typically gather participant observations, necessitating direct engagement and involvement with the world they are studying (Kramer & Adams, 2017). Participant observation is a research method where the researcher observes the everyday lives and work of participants to understand how they make sense of them. It generates extensive field notes on observations, statements and artifacts as well as the embodied experience of the activities (O'reilly, 2012). Within, an embodied approach, the interpretive method of participant observation, associated with ethnographic study, involves researchers immersing themselves in social settings for a considerable length of time: potentially eating, sleeping, socialising and working alongside research participants (Thanem & Knights, 2019). Watching people and recording these observations by writing fieldnotes develops an understanding of how people make sense of their everyday lives and work (Emerson et al., 2001), As Bernard (2017) clarifies, participant observers can be insiders who observe and record some aspects of life around them (in which case, they are observing participants), or they can be outsiders who participate in some aspects of life around them and record what they can (in which case, they are participating observers). Doing participant observation had been an essential method for this research. This allowed me to take part to participants' lives and experiences, to observe how they engage with their settings and how they are affected by more-than-human beings. Furthermore, participant observation allowed me to build rapport with the research participants and was crucial to inform my interview questions and to consequentially have insightful and deep conversations as trust and respect increasingly developed. During the weeks of the fieldwork, I focused on participating in the daily activities, in order to better understand the day-to-day life in CSAs and in urban gardens, and to connect to the different members. Participatory observation gave me insights into the care practices and affect that were enacted, that are of great importance for the human-non-human reconnection I tried to uncover. This involved observing behaviours, relationships, attitudes, emotions, smells, sounds, and conversations. As emphasized by Mol et al. (2010), "care, after all, is not necessarily verbal". Hence, I paid close attention to the ways in which farmers and gardeners cared for their soil, meticulously tending to their crops and considering their individual needs to make them thrive. Additionally, I observed how participants interacted with the non-human focusing on how people perceived and were affected by these interactions, whether it be with animals, bugs, food, weather events. Furthermore, I paid attention to the sensuous qualities of food, and how its taste and aesthetic affected people's attitudes and experiences.

To couple my observation tasks with actively participating in daily activities, I found that recording observation on my phone's notes became one of the most efficient and immediate methods of documentation. It allowed me to quickly document observations real-time while assisting participants with their tasks. Using my phone proved to be useful also to record interviews directly on my phone and to take pictures.

Interviews

Coupled with participant observation, a typical instrument to gather data in research is through interviews. The concept of "interviewing" covers a lot of ground, from totally unstructured interactions, through semi-structured situations, to highly formal interactions with respondents (Bernard, 2017). For the purpose of this thesis, I gathered data through informal and formal semi-

structured and unstructured interviews. I used purposive sampling to choose the interviewees and I conducted 25 interviews in total, 12 were formal structured interviews and 13 informal unstructured interviews. Using informal interviewing at the beginning of participant observation fieldwork is crucial because it helped to build greater rapport with the selected participants and to uncover new topics of interest that might have been overlooked (Bernard, 2017, p.163). Because of the "casual" nature of this type of interview technique it can be useful in eliciting highly candid accounts from individuals (Reeves et al., 2014). Furthermore, the use of unstructured interviewing is excellent for building initial rapport with people and it is especially useful to get to know about the lived experience of fellow human beings (Bernard, 2017, p. 165).

Observing and getting to know the context in an informal way, also served me to better inform the content of semi structured interviews, which are open ended interviews that follow a general script and covers a list of topics (ibid, p. 163). Semi structured interviews are an effective method for data collection when the researcher wants: (1) to collect qualitative, open-ended data; (2) to explore participant thoughts, feelings and beliefs about a particular topic; and (3) to delve deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues (DeJonckheere et al., 2018, p.2). Using semi-structured interviews allowed me to use a flexible approach and to let the discussion flow naturally. Moreover, I used open-ended questions, which allowed the participant to have more voice. Most data collected came from the interviews, as these were the moments in which I could explore opinions, feelings, and experiences, that led me to understand better care practices and how participants were affected by human and non-human others. For instance, by asking individuals about their beliefs and values surrounding food, I could understand what they considered important about it. This allowed me to grasp the motivations that guided their care practices. Moreover, I used interviews to investigate how participant's perception of taste could affect their attitudes towards food.

While semi-structured interviews served as an important data collection method, I noticed that it was the spontaneous and unplanned conversation that often revealed more aspects. Helping with daily activities, engaging with soil, crops and other non-human entities was useful to start conversations about them and to explore how participants perceived these entities. Moreover, I noticed that convivial moments were very important not only to share food, but also to discuss and explore perceptions around food.

Data Analysis

The data from the participatory observations and interviews were analyzed through inductive coding. I started by highlighting important quotes and observations. I used color coding through the ATLAS.ti software. First, I identified recurrent themes and then I grouped quotes and observations distinguishing between more-than-human care practices, affective encounters and ethical engagements.

Chapter 4. Results

In my results section, I will document the more-than-human caring practices enacted by the participants of the study by exploring their affective experiences. First of all, I will answer to the first sub-question as to provide an initial picture of the research's subjects in terms of who they are, what are they involved in and what are the reasons they joined these AFNs for. I will then focus on answering the other sub questions through an entangled discourse which includes the identified caring practices, the relationships participants have with the non-human, how are participants affected by the Other (human and non-human) and which ethical consequences these encounters have. When analyzing the data, I identified three main practices of care which are soil care, care about food origin and community care. By understanding practices as care, I try to shed a light on the morality behind practices. Through each caring practice, I will explain how participants are affected by the more than-human other and the ethical implications that derive from this affective experience.

4.1. AFNs participant's motivations

In this section I will show what brought participants to join the above-mentioned selected AFNs. To explore participants' motivations, I investigated the personal experiences that drove them to care for (and about) and reconnect with the more-than-human dimensions in urban gardens and CSAs. This will provide insights into the enacted care practices related to food, nature and community and will inform a preliminary understanding of the participants' ethical engagements related to food production and consumption.

4.1.1. Participant's motivations related to food.

When exploring motivations that brought people to join urban garden or a CSA, I found that interests in food origin, fresh and healthy food and organic production were among the main factors that participants were looking for in urban gardens or CSAs. Urban gardens for example provided opportunities for people to engage in a closer relationship with food. For some of them, joining gardening meant having the chance to grow their own food, "*to understand more and be more careful about the food we eat*" (Kevin, G1), thus becoming more aware of and closer to food production processes. This was expressed by Mauro as well, one of Orti Generali gardeners:

"*When Orti Generali opened three years ago, before the pandemic, I was one of the first to participate. I always liked the idea to grow my own food and eat it. To me it feels like I had a natural instinct to have a garden. If feels natural to me […] it is very satisfying to eat what I grew with my own hands. Especially because I know they do not have any chemicals because I do not use them. I only use Nimm oil and verdigris*". (Mauro, G2). [1]

[1] Verdigris is a very popular copper-based pesticide used in both organic and conventional agriculture.
Neem oil is a botanical insecticide fertilizer, with the organic and inorganic compounds present in the plant material acting to improve soil quality and enhance the quality and quantity of crops.

Developing a direct relationship with food production and getting closer to the origin of food, was a common motivation among CSA members as well. When I talked with Tommaso, one of the founders of Cresco he mentioned how for him caring about food origin was the start of everything:

"*Previously, I worked as a cook and I already had a passion to grow the food that I would cook, and this is because within the food supply chain it is almost impossible to find truly organic vegetables. And those who do organic, usually do organic monoculture so I could not even find much variety. That is why I started to grow my own products. And when we (Tommaso and Alessio, his partner, a.n.) started the CSA experience, we first used the field where I grew the food for my kitchen*". (Tommaso interview, CSA 1)

Indeed, "choosing what to grow and knowing how it was cultivated" (Fieldnotes, 28/11/22) was of great importance for the majority of participants. Caring in relation to food production, emphasizes the need to care about the conditions under which food is cultivated (Jarosz, 2011). Growing food means not only having the chance to eat what you produce with your own hands, but it also means caring about the methods of production and thus caring about the non-human other, through "cuddling them and being within the growth process of the plant" (Fieldnotes, 28/11/22) and using organic methods of cultivation. This was also an important aspect in the CSAs, as people joined mainly to have access to organic food, which is local and easily traceable. As a member expressed "*to be part of a CSA means being sensitive to seasonal, local and healthy food*" (CSA 2 member). As a matter of fact, the polices of both gardens and CSAs forbid the use of agricultural chemicals, demonstrating a care for soil and plant's health.

4.1.2. Participants' motivation related to nature.

Reconnecting with more-than-human elements, such as nature, soil and plants, was another important motive to join an urban garden or a CSA. For example, some of the gardeners have had previous experiences with private gardens or lived in the countryside and joined a community garden because they wanted to find again that rural aspect within the city; others were attracted by the chance to do outdoor activities and be around more-than-human entities. Simone, one of the coordinators of the Bunker Garden, explained:

"*Those who want to get close to this reality (gardening, a.n.) it is because they got a particular sensitivity, and they strive to get close to nature, as in the city it is kind of difficult to find this connection. And our project responds to this need, which is to be in touch with soil, plants and animals*" (Simone interview, G1)

The search for a gardening experience was further motivated by positive feelings resulting from a renewed connection with the non-human other: gardening became "*a moment to break from the city life*" (Giorgio, G2). Community gardens have long been championed for their supposed ability to reconnect people to nature by mitigating its absence from urban life (Pitt, 2018). As Giorgio commented "*Many people come here to relax, to fight off their frustrations and to feel better*" (Giorgio, C2). Another gardener commented "*I chose to have a garden because I wanted to have a good time and break from my routine. Especially because I wanted to be closer to nature*." (Daniele, G2).

Thus, reconnecting with the more-than-human through engaging with soil, plants and nature, brought health benefits, both physically and mentally. Working the soil is tiring, however it sparked feelings of relaxation and satisfaction. Gardening responds to a need to find "a diversion from work life" (Andrea, G2). As Andrea further explained, "*I noticed that when I started my journey here at Orti Generali, one of my daughters who did not like the rural life at all, started joining me and now she always come here to help me whenever she gets off work. She is enthusiastic and she told me she feels very relaxed here. Plus, you get to try physical fatigue (laughing). We do not use any machines, so gardening can be very tiring. But she loves that now*." (Andrea, G2)

Reconnecting with the more-than human other was also true for CSA members. Indeed, for some, joining a CSA meant having the chance to reconnect with the local territory, experiencing a renovated relationship with local food and producers. Joining a CSA means supporting locality and consequentially the territory: "*I joined Tavola Sociale because I want my territory to be alive. I want it to give me healthy and good products and because I want to reduce pollution. If I buy local, I avoid transports resulting from the big food supply chains*" (CSA 2 member). Being concerned about how dominant methods of food production can have an impact on nature and the local territory demonstrates care about the more-than-human other and participating in a CSA is the resulting ethical engagement.

Additionally, the specific experience of gardening also provided a way for people to learn a new activity and change life paths, distancing from their careers:

"*Before coming here (Bunker Garden, a.n.) I had a corporate job, but I hated it, it was a very stressful environment. And for what reason? So, I decided to experience working with the soil, because I want to get close to the job of farming.*" (Kevin, G1, interview).

Another gardener had a similar idea as she commented *"I joined urban gardens because I want to understand whether I like gardening. I was thinking on moving to the countryside and open my own farm. I do not want to be in the city anymore*." (Sara, G1, interview).

A gardener's background was crucial for his need to have a garden:

"*I was a chemical technician. I worked for several years in chemical industries that develop 'natural flavoring' for food. They are not toxic, but they are used at the industrial level to connect consumers to a particular product's taste. But I did not like it, I wanted to approach natural food and I did not want to work closed in a building anymore. For me it was like feeding a plant with toxic things. That is why I decided to quit my job and started gardening, because I wanted to know where the food comes from. And now I moved to the countryside, and I have my own garden there and some chickens and I could not be happier*" (Mario interview, G2).

Mario's example is interesting as working as a 'chemical flavorist' for him meant he could not have a direct contact with the 'natural' taste of food. Thus, for him the desire to get to know where food comes from coupled with his desire to work outdoors, brought him to change life and reconnect with MTH worlds.

4.1.3. Participants' motivation related to community.

For others, it was the community aspect that moved participants to join AFNs. For example, in a CSA, the community aspect is crucial as it is the basis to share risks and benefits of food production. However, community can mean much more. One of the interviewed CSA members reported how being in a community for him means sharing common values and beliefs "*To me community is sharing values together and actively take a stance on specific themes and be completely involved in the project*" (Elia interview, CSA 1). Another shared how being in a community is a key element in his life, "*One of my strong needs is living in a community, and I love that I can get one here in the CSA, which can also bring a grassroot change. I like that I know nothing about vegetables, and I would never do the work of the farmers but in a community, everybody has got its role, and seeing how much passion they put in their work, it pushes me to help them because this is what a community does.*" (CSA 2 member interview). Being part of a community supported agriculture makes participants feel close to each other as they "share a common territorial identity" (Fieldnotes, 22/12/22), they feel close to the local producers and closer to the food they eat, as they know where it comes from and how it was produced. Indeed, a CSA gives the opportunity to establish a direct relationship between consumers and producers:

"*I think the CSA is a great way to participate in an alternative economy. We can start from the real need of consumers which is to know more about the food they eat, and this means it needs to be local. And to me it's great that I can get to see the producers' faces and really know where my food comes from. I love knowing what's behind that product and that I can go visit the farm that produces it*". (Edoardo interview, CSA 2).

This demonstrates how CSA participants not only care about having weekly boxes of vegetables, but they care about how the food they eat is produced, and they care about supporting and protecting the local territory, including local farmers.

The community aspect was also found in urban gardens. Sara's plan (one of the gardeners at Bunker) was to understand whether she liked working with the soil, and she did not expect to also find a supportive community: "*Before joining, I did not care much about meeting people here. But now that I know some of them, maybe I come to the gardens just to meet them; and I like it. I did not expect that.*" (Sara interview, G1). The same was true for Kevin, who is very happy to be part of a community of gardeners "I talked with Vincenzo (gardener G1, a.n.) before, he is the wisest gardener here, and we talked for almost an hour, he replied to my questions, and he shared his gardening experiences. It was enlightening" (Kevin, G1, formal interview).

Helping and supporting others within CSAs and gardens meant not only caring for farmers and food, but also caring for other people. This occurred through the allocation of part of the common harvest to those more in need. For a CSA member, this was the aspect that brought her to join: "*I have always volunteered but I also wanted to expand my interests. So, when if found Tavola Sociale (CSA 2, a.n.) I thought it was perfect because I can get healthy food and I know that some of the shares go to the local solidarity canteen, as well as part of the harvest*" (CSA 2 member).

Another gardener commented "*I liked that with gardening you get a chance to think about other people as well, as part of the share goes to those experiencing difficulties. So, joining was not just for me and the environment, but for other people as well*" (G2 member, interview).

These extracts demonstrated the variety of motives that push people to join an Alternative Food Network and the different care practices enacted. Care is a force that penetrates and expands in different aspects, including care for the natural environment, care about food production as well as care for close known and unknown humans. The desire to be in the open air, surrounded by nature, and to cultivate the land expresses a desire to reconnect with the MTH world and to care for its dimensions. Moreover, caring about the production of food and its origin demonstrates a consciousness towards sustainable and ethical practices. This includes considerations of local and organic production, supporting small-scale farmers, and valuing the quality of the food they consume. Additionally, joining an AFN entail caring for both known and unknown humans, involving donating food, collaborating with fellow participants and building relationships based on shared values and a sense of community.

4.2. Soil care

"We should think of ourselves as guardians of soil and not only as consumers" (Elia, CSA 1)

The first caring practice I identified is soil care, as it is the first affective encounter most of the participants have when dealing with non-human others in the researched AFNs. It means "treating soil with commitment, concern and empathy" (de la Bellacasa, 2015), and thinking about soil not only as a pool of resources but as an entity full of vitality. Soil care includes caring methods of cultivation that feed and nourish the soil, caring about biodiversity, care (and neglect) about soil's living entities, caring about soil's time and the affective and embodied experience of touching soil. By exploring these caring practices, I will show how participants are affected by the more than-human other and the ethical implications that derive from these affective experiences.

4.2.1 Caring methods of cultivation

"*Nobody mentions it, but the secret is to have a working soil" (Tommaso, CSA 1)*

Attending to soil and being aware of its needs was demonstrated by methods of cultivation apt at treating soil with care. Taking care of the soil starts with taking care of its nourishment and fertility, which means taking care of its vitality: "*I used to till my garden before meeting Tommaso (CSA 1 farmer, a.n.), and he taught me to not turn the soil over, so you do not interfere with soil's ecosystem*" (Luca, CSA 2 interview). It has been demonstrated that tilling the soil degrades its fertility and could lead to loss of biodiversity, which can impact soil properties useful for crop production (Draghi et al., 2018). "*Sometimes humans think they always have to interfere to better nature. However, most of the times we should focus on preserving the ecosystem*." (Marco interview, G2).

Being concerned about soil health, and consequentially act to preserve its ecosystem, was of crucial importance for the researched participants and at the basis of a healthy food production. As a gardener commented "*If your plants do not grow or are ill, well you should understand the root of the problem by starting from soil health*" (Cristina, G2, informal conversation). Healthy soils mean healthy plants: "*Soil is food and taking care of it means having healthy plants. In order to be healthy, we should not rely too much on medicines, but we should start from having a healthy soil. With a healthy, fertile soil, crops are better because they've got the elements to be better and we are better as well*" (Roberto interview, CSA 2). A similar idea was expressed by another gardener. When I asked him what he found important about soil, he replied: "*To me soil's life is the most important thing, as soil is full of life and microorganism. In a spoon of soil, you can find millions of organisms. These interact with our organism as we are made of microorganism as well, but we do not think about it. I became aware of it here, by gardening. I started thinking about how much health they can provide for humans*" (Kevin interview, G1).

To both Roberto and Kevin, soil is food which nourishes human health, demonstrating that if we take care of soils, they will care back by providing healthy sustenance. This reflects not only the positive consequences of taking care of soil but a recognition of the interdependency between beings, humans and non-humans. Growing food is not a rational manipulation of natural forces for solely human ends but an engagement within a vibrant living world (Beacham, 2018).

A commonly used technique to nourish the soil is nitrogen-fixing crop during rotation, which takes care of soil while engaging with the MTH world. As a gardener commented "*The important thing is to leave part of the soil with no crops, and planting legumes such as beans or chickpeas which fix nitrogen into the soil, nourishing it.*" (Andrea interview, G2). Nitrogen is one of the major sources of nutrition for plants, together with potassium and phosphorus (White et al., 2010), so it is an indispensable element both for soil and for plants. Planting legumes improves soil fertility through the symbiotic association with microorganisms, which fix the atmospheric nitrogen and make nitrogen available to crops. Legumes included in the cropping system thus improve the fertility of the soil and the yield of crops (Kebede, 2021).

Another technique which engages and cooperates with non-human beings is intercropping. Intercropping is the growth of two or more crops, simultaneously, used to feed the soil and keep off unwanted beings or weeds (Zaefarian et al., 2016). This method takes care of soil in a healthy way as it avoids the use of chemical pesticides or fertilizers: "*When I plant tomatoes, I also plant basil, which on the one hand keeps off insects from tomatoes and on the other hand it fertilizes the soil*" (Alberto, informal interview, G2). Through intercropping, participants were affected by their interactions with non-human others, and they demonstrated an openness to the interconnectedness of the world and a feeling of connection with other entities. This was similarly expressed by another gardener who told me "*I had planted roses, but they were always full of aphids. One time I empirically found out that one of those weeds called dock plant attracted aphids. So, I noticed the dock covered with insects and nearby my roses were perfectly clean*" (Simone interview, G1). Engaging with non-human others through companion planting also demonstrates how to take care of soil, human interact and cooperate with non-human further reinforcing a more-than-human reconnection.

Composting is a caring soil method as well, as compost application improve the physical, chemical and biological characteristics, organic matter, and nutrient status of the soils (Adugna, 2018). Composting is a technique which engages with more-than-human entities, as it is constituted by layers of organic matter breaking down with the assistance of aerobic bacteria, fungi, protozoa, earthworms, and other nonhuman others (Jones, 2019). When I visited the CSA *Cresco*, I helped them making compost piles, as it was the end of the harvest season, and the farmers were planning on making compost for next season. As Tommaso explained me, compost is mainly made up of green parts, rich in nitrogen, and brown or dry parts, rich in carbon. The dry parts are used as base layer: this is a crucial step as it is needed to not suffocate soil, thus oxygenating it. The second layer is composed of green parts, namely rotting plants, or food waste. For the third layer they used manure, which they got from a friend that raises cattle. Another layer is composed of dry parts namely wood chips. These allow the creation of biochar, a carbon rich substance useful to create a beneficial habitat for soil microorganisms. Finally, the pile is covered with hay, another source of carbon (Fieldnotes, 6/12/22). Each layer was watered with a mix of sugar and yeast to speed up the composting process. The final mixture is thus composed of more-than-human collaborations which will affect the soil by nourishing it. This demonstrates how composting Is a caring method for soil's vitality that engages and cooperates with MTH entities. Compost is not just about the strata of carbon rich brown layers and nitrogen rich green layers, but it's about "a collaborative act" (Fieldnotes, 6/12/22) between humans and non-human, it''s about feeling the interconnectedness with non-human entities.

(**Figure 9.** Left picture: Tommaso – CSA 1 farmer- putting hay on fresh manure; Right picture: two piles of compost, 6/12/22)

Among other caring methods of cultivation, I found that the practice of mulching was one of the most popular. Mulching means keeping the soil covered with living or dead organic matter and it is mainly used to fertilize the soil to increase its nutrition, manage moisture and protect it from weeds and other

unwanted creatures (Chalker, 2007). To feed the soil with organic methods which reject the use of chemical fertilizers, mulching becomes a valuable natural method, especially when used to retain soil moisture. One of the gardeners at Orti Generali told me "*I made some gardens growing benches this past summer and I mulched the soil. I've been away a couple of weeks, so I did not water the soil for a while and when I got back, I found some grown big zucchinis. With no water and with the extreme heat of the past summer I did not expect that*" (Gardener G2). Using mulching as soil care technique was valuable for a CSA farmer as well: "*I have a plan which is to surround all my fields with trees so to shade the soil, and when the leaves fall, they cover it and retain its moisture as well*" (Roberto interview, CSA 2).

Mulching is a technique which helps getting rid of unwanted animals as well: "*We use methods of natural mulching, such as straw or wood chips. At some point a local chocolate factory started giving us leftovers of cocoa beans' skins and we started using those to mulch. We found out they were not only effective to nourish the soil, but they helped us getting rid of snails as well*" (Simone interview, Bunker Garden). Snails were the most feared animal in gardens, as they "*eat everything and destroy many crops*" (more on this in section 4.3). Using mulching as natural method resulted effective to keep snails off without having to turn to "*that chemical rubbish which kills everything*" (Simone, Bunker).

(**Figure 10.** Mulching with fallen leaves- Bunker Garden. Personal drive. 29/11/22)

Covering the soil with mulch is a method which is not taken into consideration in conventional industrial farming techniques, namely those farming methods which involve the use of chemical pesticides or fertilizers. As Federico commented: "*At this point there are many territories which have*

been made infertile, meaning they are dead. And this is because they (conventional farmers, a.n.) always leave the soil uncovered. Bare soil demineralizes and it does not produce anymore, unless you pump it with chemical fertilizers, but eventually the soil will die anyways" (Roberto interview, farmer CSA 2). Leaving soil uncovered is "*one of the worst things you could do*" (Tommaso, CSA 1) because soil demineralizes, meaning it impoverishes as all mineral nutrients vanish due to soil erosion. Turning to milling the soil to have it perfectly clean it's a "*human thing*" which does not advantage non-human others and only respond to humans' aesthetic sensitivities: "*Fields, lawns they are all alive, and if you mill it because it needs to be clean and tidy, that is a thing for human beings. Humans always want things to be in perfect order, but why?"* (Roberto interview, CSA 2*).* Federico's incomprehension for human behavior can show how conventional farming practices deviate a lot from organic techniques, which cooperate with the MTH world rather than trying to remove it. As Tommaso comments summarizes, "*If you mill everything, the soil will die. Nature does not leave its soil empty. Soils need other beings to be fertile"* (Fieldwork, 6/12/22 Tommaso, CSA1,).

Mulching and not leaving the soil empty, become especially important when dealing with climate events such as droughts. "*The past summer everybody was buying vegetables from me, and this does not usually happen as most of the people around here have their own gardens. However, due to this summer's drought, many of those gardens were already dead by July. And this is because they were all clean and tidy without even a blade of grass used to mulch. So, humidity would evaporate soon quickly causing plants to dry up*" (Francesco, CSA 2 interview).

Letting soil lie bare and eventually resorting to chemical products to fertilize it represent part of the industrial farming culture. Research participants believed that most people growing up within an industrial and productionist-oriented culture, tend to care more about garden's aesthetics and productivity rather than caring about the vitality of soil. Giorgio, one of the coordinators of *Orti Generali,* mentioned how sometimes there can be a little discord between gardeners: "*Older generations are the ones used to deal with chemical products in gardens. They usually think that the more they intervene, meaning the more they put things in soil or plants, the more they will produce. Younger generations instead tend to not intervene and let nature be nature. And that is what we want to teach here, especially to the older generation.*" (Giorgio G2, interview).
One of the CSA 1 members, which home-gardens, mentioned how some of his neighbors were weirded out when they looked at his garden:

"*People around here, especially the older generation, they do not believe you when you talk about mulching, or about keeping some weed to protect the soil; they think it is non-sense. To them if plants do not grow, they do not work on soil, they just put chemical fertilizers and that is it. And that soil eventually becomes dirt […] Some years ago there was a lady whose garden was beautiful; it was aesthetically perfect with tons of plants. But at some point, she could not grow potatoes anymore and she would not understand the reason. We later discovered she was using a lot of chemical products; she would use whatever to boost her production. But her soil was dead.*" (Luca CSA 1, interview)

Focusing on aesthetic means focusing mainly on what is above the soil surface, and industrial cultivation methods tend to focus more on (and feed more) crops rather than soil: "*When using chemical treatments, there is a tendency to focus more on keeping zero chemical residuals on the product rather than worry about soil. The consumer is protected, but nobody ever thinks about soil.*

We should tackle the root of the problem. We should not worry anymore about how much we produce; we should worry about our soils" (Tommaso interview, CSA 1). The root of the problem Tommaso is talking about is the yield-oriented food production, which looks at plants more as commodifiable produce than living beings. Agrochemical inputs that benefit crop yield, but soil communities can face long-term destabilization or destruction, making soils and growers dependent on fertilizers (de la Bellacasa, 2017, p.190).

Being worried about the destabilization of soils due to conventional methods of cultivations was also expressed with a need to protect soil biodiversity: *"The important thing is there must always be biodiversity in soils. For me the biggest environmental impact is given by the absence of biodiversity and the destruction of habitats. When yesterday we saw those empty fields without even a small tree or hedge, that means there is no cooperation with nature*" (Roberto, CSA 2, interview). When Roberto referred to 'empty fields' he was mentioning the industrial farmed fields, that appear "*aesthetically perfect*", without weeds, trees or other beings that make part of a resilient ecosystem, and which are crucial elements to take care of soil's nutrients and have quality crops. Indeed, "most of the biodiversity of agricultural systems resides in soil. Food web interactions among the soil biota (including plant roots) have large effects on the quality of crops (affecting human and animal nutrition or other utility) the incidence of soil-borne plant and animal pests and diseases (affecting production levels)" (Brussaard et al., 2007, p. 234).

When I travelled to visit the CSA *Cresco,* on the sides of the road I noticed huge fields of small trees that extended for some kilometers. They were very tidy and covered with plastic sheets (Fieldnotes, 4/12/22). When sometime later I talked with Tommaso, the farmer, he explained me that all those fields were kiwi vines and apple fields, devoted to industrial mono-crop production. "*Everybody around here is used to plant the same crop, whether apples or kiwis. However, kiwis around here have been dying for some years now, because of some mysterious disease or because of the soil's conditions*" (Tommaso interview). Italy, and the province of Cuneo more specifically, is the second largest producer of kiwi above New Zealand and recent estimates suggest that the disease now affects 25% of kiwi orchards (The Guardian, Perrone, 2020). The origin of the disease is not yet clear, however to Tommaso the cause was straightforward:

"*You cannot force nature. The type of agriculture they do around here, they do not realize that nature always has the last word. Biodiversity is functional and healthy crop production depends on the quantity of different organisms' interactions in the ecosystem. When I plant just one type of crop, how many interactions can be expected? How many different beings living there can I find? For sure much less than when you plant 130 different varieties of crops*".

Tommaso's rant on mono-crop farming, shows how one of the biggest damages on ecosystems also comes from loss of biodiversity. Thus, being concerned about ecosystems and about having a healthy soil, translated into becoming aware about the importance of biodiversity. Caring for a diversified ecosystem demonstrated attention and protection towards non-human others. As a Cresco's member told me: *"We can farm in the most conscious way, but we always need to remember that agriculture is different from nature. Nature can teach many things, like biodiversity and having different plants means having a balanced soil*" (Elia CSA1, interview).

Soil-attentive care resulted in caring practices that helped the soil, being aware of the need to feed it and protect it, without focusing solely on crop production. Such treatments demonstrate that participants understood and provided for soil, meaning they took care of it by learning how to meet its needs and taking responsibility for it. This feeling of being responsible, can drive people to act. As a matter of fact, attending to soil's vitality and being affected by MTH encounters, sparked feelings of connection, becoming aware of how inattentiveness towards the MTH other "can have consequences for more than ourselves and our kin" (de la Bellacasa, 2017, p.146).

Moreover, care does not need to be motivated only by warm feelings of affection or nurturance but is often propelled by feelings of injustice or indignation (Martin et al. 2015). Indeed, the perceived frustration experienced by participants in relation to conventional practices of cultivation which destroy and devitalize soils, led them to raise their ethical consciousness, becoming aware of the existence of another beyond the human sphere and thus act to preserve it with care. Emotions both negative and positive, move people into both action and thought (Weenink and Spaargaren, 2016).

In sum, the above presented caring methods and interview extracts show how becoming ethical within the dimension of care means recognizing that negligence towards soil's needs has an impact on both humans and non-humans, as care conceptualizes beings within an interconnected web including "our bodies, ourselves and our environment" (Tronto, 1991).

4.2.2 Touching with care

Care and attention to soil are also expressed through the affective and embodied experience of touching. As a matter of fact, the aspect of reconnecting with the more than human, cannot but include the inputs brought by touch. Re-connecting implies contact, which is the state or condition that exist when two people or things physically touch each other (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Through the experience of touch, the participants got to have close encounters with the more-than-human and learned by being affected to soil. For many participants it was the affective experience of touching and "*getting your hands dirty*" that not only sparked feelings of connection and good feelings more in general, but also awareness of and concern for the MTH other, thus engendering an ethical sensibility.

Touching and growing plants prompted ethical thinking for what regards food production. Through the affective experience of touch, some participants realized how much their work differs from the conventional and industrial agriculture one, as in conventional farmers do not have any connection with the food they produce, especially because they do not touch it as they use agricultural machines: "*I think that our soils should be human-sized, and not for big and costly tractors. Mechanized agriculture prevents you from being scrupulous about soils. I think that with a couple of rakes and shovels you can do better, and you feel closer to soil."* (Elia, CSA 1, interview*).* As a gardener similarly commented, "*I enjoy gardening, especially because I do not use machines. When I need to clean it, I just use my hands, in contact with nature*" (Andrea, G2, interview).

The experience of gardening was useful to understand the dynamics behind conventional food production:

"*While gardening I always find bugs and parasites, and as we do organic here, I kill them by hands or with natural products. But this got me thinking, how can they (conventional farmers, a.n.) produce tons of perfect zucchinis every day without even a small defect? You cannot just kill some parasites with your hands… I mean here I understood how industrial food production work. Who knows how much chemicals do they use…*" (Mauro, G2, interview).

Among my participants, the experience of 'get in touch' with MTH worlds was the spark needed to acknowledge the existence of the MTH other. Gardening for example "*brings people to listen to earth's needs and soil can become the mean to connect us to our earth*" (Fieldnotes, 28/12/22). Indeed, another gardener commented: "*I feel like having a garden is crucial to become aware of many things. Seeing vegetables growing makes you understand what is behind that growing process. It put things in perspective. And you can understand that even if we can feel like we can control nature, here in the garden you become aware of the contrary*". (Mario, G2, interview).

Getting in touch with nature and soils can spur awareness and concern, while on the contrary, the absence of touch causes neglect. This was expressed especially by one participant:

"*We do not have contact anymore with our earth. When I went to Brazil, I remember I talked with an old lady and she said that the more we build concrete roads and buildings, the more we are creating a distance between humans and nature, from our Pachamama (Mother Earth, a.n.). And I believe this is true. We do not respect nature because we do not have a direct contact with it anymore. The important thing is that people start to handle something, that people start touching with their hands, touching and having to do with soils*" (Alessandro, CSA 2, interview)

Thus, being disconnected from the experience of touching MTH dimensions, can be the main cause of lack of care for the MTH other. The same was expressed by another CSA member "*People are not aware of what they eat, of the environmental impact of what they eat. And why don't they have it? Because they do not have a contact with nature. I cannot even imagine how a person can go a whole year without even touching a blade of grass*" (Yuri, CSA 1, interview). As another CSA member commented: "*My boyfriend always lived in the city, and when we became members of* Tavola Sociale *he started becoming aware of what is behind the food we eat. To me it was obvious because I always had a contact with gardens, but if you are not used to touch soil, you are not aware of many things*" (Giulia, CSA 2, interview).

Thus, the experience of touching food participants cared for, made them feel connected to what they produced. As a gardener commented "*One of the opportunities of having a garden is that you can see things growing and you can pick them up with your hands. I feel more connected to my food, and I feel like you can develop a bond with nature when you see and have to do with your crops growing. It is not like going to the supermarket*." (Kevin, G1, interview).

These extracts demonstrated how the experience of touch, can make people feel more connected to soils, nature and food. Touching food with care helps to become aware and develop a bond with MTH others. Participants in the study experienced a profound impact through these encounters with the more-than-human, leading them to cultivate an ethical engagement aimed at distancing themselves from the conventional dynamics of food production and reestablishing a closer relationship with food.

4.2.3. Humans 'with or versus' non-humans?

When growing food, especially organically, encounters with non-human others are inevitable. Engaging with non-humans sparked different feelings among my participants and looking at the way they would take care of MTH elements, I could distinguish between friendly or inimical relationships. Indeed, care can be a very selective mode of attention, leading to the neglect of those who are excluded from 'care' frames (Lynch et al., 2021). Care can be thus seen as a form of "mutual care", but it can also involve a form of "harmful care", namely some non-humans are attended and other are purposely neglected (Pitt, 2018).

The non-human interaction that most resonated with "friendly" relationship and that brought pleasure was engaging with plants, especially through the experience of growing plants: "*I love being in the growth process of the plants, I like to cuddle them, and I talk with them, hoping they can grow faster (laughing)"* (Gardener G2, informal conversation). The same was true for a CSA farmer whose favorite experience was seeing his plants growing and expressed a feeling of connection with them: "*When I plant seeds that come from my plants,from my plants to me those plants are like my children. It is different when you buy seeds at the garden center. If I know a seed comes from my plant, and I know I grew it, I have a stronger relationship with that plant*" (Tommaso CSA1 farmer, interview).
Another gardener as well referred to his plants as relatives "*When I see my plants growing it feels like a miracle, I love them. It is like seeing your children growing*" (Mario, G2, interview).
The use of such metaphors, as Singh highlights, "shows that intimate relations between non-humans (nature) and humans emerge from the same kind of intersubjective communication that characterizes human-to-human relations" (2015, p.58). Indeed, care felt for non-human others sometimes can be similar to a care felt for other humans. This aspect reflects a sense of 'kinship' with the MTH world, as ecofeminist Donna Haraway puts it referring to an enduring mutual relationship with non-human others (Haraway, 2016).

This was expressed with the practice of talking as well, demonstrating a feeling of connection with non-humans. A CSA member confessed "*When I visit the field and help the guys, I talk with plants and flowers, they are like my babies*" (Alessia, CSA 1, interview). This was true for one of the CSA farmers as well, who mentioned he feels like he has a relationship with plants "*Sometimes I talk with them, maybe they grow faster (laughing), other times I spend time just looking at vegetables.*" (Francesco CSA 2, interview). The experience of talking with non-humans did not refer solely to plants. This was true for one of the volunteers at Bunker, Anna, a girl in need with health issues who loved taking care of chickens as it made her feel better. Anna was the one in charge of the chickens and she usually was the one responsible to feed them. She would let chickens eat from her hands where she had some birdfeed and she would always talk with them: "*When I feed chickens, I always talk to them. I noticed that if you talk, they listen and if they maybe they are hurting my hands because they peck too aggressively if I say to be gentle, they listen to me*" (Fieldnotes, 18/11/22, Anna, G1).

These intimate relations demonstrate how some participants felt connected to non-human other and how this reconnection strengthened practices of care aimed at nourishing and protecting them. Indeed, an ethic of care embraces a new ontology of being in the world, accepting the notion that everything is relational, and recognizing a mutual entanglement between the human and the natural (Haraway,

2016). Intimate relations with the MTH became a site to reconnect with and take care of the MTH other.

(**Figure 11.** Anna feeding chickens, personal drive, 18/11/22)

Other beloved creatures were earthworms, especially for their essential role in maintaining soil health. As Puig de la Bellacasa states, "worms are a more visible manifestation of soil life than microorganism" (2010, p.160) and the majority of gardeners expressed attention and care in regards of worms. As a gardener explained, "*When I am digging the soil, I always try to be careful in not killing earthworms. Whenever I see one, I protect it and it makes me happy because it means my soil is alive and healthy"* (Gardener G2). Another gardener felt the same: *"In our soils there is a world we cannot imagine. When I start digging in March, I am happy when I see earthworms. That is a clear and evident aspect of soil health. I really respect them because they do a precious job by moving the soil*". (Andrea G2, interview). When I visited Bunker and helped a gardener to plant some seeds, I experienced the same feeling of joy when seeing an earthworm while I was digging (Fieldnotes, 15/12/22).
In recognizing the importance of worms, participants (and myself too) felt the need to protect them. Seeing earthworms brought feelings of joy and pleasure because of their crucial role in keeping soils healthy and alive. This suggests a form of 'mutual care' as we can identify a relationship of interdependence recognizing mutual benefits for humans and nonhumans (Pitt, 2018).

(**Figure 12.** Friendly encounter with earthworm, personal drive, 2/12/22)

However, not every non-human being was treated with beneficial care; others received 'harmful care', meaning humans had to compete with other beings, especially to protect their crops. This resulted in practices aimed at killing rather than tending. In some contexts, care is inseparable from killing (de la Bellacasa, 2017) and as Haraway puts it, interspecies living is also about "mortal relatedness" (Haraway 2007b). As a gardener put it, "*we are in competition, mutually damaging each other*" (Andrea, G2). For some participants, weeds were the most tedious competitors: "*I hate removing weeds. I love when I see my garden clean, but removing weed is very boring*" (Simone, CSA 2); "*as we cannot use herbicides, you need to remove weeds by hands and this is the most tiring job*" (Andrea interview, G2). Weeds were removed because they do not conform to human desires or aesthetic sensitivities, especially when competing with crops, because "where the needs of different nonhumans conflicted, priority went to ones feeding – literally and figuratively – human goals" (Pitt, 2018, p. 264): "*you need to remove weeds, otherwise it will infest crops*" (Luca interview, G2).

For other participants, weeds could also hide some benefits, demonstrating partnership instead of competition, appreciation rather than antipathy: "*they say you should remove weeds because they consume water from soil, but I think it is the contrary because weeds retain water in soil. Last summer our farm's neighbor, which who does not farm organically, he harvested less than our farm and this is because we keep weeds as they shade soil"* (Francesco interview, CSA 2). Another farmer told me "*One of the first years I planted hazelnut trees, I always used to hoe the area because hazelnut trees need to be kind of free from weeds. I remember one summer day I found a portulaca plant, which is like a succulent. And when I lifted the plant, I noticed the soil beneath was very humid while the soil around was dry. Weeds do not allow water evaporation. So, I understood that weeds protect soil, especially in summer because they retain humidity*" (Roberto, CSA 2). For both Francesco and Roberto weeds grew without human accord were seen as keepers of the soil rather than enemies. For another gardener, weeds represented a delicious surprise as well: "*I do not like killing anything. For example, I have many spontaneous plants in my garden, and they taste delicious*" (Mario interview,

G2). Perceiving weeds as "spontaneous plants" shows how Mario cared and respected weeds as natural encounters, coexisting with them and benefitting from their good taste.

However, removing weeds was usually a crucial step to remove pests, especially slugs. No other creature sparked as many feelings of repulsion and frustration as these "*big and fat slugs*" and no practices of mutual care were reserved to them. Among participants, creative ways of dealing with slugs were a daily business. As previously mentioned, mulching with skins of cocoa beans was proved to be an effective method to get rid of slugs: "*We have a small lake here and the soil is pretty muddy, so it is the perfect environment for slugs to strive and they destroyed many crops. A local chocolate factory gave us cocoa beans' skins and we started using those to mulch. We found out they were not only effective to nourish the soil, but they helped us getting rid of snails as well".* (Simone interview, G1) Slugs caused frustration and by eating crops they became enemies: "*I used to worry about killing animals and whenever I saw slugs, I would just remove them and place them in another spot. But they always come back, and they eat everything. They are really a problem. So now one of my favorite activities is cutting them in half. And I have got no problems with that anymore.*" (Alessio interview, CSA 1). This demonstrate that participants relate to nonhumans in complex ways, and that even in the context of care violence may occasionally be called for (Held, 2010). Indeed participants, in order protect their crops turned to violence orienting care towards the needs of humans only and disregarding other beings.

Another method to deal with slugs, was presented by Roberto who purposely created a pond within his farm, seeking a partnership with non-humans to deal with other unwanted non-humans. The aim of the pond was to provide an environment for frogs, which eat bugs, insects and snails in order to get rid of them without resorting to chemical products. Roberto thus demonstrated care for the environment and care for the frogs, avoiding chemicals and providing frogs with the perfect environment to thrive. However, the motive behind caring for frogs was because they could serve the purpose to kill non-human enemies. Thus, the motive behind care or neglect was motivated by priority of human needs over non-human ones.

Another common annoying problem was dealing with cabbage butterflies, which as the name suggests, they mainly eat cabbages as caterpillars and when they grow, they become white butterflies. Gardeners mentioned how they start worrying when they see these butterflies and feel frustrated when they found their crops with holes. "*It is very frustrating, when you see all your beloved vegetables eaten by some stupid insect it makes me want to use chemical poisons, because it is basically hours of hard work that go wasted*" (Andrea, G2). Other unfriendly encounters had to do with rats which eat roots, small hares which chew plants and aphids. "*The other day I noticed a small hole under my garden's fence, and I guess it was a hare. It is very frustrating when they eat your food*" (Daniele, G2).

As these extracts demonstrated, engagements with non-human others are ripe with both affection and tension. This shows how care practices do not involve solely mutual respect and benevolence towards others, but care also engages with negotiation and competition, which at times ends up in a part winning over the other. As Fisher and Tronto describe (1990), care starts from noticing another and how it contributes to our lives. However, when non-humans did not contribute to the needs of human beings, but rather went against by taking crops, they became enemies, and they did not receive any

ethical concern (Popke, 2009). This demonstrates that care for non-human may be driven by instrumentality which prioritizes human needs (Pitt, 2018).

(**Figure 13**. Cabbage butterfly worm and eaten pak choy leaf, personal drive, 21/11/22)

4.2.3 Becoming attuned to soil's temporality

As soil care is an embodied, affective and learning experience (de la Bellacasa, 2017), one of the most evident consequences of this is how humans are affected by soil's temporality, which means becoming attuned or be affected by more-than-human rhythms.

Being affected by soil times in my data included the aspects of seasonality and embodied time. Seasonality means following nature's timing in producing crops and participants somehow embodied the time of nature by eating seasonal products. For some participants, eating seasonally meant feeling it in the body: "*Since I started gardening, I got used to eat seasonally. Now I cannot even eat tomatoes when they are off season, I guess my body simply does not need them at that moment*" (Fieldnotes, 30/12/22). Another CSA member mentioned: "*I like that I can get seasonal and local food here. We are so used to eat everything all the time. I prefer to eat cabbage for a month and enjoy tomatoes In summer. Even If I get tired, I canIys come up with different recipes. If nature produce determined products, it means that my body needs those products at that time. Spring crops are purifying and let you get rid of the winter when you ate fattier things. Everything is connected and I think seasonality really helps our bodies*". (CSA 2-member interview). Through embodied experiences with seasonal

food, participants got attuned to MTH rhythms and felt that their bodies were benefitting from this reconnection. Indeed, an attentive care for ecological processes was also a way to practice a form of self-care, as eating seasonal food was considered healthy for the human body. From a care perspective, individuals are found in an environment of interdependencies with non-human others, thus practicing care for the MTH could be seen as a way to practice care for the self. This condition of interdependency and care for one's own body was also expressed by a CSA member who commented: "*Since I joined Cresco, I am re-discovering nature's rhythms. I like waking up early, when the sun rises. And now that is wintertime, I do not mind to spending time resting because this is what my body needs. Just as what fields need at this moment, to rest and prepare for the following season*" (Alessia, CSA 1, interview). By attuning to nature's rhythms, Alessia took care of her body as she felt the need to rest in wintertime just like agricultural fields.

For some participants, following food seasonality came after engaging with soil, either through gardening or receiving fresh food boxes. As Mauro expressed: "*having a garden, makes you approach society in a different way, with different rhythms, the ones of nature*" (Mauro, G2, interview). Another gardener mentioned "*Having a garden teaches you need to follow a specific seasonality. While at the supermarket we are used to always have everything, if you go now (wintertime, a.n.) you can find eggplants which are a summer crop*" (Andrea, G2, interview). A CSA member commented "*I really like that we can have boxes with the products you find in the fields. You are not the one choosing what to eat*" (CSA member, informal conversation). This demonstrates how participants' engagements with more-than-human entities taught them to adjust to soil's cycles in a more caring way.

Other participants also cared about following seasonality of animals. As a CSA member told me, "*My dad used to have cows and I remember milk had a different taste each season, because it depended on the cows' diet. In wintertime the taste was fattier, as cows ate more hay, while in summer it tasted different as cows ate more grass. I cannot stand how milk taste the same in the supermarket*" (Cristina, CSA 2, interview). Another gardener also commented: "*There were other rhythms before industrialization. You could not eat pig meat every time. You could eat it before Christmas because the meat was stored during colder months. In summertime you could not eat pig, it was like a non-written rule.*" (Andrea, G2, interview).

Through the affective experience of gardening and dealing with non-human cycles, participants demonstrated awareness on the importance of eating seasonally. The same was true for another member's wife: "*Sometimes my wife complains that she cannot eat what she wants, because the box only gives you what's in the field at that moment. But the important thing is getting used to this, you cannot always expect everything all the time*". Due to conventional rhythms of production humans got used to a constant and uniform food production. As another gardener commented "*A few days ago, my wife asked me 'why are you not bringing home those tasty zucchinis anymore?' and I told her they are off season. And this is because we do not have knowledge anymore about seasonality as in the supermarket you get everything*" (Andrea, G2, interview). In this case the example of the supermarket is emblematic as it is a place in which 'natural times' do not exist, and you can find everything at any time. Moreover, having to do with soil's rhythms can be off putting as humans got used to impose their temporal dominance on the more than human world. Roberto, one of the farmers of CSA 2 told me: "*One time a member complained because she was eating only cabbages and she*

tried to ask if we could produce some tomatoes. I explained to her that is not possible, in wintertime is too cold for tomatoes!" (Roberto, CSA 2). An anthropocentric temporality thus tries to control food seasonality while clashing with the temporality of soil. The tension between human and non- human time involves "misadjusted temporalities: between soil as a slowly renewable entity and the accelerated technological solutions required by intensified production." (de la Bellacasa, 2017, p.185).

Seasonality meant having to do with and become attuned to shifting seasons as well, especially due to climate change which has a direct impact on crop production. As result, both humans and non-humans need to adapt to these seasonality mismatches. For example, this was true when the CSA Cresco's farmer planted a drought resistant corn variety, which survived the extreme heat weather of the past summer without using water and was able to deliver the promised product to the other members. Or like Simone, the coordinator of Bunker gardens, that experimented with planting a crop called Ookra, typical of African environments, but that settled well in Turin's climate.
However, when dealing with shifting seasons, there are times when humans cannot put remedy. The drought of the past summer has been particularly challenging for the survival of crops: "*This summer it basically never rained. No rain causes a lot of difficulties when farming, because the extreme hot weather messes up with a lot of vital cycles, many plants struggled to grow. This past October has been unusually hot, and we lost our fennels' harvest. The thing is that you cannot plant those again, soils has got its time and you cannot control it.*" (Tommaso CSA 1, interview). As the gardener Andrea commented "*having to do with gardening means having to do with seasons' adversities*" which can cause feelings of distress: "*Last summer it hailed so much that every garden was completely ruined. When I saw my garden, I simply wanted to cry. I planted some crops again, but it was already too late*". (Andrea G2, interview).

(**Figure 14.** Andrea's garden with protection against hail. Personal drive 11/12/22)

Having to do with seasons' adversities, was especially true for the CSA Cresco, located in the mountains and thus affected by a colder climate. This meant adjusting to the area's climate and becoming attuned to soil's time, which is directly affected by colder temperatures: "*This field is the coldest one because in the afternoon it does not get any sun as it hides behind the mountains. Here we plant things that do not need much light or plants which take longer growing times*" (Tommaso, interview). Likewise, dealing with a colder climate, for Cresco meant planting the winter production ahead of time "*in July at latest*", in order to take advantage of the warmest and sunniest weeks of summer.

Being affected by non-human rhythms, also meant becoming aware that gardening or farming do not allow many attempts to have productive crops: "*We tried planting blueberries, but they did not survive well the past winter, so they did not produce much. I hope this year goes better. You do not get many chances for a good harvest season*". (Tommaso, CSA 1, interview). The same was true for the other CSA 2 farmer, which told me last year he did not cover fennels in time for colder weather, and he lost part of the harvest as they got completely frozen: "*The thing is that you cannot try again the day after and have new fennels immediately. To try again you need to wait and try again the following year*" (Fieldnotes, CSA 2 Roberto, 22/11/22). For another farmer this aspect was not necessarily a negative one: *"I like trying things in the garden. It takes more time, but you get the chance to do things with more natural rhythms. You understand what is wrong, and you get a whole year to study, and try again the following year. I like following nature's rhythms, and the plants like it too*" (Francesco, CSA 2, interview).

Attuning to soil's temporalities and distancing from human centric rhythms, made participants realize they are not in charge of the ecological management and sometimes nature does not answer to humans' desires: "*For some reason I could not grow pumpkins last year, and whatever I did, it simply did not work. But this taught me you cannot control nature. Nature has got its cycle and we need to respect it*". (Mario, G2, interview). Recognizing that human cannot impose dominance on natural cycles, showed care and respect for the MTH other and its rhythms.

An affective and embodied encounter with soil time brought "political epiphanies" (Carolan, 2011), namely participants have come to realize the impact of the conventional and productivity-oriented agriculture and the danger this has on the environment more in general: "*We cannot have productivity as our only value, this is not logic to survive. More productivity does not necessarily mean more wellness*" (Tommaso, CSA 1). Using chemical fertilizers, pesticides or with the use of greenhouses humans have tried to harness soils' times creating intensified rhythms of production. As CSA farmer Roberto commented: "*With conventional agriculture we are interrupting nature's cycles that have always existed. For example, in Canada wheat crops could not dry up because of the cold temperatures. But what farmers do is using glyphosate (a chemical crop desiccant, a.n.) so they can speed up the drying process, harvest it and sell it worldwide*" (Roberto interview, CSA 1). Indeed, the dominant food production trend requires the use of chemical methods that speed up plants growing processes to keep up with intensive food production. From a production perspective, soil care is aimed at increasing soil's efficiency to have constant production with little consideration for wider ecological effects (de la Bellacasa, 2017). However, from a feminist ethics of care, this is a form of exploitative care, oriented by an anthropocentric temporality (ibid).

A more soil attentive care instead requires seeing plants not as things to be controlled (the typical view in industrial agriculture) but as living entities that must be engaged with through a choreography of care (Law, 2010). Taking care of plants, thus meant perceiving them not as commodity but as living beings with their own needs and temporalities.

Being aware of the importance of respecting plants growing time, was demonstrated by a gardener who did not cover with sheets his vegetables during wintertime because he did "*not want to rush their growth and eat them before their right time*" (Fieldnotes, 28/11/22). To farmer Tommaso as well, caring for soil meant caring about soil's time: *Having a healthy and balanced soil, means the plant can grow with its natural time. If we use chemical fertilizers on plants, they grow in an abnormal way. That plant will be unhealthy, and nature will recognize it as unhealthy, so it will tend to eliminate it with parasites, bugs etc. Consequently, to protect fit from insects you will need put chemical pesticides, thus ending up a toxic loop. So, the more you follow nature's time, the more nature will behave positively*" (Tommaso, CSA 1, interview). This comment demonstrates how respecting the growth time of a plant and the temporality of soil, means recognizing the active presence of the MTH other and its power to take back control over humans by refusing crops conditioned by the interference of human-made chemical products.

For the participants of this study, re-connecting and cooperating with soil's temporalities meant fostering human-soil relations, and connecting with MTH worlds and its cycles. Distancing from human centered and fast paced productions temporalities and embodying slower and non-human centered ones, demonstrated more-than-human care and respect for soil. Getting involved with soil's temporalities in a more caring way implies a disruption of current modes of temporal dominance in more-than-human worlds (de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 172).

4.3 Care about food origin

"Food carries around a message, meaning it can tell us where it comes from, who made it and how it was made." (Elia, CSA 1)

The second caring practice I identified in my results is caring about the origin of food. This refers to the attention and concern participants had when considering where food products come from and the conditions in which they were produced. In line with the ethics of care, "caring about" implies both engagement and action (Tronto 1993, 102). Participants actively expressed this ethic by showing a desire to engage and reconnect with the origin of food, demonstrating their willingness to establish a deeper connection with the others of the food system, both human and non-human.

Food has an origin and a history before it is consumed, and a majority of the participants emphasized the importance of being aware of the production history of foodstuffs. In fact, through activities like gardening or being part of a CSA, participants were able to have closer and more intimate experiences with the others of the food system. These experiences, in turn, affected their engagement with food origin. Affect, which refers to the power to affect and be affected, becomes evident through specific

encounters (Stewart, 2007). As stated by Archambault (2016), an encounter, whether it involves a person or something else, becomes affective when it elicits some kind of effect. The way participants in alternative food networks experienced closer encounters with food, plants, soils, producers, and the territory had an impact on their ethical engagements within the food system and affected their care about food origin.

By exploring affective encounters with the more-than-human entities in the food system, specifically with food itself, this chapter aims to demonstrate the effects of such interactions and the ethical engagements that arise from them. I will demonstrate how intimate relations with food, whether through growing or eating it, affected participants' care about its origin.

4.3.1 Affective encounter with food

"When you know where your food comes from, who produced it and how, it seems like there is a connection between the people who grow food, you eating it and the soils that produce it" (CSA 2 member, interview).

The desire to reconnect with MTH others of the food system was a common theme observed in the researched CSAs and urban gardens. Understanding the origin of food, how it was produced, who produced it and where, were vital elements in fostering this connection. Due to disconnection with food caused by the dominant food system, participants were actively motivated to look for a more immediate relationship with food production. Joining AFNs provided them with this opportunity as these networks are known to reconnect people with the social, moral and biological dimensions of food (Dowler et al., 2009). As a gardener commented:

"*What pushed me to join Orti Generali was having a more direct approach with food production. I mostly eat what I produce and there is something magical about knowing where my food comes from. The thing that I plant a seed, I take care of it, and I see it growing and becoming a plant, to me it opens your mind, meaning you understand what's behind a finished product. And this you cannot do it in the supermarket where you are not aware of what's behind those products*". (Andrea, G2, interview).

Immediate and visceral encounters with own-produced food provoked a sense of wonder affecting participants' interest and ethical engagement in understanding food provenance. As Coulson (2016) argues, moments of enchantment, or a state of wonder, which is to "be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday" (Bennett 2001a: 4) can enable care, action and can assist in bringing about "socioecological transformations, offering greater momentum for mobilization" (Buck 2015, p. 372).

In contrast to conventional food networks such as supermarkets, where consumers are excluded from the history of food and are not involved in the processes that hide behind food production (Coff, 2006), AFNs offer a closer encounter with food that can "open your mind" and affect knowledge about its origin. As expressed by a CSA member: *"Before joining Cresco, I used to ask myself fewer*

questions about food production. I did not even read the origin of the products in the supermarket" (Elia, CSA 1, interview)". An affective encounter with Cresco's produced food sparked Elia's ethical engagement in learning about the origin of food and the processes of production before consuming it, leading him to be more careful in his food consumption practices. During my brief stay at the CSA *Cresco*, I also experienced a closer connection to food production and a greater care for its origin. There, I had the opportunity to know who is behind food production, the agricultural methods employed and the territory. I could collect peppers, lettuces, and kale directly from the field, I learnt how and when to harvest, and I could understand what's behind a finished product. This experience allowed me to grasp the journey of food, by establishing a connection with it as I directly engaged with its origin and I noticed I started to ask myself more questions whenever consuming food from farmers' markets or supermarkets (Fieldnotes, 22/11/22).

Reconnecting with food and its origin, was what moved one of Cresco's farmers to start his CSA experience: "*I used to be a cook and that is what brought me to have a closer relationship with food because I started caring more about the food I made, as I wanted it to be organic. However, obtaining organic vegetables within the food supply chain that were produced like I wanted was very difficult. That is why I started farming.*" (Tommaso, CSA 1, interview). Tommaso's active pursuit of ethical and environmentally sustainable organic food led him to establish a closer relationship with it through farming, engaging more intimately with the more-than-human elements of the food system. Food comes from nature; it is made from nature (Coff, 2006). This suggests that the best way to directly engage with food origin is through encounters and connections with the more-than-human world. Affective encounters with food through farming and gardening, which establish a connection between individuals and the more-than-human entities, become crucial in influencing knowledge about the origin of food and the conditions under which it is produced. This, in turn, fosters participants' ethical engagement in the processes of food production. As CSA member explained: "*I chose to join a CSA because I wanted to know where my food comes from. I noticed most of the time I was eating products which either came from the other side of the world or the origin was unknown. And I did not like it, because there was no connection between me, my territory, and the food produced […] The idea of a CSA is not only to get your vegetable box, but it is about knowing where those vegetables come from, is about informing the consumers about food origin." (Giulia, CSA2, interview).*

Affective encounters with food within AFNs made participants feel connected with human and non-human of the food system, fostering their attention and care for the provenance of food. As a gardener expressed "*Since I started gardening, I started selecting more the food I eat, and I became much more aware of the importance of its origin. When I worked in the office, I used to worry more about my wallet. Having a garden taught me to be careful about the food I eat and its environmental impact. Now I always try to buy things which are local or fair trade, even if they are more expensive*" (Kevin, G1, interview). Engaging differently with food via alternative food networks, brought Kevin to change his lifestyle, prompting him to care more about what's behind food and actively choosing products which are considered ethical, both for human and non-human.

Care about food origin is not reduced to knowing the place of production, but it also means caring about the impact that food production can have on both human and non-human. Indeed, care in relation to food production, emphasizes the need to care about the conditions under which food is cultivated and care for the vast array of nonhuman others implicated in the process, such as the soil

and wider environment (Jarosz 2011). Food is always conditioned by cultivation methods which can have a higher or lower environmental impact and the more food is produced according to conventional methods, the more it can negatively impact the health of ecosystems. One of the gardeners mentioned: "*What I like about gardening is that I know how I produced food; I know that I only used natural pesticides such as verdigris or neem oil.They stink but they do their job. While most of the things you buy in the supermarket, they come from who knows where, from long supply chains and most of the time they used chemical products on them*" (Daniele, G2, interview). From a caring perspective, by using natural pesticides only and by worrying about the health of a territory, participants were aware of the impact that conventional food production can have on more than human others, demonstrating concern for nature, the living organism and human beings involved in the production process.

By engaging in closer encounters with the human and non-human of the food system, participants could re-establish a connection with food. This reconnection had an impact on their level of concern and interest in understanding the origin and production conditions of the food they consumed. Consequently, these affective encounters with food sparked ethical commitments, prompting participants to be more careful about food origin and, by extension, the others of the food system.

4.3.2. Ugly but delicious

Having direct contact with food origin via AFNs also meant becoming aware of the misrepresentative aspect of some fruits and vegetables which appears aesthetically perfect without holes or other imperfections, due to the use of chemicals that remove any presence of bugs or pests on crops. This was noticeable especially when participants had to do with organically produced food which, contrary to conventional production, presents aesthetic imperfections: "*People are used to seeing perfect and glossy apples, but they are not aware of what's behind that beautiful appearance. Here [in the CSA, a.n.] you can often see that products are not perfect, and this makes you think about how they were produced*" (Umberto, CSA 2). Re-connecting with "ugly" products allowed participants to be more aware of what hides behind food production, realizing that the appearance of a product can be misleading: "*I do not care about eating an aesthetically perfect lettuce. If it's got holes or if I find an insect, to me it means it's more natural. The problem exists when you do not find any flaws on food, and why is that? Because that food was produced with who knows how many chemical products*" (Caterina, CSA 2, interview). Finding flaws on crops and engaging with non-human others when dealing with food, was a sign that food was produced ethically, meaning it was produced under organic conditions of production which do not care about improving the aesthetic condition of food. Being more aware of what hides behind "ugly" food made participants more willing to accept imperfections. For example, a CSA participant mentioned she used to instinctively throw away vegetables that maybe had some holes or bugs as she was disturbed by it "*But I do not do that anymore because I know where they come from*" (Fieldnotes, 13/12/22). The instinct to throw away food solely because of its flawed appearance depends on the conventional way of producing food which attuned people to aesthetically perfect products which often require the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers. However, engaging with AFNs allowed participants to re-attune perceptions to a more "natural" look of food, understanding that beauty is not necessarily a synonym of good.

4.3.3. Affective experience of taste

When eating food, one of the things most people care about is its taste. For some participants of this study, it was the affective experience of taste that could bring them closer to know more about food origin and conditions of production, thus prompting ethical thinking. Taste has 'emancipator powers' and holds the potential for building up different food practices (Carolan, 2011).

Tasty and ethical

During my encounters with AFNs' members, I noticed how discussion around taste were common, especially because for many the taste of a product was strictly related to its origin. When a CSA member was telling me about the quality of food produced by CSA farmers he commented: "*There is a step that people need to do to become aware, and that step is to put food in their mouth. You should have seen my friends' reactions when they tasted these products*" (Fieldnotes, 20/12/2, CSA2 member). Experiencing the taste of 'quality' products was pivotal to make people aware of what's behind food quality, thus sparking curiosity about food origin and consequentially the methods of production. This was expressed by another participant as well. Before becoming a chef and later a farmer, Tommaso did not really care about the food he was eating, but it was the experience of eating 'quality' food, thus a visceral encounter with tasty food, that sparked a change in his food consumption lifestyle: "*For years, I could not even eat vegetables, I did not like them. I guess my relationship with food changed when I experienced good food. And the quality of it depended on how the food was cultivated*". The good taste for Tommaso was related to the conditions of production and prompted him to engage with food differently. As he further commented: "*To me, farming became the entrance door to the world of food because I could understand the difference between something which tasted good or not. There is an enormous difference between organically made products and others which were pumped with water and chemical fertilizers*". Hence, farming allowed him to "re-tune" to the tastes, cares, sensations, and practices associated with the alternatives to the status quo (Carolan, 2015).

Indeed, among most of the participants, the taste of food was an important indicator of its history of production. As a gardener formulated "*the important thing is the taste of food. As the taste of a product depends on how it was produced and the processes it followed, it goes without saying that garden products taste better. The taste of a freshly picked lettuce is better, it is crunchier, it tastes like real salad. When you eat it, you discover another world*". (Andrea, G2, interview). By using word such as "better" and "real" to describe organic produced food, Andrea is implying a comparison with another type of food which is "worse" and "fake". As he later specified "*when I go to the supermarket because I need to buy other stuff, I feel a sort of repulsion towards the vegetables I find there, they are not attractive at all…The vegetables at the supermarket are fake and do not taste like anything*" (Andrea, G2, interview). Andrea's repulsion towards supermarket vegetables demonstrates how participants linked taste to methods of food production. Thus, when individuals referred to "good" or "quality" food they were not only referring to its taste, but also to the care put into production processes.

Indeed, participants in AFNs engaged with organic methods of production which involved the use of caring cultivation practices (see section 4.1.). Through affective encounters with "good" food, participants attuned to alternative tastes:

"*here [in the garden a.n.] you know how the vegetables are produced. I can feel they are more natural, and the taste is very different. The same happens when you buy from an organic farmer, you can notice zucchinis do not have the same taste, maybe one has got a bitter taste, another is sweeter, and another is spicier. And this depends on the fact they were produced organically […] The vegetables you buy in the supermarket taste like nothing and this depends on the mass industrial production*" (Daniele, G2, interview).

Being able to feel whether food had a 'natural' taste derived from the affective experience of good and diversified taste, which was linked to quality and promptly compared to the industrially produced food which resulted 'bland' as industrialization processes flatten out the tastes and experiences available to consumers (Carolan, 2015). Therefore, *feeling* the alternative (Carolan, 2014) can lead to more reflexive behaviors and lead people to care more about food origin.

Tasty and healthy

For some participants knowing about food origin and the conditions of food production, meant they were dealing not only with good and tasty food but with healthy food as well. Healthy food for participants meant it was free of chemical products and that it was high in nutritional values, meaning it was safe and nutritious. Thus, when participants cared about food origin and eating good food, they also cared about personal health. As a participant mentioned: "*To me, food needs to be healthy. I joined a CSA because I hoped to eat healthier food compared to the one in the supermarket. And by healthy, I mean I can track its origin, it is easier for me to know where my food comes from*" (Umberto, CSA 2, interview). Via a CSA membership, one can easily track the origin of food as it's possible to directly follow the processes of production by engaging directly with organic farmers. Knowing about food origin thus meant knowing that food was produced organically and locally and for these reasons it was deemed healthy. As another member expressed: "*What's important to me is that food must be healthy. And to me healthy food means it was cultivated without the use of chemicals, it means I know its origin and that it tastes good.*" (Cristina, CSA 2, interview). These comments demonstrate that for some participants organically produced food not only tasted good, but it was also healthier compared to the conventional one. Although current studies do not allow a definitive statement on the health benefits of organic food compared to conventional one, organic foods have been shown to have lower levels of toxic metabolites, including heavy metals such as cadmium, and synthetic fertilizer and pesticide residues (Vigar et al., 2019). For participants, organically produced crops were higher in nutrients, and this reflected positively on human organisms' health: "*I truly believe it is important to produce a type of food that is able to give you the right nourishment, food that is healthy for your organism and which can give you better nutritional intakes. For example, when I eat meat, I care about eating good meat, and I care about knowing where it comes from. It's important to know how food got to your table and how much it can be healthy for you*" (Elia, CSA 1, interview). Feeling that organic food is more nutritious moved participants to be careful about its origin, selecting only 'good' food.

Nevertheless, caring about eating healthy food which came from organic sources, was deemed important not only for human's health but for non-human others as well. This was demonstrated especially by a gardener who commented: "*From a health point of view, avoiding the use of chemicals means you avoid inserting in your body things which are not healthy. So, when I eat food, I am careful in choosing quality food I know the origin of. Moreover, if you eat vegetables with chemicals on them, it means you hurt the soil in the first place*." (Andrea, G2, interview). For Andrea, the origin of a product was part and parcel with ethical food consumption, as eating conventionally produced food was considered unhealthy not only for the self but for non-human others as well. An attentive care for the self thus was not a symptom of selfishness, as caring for the self was also transported to care towards non-human others. By practicing self-care, one is always also properly caring for others because the relationship and responsibility to others is the central ethic of self-care (Jarosz, 2011).

Caring about soil's health, and consequentially about healthy food for humans, was also expressed by farmer Tommaso who wondered: "*What is it that really nourishes the soil? Is it the amount of food we produce or the nutritional values? We need to nourish our bodies with food which comes from healthy soil. Eating a beautiful apple that tastes like water is useless*" (Tommaso, CSA 1, interview). What Tommaso is rhetorically wondering is whether we should place more importance on quantity over quality. Conventional methods of food production are quantity-oriented, and thanks to the combination of artificial fertilizers, genetically modified food and chemical pesticides, industrial farmers can intensively produce crops and guarantee unprecedented yield (de la Bellacasa, 2017). However, this is at the expense of the nutrients in the soils, which are exploited and worn out. For participants, this consequentially meant that industrially produced crops could not compete with organic crops in terms of nutrients and quality, as conventional crops come from unnourished soils, are less nutritious and of inferior quality. The concept of healthy and nutritious was thus linked mainly to organically produced food: "*When I say healthy food, I mean something which is closer to my idea of nature, something which respects nature. I choose organic food because of that, and because it does not have chemical substances that are bad for your health and for the environment*" (Caterina, CSA 2, interview). Through the affective experience of eating "good" food, namely, food that had more nutritional values, participants felt they could nourish and nurture both themselves and more-than-human others. Being aware of the interconnectedness of the world, meaning being aware that negatively impacting soils' health means negatively impacting humans' health, means perceiving health as something holistic, a type of health which relates to a thriving and sustainable ecosystem (Dowler et al., 2009). Care about food origin thus means caring about the health of the MTH other as well, as healthy food is nutritious both for human and non-humans.

4.4. Community care

Care for the human community emerged as a prominent caring practice observed in the data. In the preceding paragraphs, I have discussed the ethical engagements arising from more-than-human caring practices and human non-human encounters. In this section, I will mainly focus on care practices and affective encounters among humans and how these foster ethical engagements.

When I asked participants what community meant for them, I identified as a common denominator a feeling of cooperation and solidarity, namely a way to take care of each other. Indeed, through AFNs like urban gardens or CSAs, participants built the foundations for a community, in which individuals shared common values and cared about the needs of others, both human and non-human. Care is found in relationships and from an ethic of care perspective, these relations involve affective dimensions that shape our attitudes and ethical engagements (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

All these relations affected the way people moved for the well-being of others as through these relations they recognized the inevitability of dependence and interdependence. This inherent condition of interdependency engenders ways to practice care for the common well-being, which encompasses human and non-human well-being. In the examined AFNs, these ways of practice care were expressed through giving support to the community of participants by sharing workloads and emotional tolls, sharing food or through sharing knowledge and values with others. This last form of sharing is here seen as a way to take care of community members' minds by moving, influencing, affecting other humans' ethical awareness within food production and consumption as well as the environment.

Thus, as this section will demonstrate, being part of a community of gardeners or being part of a CSA, is not just a matter of having common interests, but it is also a space in which people can practice care for the common well-being, can affect each other and prompt ethical thinking and actions aimed at protecting humans, food and the environment.

4.4.1. Sharing support

One of the most noticeable forms of community care was giving support to community members. Indeed, care is seen as the relational practice of giving which involves attentiveness, sensitivity, and responding to needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility (Friedman, 2008). This was especially expressed in the two CSA schemes, in which members and farmers mutually supported each other by giving help and taking responsibility for the community well-being. In a CSA, members share the risks (and benefits) of production, committing themselves to exchange farm products with a regular membership fee throughout the season, accepting to deal with any production failure. In return farmers are responsible of feeding and taking care of members by providing fresh and organic food. Thus, in an environment like the one of CSA, individuals are embedded in a condition of interdependency in which mutual support becomes crucial for community well-being.

A form of community care involved supporting others through sharing the workload. This was true especially for the CSA *Cresco*, in which many volunteered to help the two farmers harvest products or do other field works. As one of the farmers commented: "*I believe one of the coolest things about the CSA is that everybody can play their part. We were not able to engage with each member, as some people just take the box and leave. But here most of the members help a lot, they help to harvest each Wednesday. We are lucky to have that, otherwise, we will be still harvesting at this very moment (laughing)*" (Alessio, CSA 1, interview). So, caring for the community was here expressed by the support members gave to CSA farmers, which was crucial for Cresco's harvesting moments. Moreover, members were very happy to help, as a member shared: "*I really like helping them to*

harvest and do other activities in the field. I like having an active role for the community, I like feeling useful and it's a thing I want to teach to my children." (Alessia, CSA 1, interview). Being actively involved in the community through sharing workload was a form of care and crucial to support the community.

Moreover, being able to count on members' cooperation was also important to share the emotional tolls coming from non-steady food production. CSA farmers, cooperate not only with people but with nature as well, as they focus on growing food organically avoiding anything that might disturb the MTH's balance. Thus, not competing with nature like conventional agriculture does with the use of chemicals pesticides or fertilizers, means dealing with unstable food production. During one of our conversations, Tommaso shared how sometimes he feels wrong in being the only organic producer among many other conventional farmers in the Valley, as he has to deal with more difficulties: "*Sometimes I feel out of this world by going against the conventional norm, and I am afraid I cannot pay the bills. Our wages are very low as in a CSA the aim is not to produce gain, but rather not exceed the budget. And keep in mind that half of the budget comprises our wages, as we do not use any money for big tractors or fertilizers. However, I do not feel alone here, and I have Alessio and all the other members helping out, we could not do that without the community. Being productive is important, and we always worry about that, but it means nothing without the community*" (Fieldnotes, 5/12/22, Tommaso, CSA1). The community, beside sharing the costs of food production, is also involved in coordinating activities aimed at raising money for the CSA: "*Last year we decided to share the activities within the community, so now we have a group which deals with media and communication to attract more members, and another which plans educational activities with school children. Many kids came to do activities in our fields, and besides the aspect of teaching, the economical aspect has been crucial because part of our expenses have been covered by that."* (Luca, CSA 1 member, interview). Having a supportive community is important because besides contributing economically to production costs, it also shares the emotional toll of going against the trend of conventional food production and all the difficulties that may arise from that: "*With a community, you do not feel alone in your world. The social aspect of the community is crucial, both to keep the project alive and to share difficulties. Cresco does not belong to us farmers only, it belongs to each member, and everybody helps*" (Alessio, CSA 1).

To further support the community, Cresco decided to implement the "auction shares", to help members and encourage more people to join the scheme. Indeed, the model of CSA is often criticized for reproducing social hierarchies and exclusions, as members are predominantly white and well-educated members of the middle-class who possess above average economic and cultural capital (Farmer et al., 2014). However, Cresco strived to go against this trend: "*This year we decided to implement the auction shares, namely everybody chooses the amount of his/her share, so someone can decide to share more or less based on their income. We are trying to build mechanisms to include more social strata, which are not necessarily middle-class people. This year nobody offered less, maybe I will share less (laughing)* [CSA farmers share the same quota as members, a.n.]" (Tommaso, CSA 1, interview). The "auction share" is a commonly used instrument in CSAs. At the beginning of each year the community makes an estimate of the budget which should cover all the productions costs, which include the farmers' wages, tools and seeds. Each member then offers the amount of the share he or she is willing to give, which can be more or less than the predetermined amount. The

auction closes when the amount needed for the budget has been reached. In this way people can help each other in the community and allow low-income families to buy a fresh vegetable box as well. Supporting a CSA, thus means actively contributing to its survival and facing difficulties together by taking care of the community both financially and emotionally.

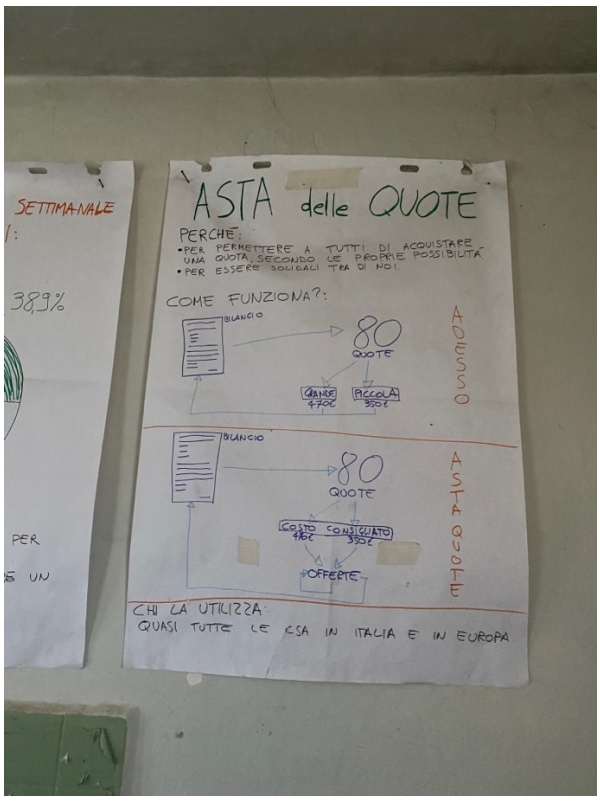


Figure 15. Cresco's Auction Shares. "Why? To allow everyone to have a share according to their capabilities; to show solidarity among each other"; 7/12/22, Personal Drive

Although a community shares common interests, it's the different talents and skills of the members that help the community succeed. For example, one of the members of *Tavola Sociale* held concerts to raise money and attract other people to join the CSA: "*One of the things I like here is that I know nothing about growing food and I do not like getting my hands dirty. But seeing people working so hard, makes me want to help them. I won't' help them hoeing, but I play the violin and I can hold concerts with my quartet. I recruited many members with that (laughing). Or for example, others are good at dealing with paperwork, others are good at helping at the farms. So, the important thing about a community is that everybody has got a talent which is useful for everybody.*" (CSA 2 member interview). Support and cooperation within a community are possible as everyone can help and has got something to offer for the common well-being.

Sharing support and solidarity was also true for the community of urban gardeners: "*The cool thing about a community is that it's a group of people which is very supportive to each other. Many gardeners help each other out, so for example, if a gardener goes on holiday, another takes care of the garden for him or her*" (Daniele, G2). As another commented: *what I like about the community here is that if I have doubts about something I can ask for help or if I have a cucumber and you have zucchini, we can exchange that. And it's a nice feeling… I mean I know my garden's neighbour more than my apartment's one, and I have been living in Turin for 15 years*. (G2 member). Through their embodied labor of care for food, gardeners developed a sense of community and established

relationships rooted in care. This sense of community would also increase through the engagement in educational and social activities. Indeed, Orti Generali was committed to have a supportive community and engaged with gardeners for educational activities or social events: "*Stefano, Matteo and the others (founders of Orti Generali, a.n.) they come up with a lot of activities and they always include the community. I know one of the gardeners here holds yoga lessons sometimes. Or every year they held a Grand Gala which is like a fundraising event for gardeners. You can join by paying a small amount to attend the event, you dress up in an elegant way and you need to make dishes using your garden's vegetables and you can win a prize. And after that there is a fundraising auction to support the project activities.*" (Andrea, G2, interview). Engaging in activities with the gardeners became not only a financial opportunity, but a chance to create a sense of community. In return, gardeners benefitted from their own garden plot's production, and they also feel involved in a supportive community in which each participant cooperates to keep the project alive.

When sharing support participants demonstrated solidarity and took care of each other through financial and emotional support, such as the CSA case, and through exchanging skills and putting individual talents at the community's disposal.

(**Figure 16.** Gardener showing another gardener how to correctly plant seeds, 29/11/22)

4.4.2. Sharing food

Within the under examined AFNs, the aspect of sharing food had to do with sharing surplus food and fresh vegetables among members of the community, the food bank, solidarity canteens and to other people more in need of help.

Many gardeners were surprised by the high productivity of their gardens and usually found themselves with too many products, so they happened to share surplus produce with other community members: "*my garden is very generous, and I usually gift some crops to other gardeners or friends because I do not want to waste them*" (Marco, G2). Participants cared about their crops and the avoidance of waste was motivated by the recognition of the value of the food itself. Such modes of valuing encouraged participants to share food with others, demonstrating care both for non-human

(the food produced) and human others. Indeed, delicate and perishable items such as fresh vegetables required urgent exchange and therefore prompted ways to take care of it by devolving food to human others. As result, thanks to the high productivity of gardens, food aid projects were started: "*Sometimes in springtime or summertime the communal garden produces too much, so we started to give food to some projects that deal with food security. Other times we share it among each other, but the garden produces so much sometimes we do not know where to put it"* (Alberto, G2). This was true for Bunker Garden as well, which started to donate food in the same way: "*we decided to use the surplus products of the communal garden for projects that combat food emergency, or we sustain projects of social cooking, anyways projects that use food as mean to foster food aid"* (Simone, G1). Thus, care for food production created ethical commitments that turned food from surplus to aid. Surplus food represented a way in which the grower's care about the materiality of food could prompt ethical engagements aimed at caring about the well-being of other humans.

Food aid was also one of the pillars of both CSAs, which decided to devolve excess food or part of the shares to local low-income families. As Tommaso explained: "*we devolve two shares which are paid by our members to a nearby organization which gives food to those in need, especially fresh and healthy vegetables which they rarely eat*" (Tommaso, CSA 1, interview). Once again, caring for healthy and fresh food was closely and positively connected to caring for other humans. This was expressed by another CSA member who commented: "*One of the reasons I chose to join Tavola Sociale is because I can help other people. I know that part of the harvest goes to people more in need, so I like that we can provide healthy food not only to members but to others as well*" (Caterina, CSA 2, interview). Valuing and caring about "healthy" food, namely organically produced food, prompted participants to share it with other humans showing sensibility and concern for their well-being.

4.4.3. Sharing knowledge and values

When participants used knowledge in conjunction, they were taking care of each other and contributing to the well-being of the community by inspiring and educating people to be more aware of food production and consumption and resource management issues. To care is the capacity to affect and be affected, thus being moved by other bodies (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Being in a community resulted in being affected by other people's thoughts, values, and knowledge which consequentially elicited action, as bodies make a difference to one another and in so doing they also make each other act differently (Brice, 2014). For example, being a CSA member does not mean solely being in a group of people that share the cost of food production via shares, but as a member explained: "A *CSA is a way to communicate a message, a way to establish cornerstones for everybody. Behind a box of fresh vegetables, there is much more. What I love about the CSA is that we share the same values, and we actively take a stand on certain issues. For example, we care about eating healthy food, we want to know how it is produced and where it comes from. I like the work Alessio and Tommaso [CSA 1 farmers, a.n.] are doing, because it's nice when you work for something you believe in, and you want to share it with as many people as possible" (Elia, CSA 1).* Sharing knowledge and values with other community members meant taking care of their awareness of certain issues, nurturing and educating them in thinking more ethically about food. From a care perspective, individuals are not individual units, as they are found in an environment of interdependencies. As result, ethical thinking and actions can be influenced by the relationships and interactions with other individuals. Indeed,

interacting with members in the community had the capacity to affect and inspire participants to be more aware and reflect on both agricultural and environmental issues.

A member commented that he was led to reflect on the unethical dynamics of conventional agriculture thanks to his CSA farmer: "*Roberto (CSA 2 farmers, a.n.) makes me aware of things I did not know. For example, a high percentage of agricultural fields in the world are intended to make food solely for animals. And you need to feed an animal at least for a year and a half, so imagine how much food that animal would need. So, we are using a lot of spaces in which we could make healthy food for people instead*. (Alessandro, CSA 2). Taking care of community members' ethical awareness was also demonstrated by the CSA *Tavola Sociale*, which beside growing and distributing food, also organized cultural events for the purpose of engaging the community and raise awareness on food: "*I feel like being in a CSA teaches you to be more sensitive to certain issues. For example, at the beginning of this year, the CSA organized a meeting with a doctor, and she gave a speech about the importance of eating healthy food, which is fresh and nutritious. So even if you are not yet aware of certain issues, being in this space allows you to understand many things*". As another CSA member commented: "*Being in a CSA is very important because we can work together to create food quality, we can educate people and create knowledge for a more sustainable future*" (Alessia, CSA 1). When talking about fresh, nutritious and quality food, CSAs' participants were referring to organically produced food. Being affected by community values meant learning about the importance of dealing with organically produced food, becoming aware of a way to act "for a more sustainable future". Thus, care of the community meant affecting people with specific values that have to do with an alternative way of dealing with food, which is more ethical and conscious.

Being affected by community members values, could also inspire participants to act more responsibly towards the environment. A participant shared how joining a garden resulted in developing a greater environmental consciousness: "*A thing that I learned when I started gardening here was becoming aware of not exploiting our natural resources. I think that being part of a community like this, where you need to follow specific rules [such as avoiding the use of chemical pesticides or fertilizers, a.n] can teach you to be more careful towards the environment and you become more sensitive to certain issues*" (Daniele, G2, interview). Finding oneself in a community which holds specific values, such as caring about MTH resources, can raise awareness and mobilize people towards environmental goals: "*What I like about gardening is that I know I am actively doing something and that my actions can have a positive impact on soil and biodiversity. And my actions can be positive for other people as well, in terms of sharing positive knowledge. We are a small group, but I learned a lot here.*" (Kevin, G1, interview). Sensitivity to differences in others can proliferate capacities to act differently and being affected produces more varied capacities for action (Brice, 2014).

Moreover, participants tended to share insights and values, especially in moments of conviviality, namely when participants shared meals together. A variety of definitions of conviviality have been suggested, but here conviviality is seen as an atmosphere and an affect, in which social dimensions enmesh with material, sensory and spatial ones (Wise and Velayutham 2014, 425). The affective experience of sharing food prompted discussions about food and participants were much more drawn to talk and share knowledge during meals (Fieldnotes, 5/12/22). So, moments of conviviality not only have turned out to be the most fruitful moments to interview participants, but they also served people a way to learn to think differently about food. This was demonstrated especially by CSA *Cresco,*

which decided to hold a lunch with the members each Wednesday after the communal harvest: "*every Wednesday we have lunch all together after we harvested, and Tommaso cooks food for us and he teaches us things, especially about the downsides of conventional agriculture. Or like the other day a member brought a fair-trade chocolate bar, and this started a discussion on the ethical production of chocolate.*" Thus, affective encounters with food during convivial moments were not only a moment to share food together, but they were effective to share knowledge and to learn more about ethical issues around food as well. Participants in communities were affected by each other's thoughts, values and knowledge and they learned to think differently about food and its ethical and environmental impact.

5. Discussion

Responding to the call by Artmann et al. (2020) to further explore the dimensionality of human nature connection in Alternative Food Networks, with this research my aim was to explore the more-than-human reconnection that happens within the selected AFNs and its ethical implications. Building from an Ethic of care theory (Dowler et al 2009, Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010, 2017, Tronto 1998) and affect (Carolan 2011, 2015; Singh 2016) from a more-than-human perspective, I tried to understand how care practices and affective encounters with the more-than-human influenced participants' ethical engagement in their relationships with food consumption and production.

By focusing on the interactions and relationships between humans and the non-human entities involved in AFNs, such as plants, animals, and ecosystems, I aimed to shed light on the ways in which these encounters shape people's attitudes, values, and behaviours towards food and the environment. The exploration of care practices and affective encounters allowed me to uncover the connections and ethical responsibilities that individuals experienced in their engagement with the MTH world.

The findings of this research contribute to our understanding of how Alternative Food Networks can foster a sense of interconnectedness with the more-than-human and spark ethical engagements. As argued by Beacham (2018) AFNs with their attempts to organise food production differently, can enable us to 'share meaning and find ways of being together in the world'. By recognizing and valuing the complex web of relationships between humans and the more-than-human, we can develop more sustainable approaches to food production and consumption.

I start this chapter by summarizing the key findings of the research and putting them in perspective by using existing theories and literature on the topic. I will touch upon the implications of this research for debates around AFNs and I will conclude by reflecting on the theories used.

5.1. Key findings

The primary objective of this research was to answer the main research question:

How do care practices and affective encounters with the more-than-human other foster ethical engagements among AFNs' participants?

Through the lens of a more-than-human ethic of care, I identified three main care practices and I tried to shed light on the morality behind those practices.

Initially, I explored motivations that led individuals to join AFNs and engage in ethical practices. This helped me to uncover and introduce both affects and care practices, revealing the importance of care as ethical driving force. However, it is worth noting that care did not always precede ethical engagements, as participants sometimes were moved by an internal drive independent of care or affect. While care practices and affective encounters can shape and reinforce ethical behaviors - as I will show later - the relationship between them and ethical engagements is complex, with multiple directions and varied causality. Affective encounters and care may influence behaviors and foster ethical engagements, but they can also simply act as facilitators or enhancers of preexisting attitudes.

In "Soil care" I showed how an affective encounter with soil played a pivotal role in shaping participants' understanding of the interconnected relationship between food, people and the environment. By directly engaging with the soil and by taking care of it, they gained a firsthand appreciation for its vitality and the essential role it plays in supporting plant growth and a sustainable food system. Participants felt protective of their soil, treating it with the commitment, concern and empathy. They felt affectively involved in its processes and this affective encounter led to the realization of the detrimental effect of industrial agriculture at expense of long-term soil health. This confirms Puig de la Bellacasa's finding (2017): what soil is thought to be affects the ways in which it is cared for, and vice versa, modes of care have effects in what soils become (2017). Indeed, participants valued the vitality of soils to produce food which was healthy both for human and non-human and acted to preserved it with care by nourishing it and respecting its needs. Through close encounters with soil, participants were affected in their care practices. This further supports Singh's claim (2017) that affect can spur sensibility and concern for the well-being of others with whom we are relationally entangled. Indeed, participants became more sensitive to the environmental consequences associated with the use of chemical inputs, monoculture farming, and soil degradation.

Through close encounters with soil and taking care of its vitality, participants recognized how the negligence towards soil- enacted by a production-oriented agriculture- affect both humans and non-humans. Hence, participants felt committed to act with care by adopting organic cultivation methods, being mindful of biodiversity, and following seasonality. I found this last aspect of following crop seasonality particularly interesting because it demonstrated how encounters with soils and other elements of the more-than-human world affected participants' perception of time, which diverged from the production-centered temporalities. Embracing the cycles of the more-than-human world by adhering to crop seasonality not only fostered human-soil relations but also established an attunement with the natural cycles of the broader ecosystem. This aligns with Puig de la Bellacasa's findings on how engaging with soil's temporalities in a caring manner disrupts dominant modes of temporal control in the more-than-human world (de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 172).

This disruption can be seen as an ethical engagement that acknowledges soils and other resources as entities with their own slower cycles that need protection, rather than solely serving the productive pace of humans. As Tronto (1990) argued the moral dimension of caring is to take seriously responsibility and meet the other's need. Participants met the others' entities needs driving them to

act ethically and distance themselves from the industrial-oriented model of agriculture by embracing alternative practices that prioritize the health of the soil, natural cycles, biodiversity, and the long-term sustainability of food production. This further confirms Dowler et al's (2009) finding that both producers and consumers in AFNs are aware of the needs of others, human and non-human, and are prepared to act on this awareness, in order to repair and sustain theirs and others' life-worlds.

However, participants' recognition of the interdependency with the more-than-human did not always produce sensibilities to others. As I showed in section 4.2.3, care practices also turned into "neglect practices" especially when non-humans did not contribute to the needs of human beings. Affective encounters with weeds, slugs and other insects did not produce care or sensitivity and on the contrary their practices were aimed at killing rather than tending. Indeed participants, in order protect their crops turned to violence orienting care towards the needs of humans only and disregarding other beings. This confirms Pitt's argument (2018) that individuals relate to nonhumans in complex ways and do not unequivocally care as a result of close encounters. It highlights that care for non-human entities can be driven by instrumentality, which prioritizes human needs. Therefore, when exploring the ethical sensibilities arising from affective encounters with the more-than-human, it is crucial to consider who benefits from these care practices and whether they prioritize human goals. These findings do not necessarily impose limits on the ethical engagements resulting from encounters with non-human beings. However, they emphasize the need for awareness regarding the selectiveness and potential biases in care practices. This is in line with Pitt's call (2018) for a nuanced understanding of the complexities and biases inherent in the human-nonhuman relationships.

In "Care about food origin" I further explored the affective encounters participants had specifically with food, by either growing it in urban gardens or engaging with it through a CSA. I noticed how these encounters have shaped their interest in understanding where food products come from and the conditions in which they were produced. Participant's embodied encounter with food, inspired ethical engagements aimed at critically questioning the origin of products before consuming them, leading individuals to actively seek out locally and organically produced food. This confirms Carolan's finding (2011): given the embodied nature of food, whether eaten, grown or husbanded, different practices and different ways of 'being with food' provide the space for different food relationalities that then give rise to possible, transformative political openings.
It is worth noting that some participants already displayed curiosity about the origin of food even before engaging in embodied encounters with it. This indicates that in a way they were already open to being affected by these encounters. Consequently, the relationship between care, affect, and ethical engagement can be characterized by ambivalence. The affective encounters with food are also influenced by the individual's experience with such encounters. Care practices and affective experiences can foster ethical engagements, but individuals' pre-existing attitudes and beliefs also play a role in how they perceive and respond to these encounters. This is in line with Coulson (2016) who argues "while participation in tactile activities can foster ethical sensibilities, gardeners have to be curious to being open to such value encounters, and therefore, this is not inevitable". However, this argument is not to dismiss the role of care and affect in motivating ethical engagements. On the contrary, care and affect play a role in reinforcing individuals' ethical commitments.

Following the 'ethics of care' framework, I further noticed how care about the origin of food also reflected a sense of ethical responsibility towards the environmental impact of food production, as

learning about food origin was also related to understanding the environmental consequences of different production methods. Through their care about food origin, participants demonstrated awareness of the interdependency of all beings as they recognized the importance of consuming and producing food that was not only beneficial for human health but also mindful of the well-being of non-human beings. This is line with Turner's finding (2018) that recognition of the relational entanglements of humans and more-than-humans, particularly through our visceral encounters with food, may be able to encourage ethical ecological thinking and practices that lay the foundations for more sustainable lifestyles. These ethical practices were expressed by the participants' engagement aimed at consuming food differently, avoiding a type of food which is connected to industrial food production and dealing with food which is produced locally and organically.

These ethical practices were also influenced by the sensory experience of taste. I discovered that how participants experienced the taste of a product played a significant role in shaping their care about food origin. Taste has 'emancipator powers' and holds the potential for building up different food practices (Carolan, 2011). When participant had a positive taste experience, it could spark curiosity and interest in understanding its origin. Participants associated good taste with caring methods of production and believed that the quality and care put into the production process were reflected in the taste of the food. So, the concept of "good" food extended beyond its taste and encompassed the values and practices associated with its production, such as organic farming methods. Indeed, participants tended to link high-level usage of pesticides and herbicides with poor taste. Through the sensory and affective experience of positive taste participants were brought to question the industrial agricultural system and acted in order to avoid poor tasting food. This confirms Carolan's findings how bodily pleasures of interconnectedness with natural processes can nurture pro-sustainability relationships and thinking, because knowledge gained through sensory experience of soil, plants and food is expected to stimulate political epiphanies (2011). Experiencing "alternative" tastes, ones that deviate from conventional flavors, affected participants' understanding and knowledge of food and its environmental impact. It inspired people to seek out alternative food practices and engage in more sustainable and ethical forms of consumption. This confirms Carolan's finding that alternative food networks can "re-tune" people to the tastes, cares, sensations, and practices associated with the alternatives to the status quo (Carolan, 2015). Therefore, *feeling* the alternative (Carolan, 2015) can lead to more reflexive behaviours and lead people to care more about food origin and the conditions of production.

Reflexive behaviours also emerged through encounters between humans and taking care of the community of humans. Community is a space in which people can practice care for the common well-being, can affect each other and prompt ethical thinking and actions aimed at protecting humans, food and the environment. The involvement of people in CSA or urban gardens creates a network of mutual support, knowledge exchange, social connection, and environmental impact. Through their embodied labor of care for food, gardeners developed a sense of community and established relationships rooted in care. This is in line with Dowler at al (2009) finding that community and shared knowledge are built by becoming involved in growing food or otherwise helping out, discussing problems or talking to someone about their food. Participants were affected by these relationships as sharing knowledge and values prompted them to be more aware and reflect on both agricultural and environmental issues. Indeed, the capacity to affect and be affected becomes manifest through particular encounters, meaning meeting with someone or with something (Stewart, 2007). Through care for the community,

participants are affected and moved by encounters with other humans, and this strengthen their ethical commitments. This confirms Coulson (2016) who argues that to care is to be moved (in both positive and negative ways) and involves encounters that can strengthen or reduce a subject's capacity to act or think. Hence, ethical thinking is stimulated by the capacity of various forceful 'things', organic and inorganic, human and nonhuman, to move and be moved by others (Coulson, 2016).

5.2. Contribution to literature

The aim of this thesis was to contribute to research around Alternative Food Networks by turning to a more-than human perspective to explore the dimensionality of more-than-human reconnection and to understand how AFNs might contribute to a different way of thinking about food. This way acknowledges that food cannot be viewed in isolation but should be understood within a broader context that recognizes the interdependencies between humans and non-human entities.

Generally, research around AFN risks reducing the focus to a human-centered perspective- namely focusing on people and the structures they created- and gives little attention to the potential Alternative Food Networks have in reconnecting with the more-than human-dimension (Beacham, 2016). Hence, the purpose was to move beyond conventional analysis of AFNs to demonstrate the ethical potential these networks have in recognizing the human-non-human interconnection and how they can promote care "to maintain, continue, and repair the world so that *all* can live in it as well as possible" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). The more-than-human reconnection can consequentially prompt ethical engagements in relation to food. Turning the attention to a more-than-human life sustaining web, the contribution of my thesis is in line with authors such as Dowler et al (2009), Beacham (2018) and Hassink et al. (2020) They argued that AFNs have the potential for a more-than-human reconnection, moving away from an attitude of control towards the natural and social environment, and 'enabling us to share meaning and find ways of being together in the world' (Hassink et al., 2020; Beacham, 2018).

Becoming an active participant of a CSA or an urban garden through allowing oneself to be affected by the processes that happen all around fostered a growing connection with both humans and non-humans. This result contributes to research around AFNs as its shows the potential these spaces have in allowing encounters with other entities and how these can enable a change in the ways we interact with food. Building upon Singh's argument (2017) that "Indigenous perspectives about the commons can foster a stance of interdependence and care for the more-than-human world", AFNs similarly embody this principle and they can foster a more-than-human care. This further contributes to Beacham's finding (2018) of how AFNs with their attempts to organise food production differently, can point towards different, hopeful ways of mattering and existing within the more-than-human world.

Carefully reconnecting with the more-than-human in Alternative Food Networks involves recognizing that through caring practices, individuals can establish connections with both human and non-human entities. It entails understanding the interconnectedness of all beings and the potential for nurturing relationships beyond the human realm. By nurturing the health of soils, tending to plants, food, and supporting the community, participants developed a firsthand appreciation of the vitality and interconnectedness of the world and acted to preserve it. When we engage in attentive

relationships, we are more inclined to care about and for others. Through caring practices, participants felt responsible to contribute to the well-being of the earth (Tronto, 1998). This contributes to Dowler et al (2009) who also argued how care-full relationships between consumers, producers and other actors in the food system, built over time through practice, are critical to processes of reconnection which are crucial for developing an ecologically sustainable system of food production. Indeed, food systems before being places of commodification and economic transactions, are a web of connectedness, and of interrelated relationships between society and environment (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017).

To support these arguments, I explored the more-than-human reconnection by identifying care practices and affective encounters that happen within Urban Gardens and Community Supported Agriculture. To do this, my research was backed by an Ethics of Care theory, which offered me a framework for thinking through more-than-human relationships. So, unlike other moral theories, it gives us the opportunity to enrich our interdependencies and to expand the act of care to the non-human world as well (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Using an ethics of care framework allowed me to look at reality as one of relations and it helped me to understand the interdependencies with the more-than-human and its ethical implications.
Moreover, feminist materialist approaches to care emphasise the importance of attending to the transformations that occur at emotional, visceral, affective, and embodied levels –and see these as important ethical and political openings for rethinking our relationship with food (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Hence, to further make sense of this reconnection and its implication, I engaged with the affective dimension of care. Turning the attention to how participants were affected by the more-than-human other, allowed me to see how practices of care forced and reinforced affective relations, moving people to be open to the world and to the possibility of being transformed through this engagement with the material world (Singh, 2017). Thinking with affect also allowed me to look at the affective dimension of food consumption, which is seen as a deeply visceral process (Carolan, 2014). Indeed, as Carolan (2015) highlights, the affective turn in agri-food studies, highlights the significance of affect, emotion, and sensory experiences in shaping our attitudes, behaviours, and decisions related to food. Through visceral food encounters, bodies can come to feel differently about the world (Carolan, 2015).

However, it remains to be seen to what extent care practices and affect can foster ethical engagements, thus transforming the way we relate to food. Noticing that AFNs' participants also engaged with "neglect" practices rather than care practices, contributes to challenge the proposition that connecting with nature through direct encounters with nonhumans promotes ethical regard for them (Pitt, 2018). Engaging with care also means having to do with its ambivalences. This is in line with Puig de la Bellacasa invite to also think with the conflicting dimension of care with questions such as "For whom?" "Who cares?" "What for?" "Why do 'we' care?" and mostly "How to care?" (2017). Different perspectives may prioritize certain entities or relationships, leading to conflicts over how care should be enacted. The dimension of care does not only include good attitudes, and thinking with care should connect caring with awareness of oppression (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).
Moreover, while care practices and affective encounters have the potential to foster ethical sensibilities, is it worth noticing that individuals' pre-existing attitudes, curiosity, and openness also influence their perceptions and responses to these encounters. Recognizing the interplay between

these factors and the ambivalence of the power of care, is important to have a nuanced understanding of the dynamics involved in ethical engagements with food production and consumption.

5.3. Theoretical reflection

Exploring the intersection of the ethics of care and affect to analyze the reconnection between humans and the more-than-human in Alternative Food Networks proved to be both fascinating and challenging. The concept of care offered a valuable lens through which to examine novel ways of relating to each other. However, translating these theoretical ideas into concrete examples was an intricate process. It required delving into the realm of the intangible, trying to comprehend the often-invisible processes of becoming affected. Moreover, exploring care and affects cannot ignore subjectivity and bias in interpreting and evaluating them. While an ethics of care framework offers objective guiding principles and values that can be applied to evaluate care practices, I noticed that interpreting and applying this framework is subjective and this may introduce biases into the data analysis process.

While using this framework was challenging, I also discovered that navigating with care and affect allowed for the explore new dimensions and this expanded my understanding of the interconnectedness of the world. It enabled me to recognize the intricate web of relationships that exist beyond what is immediate visible, meaning I could observe relationships and actions with a different and more careful approach, and I learnt to give meaning to what I observed.

I understood that we usually give care practices for granted and that they have an untapped potential: if care practices are not carefully attended to, there is a risk that they will be eroded. (Mol et al., 2010) This exploration of care and affect in the context of AFNs provided valuable insights into the complexities of human-nonhuman relationships and their ethical potential. This enriched my understanding of the dynamics at play within AFNs and allowed me to appreciate the fact we live in an environment of interdependencies, and that practices of care for the more-than-human are increasingly needed.

5.4. Methodological reflection

Over the course of six weeks of fieldwork I kept track of my activities through field notes, made pictures and participated in the day-to-day interactions and activities at gardens and CSAs. While I feel content with the process, there are things I would have liked to have done if I had more time. Not all CSAs and urban gardens' members were willing or able to schedule an interview, especially due to the fact it was the winter season. It is during this time that gardens and farms typically experience a decrease in productivity and activity, and members often postpone their activities until springtime. However, I managed to interview a variety of members, with different points of view, motivations, experiences and knowledge.

Due to the seasons, I also got to fewer chances to experience the field and encounters with non-humans, as there were fewer insects, plants and animals to be spotted in winter season. Moreover, the season influenced the activities in gardens and fields which were mainly related to cleaning up and prepare the field for the more productive season in springtime. Some days were spent on odd-jobs, like building growing benches, removing old plants, cleaning up. I feel that because of this, my thesis lacks some first-hand experience. While the slow-paced work of the early wintery season gave me space to talk to people, I suspect results would have been different in spring, when the members are working more with the plants, and insects are around flowers and vegetables. Nonetheless, I am content with the interviews I conducted and the practices I observed as my participants were very willing to tell about their experiences and participate in my study. The interviews were very helpful in understanding participants' ideas and approaches, and at times to confirm what I had previously observed. With the interviews I would have like to dive deeper into affective experiences. However, this was challenging to achieve within the limited timeframe and due to the need to establish the necessary level of trust and comfort to explore deeper feelings.

6.Conclusion

This research was driven by the main research question: How do affective encounters and care practices with the more-than-human other foster ethical engagements among AFNs' participants?

To answer, I tried to highlight the significance of care practices and affective encounters in promoting ethical engagements. By examining the relationships between humans and the more-than-human world in AFNs, specifically focusing on soil care, care about food origin and care for the community, I demonstrated how these encounters shape participants' understanding, sensibilities, and ethical commitments for what regards our relationship with food and the environment. This happened through reconnecting with the more-than-human, recognizing the intricate web of relationships all entities live in. Through reconnecting, people encountered non-human others, and this affected their sensibilities and changed their behaviors. These affective encounters played a pivotal role in deepening participants care practices fostering a sense of ethical responsibility towards the MTH world. Through direct engagement with the soil, participants have developed empathy and a commitment to its vitality. Affective encounters with food have prompted critical reflections on its origin and production conditions, leading participants to look for local and organic food. Engaging with the community of humans strengthened relationship rooted in care and support, sparking awareness on environmental and agricultural issues.

At the same time, care practices and affective encounters present ambivalences. Firstly, care might be selective and be moved by power dynamics that primarily benefit human needs. This raises questions regarding the extent to which care truly promotes ethical engagements and to what extent humans are willing to let go of their dominance. Secondly, the effectiveness of care and the degree to which people are affected, depends on the willingness and openness to be affected and be changed

by MTH encounters. These ambivalences surrounding care practices and affective encounters underscore the need for further research and reflection.

To conclude, the worth of these AFNs goes beyond what may seem obvious. It is not just healthy food, or biodiversity, or social value. In essence, they contribute to new ways of enacting our relations to the world around us, and how we become different humans through them. They are growing and cultivating new ways of relating to each other. The results show that caring practices contribute to growing feelings of connection and appreciation towards non-humans. Through actively participating in AFNs, participants become relationally entangled within a more-than-human community. This happens through processes of being affected and moved by non-humans, which invites us to recognize the importance of non-human others and their contributions to spark ethical commitments for what regards our relationship with food and the environment. Members of *Cresco, Tavola Sociale, Bunker* and *Orti Generali* contributed to hopeful ways of mattering and existing within the more-than-human world, engaging in the creation of a more sustainable food system.

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