





# From Ordinary Affects to Ordinary Science

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The technical, textual, organic, historical, formal, mythic, economic, and political dimensions of entities, actions, and worlds implode in the gravity well of technoscience—or perhaps of any world massive enough to bend our attention, warp our certainties, and sustain our lives.

—Donna Haraway, *Modest Witness*

Ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected...that catch people up in something that feels like *something*.

—Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*

The strange hothouses in which researchers make knowledge—study, archive, seminar room, laboratory, observatory—are just highly structured venues for channeling and focusing something we experience all the time: the way thinking feels.

—Donovan O. Schaefer, *Wild Experiment*

This volume is a scrapbook and an experiment. It collects the artifacts, written and otherwise, of a year's worth of public workshops that put science and technology studies (STS) and affect studies together. We are Doing STS,<sup>1</sup> a small member-funded public education non-profit in Vancouver, Canada run by graduate students and non-academics. Our events coalesced around two big ideas. We borrowed "implosion"

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1. See <https://doingsts.com>.

from Donna Haraway (1997, 68) and Joseph Dumit (2014) to consider how histories, materialities, and public moods get packed into ordinary objects and habits. Inspired by Kathleen Stewart (2011), we practiced writing and making together to cultivate “atmospheric attunements,” catching the world taking uncertain shape as relationships that matter. Crucially, we attended to how teasing things or words apart and putting them together makes something to notice and act on—to care for (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Looking to STS in its most rangy sense as situated, feminist, multispecies, and Indigenous or other non-Western methods and sensibilities for approaching technoscience and to affect at its most ordinary as circuits of more-than-human feeling and movement (or impasse), our weekly WriteLabs and monthly workshops took on a rhythm of imploding and composing. This meant honing theory literacies in order to notice how the world has been already composed. It meant writing, of course, but also critical making. Through zinemaking, collaging, foraging, tincturing, fermenting, tasting, perfuming, smelling, and walking together, we “craft[ed] with matter” (Papadopoulos 2010) to materialize alternative futures.

Doing STS centers and develops methods of care. Pragmatically, this means caring for the tools, materials, animals, plants, and microbes that show up in the more-than-human contact zones of our shared practice. It also means caring for each other: attending to the multiple histories, concepts, technologies, and bodies that inflect our shared work. We go slow and practice caution about what worlds our research helps to make or unmake. STS and affect studies work often require access to paywalled articles or travel to conferences. Care also includes sharing money, food, transportation, gear, and pirated academic resources like meeting rooms or university library passwords. Our care methods highlight the performativity of practice: how what we do tends some relationships and neglects others. In this way, care signals the inseparabil-

ity of knowledge work and everyday life amidst the economic, political, and ecological pressures that inform or impossibilize ways of living and studying together. We work to unsettle the taken-for-granted of science and tech knowledge production that leave little space for neurodiversity, chronic illness, poverty, Blackness, indigeneity, and gender and sexual difference. We turn instead to atmospheres of living and pay attention to vibes and gut feelings.

For decades, Indigenous communities here have known the gut-wrenching absence of kin forcibly removed to Indian Residential Schools. Met with overcrowding, filth, starvation, and nonconsensual medical experiments, many never made it home. Only when radar imaged thousands of graves in the soil here and across Canada was the magnitude of loss registered as a national concern. Ground-penetrating radar is a technology that chains together complex geophysical models and machineries. It is used to assure the integrity of subsurface utilities, prospect for metals and gems, orient self-driving cars, and by China's Yutu rover to probe lunar soil. For the non-expert, how it sees (radargrams and data arrays) is no different from what it effects: faultlines evaded, diamonds mined, terrain mapped, bodies found. This example shows how scientific technicities and everyday literacies are entangled with truth-making and possibilities for action and feeling.

Dimitris Papadopoulos (2018) calls matter the "frontier of colonialism": a site of ongoing scientific, medical, and technological discovery, where material processes are measured, named, and conscripted into larger political, economic, and tech systems of standardization, regulation, surveillance, and so on. He proposes we instead engage in a anticolonial politics of matter, experimenting with changing the material composition of life in ways that delink from knowledge practices that see matter as raw material for enclosure and extraction. Social

and political movements are always about more than just legible social institutions, they also implicate a wide, material, nonhuman world: movements of matter. To practice changing the world, we'll have to reckon with both technoscience and affect—the tools or machines, tech-driven knowledges, material flows, feelings, moods, and methods that articulate mainstream understandings of the world.

Even the most boring facets of everyday life are radically shaped by natural and social sciences and there is a case here for applying STS thinking to non-exceptional things: habits, hobbies, domesticities, the lo-fi, the junk drawer. On the other hand, laboratories and fieldsites are never immune to vicissitudes of living: breakups, bad moods, being hangry or a Karen, the joy of things falling into place, cutting corners, or power-tripping. Science is all about affect (eg. Schaefer 2022). If there's nothing all too exceptional about science, there's nothing banal about the everyday. Even boring objects and routines come with planet-spanning supply chains, layers of technicity, and insider knowledge. They require infrastructures and forms of training or comportment, algorithms and attitudes. One way to access this overwhelming complexity is by caring and being interested. So, we do ordinary science from the kitchen table—from the body, from situated knowledges, from unknowing. Putting STS and affect together shows how emergent global complexities are made and experienced in local practices that include specificity but also messiness, vibes, gut feelings, and mistakes (Law 2004). It bolsters literacies for how the world is being made and how we might make it differently.

I've been cultivating a writerly relationship with yeast as a way into ordinary science. I ferment food scraps and store-bought yeast into alcohol, then carefully tend its conversion via acetobacter microbes into vinegar. It's a months-long

process—and the final fermentation can age for years before its taste matures. There are tools to be used: a hydrometer and refractometer to measure sugar content and alcohol volume; pH strips and rainbow-coloured pH charts; ways to titrate for acid content, thermometers for pasteurization. But most of all it's a labour of tuning into the surrounds—over time, learning what small patterns can be seen in a process that's largely invisible. It's a perfect lab for wrestling the tension between realism and performativity—where, in your own kitchen, you can see how tools and units of measurement, techniques and trained modes of attention, break down when something's off with the weather or a jar wasn't as sanitized as you thought.

In 2023, Doing STS was made up of three labs which correspond to the three sections of this book. WriteLab was a weekly affect-driven theory writing meetup modelled loosely after Dumit's "implosion" and Berlant and Stewart's "Hundreds" (2019). Kathleen Stewart, Donovan O. Schaefer, and Chad Shomura kindly wrote initiating provocations about theory—its textures, animacies, and snares—for our meetings. From 7–9pm on Mondays from March to October, we met to write short bursts of theory about the boring or catastrophic, invisible or cosmic, fads and technologies, things split-second or geologically slow, top-secret or TMI. Afterwards, we walked down the street for happy hour. We called it "BeerLab." Our loud theory-chatter must have been infectious: our server later joined Monday writing. In early June, Sarah Law 婉雯 led a climate mourning workshop. We collaged with dried leaves and petals to "write" about relations with dead and dying matter. Sarah's zine, *Climate Mourning, Soft and Slow* is reproduced here. In July, we were joined by Coleman Nye, Lindsey Freeman, and Amanda Watson for a special edition WriteLab on episodic writing that gets at the haptics and affects of a scene—written while "still feeling the high, exhaustion, boredom, or frustration."

Smellworlds, our second lab, is an ongoing project to work with and develop sensory methods through DIY perfumery and smellwalks. In 2022, I was invited by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi to lead a multi-day workshop around critical fermentation and DIY perfumery at 3Ecologies in northern Quebec. The gathering was an opportunity to grow kindred interests in fermentation and fragrance and assembled an international group of academics. We experimented with practices of fermenting, tincturing, distillation, and perfume formulation and rehearsed new vocabularies of taste and scent across languages and disciplines. My time at 3E sparked a renewed sense that small practices are theory—they can be angled into with neurodiversity, against white supremacy and the violence of settlement, with quiet hunches or big philosophical propositions, as a collaboration or pedagogy. In the momentum of this feeling, *Doing STS* was born. My small booklet for the 3E event, *Smellworlds: A Critical Perfuming Primer* is included here. In August of 2023, Ceall Quinn led *Doing STS* in a pollinator smellwalk. We dabbled and paused in a space of non-instrumental bee noticing alongside Quinn’s accompanying zine (with a map by Lily Demet), learning to “perceive oneself as sensor” and how scent “indexes relational networks and registers differentially across multispecies sensoria.”

Otherwise Tastes was a series of critical herbalism and fermentation workshops that explored the relationship between taste, unseen microbial worlds, ecology, and political formations. Multispecies work is often either abstract or exotic in its empirics. It can require travel for fieldwork, special lab equipment, or access to gatekept institutional relationships. Following species around depends on access to big grants, stable housing, and ample time off work. Instead, we cultivated appetites for theory closer to home: from the kitchen table. Through ordinary tactics of witness like colour, temperature,

visible mould or yeast, carbonation, or scent, we reckoned with the tension between technoscientific settler sovereignties and Indigenous and other approaches to multispecies kin. In May, Hayden Ostrom led us in a critical herbalism workshop. We made oxymel (a vinegar and honey herbal tincture) with foraged and storebought medicinal herbs, learned the basics of six channel and five element theory in Traditional Chinese Medicine, and made connections between Indigenous practice, STS, and syncretisms of TCM and Western biomedicine—imagining multispecies, even planetary meridians and acupuncture points. As Hayden writes, “body is land and the land is our body.” While not written for *Doing STS*, WriteLab regular Rowan Melling’s “My Starter and I as Cyborg Holobiont” kneads sourdough along similar lines: “when a technology is also a living thing, it throws into relief the relational nature of all technology.” Finally, in June, Erin Manning joined us for *Perceptual Ferment*. Erin’s talk on neurodiversity and the immediacy of relation through the figure of vinegar mother (similar to a kombucha scoby) was followed by a DIY fermentation workshop. We worked with packets of industrially-produced yeast as an entrypoint into thinking about histories of epidemiology, pasteurization, and microbial relations. Intensities of taste across always-different microbial cultures offered a way to think about process and perception beyond the human and its categories.

All three labs entail daily acts of care: self-care as integral to writing practice, tending jars of fermenting mash as their microbial flora care for our gut health, or gardening plants whose roots or petals both resource our tinctures or DIY perfumery and lift our moods with scent. But academic productivity risks these relations. Likewise, being sick or sad, tediously skimming off bad yeast, or spending hours lost in a tableful of perfumery ingredients disrupts the tempo of scholarly work. In this way,



rubrics of care help to track interests, attachments, politics, and ways of working. They offer a humble ethical grounding for doing STS and affect work beyond institutional contexts that demand forms of legibility despite the messiness of practice. We can all do ordinary science: feeling, imploding, composing.

All our workshops have been self-funded, free, and open to the public. While academic in tone, we have worked hard to cultivate atmospheres of shared curiosity and non-mastery. None of which would have been possible without the care and collaboration of Studio Utopia and our core Doing STS members: Ceall Quinn, Sarah Law 婉雯, Lily Demet, Hayden Ostrom, and Reuben Jentink. Thanks, too, to our advisory board members for your guidance and care: Vivienne Bozalek, Lindsey A. Freeman, Jonas Fritsch, Kelly Fritsch, Donna J. Haraway, Omar Kasmani, Linda Knight, Dana Luciano, Erin Manning, Andrew Murphie, Natasha Myers, Coleman Nye, Dimitris Papadopoulos, Joseph C. Russo, Donovan O. Schaefer, Gregory J. Seigworth, Chad Shomura, Alexis Shotwell, Nathan Snaza, Stephanie Springgay, Kathleen C. Stewart, Katie Strom, Juanita Sundberg, Sarah E. Truman, Amanda D. Watson, and Jie Yang.

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