



*Moominpappa and
the Vibrant Matter*

Tove Jansson's "Moominpappa at Sea" as an
addition to "Vibrant Matter" by Jane Bennet

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<p>As humans we are constantly engaging not only with other humans but with plants, animals, and matter. This thesis examines the way we view our engagement with the materiality of the world around us, by looking at the work of philosopher Jane Bennet on vibrant materiality and author Tove Jansson. Bennet presents an argument that matter can be analysed as active and vibrant. While Western philosophers are used to viewing matter as passive and dead, seeing it as active makes space for different engagement with matter. One of the ways we can start engaging with matter, once we stop thinking of it as passive and dead, is through the lens of ethics. My aim in this thesis is to use Bennet’s and Jansson’s work as a way to consider matter as active and included in the ethical frameworks of the Western philosophical canon.</p> <p>Jansson in her children’s book <i>Moominpappa at Sea</i> shows a possibility for looking at the material world through this ethical lens. This thesis will put these works in conversation by reading both as philosophical works that have nuanced engagement with the topic of how we can be in community with the things that surround us. This thesis argues that it is impossible to have interactions that are devoid of ethics. We are always already in community and therefore our actions always take place in an ethical register. This thesis concludes with an exploration of the ethical relations we already have with our material surroundings and a way to engage more actively with the ethical ecology of the things that surround us.</p>	
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Introduction

In her book *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things* (2010), philosopher Jane Bennet uses the term *vibrant matter* for the way materials, objects or things are more than just inanimate matter. Matter, according to Bennet, is vibrant in particular ways; although it is not necessarily alive it is active and influences the world around it. In this thesis I will compare Vibrant Materialism as Bennet describes it, with how Finnish author Tove Jansson describes animate nature in her book *Moominpappa at Sea* (1984). I will explore what it would mean to look at matter as vibrant or alive, as Bennet suggests in *Vibrant Matter* by using vibrant materiality as a lens to analyse *Moominpappa at Sea*. I want to explore what Jansson in *Moominpappa at Sea* has to say about the way we as humans engage with matter and to discuss what it would mean to include matter in our thinking about ethics, responsibility, and care.

Moominpappa at Sea is the eighth book in the series of Moomin books written by Jansson. The Moomins are small dumpy trolls, resembling white hippos with a long tail. Jansson created nine books, five picture books, and a comic strip about the Moomins. Additionally, there have been highly successful adaptations on stage and as various animated television shows. In Finland, the Moomins are everywhere: on toys, pasta and collectible Moomin mugs. The Moomins, especially the original book series, has been read not only for children but also as part of the Swedish-speaking canon in Finland. Because of this there are quite a few scholarly works analysing the Moomin books.

Boel Westin is one of the more prolific scholars on Jansson's work. Westin has analysed the Moomin books in her doctoral thesis *Familjen i dalen. Tove Janssons muminvärld* (1988). Westin and other scholars often remark that the Moomin books are at least semi-autobiographical; many friends and family members of Jansson can be recognised in the different characters. Many important events in Jansson's life are also reflected in the Moomin stories. The Moomin stories have often been analysed from a perspective of hospitality and Otherness (Tesar & Koro-Ljungberg, 2016, Happonen, 2014). Jansson has created a world full of unlikely creatures that are not always likable or easy to get along with. However, the Moomins tend to welcome this Otherness in their midst. In my thesis I will be looking at a different manifestation of this Otherness, in the form of nature and the way the Moomins relate to nature.

This is a thesis within the fields of Social Exclusion and Philosophy. My aim in this thesis is to use Bennet's and Jansson's work as a way to consider matter as active and included in the ethical frameworks of the Western philosophical canon.

Initially, I wanted to do something different with this thesis. I knew I wanted to write about a children's book in my thesis. My original idea was to write about the Hattifatteners. Hattifatteners are small ghostly white creatures that appear in several of Tove Jansson's Moomin books. My idea was to examine the Hattifatteners as a sort of radical Other. They are mute and have poor eyesight, they only communicate through seismographic vibrations (Jansson, 1972). My thesis was going to be about the relevance of introducing a creature like this, in a world where all animals speak and can be related to, even the scary Groke becomes a figure of sympathy. However, the Hattifatteners cannot be understood by the other Moomin characters because they speak through vibrations rather than through conventional language. Through this I came to using the book *Vibrant matter* by Bennet, with the idea that I could use the concept of vibrant matter to describe the Hattifatteners, not as animals but as live matter.

The Hattifatteners at first glance also seem to fit in better with the concept of Social Exclusion because they are identifiable creatures excluded from full participation in the world of the Moomins through the Moomin family's inability to communicate with them. I decided to use both the lonely island of the Hattifatteners in *Finn Family Moomintroll* (1972) and the lonely island in *Moominpappa at Sea* as examples of vibrant matter. However, through reading I came to realise that writing solely about the island in *Moominpappa at Sea*, and focusing on the ethical ecology of the Moomin family and the island might be a better project to undertake as a Master's thesis. While the Hattifatteners provide an easily recognisable excluded Other, the island in *Moominpappa at Sea* does not. An island is not an individual. This is precisely why I ended up writing about only *Moominpappa at Sea*. Jansson presents a story about living in community through the figure of the island, which is not a singular person or multiple persons, but rather a swarm of what Bennet would call agencies. This falls under the subject of social exclusion because matter, and nature in particular, is often excluded from ethical consideration. In this thesis I examine how Jansson provides us with some frameworks for including matter in our ethical considerations.

In chapter one I begin by explaining how Bennet describes vibrant matter. I also discuss Mel Y. Chen in their book *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (2012). Chen and Bennet discuss a similar theory, however Chen refers to living matter not as vibrant but as animate. I analyse how both Bennet's and Chen's work ties into certain philosophical

traditions and explain the terminology that Bennet uses to conceptualise vibrant matter. After this I explain some potential problems Bennet's theory has, to which Jansson offers a possible solution. I examine the different ways view ethical action regarding matter and consider what is often called ethics of responsibility as proposed by Emmanuel Levinas in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1991) as a possible way to reframe the ethical responsibility we can have towards matter. In my second chapter, I will explain the methods I used in my literary analysis of Jansson's *Moominpappa at Sea*. I am using a literary work in conversation with a philosophical theory. I am doing this primarily informed by Toril Moi's essay *The Adventure Of Reading: Literature And Philosophy, Cavell And Beauvoir* (2011). Moi examines the importance of reading literature not only as an illustration of a theory but as a work in and of itself, a work which can offer new insights that could not have been reached through theory alone. In the third chapter of this thesis, I present my analysis of *Moominpappa at Sea*. I analysed *Moominpappa at Sea* by identifying the description of characters' interactions with the natural world and dividing them into three categories: *Control, cultivation* and *complicity*. I describe these relationships the characters have with nature. Additionally, I describe how Jansson's nature in *Moominpappa at Sea* is described as animate and how this is conceptualised. I discuss the way Jansson describes nature as both being alive and being frightening. Nature as Jansson describes it is uncontrollable and alive. I also explore how Jansson describes the agency of the natural world in *Moominpappa at Sea*. I end this thesis with a discussion chapter in which I discuss the possibility of using Bennet and Jansson to think of a different ethical relationship to the things that surround us.

Chapter one: Theory

The life of things

Jane Bennet in her book *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things* (2010), and Mel Y. Chen in their¹ book *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (2012) both argue in different ways for a rethinking of our relationship with matter. They theorise matter or objects not as passive and dead, but rather as active and vibrant. Both Bennet and Chen argue that a strict distinction between active alive organisms and passive dead matter is unsound.

In this chapter, I will describe how Bennet in *Vibrant Matter* theorises materiality as more than Objects. Bennet describes matter as vibrant in order to capture the way matter is not inanimate and only acted upon. Bennet argues that matter or things are animate and vibrant. They act upon bodies and influence their environment. I will discuss what this vibrancy looks like, and how it may be understood as a collective vibrancy. Then I will describe what Bennet refers to as *thing power*, and how this power relates to human power. I will examine how Bennet, and Chen, in *Animacies*, describes the binary opposition between life and matter (Bennet) and animacy and inanimacy (Chen). I will explain how they pose this against a binary of the mind and the body. In addition, I will explain why the subject cannot be understood from this perspective of dualism.

Vibrant matter

Imagine I throw a stone to a lake, perhaps with the intention of it skipping neatly across the lake, and it is blown off course. The stone hits an unsuspecting duck swimming on the lake. Can it truly be said that I am the cause of the duck being hit by a stone? I am one of the causes, but what are the other causalities that participate in this event?

In her book *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, Bennet explores the ways the more than human world exhibits an agency of its own. Bennet describes objects as having a power beyond the meaning we ascribe to them. An object, according to Bennet, influences the world around it not only through the significance we give it, but also through its materiality. A

¹ Mel Y. Chen uses singular they/them/theirs as pronouns and will therefore be referred to by these pronouns in this thesis.

crucifix has power we ascribe to it through Christian symbolism, but according to Bennet it also has a power through the space it takes up in the world. Bennet refers to these objects imbued with power as things. By referring to things instead of objects, Bennet means to contradict the distinction between the subject and the object. In the subject-object binary the subject is active while the object is passive. By using “thing” instead of “object” Bennet positions her theory outside of this binary (Bennet, 2010, p.19).

Bennet describes the way many thinkers, Like Baruch de Spinoza, Theodore Adorno and Gilles Deleuze, have taken note of the power of things. Things influence other bodies (human bodies, animals, other things). There seems to be a power and an agency to them that cannot accurately be described by individual notions of agency. When we see an object as having agency individually their agency is extremely limited, the stone can only influence the duck if it is brought into motion by another agency. A stone may have some of its own agency, influencing the landscape it is in, and the creatures moving on and around it. However, on its own its agency is not especially noteworthy. In combination with other agencies a stone may become much more important, as can be seen in the example of skipping a stone and hitting a duck. Additionally, with non-animal agencies we often struggle to find the boundaries of an individual agent. For example, a beach comprises grains of sand, plants, and proximity to the sea; describing the agency of a beach is by necessity a description of multiple agencies.

According to Bennet we should look at the agency of matter from the idea of an assemblage. Bennet takes the concept of an assemblage from Deleuze and Guattari (Bennet, 2010). Assemblages, according to Bennet, are living congregations that are kept together without a binding agent due to a shared trajectory. The components are not all equally powerful or equally distributed. They do not have a distinct hierarchy, no one part determines the trajectory of the assemblage. Returning to the simplified assemblage in which I skip a stone over a lake, there is a sudden wind that redirects the stone. The stone hits an unsuspecting duck swimming on the lake. The assemblage I-stone-lake-wind-duck resulted in a trajectory where a duck was hit by a stone. The eventual outcome was not intended by me and could perhaps not have been predicted.

The effects generated by an assemblage are (...) emergent in that their ability to make something happen (...) is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone. Each member or proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force, but there is also an effectivity

proper to the grouping as such: an agency of the assemblage. (Bennet, 2010, p. 24)

According to Bennet there is no way to separate these small agencies into individuals. Instead, Bennet proposes to speak of *actants*, a term Bennet takes from Bruno Latour, or *operators* within assemblages. “Actant and operator are substitute words for what, in a more subject centred vocabulary are called agents” (Bennet, 2010, p. 9). This use of actant and operator takes the focus away from individual agency, and instead focuses on the ways everything acts in assemblage with other things. The assemblage has an agency that exists out of all the actants participating in it, this agency is a trajectory in which it is moving. No one single actant can control the assemblage, and often the eventual trajectory of the assemblage is impossible to accurately predict. In this way things have power, not an individual agency, but a power to work upon other bodies. When I skip a stone and hit a duck, there is an assemblage at work. I-lake-stone-wind-duck and all the unknown factors that influence the stone hitting the duck.

In this section, I have examined what Bennet means when she states that things exhibit agency. Bennet uses the word thing instead of object to position her work outside of the subject object binary. Matter acts upon subjects, and though this acting is not individual it is a form of animacy, or as Bennet refers to it, vibrancy. I have explained how the agency of things is, according to Bennet, not a singular agency but an assemblage, a swarm of agencies creating a trajectory.

Thing Power

In this section I will explain how Bennet and Chen argue that the binary opposition between the subject and the object stems from Cartesian dualism. Within a dualistic framework matter is not seen as animate and the body is seen as matter that is animated by the mind or soul. This distinction between mind and matter has been critiqued both by historical and modern theorists (Chen, 2012). I will explain the historical and contemporary resistance to the distinction between the body and the mind. The resistance to dualism I am most interested in is the resistance that focuses on the impossibility of taking a part out of its context. Can we imagine a human being uninfluenced by having a body, or uninfluenced by being part of a community?

Bennet describes the animacy of things as vibrant matter. Chen, in their book *Animacies*, does not use the language of vibrancy, instead opting for animacy. Bennet and Chen plead a similar

case, Chen focusing more on the relationships between people and things, and Bennet focusing on the relationships between things. Both Chen and Bennet are arguing against a binary distinction between animate and inanimate, between life and matter.

Chen argues that a distinction between the animate and the inanimate, the alive and the dead cannot be a strict binary one. Animacy must be read on a continuing spectrum. To explain this, they give the reader some boundary straddling cases from both human experience and the experience of matter. Chen argues that though stones have an animacy of near zero on the scale of animacy they are not the binary opposite of animacy. Rocks change, be it in a way and on a time frame that is imperceptible to most humans, and are therefore animated. (Chen, 2012)

Both Bennet and Chen argue that the line drawn between the animate and the inanimate creates a problem in our thinking about certain border straddling cases. Bennet (2010) names food as an example. Food is considered matter; however, it becomes part of our bodies and therefore becomes part of an animate being. Chen uses toxicity in the same way. A toxin outside of a body, floating in the air for example in the form of pollution is a non-organic piece of matter. However, once it is breathed in by an animate being, we must reassess its separateness. Once it is inside a living organism and influencing it, does it become organic? Does it become alive? For these pieces of matter, it is not useful to maintain a binary distinction between the animate and the inanimate because they exist in the space between fully animate and fully inanimate.

According to Chen, the binary distinction between the animate and the inanimate is an extension of the binary distinction between the body and the soul, or the body and the mind. Descartes is often given the dubious honour of bringing the sharp distinction between the soul or mind and the body into modern thinking. A simplified version of the argument Descartes makes is that one can doubt anything except that you have doubt; that something is thinking. In *Meditations* he therefore famously concludes “Cogito ergo sum”; I think, therefore I am (Descartes & Cottingham. 2013). This resulted in a sharpening of the distinction between thought and body. The thinking part becomes more strongly separated from the body by the awareness that we can prove the existence of thought without a doubt, but we cannot prove the existence of the body in the same way. Thought becomes separate from physicality because once we have proven thought we must still prove the body via the existence of thought. They are not, in the Cogito argument, part of one whole. In this argument I am my thoughts, more than I am my body. Descartes was writing in a Christian tradition that had for

a long time made a distinction between the body and the soul as two radically different parts. Bennet and Chen argue that this distinction is similar and related to the distinction between animate and inanimate, between life and matter. Cartesian dualism is a dualism between the I that thinks and therefore must be, and that which is around the I. It creates a distinction between the one subject I and the objects around it. The I cannot prove the definite existence of other subjects or objects around it. Knowledge for Descartes starts with the subject. This creates certain problems, once one starts with thinking as the primary way to prove existence it becomes exceedingly difficult to prove anything beyond the isolated subject.

This isolation of the subject results in the *other minds problem*. How can we definitively know that there are other minds, other subjects, around us if we cannot see them think? Max Scheler in *The Nature of Sympathy* (1979) argues that the other minds problem comes from a false idea that we are unable to experience other minds. According to Scheler we experience other minds before we know our own. We are always already in community. The other minds problem assumes a situation in which we can imagine a lone subject. According to Scheler it is impossible to imagine a subject on its own since the existence of a subject is determined by the subjects' community (Scheler, 1979). The subject is part of its context, but the context is also part of the subject. Consequently, the subject cannot be imagined without its context without damaging our full understanding of the subject. For example, we cannot accurately imagine who we would be and how we would think had we been raised without our family and extended community.

Bennet's argument seems similar. Bennet argues that we are not only already in community with other subjects, we are also in community with things. Even within the human body we are a community of things, vibrant things, acting together in the human assemblage.

(...) human power is itself a kind of thing-power. At one level this claim is uncontroversial: it is easy to acknowledge that humans are composed of various material parts (the minerality of our bones, or the metal of our blood, or the electricity of our neurons). But it is more challenging to conceive of these materials as lively and self-organizing. Rather than as passive or mechanical means under the direction of something nonmaterial, that is, an active soul or mind. (Bennet, 2010, p. 10)

Bennet argues that human power is a form of thing power. Humans are, she argues, not a combination of material animated by the soul or the mind. Rather we should understand the

human body as an assemblage of its own. Everything in the body is part of that body's animacy, not merely the mind located in the brain. Bennet argues that a human power, when we look at the body as an assemblage of already vibrant matter, can be understood as thing power. Human bodies comprise many things; bones, blood cells, gut microbes, and all these things participate in the human body to facilitate the ability of the body to function. Bennet argues, akin to Scheler, that we are always already in community. In fact, we cannot imagine a subject outside of a context of things.

In this section, I have explained how Bennet and Chen argue for an erosion of the binary between the animate and the inanimate. Chen argues that the binary between the animate and the inanimate comes from Cartesian dualism between the body and the soul. I have explained how I think Bennet and Chen's arguments are similar to Scheler's argument, an understanding of the subject outside of their context is impossible. The subject must be theorised within a context, and according to Bennet and Chen the power of things must be part of this context. In the following section, I will further analyse what it would mean to theorise matter as vibrant. According to Bennet, theorising matter as vibrant would have the potential to change the way we engage with our environment and how we consume matter.

What does it mean for matter to be vibrant or animate?

Bennet argues that changing the way we look at matter would have the potentiality of changing how we engage with matter. She submits that capitalism, although often accused of being materialist, encourages a strange combination of materiality and non-materiality. Within capitalism, things are disposable and interchangeable.

(...) American materialism, which requires buying ever-increasing numbers of products purchased in ever shorter cycles, is antimateriality. The sheer volume of commodities, and the hyperconsumptive necessity of junking them to make room for new ones, conceals the vitality of matter. (Bennet, 2010, p. 4)

Bennet argues that though it may seem like capitalism is a system rooted in materiality, it is in fact oppositional to understanding matter as vibrant. Matter that is constantly thrown away in order to make space for more matter conceals the way all matter is distinct. If things are made

to be thrown away, as they are in our current economic system, to continue the consumption and production of more things, it is consumption and not materiality that is prioritized.

Bennet uses Theodore Adorno's concept of non-identity to illustrate what it would mean to think of matter as vibrant, and why consumerism clouds this vibrancy. Adorno argues in *Negative Dialectics* (1973) for a materialist philosophy. Adorno argues against Immanuel Kant's separation of the *noumena* and the *phenomena*, According to Kant phenomena are the things humans can see and experience in the world with noumena being the truth humans have no way of accessing because humans experience everything through our own lens. Adorno argues that Kant makes a clean separation between the things to which humans have access and the things to which we do not have access (Adorno, 1973).

According to Adorno these things are always intertwined. Adorno argues that there is always something about a thing that exists outside the grasp of our categorisation of it. Adorno refers to this as the non-identical. For example, imagine a bowl, according to Adorno, within our capitalist scheme this bowl has a determined exchange value. This bowl can be exchanged for any other bowl of the same worth. However, argues Adorno, there is always something about a particular bowl that is non-identical, that cannot be exchanged for any other bowl of the same value, it has something that refuses to be objectified. "Objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder" (Adorno, 1973, p. 5). There is, according to Adorno, always something ungraspable about a thing, it cannot fully be incorporated within the concepts we use to describe it. Matter, understood this way, is defiant and refuses complete intelligibility.

Non-identity, as Adorno calls it, refuses reconciliation with the concepts we use to describe it. The human ethical project for Adorno is acknowledging and making peace with the parts of a thing that refuse our conceptualisation (Adorno, 1973). According to Bennet the way to do this is through understanding Vibrant Materiality. This means understanding that things have a life of their own that we as humans cannot capture within our framework of exchange value and acknowledging that things that seem identical are on a fundamental level non-identical. Bennet argues that this has the potentiality to change the way we relate to matter, and with that the way we relate to our environment. If we start to see matter as being nonidentical and vibrant things we can relate to our things as being irreplaceable (Bennet, 2010). The irreplaceability of things could mean we cannot uphold a culture in which things are disposable. If we break a vase, and the vase is nonidentical, that means we cannot replace this

vase, even with one that looks identical. On a larger scale this would mean engaging with matter ethically instead of opportunistically.

In the previous section, I have explained what Bennet thinks the importance is of theorising matter as vibrant. Following Adorno, she sees the vibrancy of matter as something that refuses to be quite captured by the human need to categorise. According to Adorno this categorisation makes it possible to make things interchangeable. However, there is always something non-identical about things that refuse categorisation. This is what Bennet defines as vibrant matter. According to Bennet theorising vibrant matter in this way allows for a radically different relationship to our environment. If we think of our environment as non-identical and vibrant and as something that is not intelligible, we would necessarily need to care more for it. If we see an environment as unintelligible it means we cannot act within it as if we know every result our actions are going to have. When an action may have unforeseen results or consequences that means we must be more thoughtful with our actions and consider an environment not only as a resource but also as an irreplaceable thing that may act in mysterious ways.

Responsibility and blame

In this section, I will explain how responsibility can be understood within the context of human and more than human assemblages. If the subject can never be the sole cause of an event, how do we think of responsibility and blame? I will further explore what it would mean to think of matter as vibrant. I will discuss the politics of assemblages and how Bennet argues we can theorise responsibility and shared causality.

Returning to the imagined assemblage of I-stone-wind-duck-lake, I did not intend to hit the duck, and could probably not have predicted this would happen. However, there is still the inclination to say that *someone* must be responsible, perhaps even to blame, for the duck being hit by the stone. On a larger scale this also happens with political problems. Who is, for example, responsible for a war, a famine, an injustice? We cannot blame a politician for a war when we keep in mind the way this politician is only one part of an assemblage, a cog in the machine, and they may not be the most influential part. Bennet uses a power outage in August of 2003 as an illustration of this problem: A power grid relies on two types of generated electricity, active and reactive power. In 1992 the US approved a division between the production and distribution of electricity, meaning that electricity is produced in a power plant

and then distributed to companies to sell, sometimes to places much further away from the power plant. Active power travels well, but reactive power does not. This can create a reactive power deficit. Power plants can make extra reactive power but often do not, to spare expense, and companies do not have the power to force them to produce this reactive power. This specific power outage happened when suddenly the stream of electricity in the power grid started flowing backwards. Bennet states that this is not just an example that can be explained by referring to human agency. It is an assemblage of company greed, housing scarcity, American imperialism, the flighty nature of electrons, and wildfires. Human agency plays a part in these but is not the sole agent. Even in company greed and housing scarcity the environment plays a large role. A lack of resources, or a lack of suitable building ground may influence these human problems. Bennet refers to a theory of distributive agency:

A theory of distributive agency, in contrast, does not posit a subject as the root cause of an effect. There are instead always a swarm of vitalities at play. The task becomes to identify the contours of the swarm and the kind of relations that obtain between its bits. To figure the generative source of effects as a swarm is to see human intentions as always in competition and confederation. (Bennet, 2010, pp. 31–32)

Distributive agency would acknowledge that human actions are only a part of a larger assemblage. Human action is always participating within an assemblage. We are building our houses and living our lives among matter, and the state of this matter influences human actions and agencies. We may have to live close together due to mountains preventing wider building, we may use certain materials more than others because they can be found in the area, and fight over other, scarcer, materials. Sometimes human agency is working against the trajectory of the assemblage, sometimes it is working with the trajectory of the assemblage. The way we should look at agency is by looking at the whole trajectory of the “swarm of vitalities” and the way these vitalities relate to each other. Questions we could ask would be: How does human action relate to the environment it is in? How do the materialities influence the trajectory of political or ethical decisions?

Perhaps the ethical responsibility of an individual human now resides in one’s response to the assemblage in which one finds oneself participating: Do I attempt to extricate myself from an assemblage whose trajectory is likely to do harm? (Bennet, 2010, p. 37)

Bennet argues that human responsibility within the thinking of complicated assemblages with unpredictable trajectories may be the way we do or do not participate in an assemblage. If we can predict that the assemblage we participate in has a trajectory that will likely cause harm, it is our responsibility to exit this assemblage. Imagine you are usually active for a certain political party, but in this year's election plan they announce they want to privatise healthcare, and you think that privatising healthcare will cause long term harm. Bennet's argument seems to indicate you should seek a different political party to support and exit this assemblage that now has a harmful trajectory. For many examples Bennet's argument works well, if we see a structure we are participating in become violent, it would be best to take our individual agency elsewhere and not contribute in the harm. If we think like Bennet, we need to exit assemblages which we think have a harmful trajectory.

However, as Bennet has already shown us, assemblages are complex and unpredictable. What then happens in cases where we cannot extricate ourselves from an assemblage, even if we think the trajectory is harmful? We are always already complicit in certain structures we cannot fully opt out of. How can we consider a way in which we acknowledge our participation in certain assemblages with harmful trajectories, like climate injustice or social injustice? In this thesis I want to consider an ethics of complicity that is formulated in the book *Moominpappa at Sea*. I argue this story helps us to better understand the vibrancy of matter, and that it could provide a way to contemplate an ethics of complicity where we have responsibility for and to vibrant materiality.

Complicity and ethics of care/responsibility

In the previous section, I explained how Bennet argues that human agency is always influenced by other humans, structures, and things. When we think of agency as distributive in this way it becomes easier to recognise the agency of things. Humans, Things and Structures together participate in assemblages that have certain trajectories that are not determined by any individual participant but rather by the assemblage as a whole. Bennet argues that the way to act ethically within this theory is to extricate oneself from an assemblage with a harmful trajectory. I argue that extrication is not always possible. Some assemblages implicate us, without the possibility of removing ourselves from them. In this section, I will explore another way to look at ethics and vibrant matter. I will examine further how Bennet thinks of ethics and responsibility, and how we can think differently about this. I

will examine Levinasian ethics and the possibility of responsibility to things. In addition, I will explain the concept of complicity.

Bennet in *Vibrant Matter* describes the way we are all part of a context. The subject can never be theorised on her own, she needs to be theorised within her context. Bennet describes this as a process that lessens our responsibility. We are only part of a larger whole, and therefore never the sole cause of any event. However, we can also read this as a movement that makes us more responsible, since we are potentially taking part in everything that is happening in the world, even if the part we take is small, or very small. This can mean that in some assemblages we participate in such small amounts that our responsibility is negligible. However, there remain enough assemblages in which we can consider the responsibility we have for the assemblage we participate in.

Bennet argues that when we see humans as part of their context, and part of an assemblage of actants, a single human can never bear the full responsibility for an event. “A theory of vibrant matter presents individuals as simply incapable of bearing full responsibility for their effects” (Bennet, 2010, p. 37). We are always part of an assemblage of human and nonhuman actants. Bennet imagines that a choice must be made when we look at responsibility. We need to choose between political outrage and acknowledgement of distributive agency:

It is ultimately a matter of political judgment of what is more needed today: should we acknowledge the distributive quality of agency to address the power of human-nonhuman assemblages and to resist a politics of blame? Or should we persist with a strategic understatement of material agency in the hopes of enhancing the accountability of specific humans? (Bennet, 2010, p. 38)

Bennet acknowledges the importance of moral outrage at injustice. Bennet argues outrage is important to the functioning of a democratic system, however, politics should not only be based on outrage. Paying closer attention to the nuanced web of agents involved in an event is important in order to, as Bennet states “detach ethics from moralism” (Bennet, 2010, p. 38). Detaching ethics from moralism according to Bennet would be acknowledging that there are no singularly good or singularly bad agents, where the good agents ought to punish the bad agents. However, Bennet argues, we do need to hold people, especially political leaders responsible. Political leaders are not the sole cause of any injustice, Bennet states, but we sometimes need to enhance the accountability of these figures (Bennet, 2010). The key here I

think is the political leader, or any leader, having chosen to become responsible for an assemblage, like a country. We hold the prime minister responsible for laws passed. We know she is not the only agent in the passing of this law, she is not even the only human agent, but she is the person who has taken responsibility for these political decisions. Therefore, we can hold her responsible in this way that Bennet refers to as “strategic” (Bennet, 2010, p. 38).

I am interested in the question of ethics and responsibility within Bennet’s description of vibrant matter. Bennet, in her thinking through ethics, focuses very much on politics and justice. Emmanuel Levinas in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1991) states that our ethics begin with the responsibility we have to the Other. Political responsibility and personal responsibility are different in the sense that political responsibility is a responsibility of all citizens, not a responsibility of one specific person to an Other. When we meet the Other, they express to us a need and we feel a responsibility to them. We can choose how we react to this responsibility, we can ignore it, but it is impossible not to act.

I can recognize the gaze of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan only in giving or in refusing; I am free to go or to refuse, but my recognition passes necessarily through the interposition of things. Things are not, as in Heidegger, the foundation of the site, the quintessence of all the relations that constitute our presence on the earth (and “under the humans, in company with men, and in the expectation of the gods”). The relationship between the same and the other, my welcoming of the other, is the ultimate fact, and in it the things figure not as what one builds but as what one gives. (Levinas, 1991, p. 77)

Levinas argues here that when we meet the gaze of the stranger, we have the choice between giving and refusing. We no longer have the ability to do nothing. When we take this into account, we can see an ethics of responsibility in which things can take part. Despite not being the singular cause of an event, by meeting it face to face we become responsible. A historical approach to ethics is usually concerned with questions of justice. The question “what is just” is always part of a question of objectivity. Justice must be something there is a measure for, be it a law book or the divine word of God. What is just needs to be just for everyone; something cannot be just in one case and unjust in another case of the same kind. Someone needs to be subject to justice even if they disagree with this notion of justice. If we say it is unjust to kill, the murderer must stand trial even if the murderer argues that for them it is just to kill. Ethics of justice seem to be a form of boundaries, we must only think about

justice when we see the boundary, but justice is not inherently a part of our daily life. We think of justice when we are coming upon an injustice. When we approach ethics in the way Levinas suggests, not just as a matter of what is just, but as a way to see what responsibilities we already have to the Other, we get a very different kind of ethical analysis. When the question becomes “what are my responsibilities to you?” ethics becomes a personal endeavour that is part of every interaction, rather than something enforced on a general level. The ethical demand Others make on us, and the responsibility we have to meet it means we have no choice to opt out of ethics. It is already there in all the spaces between people, whether we acknowledge it or not. Not acting upon the ethical demand of an Other is still an ethical choice, and usually not a particularly kind one.

Levinas argues that it is the face to face encounter between humans that causes us to see the responsibility we have to the Other (Levinas,1991). Despite this I would argue the idea of an ethics based on encounters makes behaving ethically to things possible. Bill Brown in *Thing Theory* explains how the difference between the object and the thing is that things are objects that appear to us as individual and irreplaceable. We can become aware of the thingness of objects by encountering them as specific instead of general. When we use a hammer, we do not consider the individuality of the hammer, it is replaceable by any other hammer. When this hammer breaks, we become aware of this specific hammer (Brown, 2001). What is happening in the moment where we recognise the thingness of the object is a moment which we could see as a meeting with the object. We recognise the individuality of the thing and could recognise the ethical demand the thing makes upon us.

When ethics is not seen as an overarching structure but rather as something that naturally occurs within an encounter, we can start to consider the encounters we have with the non-human, and also recognise our responsibility in those encounters. In this way we do not have to introduce ethics into a theory of vibrant materiality. We can use the theory of vibrant materiality to become aware of the responsibility we already have to assemblages and things.

Secret Feminist Agenda is a peer reviewed podcast hosted by scholar Hannah McGregor, where McGregor invites guests on the podcast to speak about a variety of topics. In *Episode 2.26 Getting Deeply Into Sourdough with Emily Hoven* (27.7.2018), McGregor speaks to fellow academic Emily Hoven about sourdough. McGregor and Hoven discuss the ethics of care in connection with sourdough. Sourdough starter is a cultivated wild yeast used to make bread rise. McGregor says this about the relationship between ethics of care and the sourdough starter:

And there's something about what you were saying about sourdough starter, you put flour and water in a container together and then the ecosystem of your kitchen turns it into something, and that's such a reminder that we are in these relationships always already to all of these living ecosystems around us that we can ignore if we want, and we cannot care for if we want, but that's a choice, and that's a violent choice. So, what are other ways of being in relationship to the many, many things we're sharing space with? (McGregor, 2018, p. 4)²

McGregor notes here that we as humans are always already in relation to our environment and our context. Thinking of ourselves as individual and separate from our environment “is a choice, and that’s a violent choice”. This seems to align with what Levinas states about our responsibility to the other. We are always already responsible to the Other, because they make a demand on us, and this demand does not give us the choice to opt out of responsibility to the Other. Levinas speaks exclusively of the Other as an encounter with a human face. However, if we can manage to meet the non-human other and recognise them as Other this allows us to theorise responsibility to an assemblage or a thing.

McGregor describes complicity in her work *Complicit Witnessing: Distant Suffering in Contemporary White Canadian Women’s Writing* (2013). Here McGregor describes the two possible definitions of complicity:

Complicity is an allusive word, defined as a state of both “being an accomplice ... in an evil action” (def. 1) and “being complex or involved” (def. 2). To unpack these definitions further: “accomplice” suggests partnership and accompaniment, generally in a crime or wrongdoing. “Complex” is defined as “[c]onsisting of or comprising various parts united or connected together” (def. 1), while “involved” suggests being “[e]nfolded, enwrapped” (def. 1b). Involvement and accompaniment gesture to the sort of affiliations I have been outlining, while being enwrapped also evokes something of what [Sarah]Ahmed describes as the stickiness of complicity, the seeming impossibility of escaping a position of implication. (McGregor, 2013, pp. 16–17)

² The source is a transcript of an audio recording and has been edited for clarity.

Complicity according to McGregor has two possible definitions. One is a legal definition, to be an accomplice in a crime. The other is being complex, to consist out of a multiplicity, to be part of something, or to be involved, meaning to be enmeshed, which ties into what Bennet refers to as assemblages. To be complicit seems, in its second definition, connected to being part of an assemblage. McGregor mentions Sara Ahmed's description of the "stickiness" of complicity. This points to the way we all become complicit by being. When Levinas states that we cannot escape the responsibility we have to the Other, that ties into the way we are always complicit. By being in the world we are complicit, precisely because we are responsible. By being responsible to Others we become complicit in harm we participate in through being part of an assemblage.

Bennet states the difficulty in blaming individuals for the harm they do. Bennet also argues that to behave ethically while acknowledging the vibrancy of materiality may mean to extricate oneself from assemblages with a harmful trajectory. However, this seems to rely on the idea that ethics needs to be introduced into a theory of vibrant materiality. Bennet is trying to introduce ethics in her theory by describing how we need to view our own responsibility and hold others responsible if they are not the singular cause of an event. By diminishing the importance of human agency Bennet worries that it becomes hard to hold people responsible for their actions.

Levinas, however, argues that ethics never need to be introduced; they are already there, within the meeting with the Other. If we theorise this meeting as involving not only the human but also the non-human other, we can use the ethics of responsibility as described by Levinas to understand the responsibility we have in a world of vibrant materiality. McGregor argues that to be complicit means that we are always already part of harm. We are part of larger assemblages that cause harm. Despite not causing the harm by ourselves, and only being a part of an assemblage, we do have a responsibility to the Other we encounter to work against the harm we are part of causing them. Within the theory of human and non-human assemblages Bennet proposes this means we have both more and less responsibility to the Other than as a singular subject. We have less responsibility because we are never the sole cause of an event. However, we have more responsibility because we play a part in much more assemblages than interpersonal relationships. We, as individual subjects, do not cause climate change. However, we do play a part in the *assemblage* of climate change. Because we do play a part, we therefore have a responsibility to act towards and within these assemblages.

Chapter 2: Methods

The importance of stories

In the previous chapter I have explained how Bennet and Chen describe vibrant matter. I have explained the key concepts of vibrant materialism. I have discussed assemblages as ways to conceptualise the distributive agency of things as a swarm of vitalities moving forward together in a non-hierarchical trajectory. I have also described Bennet's ethical claim that when we think of matter as vibrant and agency as distributive, behaving ethically means removing yourself from assemblages with a harmful trajectory. I have argued for the possibility of a different approach using ethics of responsibility as proposed by Levinas.

In this chapter I will detail the method I have used to analyse *Moominpappa at Sea*. I have primarily focused on ways to use stories as more than illustrations to a theory. This method is proposed in different ways by indigenous scholars like Kim Tallbear (2015), and non-indigenous scholars like Toril Moi (2011). I will explain these theories and the importance of stories in philosophy, then I will explain how I applied them in my analysis of *Moominpappa at Sea*.

In this thesis I will pay particular attention to stories, specifically I will look at stories in the Moomins series by Tove Jansson. These books were written as children's books, though they are widely enjoyed by adults and some (like *Moominpappa at Sea*) are considered part of the Finland-Swedish literary canon. Bennet, Chen, and Tesar and Arndt (2016) also look specifically at stories written for children. Other authors look at art (Horton, 2013) or stories for adults (Tallbear, 2015). Bennet mentions there is a quality specifically in children's stories that reverberates with the concept of vibrant materiality. This is because in the Western canon children's stories are more likely to feel comfortable with a certain amount of animism or anthropomorphism. Bennet explains why she uses stories:

It [a story] can direct sensory, linguistic, and imaginative attention towards material vitality. The advantage of such tales, with their ambitious naiveté, is that though they “disavow ... the topological work, the psychological work, and the phenomenological work entailed in the human production of materiality,” they do so “in the name of avowing the questions that have been too readily foreclosed by more familiar fetishizations: the fetishization of the subject, the image, the world. (Bennet, 2010, p. 19)

Bennet makes the claim that stories are good ways of becoming aware of the vibrancy of matter. Bennet argues that it, in the words of Bill Brown, “disavows” the way humans are usually engaged with the world as objects rather than things. In his essay *Thing Theory* (2001) Brown takes this distinction between *object* and *thing* from Heidegger. The object goes unnoticed, we do not notice the peculiarity of a hammer while it is functioning, it is merely a tool. However, once the hammer breaks it reveals its thingness by no longer being effortlessly accessible. When something breaks, we become aware of its individuality and peculiarity by the fact that we are forced to consider it as a thing. Bennet argues that stories have this same power to make us see the thingness of objects by seeing them outside of their use as tools (Brown, 2001). A description of a hammer can have the same effect of revealing thingness as a hammer breaking. We are forced to consider the hammer as thing precisely because of the way it has been presented to us through literature. The description of a hammer can never be effortlessly accessible because it is not a tool. This makes thingness easier to access through stories, because we cannot mindlessly use the objects in the story as objects. The objects in a story are imagined objects, rendering them as a thing rather than an object. We do not have access to a hammer in a story in the same way we have access to the object of a hammer. A hammer in a story cannot be taken out of the story to hang a painting, and even when in the story it is used to hang a painting, a story is a conscious telling of an event (real or imaginary) and therefore never a mindless use. Instead of using it without thinking we must put effort only into the hammer as a thing, a description of its particularity rather than an object.

Using stories is therefore not only a good medium through which it is possible to show the vitality of matter. It is also a medium through which the vitality of matter may be understood better than through pure theory. Stories can function as a way we become aware of the thingness of objects, of the animacy of things that in Western philosophical tradition are usually seen as inanimate. Stories can teach us ways to think about matter that cannot necessarily be grasped in theory alone. In *The idea of a social science and its relation to philosophy* (1990) Peter Winch describes the human sciences as different in kind from the natural sciences. The human sciences are doing something else, asking different questions, than the natural sciences. The human sciences seem to be more concerned with stories and less with the ability to find exact laws of nature. Winch uses Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* as an example to illustrate how a story is not translatable into a measurable, quantifiable thing. The story as a story gives us important information, that outside of a story is very difficult to communicate. You can distil a story to its base principles, or its roots in biology, but it will

feel like a reduction. Winch states that one can describe literary motives in the shape of biological urges, but these two are not interchangeable:

But would it be intelligent to try to explain how Romeo's love for Juliet enters into his behaviour in the same terms as we might want to apply to the rat whose sexual excitement makes him run across an electrically charged grid to reach his mate? Does not Shakespeare do this much better?" (Winch, 1990 p. 77)

The story of Romeo and Juliet could be described by the biological drive to procreate we can see in most animals. However, to describe it as such would result in a completely different story. Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet may clarify something to us about family, love and adolescence that is not reducible to laws of nature and biological drives. Looking at literature and stories through the lens of the humanities they can be used not only as material to illustrate an existing theory but also as a work that in itself gives an account of thought.

Stories are important in theorising vibrant materiality. Many indigenous peoples see materiality as animate and think of this through a narrative tradition. "Of particular interest in this literature [Indigenous literature] is the attention to the purposes of non-human agents, the examples of ethical reciprocity with nonhuman agents, and the treatment of narratives themselves as agential beings" (Rosiek & Snyder, 2019). Rosiek and Snyder in their paper *Narrative Inquiry and New Materialism: Stories as (Not Necessarily Benign) Agents* (2018) discuss the way Indigenous stories often already are aware of the vibrancy of matter. Matter in these stories is animate by default, things have important relationships with people and animals that sometimes are described as bonds of kin. Tallbear in her article *An Indigenous Reflection On Working Beyond The Human/Not Human* (2015) notes this about indigenous stories in the Sioux tradition: "Our stories avoid the hierarchical nature- culture and animal-human split that has enabled domineering human management, naming, controlling, and 'saving' of nature" (Tallbear, 2015, p. 235). The importance of this is that humans often feel like we can control, manage or save nature. What Tallbear notes here is that, if we are to take a theory of vital materiality seriously, we need to look at materiality as something that we are, not something that we can control or save.

In their study *The Story Is a Living Being: Companionship With Stories in Anishinabeeg Studies* (2018), Kathleen Westcott and Eva Garrouette explore the agency that stories have in the Anishinabeeg traditions, these stories often treat the narrative itself as a thing or being

with agency. Westcott and Garrouette argue that for these stories it is also important to ask yourself if you are being a good companion to a story. Stories are treated as beings with agency, with which one can have ethical engagement. To tell a story while being a good companion to it is to listen to the agency of the story and follow it where it wants to go. How can one be a good companion to a story you are analysing? I think the question of following the agency of the story in an analysis is comparable to how Toril Moi describes the adventure of reading. Moi argues that we should not use literature as a mere illustration of philosophical ideas, but rather see the story itself as something that can present us with new ideas. In this way you are not rifling through the story and only taking what can illustrate your point, but rather engaging with it as if it is a thing of worth in itself.

Moi in her essay *The Adventure Of Reading: Literature And Philosophy, Cavell And Beauvoir* (2011) argues that literature can work with philosophy. However, literature should not be treated only as illumination of pre-existing philosophical theories, instead it should be seen as working ‘behind philosophy’s back’:

Literature works ‘behind philosophy’s back’. Yet its work is not ‘outside’ philosophy, but ‘essential’ to it, as if philosophy has to turn around, to look behind itself to find fundamental ‘illuminations’ it can’t find in any other way. (Moi, 2011, p. 129)

Moi argues that, as Stanley Cavell says, literature should not be a mere illustration of philosophy. Literature works behind the back of philosophy but does not go outside of philosophy. Moi explains that philosophy and literature can add to each other. Literature can be used to reach conclusions that would have been impossible with pure theory. Moi in her essay uses Simone de Beauvoir to nuance this point. According to Moi literature is, as de Beauvoir describes, an adventure the reader can be taken on if she adopts the right mentality. This allows the reader to become the Other while remaining herself at the same time. This absorbing power of literature is different than the power of philosophy. An academic essay cannot truly transport the reader in the same way literature (and other art forms) can. We use imagination both with art and academia, however, art and literature are forms that can activate the imagination without the necessity of working towards understanding, academic texts have as a goal to make the reader understand something, and imagination is a tool that can be used to get the reader to understand the theory. Moi argues that it is this adventure that makes literature a valuable asset to philosophy. It has a power to transport the reader and make clear structures and concepts that philosophy could not have got to on its own. “(...) to read well is

to bring to the text a certain quality of attention which she characterises as a willingness to participate in the ‘adventure’ offered by the text.” (Moi, 2011, p. 136).

In this thesis, I treat *Moominpappa at Sea* as a philosophical work in its own right. I understand Jansson as a thinker who writes on similar themes as Bennet. In this thesis, my method for reading *Moominpappa at Sea* has been reading *Moominpappa at Sea* and *Vibrant Matter* as books on similar themes that help to explain each other as well as argue against each other. I treat *Moominpappa at Sea* as a literary work that offers a nuanced view of the topic of vibrant materiality, as well as other topics. I have chosen to focus on the themes of vibrant materiality.

Initially, I thought I would use *Moominpappa at Sea* as an illustration of Bennet’s theory. However, I participated in/attended a seminar where Ylva Perera discussed her paper *Från Djurets Synvinkel Är Människan Nazisten* (2019) which led me to re-evaluate my literary analysis. Perera discussed how she in her article endeavours to treat the literary writer Mirjam Tuominen as a thinker. Approaching the work of Tuominen not as an illustration or example of a philosophical theory, but rather seeing her work as a work of philosophical importance in and of itself (Perera, 2019). This aligned much more with how I see the role of literature within philosophy, and led me to change my approach to literary analysis and regard Tove Jansson as a thinker rather than her work as an example of a philosophical theory.

Moi describes the method Cavell endorses for reading literature as “letting the work teach us how to read it”. We should read a literary work in much the same way we read a philosophical work:

What does this sort of reading look like? Well, we often begin by trying to get at least a general idea of what the work is about, what its major concerns form and concepts are. At first, we may only form a hazy idea of the whole. To get a clearer view, we zoom in on key concepts, study the examples, circle back to passages that illuminate them, look for the arguments, the contradictions, and the exceptions. In the end, we come out with a workable understanding of the book’s concerns. (Moi, 2011, pp. 131–132)

Moi describes the method of reading a literary work as a philosophical work. We read the text to get the general idea, then we read it again and highlight what we may call key themes. We read and reread, identifying arguments and usable passages to get the overview of what the book is about. Of course, a philosophical work and a literary work are different in the way

they offer concepts and understanding. The intention of a literary work is not necessarily to make an argument, but rather to make space for an experience. Moi refers to this as an adventure. This is, according to Moi, the central difference between a literary and a philosophical work, a literary work is meant to make the reader experience something, while the philosophical work is meant to make the reader understand a theory. The experience in the case of literature can take place without full understanding of the work, understanding tends to not be the goal of literature, while an academic text has understanding as a goal, and experience might get the reader there.

In my reading of *Moominpappa at Sea* I identified three core concepts that I see as the book's central descriptions of relationships to the natural and object world. I discuss these in terms of *control*, *cultivation*, and *complicity*. I use these themes to examine the way Jansson describes the relationships between the characters and the natural world and how these relationships evolve the longer they are in this environment. I use other theories to explain where Jansson's account relates to other philosophical theories. I use *Moominpappa at Sea* as a work that can provide additions to and argue with the philosophical theories I use in my thesis. I explore the type of natural agency Jansson describes. Jansson describes wilderness and chaos as a form of natural agency. I compare the wilderness and the way the characters relate to it to the genre of ecohorror as discussed by Pietari Kääpä in *Ecology and Contemporary Nordic Cinemas* (2015). Ecohorror however ends with the relationship between wilderness and humans being terminated, humans must either leave or die. Jansson's wilderness allows for a continuation of the complicated relationship between the characters and the natural world.

Chapter 3: Analysis

Relationships to matter

In this chapter I will analyse the different relationships the Moomin characters have with the island they move to when they leave Moominvalley. I will analyse the ways Jansson's work corresponds with and argues against Bennet's work in *Vibrant Matter*. I will begin with a general introduction to the Moomins and what they are. Then I will summarise the story of *Moominpappa at Sea* and discuss previous scholarship. In the next sections I will explore the categories of *control*, *cultivation*, and *complicity*. After this I shall examine the particular kind of agency the island is described as having.

Moominpappa at Sea

Moomins are small trolls created by Jansson, they live in the Gulf of Finland in Moominvalley. Moomins are often seen as emblematic of kindness and hospitality, providing home and comfort for all kinds of different creatures through nine books and a comic strip written over a period of two decades. Despite the Moomin characters being obviously non-human, in these books they function as humanoid. Their behaviours and lifestyles are anthropomorphic and in this thesis I will be treating them as taking the place of the human in this human free world. *Moominpappa at Sea* is the eighth and second-to-last book in the Moomin series. In *Moominpappa at Sea* the central characters are Moominpappa, Moominmamma, their son Moomintroll and their adoptive daughter Little My. Moominpappa is an adventurer; he loves fires and big storms. In *Moominpappa at Sea* he tires of their safe existence in Moominvalley and takes his family along on his adventure to start a new life in a lighthouse on an island far out in the Gulf of Finland. Moominmamma gardens, bakes, and welcomes everyone into her home in Moominvalley. When the Moomins leave Moominvalley she is initially excited but later becomes terribly homesick.

Moomintroll is a young troll who is very close to his mother. However, in *Moominpappa at Sea* he starts to emancipate himself from his parents. He moves out of his parents' new house and starts a life of his own. Little My is a ferocious little creature who says what she feels without much regard for others. She lives her own life and is quite independent from the rest of the family. In addition to these central characters, there is also the Fisherman, a mysterious figure who lives alone on the island when the Moomin family arrives. The Groke is a frightening cold creature that follows the Moomin family from their home in Moominvalley

to their new life on the island. She freezes whatever she sits on for too long and loves the light of the Moomin family's storm lantern.

The book starts in Moominvalley, where everything is calm. Moominpappa feels restless and wants to move away because there is nothing for him to fix in Moominvalley. They take the boat out at night to move to the island with the lighthouse which they have seen only on Moominpappa's map. The Groke follows the light of their storm lantern as they leave. When they arrive on the island the lighthouse is deserted and the light is off. Moominpappa takes on the role, and the hat, of the lighthouse keeper. However, he cannot ignite the light. He tries various other projects, such as fishing and building a jetty, but none of them go according to plan.

Moominmamma attempts to cultivate a garden like the one she had in Moominvalley, but the sea keeps washing it away. She misses Moominvalley terribly so she starts to paint the garden she had on the walls of the lighthouse. She discovers she is able to disappear into these paintings. The island begins to move at night. The trees and boulders move closer and closer to the lighthouse. Different characters have different ideas as to why this is happening. Moominpappa thinks the sea is bullying the island. Moomintroll thinks the island is scared of the Groke.

Moomintroll moves out of his parents' home in the lighthouse and into a glade he found in the woods. Later Little My removes the ants that live there. Moomintroll falls in love with a seahorse that dances on the beach at night. In the hopes of seeing her he takes the storm lantern out to the beach every night. This attracts the Groke and so begins a tentative ritual where Moomintroll brings the storm lantern and the Groke waits for him on the beach. One day they are out of paraffin, so the lantern does not burn. However, the Groke does not seem to notice the difference. Subsequently, the Groke no longer freezes whatever she sits on.

The island calms down after the Groke has warmed up, and Moominpappa has spoken sternly with the sea about bullying the island. The trees and rocks return to their own spots. It is also the birthday of the Fisherman. The Moomin family invites him to the lighthouse to celebrate. This prompts the Fisherman to remember that he is, in fact, the Lighthouse keeper. He dons his hat and immediately repairs the lighthouse lamp.

Several scholarly texts have analysed *Moominpappa at Sea* as a novel in which gendered roles within a family become apparent. The book has multiple distinct perspectives. Niko Antikainen in *Genus i Tove Janssons roman Pappan och havet* (2010) gives a linguistic

analysis comparing the language used by Moominpappa to the language used by Moominmamma. Antikainen finds that even though superficially Moominpappa and Moominmamma seem to conform to traditional gender roles, this reading can be complicated in several instances. In *Pappan, mamman och fyren: Manligt och kvinnligt i Tove Janssons Pappan och havet och Muminpappans memoarer* (2010) Sanne Sebastian Nilsson Lindberg also write about the gendered dynamic between Moominpappa and Moominmamma in *Moominpappa at Sea*. Nilsson Lindberg discuss how gender and especially manliness and unmanliness are problematised in *Moominpappa at Sea* and *Moominpappa's Memoires*. There have also been analyses of the natural world and the power of spaces in the Moomin books. In *Strange vegetation: Emotional undercurrents of Tove Jansson's Moominvalley in November* (2018) Sara Heinämaa describes the autumn forest as one of the main characters of *Moominvalley in November*, the last Moomin book. In *Parties as Heterotopias in Tove Jansson's Moomin Illustrations and Texts* (2014) Sirke Happonen describes the power that the party as a space has within the world of the Moomins. Recently a Finnish article about *Moominpappa at Sea* was published by Sanna Tirkkonen. The article *Yksinäisyyden tunteet Tove Janssonin teoksessa Muumipappa ja meri* (2019) deals with Finnish loneliness in *Moominpappa at Sea*.

In this thesis I do not discuss the Groke much, despite the fact that she is undeniably a very interesting Other occurring within several Moomin books. In the earlier books she is the main antagonist, but in *Moominpappa at Sea* she becomes more of a sympathetic figure. In *The Unseen, the Discouraged, and the Outcast: Expressivity and the Foundations of Social Recognition* (2018) Joonas Taipale discusses the Groke as a manifestation of emotions and relationships in *Moominpappa at Sea*.

In this section I have explained some of the background to *Moominpappa at Sea*, as well as some of the scholarship surrounding it. In the upcoming section I will give my own analysis of *Moominpappa at Sea* looking specifically at the way the characters relate to matter. I focus mainly on the relationships between the different characters and the island.

In my analysis I will explain how Jansson portrays the island as alive. In my analysis of *Moominpappa at Sea* I will focus on the relationship these characters have with their surroundings. I will analyse what the novel seems to be telling us about the way we have relationships with nature. I will analyse the relationships the Moomin characters have with the island through the themes of *control*, *cultivation*, and *complicity*. I found these themes in the text to be the most prominent way the relationships between the different Moomin characters

and the island are depicted. In addition, I will analyse what kind of agency the island seems to have, and how this fits into existing narratives of natural agency through the concept of ecohorror as used by Kääpä.

Control

In this section I will explain the relationships of control the Moomin family, and especially Moominpappa, has with the island and the sea.

A central point in *Moominpappa at Sea* is how Moominpappa is trying to control the island. He attempts to make the island fit his idea of what it should be. Moominpappa's form of control is through a scientific method of documentation. He has a notebook in which he writes down all his island observations. He is especially interested in the sea since he has an image of himself as knowledgeable about the workings of the sea. "I'll explain it for you," said Moominpappa. "You must always ask me if there's anything you don't understand – I know about everything connected with the sea." (Jansson, 1984, p. 56). Moominpappa tries to claim knowledge of the sea and the lighthouse superior to that of his family. However, this self-image suffers as time and time again the sea and the wind do things he does not predict.

The confusing thought that the sea obeyed no rules at all returned. He tried to dismiss it from his mind quickly. He was determined to understand, to solve the mystery of the sea so that he would learn to like it and be able to keep his self-respect. (Jansson, 1984 pp, 165–166)

Moominpappa is subscribing to the idea that everything about the natural world can be known through documentation and deciphering of the rules of nature. Moominpappa states that he needs to understand the rules of the sea, so he can learn to like it and keep his self-respect. His self-image is tied to superior knowledge of the sea, but so is his love for the sea. He feels he cannot like the sea if he cannot predict it. This suggests that for Moominpappa there is nothing about the sea that is not mechanical. He is not interested in the beauty of the sea or its eccentricities, he is interested in the way it behaves according to certain rules.

Moominpappa understands the island and the sea as something that can be controlled through categorisation. He categorises things in order to understand them and to assign ownership to them. When he finds a black tide pool, he forbids Little My from fishing in it, because "*the black pool is for fathers*" (Jansson, 1984, p.37). He forbids himself and Moomintroll from fishing in certain areas because Moominpappa thinks they belong to the fisherman. When he

categorises things, he also decides who owns them or who should have access to them. The categorisation is not only a way to understand but also a way to make clear to others who has access to what, and who does not have access. This also indicates that at this moment Moominpappa is thinking of the island strictly as an object to be used and divided, rather than as something with its own agency.

Adorno (1973) states that the way we try to capture things in concepts is a way we try to execute control over our surroundings, if we conceptualise it and capture it in a concept it is ours to control, because we understand it. Moominpappa in *Moominpappa at Sea* is trying to do this with the island. In order to live there he feels the need to understand and control it. Moominpappa's ownership of the island comes back multiple times in the book. Moominpappa himself links this ownership to having superior understanding of how to live on the island.

However, according to Adorno this control is never fully possible, there is always something nonidentical we cannot capture in a concept. Bennet compares this to what she calls vibrant matter (Bennet, 2010). The way concepts and things refuse to be reconciled with each other is frustrating to us. Moominpappa spends nearly the whole book being frustrated by the island and the sea, because they are not letting him understand them fully. They are unwilling to be captured. According to Adorno the ethical project here is to acknowledge the lack of reconciliation, the way things will continue to elude concepts (Adorno, 1990). According to Bennet we should acknowledge our own part in this non-identity, or vibrant materiality. We must acknowledge that we are part of this world of nonidentical or vibrant things, and not only looking at a world that eludes reconciliation (Bennet, 2010). Human beings are part of the world of things and influence it as well as being influenced by it.

Moominpappa by trying to control the natural world around him through conceptualisation and objectification is unable to see the way in which nature eludes his grasp. He cannot see what goes on outside of the scope of his research, he does not know of the Groke being on the island, he is unaware of the feelings of the island, and the projects engaging the rest of his family. Moominpappa's engagement with the natural world around him changes dramatically when he decides that the sea and the island are alive. He is now able to like the sea even though he has not figured out the rules by which the sea abides.

‘Are you going to stop bothering about the sea, then?’

‘Far from it,’ exclaimed Moominpappa. ‘Do I stop bothering about you just because you behave like a stupid fool?’(...) ‘the sea is sometimes in a good temper and sometimes in a bad temper, and nobody can possibly understand why. We can only see the surface of the water. But if we like the sea, it doesn’t matter.’ (Jansson, 1986, p. 181)

Instead of needing to understand the sea to like it, Moominpappa can now make peace with the sea as an entity that he does not have to fully understand to live with and like. He can love a natural phenomenon without having to understand the rules it abides by. When he concludes that the island is alive, and afraid, he feels compassion for the island, for the rocks and trees attempting to come into the lighthouse, in a way he does not when he thinks it is all “matter out of place”. He uses a different type of understanding, not the mechanical understanding of the natural scientist, but the contextual understanding of a social being.

This can be read in relation with Peter Winch who in his book *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* describes the way social science is different in kind from natural science:

We say the cat ‘writhes’ about [in pain]. Suppose I describe his very complex movements in purely mechanical terms, using a set of space-time co-ordinates. This is, in a sense, a description of what is going on as much as is the statement that the cat is writhing in pain. But the one statement could not be substituted for the other. The statement which includes the concept of writhing says something which no statement of the other sort, however detailed, could approximate to. (Winch, 1990, pp. 74–75)

To look at something through the lens of the natural sciences is to look at it with the idea that every movement of an organism can be boiled down to pure mechanics. There are laws of nature that lead, under these circumstances, to this exact outcome. The social sciences, according to Winch are different in kind, not in degree. It is not just that a cat in pain is a complex scenario to describe mechanistically, according to Winch describing this scenario as pure mechanics is to reduce it to a different story. A cat “writhing in pain” is something that is fundamentally different from a description of the cat’s movements and physical condition.

Moominpappa is now engaging with the island and the sea as if their movements are in this way irreducible to pure isolated mechanics. He is no longer interpreting the sea as a body of

water controlled by natural forces such as the tides, he is instead engaging with it as a wilful thing.

Max Scheler in *The Nature of Sympathy* (1979) discusses this same idea, the idea that something is lost when we describe an expression in purely mechanistic terms. For Scheler there is a fundamental difference between describing all the mechanical movements of a smile, upturned mouth, visible teeth etc., and saying someone “has a friendly smile”. It is impossible to mechanically describe a friendly smile. Something always gets lost in this process. Instead, Scheler argues, we should look at expressions as “patterns of wholeness” (Scheler, 1979). Only when we take a holistic view of the expression of a feeling can we interpret these in a way that makes sense for interacting with them.

This leads us back to Bennet’s vibrant materiality. Bennet claims that matter cannot be engaged only on this materialistic level, there must also be engagement with matter as patterns of wholeness. We must be able to see the assemblage matter as part of as well as the mechanics of matter.

Moominpappa learns to see the island and the sea as an assemblage of things that are alive, instead of isolated things like stones and trees. He feels compassion towards this assemblage and even sees the Moomin family as being a part of it. Control here is exercised by Moominpappa who imagines he can control the island and the sea if only he learns how they work. He thinks if he uses a scientific method to categorise the movements of the sea, he will understand it fully. However, this seems to be impossible. What seems to happen here is that Moominpappa is unable to get a grasp on the island via a method of categorisation. The island and the sea elude his notebooks, always acting in ways he could not predict. Scheler argues that we cannot reduce the world to purely isolated mechanics, something is always lost when we do this. It is a reduction that may be useful but does not fully capture any event. Scheler argues that if we see an event this has an effect that we cannot recreate with pure mechanics. Bennet makes a similar argument that things are irreducible to objects, and that we need to pay attention to the assemblage rather than the thing on its own. Once Moominpappa sees the island and the sea as agencies he is able to feel for them without being able to fully predict them. He becomes able to make peace with the unwillingness of things to be captured in objects.

Cultivation

Moominmamma is the character in the novel that is most emblematic of cultivation as a means of dealing with her surroundings. She is homesick and wishes she were back in Moominvalley. Moominmamma tries to recreate Moominvalley for herself, first by recreating her garden on the island and later by painting Moominvalley on the walls of the lighthouse. She is trying to make the island into a place where she can be comfortable but can only imagine Moominvalley as this place.

Cultivation is a specific type of control that reorganises and reshapes the world to fit a certain image. It is not the scientific method Moominpappa uses to exercise control. Cultivation is a type of control based on separating the wanted from the unwanted, based on cleaning and organising. Essentially it is the difference between a biologist and a gardener; the biologist is trying to peel apart the rules nature abides by. The gardener is trying to shape nature to a specific goal that is, in this case, primarily aesthetic. “There’s so much to be done here! Just think! Fancy being able to build all one’s life and turn the island into a miracle of perfection” (Jansson, 1984, p. 39).

Moominpappa notes that what he likes about the island is the way in which it is wild and unkept, but only because this provides the possibility to perfect it. The island is a project that can be shaped in the image of Moominpappa’s perfection. Moominmamma does something similar, she tries to shape the island to be like Moominvalley. Both of them disregard the island as already being something and having a will of its own. “‘Perhaps one shouldn’t try to change things too much on this island,’ said Moominmamma. ‘Just leave it as it is.’” (Jansson, 1984, p. 95)

Moominmamma notes that the island seems resistant to change after her first attempt at making a garden on the island is washed away by the sea. This does not, however, stop her from recreating her garden higher up on the island, away from the sea.

Gradually she had gathered together a large pile of logs and bits of plank. The nice thing about it was that she had tidied up the island at the same time; it made her feel as though the island was like a garden that could be cleaned up and made to look beautiful. (Jansson, 1984, p. 117)

Moominmamma is attempting to make the island into a garden the way she likes it. She plants rose bushes from home and attempts to make earth by bringing the seaweed up from the beach onto the rocks. She cleans up the beach and tries to make the island into a garden.

She wants to repair things and make them cleaner, more organised, prettier. Cultivation here looks like a type of control, but is very different from Moominpappa's control, which is centred around categorisation and restricting access. Moominmamma is more interested in making the island beautiful than in inhibiting other people's interaction with it. She cleans up the beach and finds solace in the way the island can be made to look or act like a garden. Unlike Moominpappa she is not researching the island in order to know the rules by which it operates. Moominmamma uses her knowledge of gardening to cultivate the island, and her homemaking and carpentry skills to restore and improve the interior of the lighthouse. In addition to this she paints herself a garden, when the garden outside does not grow to her liking, she creates a garden by painting Moominvalley on the walls of the lighthouse. Moominmamma works with what is already there in order to cultivate it and repair it. Moominpappa wants to make new things, to change and create: "‘I don't want to mend anything,' thought Moominpappa. ‘I don't want to pick seaweed...I want to build big things, strong things, (...)'” (Jansson, 1984, p. 95).

The difference between control and cultivation seems to be that control works against the environment, while cultivation works with it. However, we do see that cultivation is based on separating and putting things where they belong. Moominmamma cleans the beach by taking away the driftwood. She makes gardens where her roses can grow. In a garden, at least in Moominmamma's version of a garden, things are beautiful and ordered. Things of a kind are together. It is the opposite of wilderness. There is no space for the wild and undomesticated in cultivation.

Moominmamma tries to control the island by cultivating and domesticating it. She attempts to put rosebushes and apple trees on rocks and cliffs. By the end of the novel Moominmamma realises that this is going to be an unsatisfying way of working. She has been working with her idea of what should be on the island, instead of looking at what is already there.

She looked at her withered rose-bushes and thought: ‘How silly of me to put them there! But there are plenty, the island is full of them, and anyway, wildflowers are even more beautiful than garden flowers, perhaps.’
(Jansson, 1984, p. 193)

Cultivation is based on a pre-existing idea of how things should grow. It is based on separating things of a kind, tulips go with other tulips, vegetables grow together in neat rows, and dandelions and other weeds get removed. However, cultivation is also a tool for protecting more vulnerable species from invasive ones and making sure plants can grow to their full potential. In the final chapters of the book Moominmamma still gardens, however she decides to make a garden of wildflowers; flowers that already grow on the island. Instead of holding on to her ideal of what a garden is supposed to look like she makes peace with the wilfulness of the island. She still cultivates it, but she lets the island have its wildness and instead of forcing her norms she opens up to cultivating with the island instead of against it.

Moominmamma tries to make the island more like Moominvalley, instead of realising that the island has its own agency. Her form of controlling the island is through cultivation. She attempts to make the island into a garden, and her idea of a garden is very narrow. She makes a space that is aesthetic, and discards what she sees as messy. In Moominmamma's cultivation there is no space for the undomesticated and the wild. When she becomes aware of the agency of the island and works with it, she becomes more able to work with the island and change it in certain ways. She still wants a garden, but plants wildflowers instead of roses, she works with the wilfulness of the island to create something instead of suppressing that wilfulness.

Complicity

All the members of the Moomin family seem to be involved in guilt through complicity. Usually they are directly or indirectly responsible for harm that befalls smaller creatures that are inconvenient to them, or they accidentally cause harm to them. In this section I will give some examples of complicity in *Moominpappa at Sea* and explain what it means to be complicit in harm.

An example of complicity is the nest of the bald coot. When the Moomin family arrives at the lighthouse they cannot use the stove because there is a bird's nest in the chimney. They argue about the ethics of removing it before Moominmamma finally decides they should remove it. "Take it (the bird's nest in the chimney) down' she said. 'We can hang it out of the window. Sometimes trolls are more important than bald coots'" (Jansson, 1984, p. 54).

The Moomin family finds the nest of a bald coot in the chimney. They find it because they cannot light the stove. In order to light the stove, they would need to remove the nest. The displacement of the nest causes all the Moomins to consider the correct/proper way to act. Is it

justified to move the nest for their own convenience? Everyone looks to Moominmamma for an answer. Moominmamma finally settles that the nest could be hung out of the window because "sometimes trolls are more important than bald coots".

The Fisherman caught sight of the bird's nest on the desk. "That should be in the chimney," he said firmly. 'It's been there for years.' 'We had thought we might hang it out of the window,' said Moominmamma apologetically. 'But we haven't gotten around to doing it ...' (Jansson, 1984, p. 204)

When the Fisherman/Lighthouse-keeper comes to the lighthouse he sees the nest on the table and reproaches the Moomins because the nest should be in the chimney. The Moomins had forgotten about the nest completely. Moominmamma feels guilty when she is reminded of this, but no remark is made about the bald coot again. Jansson never explains to us that the nest was hung out and the coot returned. Instead we are left with this acknowledgement of harm done by the Moomin family. The harm they do is twofold, first they removed the nest due to a need, but then they did not take responsibility for it as they said they would. It seems like the compromise of hanging the nest out of the window was made to make them feel better about removing the nest, rather than as a real solution.

Another passage where we can see complicity in action is when Moomintroll and Little My discover a small graveyard behind the lighthouse. Little My says that there are dozens of birds buried there.

'They must have flown into the light,' Moomintroll said slowly. 'It's what birds do...And killed themselves. And then the Lighthouse-keeper picked them up every morning. And then one day he got fed up with it, put the light out and went away. (Jansson, 1984, pp. 125–126)

Moomintroll speculates that the birds must have flown into the light of the lighthouse, and that the lighthouse keeper must have buried them. Moomintroll thinks the lighthouse keeper felt so bad about the dying birds that he turned off the light in the lighthouse and left for good. In the book the lighthouse keeper leaving seems to have little consequence outside of the island. However, a lighthouse has the purpose of guiding ships so they can navigate safely. We can ask ourselves if harming the birds is acceptable because the lighthouse keeper is playing a vital part in an assemblage with a trajectory meant to prevent harm. If an assemblage is causing harm and providing care should we stay in the assemblage for the care we provide, or remove ourselves so as to not contribute to harm? This gives us a way to

expand upon Bennet's approach of removing oneself from harmful assemblages. The ethical advice of removing yourself from harmful assemblages does not cover the possibility of an assemblage having a trajectory of both harm and care.

Moomintroll finds a glade in the forest that is just the place of which he had always dreamed. It is just hidden enough, and just open enough. It is warm and full of flowers. However as soon as Moomintroll lies down he also discovers the glade is full of red ants that bite him. He wants to have the glade for himself, and tries to justify his right to it: "There were many kinds of justice. According to one kind, which was a little complicated perhaps, but absolutely fair, the glade belonged to him and not to the ants" (Jansson, 1984, p. 67).

The glade is so beautiful that Moomintroll cannot let it go. He thinks of what the right thing would be to do. The ants cannot love the glade like he does, they are unable to appreciate it. And even if they could it seems to Moomintroll that his love weighs more than the love of even many ants. Moomintroll thinks that there are different kinds of justice, and there is a kind of justice in which he has more of a right to the glade than the ants, even if they were there first.

He goes to Moominmamma to ask if there is a right way to go about removing the ants. However, Moominmamma says that if someone lived somewhere before you came of course it is only right for them to keep their home. One could politely ask them to move, and help them, of course. However, Moomin cannot find a way to communicate with the ants and goes to Little My to ask what she thinks. Little My immediately realises what Moomintroll's problem is and tells him she will solve it. After a few days Moomintroll returns to the Glade to find it ant free but discovers that underneath the moss there is paraffin and millions of dead ants.

'But ants are like mosquitoes' Said Little My. 'It's a good thing to get rid of them! Anyway, you knew exactly what I was going to do to them! All you hoped was that I shouldn't tell you about it. You're awfully good at deceiving yourself!' (Jansson, 1984, p. 97)

Moomintroll confronts Little My about what she has done. Little My tells Moomintroll that he only came to her because he wanted her to solve the problem by any means necessary and not tell him about it. He wanted this to happen, he just did not want to know about it.

For a while he is very regretful and even puts sugar around the glade for the ants. However, he soon forgets about the ants and appreciates his glade without thinking of them.

Moomintroll didn't think about the ants anymore. They had become part of the ground beneath him. The smell of paraffin had disappeared, and new flowers would grow where the old ones had died. He supposed that round the thicket there were thousands of happy little red ants enjoying the sugar. Everything was just right. (Jansson, 1984, p. 115)

Moomintroll feels regret and tries to make up for it by putting sugar out for other ants. However, Little My remarks that he only does this to make himself feel better, and that red ants do not eat sugar. Moomintroll has a goal of not feeling guilty, rather than not doing harm.

When we look at responsibility through a lens of collective agency assigning a single cause as responsible for any outcome becomes impossible. Who is the cause of the ants dying? Little My poisoned them, but Moomintroll alluded to needing her help in the first place. Besides, there are a million small things that make up the assemblage Moomintroll finds himself in: Moominpappa brought them to the island, the ants were in that specific glade, Moomintroll discovers the glade through his dissatisfaction with life in the lighthouse, and the paraffin drowned the ants. It is a swarm of small agencies that resulted in harm. How can any one individual be the cause of this? Bennet would say that Moomintroll should have removed himself from an assemblage he knew was going to cause harm. Bennet states that we should remove ourselves from assemblages with harmful trajectories. Little My states that Moomintroll knew that she would kill the ants. Even if he did not know, he did not care what would happen to the ants and wanted the glade for himself at all costs. He should have left the ants to their glade, and not have gone to Little My for help, knowing that she would cause harm.

However, the case of the nest of the bald coot seems less simple. It appears Moomintroll could have removed himself and that may even have prevented harm. However, the Moomins cannot remove themselves from living anywhere. Even if they went back to Moominvalley in order to be able to cook while not harming the coot, taking up space in the world is necessarily causing some kind of harm. We step on plants and smaller creatures, in order to live anywhere we remove other life from this area. The coot, like the example of the ants, seems to be a question of priority; when should you remove or harm a lifeform to benefit your own life? In the case of "lesser" animals humans usually find it acceptable to remove or

exterminate the animal to benefit human life. We kill ants, rats, slugs and flies in our homes with very little thought. We cannot remove ourselves from these assemblages, however, we can look at our complicity from a different angle. Looking at this from a place of guilt for all the little harms we participate in does not help us do less harm. Moomintroll feels incredibly guilty about the death of the ants. But, as Little My notes, him feeling guilty does not do anyone any good.

We can reconcile some of the harm we do by acknowledging we are part of a bigger assemblage and acting with care to the assemblage even if we cannot always act with care to all individual participants in an assemblage. The Moomin family do end up removing the nest of the bald coot. However, they also manage to create a relationship of care with the island. They create a relationship with the island where they acknowledge and respect its agency, and work with this agency, instead of trying to remake the island into something it is not. They can keep living on the island because they give up complete control of the island. The island is not a blank page for them to work on, but rather an already existing thing they can live with. It seems that in order to care for something the Moomin family has to acknowledge that sometimes they will also cause harm.

The lighthouse keeper has left the lighthouse in order to stop causing harm to the birds. However, it seems the peace on the island can only be fully restored when he comes back at the end of the book and resumes his position and his collaboration with the lighthouse. This suggests that trying to remove yourself from a harmful assemblage as Bennet suggests, in the case of the lighthouse keeper, was an untenable situation. The lighthouse keeper could not stay away from the lighthouse forever; for the island to remain a healthy assemblage the lighthouse needs to function. By removing himself from an assemblage he saw doing harm he also removed himself from the responsibility he had to the island and the lighthouse. It seems like Jansson here suggests that we sometimes cannot avoid causing harm, and when we try, we are shirking our responsibility. We may not be doing harm, but we are also not taking care.

In this section I have explained three notable moments where Jansson makes explicit the complicity the Moomins have in harm. I argue that in the scenarios Jansson presents her characters often have no choice but to participate in assemblages with harmful trajectories.

Agency

In this section I will describe the type of agency Jansson gives to her characters as well as to the island. I will explain how this agency relates to what Bennet describes as distributive agency. I will start by linking Jansson's descriptions of the island in *Moominpappa at Sea* to Bennet's vibrant matter.

The island and the sea in *Moominpappa at Sea* are described as alive and with a certain agency throughout the book. Many of the descriptions are voiced by one of the characters. However, they make for unreliable narrators. Jansson makes this clear for the reader, by making sure the reader knows all characters only have partial information and they all have their own personal biases. Jansson's writing suggests that the observations by the characters are always subjective and from one perspective. Moominpappa, for instance, has no idea the Groke is on the island, because of this his observations are often not complete. In the conclusion of the novel both Moominpappa and Moomintroll think that they have solved the problems on the island but have very different ideas about how this happened. Besides the characters there is also an omniscient narrator giving descriptions. Even in the voice of the narrator the island is immediately upon arrival described as alive and threatening, suggesting this is an objective observation:

And then out of the night loomed an enormous shadow: the island itself was towering over them, looking at them carefully. They could feel its hot breath as the boat struck the sandy beach and came to a standstill: they felt they were being watched, and huddled together, not daring to move. (Jansson, 1984)

Throughout the book the island is described as afraid and is physically trying to move itself closer to the lighthouse. None of the Moomins know what the island is afraid of, but the narrative suggests strongly that it is the Groke. Moomintroll states that the Groke is "a danger to everything growing there, everything that was alive" (Jansson, 1984, p. 138). The first time we see the island move is when things on the beach seem to be moving away from the Groke. Interestingly it is not only the grass and the trees, but also the sand and the rocks that move. Moomintroll makes a distinction between the things that are growing and those that are alive. Growing seems to be a subset of alive, suggesting that the whole island is alive, not only the matter we would normally consider to be alive:

But the island seemed to be getting more and more uneasy (...). One night Moomintroll saw something that made him feel afraid. It was the sand. It had started to move. He could see it quite clearly, creeping slowly away from the Groke. There it was, a sparkling, glittering mass moving away from her great flat feet that were stamping the ground to ice as they danced. (Jansson, 1984, pp. 137–138)

By the end of the story the island stops trying to get into the lighthouse. Moominpappa and Moomintroll have quite different ideas why the island is no longer frightened. Moominpappa thinks it is because he discovered that both the island and the sea are alive, and the sea is bullying the island. After Moominpappa has a strong word with the sea the sea stops its bullying and the island can rest. Moomintroll however notices that through meeting the Groke on the beach night after night the Groke has warmed up and is no longer dangerous; because she is no longer cold the island no longer tries to flee from her.

Both Moominpappa and Moomintroll are convinced the island is alive, and both of them refer to “hearing the beating of the island’s heart”. The novel seems to suggest that it is the Groke warming up that stills the island, however there is never a distinct answer given. There seems to not just be one answer to why the island has calmed down, or why the Groke has warmed up.

Through a lens of distributive agency, we could conclude that all of these actions may have been related to each other, and we cannot say with certainty which actions exactly caused which reactions. It seems like there are so many things happening at once, that none of the characters are aware of everything. There is no root cause to the effect, as Bennet states. However, when we “identify the contours of the swarm and the kind of relations that obtain between its bits” (Bennet, 2010, p. 32), we see that the realisation that the island and the sea are alive is an important factor in the eventual peace of the island. The relations between the island, the sea, the Moomins and the Groke have all changed. This change seems to be the mitigating factor in the island calming down, regardless of the root cause.

The common denominator in all the possible ways the island has been calmed involves the Moomins realising that the island is alive, scared, and reacting compassionately to that fear. Instead of trying to alter the island and its behaviour they listen to it and work with it instead of against it. This story does not end with the conclusion that the Moomins have to leave the

island alone, however in order to stay there they have changed their interactions with their surroundings.

The island seems to have agency in *Moominpappa at Sea*, but the island is made up of rocks and trees and sand that all also seems to have agency. The rocks and trees and sand are afraid and move on their own. Agency seems to become more diffuse when looking at sand, does every grain of sand have agency? Bennet states that she does not speak of agency and agents but instead opts for actors because agency puts too much focus on the individual. According to Bennet everything is an actor within a network of other actors (Bennet, 2010).

In this way we also distance ourselves from the purely mechanistic understanding of cause and effect. If something causes something else the cause can never be only one thing, the cause is enmeshed within a structure of actors that are all contributing to an effect. This is what Bennet refers to as an assemblage (Bennet, 2010). Within an assemblage it is impossible to point to one actor and say that they have sole responsibility for an effect. Within distributive agency you necessarily also have distributive causality and distributive responsibility.

Within this swarm of responsibility Moomintroll is trying to claim that the death of the ants is not his fault. He points at his place in the swarm and thinks that he only told little My about it, and he could not have known what she would do. He is trying to downplay his own involvement by blaming the event on Little My. However, he is partially, though not solely responsible. Even if he could not have known what she would do he would still hold some shared responsibility for the part he played within the trajectory of the assemblage.

In this section, I have explained how Jansson describes the agency of the island as well as the agency of the characters. In the next section I will explore the type of agency nature holds in *Moominpappa at Sea*, as well as how this relates to thinking of natural agencies in other genres. I have explained how agency can be seen as distributive in *Moominpappa at Sea*.

Monstrous nature

In this section I will examine the relation the Moomin family has with the island. I will explore the way Jansson describes the island and its agency. Different types of narrative traditions explore the Otherness of nature and matter, I will analyse what narrative tradition the island as Jansson describes it could be categorised as. I will use Pietari Kääpä's description of an ecohorror in his book *Ecology and Contemporary Nordic Cinemas* to give

some context and contrast to Jansson's descriptions of the movements of the island in *Moominpappa at Sea*.

The natural world around the lighthouse refuses to be organised and even refuses to stay put. It starts to move closer and closer to the lighthouse, leaving large craters where the trees used to be. Nature in *Moominpappa at Sea* refuses to be pretty and organised and appears instead as feral and wild. *Control*, *cultivation* and *complicity* are three different ways I have defined as ways the characters relate to this wildness and wilfulness of the thing worlds around them.

Ecohorror as described by Pietari Kääpä in *Ecology and Contemporary Nordic Cinemas* is “films with nature as a challenge to human civilization” (Kääpä, 2015, p. 67). Kääpä goes on to describe the way ecocriticism and the horror genre tie into each other in Nordic horror films. In Nordic film culture there are central themes of nature as a danger, both through natural and supernatural predators. In these films there is a common thread of ecological and political concern, such as the exploitation of resources, and eugenics. Kääpä describes the horror film *Thale*, and the way it has the specific qualities of an “ecotope”:

(...) particularly intriguing is its evocation of the spatial ‘ecotope’ between human and the more than human. In biology and ecology, the ecotope is a space where different organisms and lifeforms share space. In the case of *Thale* the ecotope is the meeting place where humancentric views are confronted by ecosystemic realities as, literally, the humans come face to face with their others and realize the limitations of their worldviews. (Kääpä, 2015, p. 84)

According to Kääpä *Thale*, and many other ecological horrors deal with the concept of an ecotope, where humancentric ideology is met with a reality it cannot encompass. Human centric thinking is no longer sufficient to understand the world, and this is part of the horror. A common type of ecohorror, according to Kääpä is the horror in which human culture tries to control and harness a thing and that thing turns out to be uncontrollable. A good example of this is *Jurassic Park* (2009), where scientists bring dinosaurs back and build a theme park around them, thinking they can control them. In this film the ecohorror is the dinosaurs, who turn out to be uncontrollable, and humans have to vacate the island lest they be eaten. Kääpä describes this as an ecosystemic friction:

In this case the ecotope is not about finding harmony or even understanding of one another. It is not a point of synergy, or hybridity even, but more a

space of ecosystemic friction. Any attempt of the human to control its others results in destruction of both the human and its others (...) (Kääpä, 2015, p. 84)

Ecosystemic friction according to Kääpä is the clash between humans and the ecosystem they try to control. If humans try to control the natural Other, it shall lead to destruction. An ecotope can be concerned with hybridity or learning to understand each other, but most often in horror it is about the friction between the need to control and the uncontrollable. In *Moominpappa at Sea* we see a type of ecohorror in the island. We see the island from the outside trying to come indoors. The trees are approaching the lighthouse where the Moomin family lives, wanting to crowd the windows until the light is almost totally blocked, even boulders and rocks are rolling towards the lighthouse. The trees only move at night, and especially Moomintroll and Moominmamma are frightened of them.

At dawn the island slept. The trees had reached the lighthouse-rock, deep holes were left where great boulders had been before, now lying scattered among the heather. They were waiting for another night to come so that they could roll nearer and nearer the lighthouse. The great autumn gale continued to blow. (Jansson, 1984, p. 185)

We see, represented as an ecohorror the outside coming into the domestic sphere. In the horror genre this is often manifested in a plague, a virus or a parasite, breaching the boundaries of the body. (Kääpä, 2015) In this case it is the lighthouse that is in danger of being breached, the wild and undomesticated is trying to get in. The lighthouse is acting as the manifestation of safety, the home, the only part of the island the Moomin family has managed to bring into their domestic sphere. The trees are interpreted by the Moomin characters as scared of something; this is the reason they are trying to get into the safe haven of the lighthouse. However, they are still scared of the trees, Little My tries to scare Moomintroll by explaining how the trees will crowd the lighthouse:

‘Of course they will,’ said Little My, lowering her voice. ‘Can’t you hear the boulders beating against the door downstairs? They’re rolling up from all directions, crowding round the door. The trees are closing in round the lighthouse, getting nearer and nearer. Then their roots will start climbing up the walls until they’re right outside these windows, making it dark inside...’ (Jansson, 1984, pp. 182–183)

The island is trying to gather itself in the lighthouse, bringing the wild inside and making the lighthouse unsafe because the Moomins do not understand the trees, and therefore cannot control them. However, the problem of the trees trying to come inside the lighthouse is solved without violence, and without the Moomins having to leave. This is not Jurassic Park (2009) where nature must be left alone, the Moomins, in the end, can coexist with the island.

In this chapter I have described the different themes – *control*, *cultivation* and *complicity* – through which I have analysed the different relationships the Moomins have to the world around them. I have examined some examples of control, the need to theorise and categorise everything. The notion of this kind of Control assumes that everything is fully categorisable and that we can know and alter the world by categorisation and discovering by what laws nature abides. Control differs from cultivation by the way it is executed. Cultivation is a form of domestication, trying to change the way your surroundings are by getting rid of the wild and resistant elements. Complicity is the way we cannot help but do harm. I have detailed several examples of the way the Moomins are complicit in harm, despite not being the root or only cause of this harm and linked this to distributive agency. I ask if Bennet's approach of removing oneself from an assemblage with a harmful trajectory is always possible and the best course of action. The Moomins are each part of assemblages that have harmful trajectories. However, it seems that sometimes these characters cannot or perhaps even should not remove themselves from these assemblages.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the way Jansson's *Moominpappa at Sea* can provide a helpful addition to Bennet's *Vibrant Matter*. Jansson provides a nuanced account of the ways we are always complicit in systems and events we cannot fully control. In *Moominpappa at Sea* it becomes clear to the reader that guilt is not a helpful response to harm. Instead Jansson suggests we learn to live with the harm we do, while trying to take care of the things that surround us.

Chapter 4: Discussion

Ethical ecologies

In this thesis I have claimed that we can use Levinasian ethics of recognition to become aware of the ethical relationship we already have with matter. Levinas argues that we have an ethical responsibility to the Other from the moment we meet. Ethics for Levinas are not universal or general, they are particular. Ethics are part of every interaction. Levinas specifically argues that we become responsible to someone when we encounter the human face. He very much focuses on a human face to face encounter; however, I argue that a general version of this analysis of our interconnectedness can also be used to analyse human relationships with animals, plants and matter. We can encounter things; Bennet suggests the best way to become aware of this is through literature. In the traditions of many indigenous peoples the encounter with things is a given, due to thinking of matter as animate from the start. Levinasian ethics are comparable to ethics of care in certain ways.

Both Levinasian ethics and care ethics focus on the individual relationship instead of the universal. This distinction is often called the division between ethics of care and ethics of justice. Carol Gilligan is credited with the first work on this distinction in her book *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development* (1982) Gilligan describes how ethics of justice approach an ethical problem like a maths problem, citing rules and hierarchies, while ethics of care look at the context and relationships taking place around the ethical dilemma (Gilligan, 1982). Within the field of ethics of care Bennet's work has received some pushback. Bennet's work has been critiqued for muddying the waters between animals and things. Josephine Donovan in *The Aesthetics of Care* (2016) offers a critique of Bennet, and new materialism in general. According to Donovan the equation of living and physical matter is in juxtaposition with ethics:

New Materialism, therefore, though it offers a stimulating new perspective on physical matter, fails to provide a significantly new understanding of living matter. Any ontological equation between the two is ethically untenable (Donovan, 2016, p. 36)

Donovan argues that what Bennet is doing is ontologically equating living matter with physical matter. Donovan takes the example of the dead rat Bennet describes; the rat is

surrounded by a bottle cap and other trash. Bennet uses this example of her encountering a stick, a bottle cap, a dead rat (among other things) on an early morning walk and seeing them realising that there was a vitality in them, that this culture of things could not be reduced to a culture of objects. Bennet argues that this is a culture of things rather than objects, and this is made visible to her by the way the things are interacting with their surroundings. According to Donovan, it is incorrect to compare the always dead with the once alive. According to Donovan, there is a distinct care that is required by the animate that the inanimate does not require. To use a different example; it is ethically acceptable to kick a rock, but not a tortoise. However, this reading of Bennet still holds on to the animate/inanimate binary. It assumes that a rock and a tortoise are completely distinct. What Bennet is posing is that these are not distinct, however, kicking a tortoise hurts the tortoise, kicking a rock does not hurt the rock. This does not mean that there are no other ways to engage ethically with rocks, despite them not needing the same care tortoise do. Care is based on the need the other has. Ethics of care is based on the lack of a universal standard. We can only know what care someone or something needs when we engage with it. The needs of the Other only become apparent in our relationship to them.

I argue that a rock has little need for human care, in the same way the dead rat Bennet describes has little need of human care. Care extended to these individual bodies would be based more in the human need for meaning making than the need of the rock or the dead rat. Burying the rat would be based on the human concept of a funeral and does not extend care to the rat. However, a landscape may need human care, and this care for the landscape would include both the dead rat and the rock. We have an ethical responsibility to the assemblage that make up an ecology, and therefore we have an ethical responsibility to the rock. Some rock may be part of an ecology where kicking it may not harm the rock, but it would harm the ecology. For example, a rock covered in moss sits where it needs to sit to take part in a certain ecology. We have an ethical responsibility to the living tortoise because it has need of human care as an individual thing.

In *Moominpappa at Sea* all the Moomin characters, with the exception of Little My, must examine the way they live with a resistant landscape. They are used to things adhering to their will. However, on the island nature and the lighthouse refuse to behave according to the expectations of the Moomins.

Bennet in *Vibrant Matter* argues that matter is vibrant, animate, and part of the assemblages that are active in our daily lives. Within an assemblage there is never just one cause for an

event. An event is always caused by many factors participating in an assemblage; a swarm of agencies that are not controlled by one thing. Bennet states that ethical action, given the limited amount of power humans have over the assemblages they are part of, is to extricate yourself from an assemblage with a harmful trajectory. In *Moominpappa at Sea* Jansson shows us a different way to engage with assemblages and harm. The Moomin family is not able to extricate itself from harmful trajectories. They live on the island and take up space. They brought the Groke to the island, and even if this was not deliberate they are part of the assemblage that made this happen. The Moomin family chooses to remove the nest of the Bald Coot from their chimney in order to live in the lighthouse. Moomintroll sets in motion the event that kills an ants' nest. Despite the good intentions of the members of the Moomin family, they cannot extricate themselves from harmful assemblages. This seems to be how people exist, we are part of harmful assemblages whether we would like to be or not. We are always complicit in harm and trying to extricate oneself is not always possible. However, though Jansson does not present a way to live outside harmful assemblages, she does seem to present a way to live with them.

She looked at her withered rose-bushes and thought: 'How silly of me to put them there! But there are plenty, the island is full of them, and anyway, wildflowers are even more beautiful than garden flowers, perhaps.'
(Jansson, 1984, p. 193)

In *Moominpappa at Sea* Jansson describes the way the Moomin characters engage with matter. Moominmamma cultivates a garden. By doing this she is trying to push the space into a shape it is reluctant to take. The island resists her rose garden, and in the end Moominmamma realises that it is foolish to try to make the island into something it is not. There are other islands with roses on them; this one has wildflowers, so she decides to make a wildflower garden instead. Moominmamma is still trying to shape the space around her. However, she is now trying to work with the space. Jansson is presenting a way to live with things that allows for the complexity of living. Moominmamma cultivates the space around her. She weeds and separates things that she wants in her garden from things she does not want.

I wonder whether they will go back to just the same places or choose new ones instead. Let me know when they make up their minds and I'll go put some seaweed round their roots. (Jansson, 1984, p. 199)

When the island is no longer scared, and the trees are moving away from the lighthouse, Moominmamma wonders if they will go back to their old spots or choose new ones. She notes that she will put some seaweed, which will turn into soil, over their roots as soon as they have decided. Moominmamma here shows that she is not only working to make the island look like she wants it to look but she is also leaving room for the agencies of the trees, and caring for them. Jansson, in *Moominpappa at Sea*, seems to simultaneously make two points: We are always already in the world and taking up space, and we had best make peace with this, and we need to take care of it.

Throughout the book, Little My seems fully aware of herself as a thing. She regards herself as a natural body among other natural bodies and feels no guilt for harming them. She is completely at peace with the chaotic wilderness of their new surroundings. She is explicitly scornful of other characters when they try to clear their conscience over harming other things:

Do you think the Bald Coot will know whether her nest has been moved immediately or only after a little while? You only say that so you can chuck her out with a clear conscience. (Jansson, 1984, p. 54)

Little My asks Moominmamma why she thinks the bald coot will care if the nest is taken from the chimney now or in a little while. Little My is aware Moominmamma is unwilling to remove the nest immediately in order to make herself feel better. However eventually the nest will need to be removed so she can cook. Little My seems scornful of how unwilling the other Moomin characters are to perform these tasks that make them feel guilty.

‘But ants are like mosquitoes’, said Little My. ‘It is good to get rid of them! Anyway, you knew exactly what I was going to do to them! All you hoped was that I shouldn’t tell you about it. You’re awfully good at deceiving yourself!’ (Jansson, 1984, p. 97)

Little My reacts similarly to Moomintroll when he comes to her after she has killed the ants in his glade. She tells him that he would not have come to her without knowing what she would do. He wanted the glade at all cost, he just would have preferred not to know about the consequences. Jansson, through Little My, seems to argue that the idea that you can never do harm is a self-delusion. Little My is not squeamish about doing harm and is irritated by the response of the other characters. They act in a way that allows them to avoid feeling guilty, instead of being honest with themselves. This seems to relate back to McGregor’s call for an ethics of complicity, and critique of the idea that non-complicity is possible:

A sort of fantasy of non-complicity, which is like an ethics of care which is tied in with this desire to not be part of any violent systems, to opt out of all of them. (McGregor, 2018)³

Jansson, through Little My, seems to be critiquing something similar. She seems to critique the fantasy of non-complicity as well as the way this prevents the other characters from feeling guilty. Little My does not seem to be in favour of feeling guilt either. Instead, she seems to argue that you must be honest with yourself and do what needs to be done.

This seems to stand against Moominmamma's approach to the island. Through Moominmamma, Jansson seems to argue for an ethics of care. Moominmamma takes care of the things around her. Moominmamma struggles on the island because she has never had to work within a resistant landscape. What she misses about Moominvalley is, at least in part, the way her garden flourished. The garden in Moominvalley behaved according to Moominmamma's wishes naturally. The island does not behave according to Moominmamma's wishes at all. The island resists her efforts to change it. Moominmamma at first tries to force her will upon the island. Only after she stops doing this can she recognise the particular beauty of the island. Even after this realisation, she continues to cultivate the island. However, her cultivation is now motivated by what the island is already like, instead of what it should become. Moominpappa goes through a similar process:

As Moominpappa sat on the beach, the lighthouse seemed to rise higher and higher above him. It was just like his model that he hadn't had time to finish. Now he could see that the roof wasn't as pointed as he had thought and that there was no rail. He gazed at the dark and deserted lighthouse for a long time, and gradually it began to grow smaller and more like the picture he had carried in his mind for so long. 'In any case, it's mine', he thought, and lit his pipe. 'I'll capture the lighthouse.' (Jansson, 1984, p. 36)

When Moominpappa first sees the lighthouse, he thinks it is the exact lighthouse he imagined. However, when he comes closer, he realises it is not quite the same. Then, while he looks at it, it slowly looks more and more like what he imagined it ought to look like. Moominpappa is forcing the lighthouse to match how he thinks it ought to look. Moominpappa continues to do this to the island. He has an image of the island and how it ought to be. He tries to make the island behave through figuring out the rules by which it abides. Both Moominmamma and

³ The source is a transcript of an audio recording and has been edited for clarity.

Moominpappa learn to treat the island as its own entity with its own will that needs to be taken into account.

Moominmamma and Moominpappa both learn to take care of the island on its own terms. When they first come to the island both of them are working on the island and may think they are taking care of it. They are providing the role of caretakers by remodelling and restructuring the environment. However, they are not taking care, they do not take the island into account when they do this, they care for their own preferences. Throughout the book they both learn that the island has a will and an agency. Moominpappa speaks to the sea on behalf of the island. Moominmamma starts to see the island's own ecology as beautiful and puts her efforts in maintaining it, instead of changing it to make it look more like Moominvalley. Jansson seems to make both the argument that care is an important way to engage with matter, and that we need to acknowledge the space we take up without dancing around our own guilt.

When we take account of matter within our ethics, we become both more and less responsible. On the one hand, as Bennet points out, we are never the sole cause of any event. On the other hand, as we feel in Jansson's work, we can never avoid causing harm. This means that when we include matter in our ethical theories, we need to keep account of our responsibility to the assemblages of which we are part. We need to be conscious of the ecologies we live in and what influence we have on them, and act with care towards these assemblages.

Bennet states that we should extract ourselves from harmful assemblages. I argue that this is not always possible. In Jansson's *Moominpappa at Sea* we see the characters struggle with their relationships to nature. They are never able to extract themselves from these relationships, and not always capable of being in an environment without causing harm. Jansson seems to offer us a literary version of the ethics of complicity that McGregor is trying to find. McGregor mentions that the fantasy of non-complicity is tied into an ethics of care. We want to take care and not do harm. We try to escape doing harm by removing ourselves from complicity, but McGregor argues that we are not succeeding in not doing harm, rather we are not committing to the responsibilities we have to acknowledge the harm we are still doing. Jansson offers us the beginnings of an alternative ethics of care, where care and harm exist within the same space. On the island the Moomins are taking care, of each other, of the creatures, the sea and the island. However, they also do harm, and they cannot take up space without doing some harm. This version of an ethics of care is not setting the impossible task of eliminating the harm we do, but rather of making sure that the harm and care have a healthy relationship. We have a responsibility to the Other but also to ourselves. Little My

seems to express the stance that we need to be honest with ourselves about the harm that needs to be done out of care for the self or care for another and let this exist.

Jansson provides a nuanced account of the impossibility of exiting all assemblages with harmful trajectories. Instead Jansson provides the reader with an understanding of complicity in harm, and the acceptance of our complicity in harm. Jansson states that guilt is not a useful response to harm. Guilt, and trying to absolve yourself of guilt does not result in less harm being done. Instead Jansson's characters learn to live with their complicity in harm, while trying their best to take care of the things around them. They change their relationships to their surroundings in order to care for them, each other and themselves as best they can.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have given an analysis of vibrant matter as described by Jane Bennet in *Vibrant Matter: A political ecology of things* (2010) and Mel Y. Chen in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (2012). Bennet and Chen both argue against a strict distinction between the subject and the object. In this juxtaposition the subject is seen as alive, animate, and active, while the object is seen as dead, inanimate, and passive. The subject acts while the object is acted upon. Bennet refers therefore not to objects but to things; a thing being an object placed outside the subject/object binary.

Bennet refers to things instead of objects, to position herself outside the subject/object binary where subjects act and objects are acted upon. A thing is not only acted upon, it is itself an actant. Likewise, Chen argues that things have a certain animacy. Rocks, for example, are animate, according to Chen. Chen categorises animacy on a spectrum, rather than as a binary. On the spectrum of animacy a rock would be near zero, but not inanimate. Bennet speaks of the animacy of things as *thing power*. Thing power, according to her, is impossible to conceive of individually, but so is human power. When a human acts, it is made possible by microbes, minerals and fibres. According to Bennet, things always act within an assemblage; when I act, the assemblage of my body acts.

In this thesis, I analysed *Moominpappa at Sea* (1984), the eighth book in Tove Jansson's famous Moomins series. In this book, the Moomin family leave their easy life in Moominvalley to move to an island far out at sea. On this island there is a lighthouse and a grouchy fisherman. The island is hard to live on, it seems that the sea and the island are thwarting all attempts made by the Moomin family to make changes to the island. In addition to the unruliness of the environment they find themselves in, the environment itself is also changing. Everything on the island – trees, rocks, boulders, and sand – is trying to get away from the sea and closer to the lighthouse where the Moomin family has settled. In the manner that Jansson writes, both the island and the sea serve as both characters as well as environments. The island and the sea are interacting with the Moomin family and are actively resistant to the family's activities. This forces the characters to form a different kind of relationship with their environment. I have analysed the different relationships that characters have to their environment through three categories: *control*, *cultivation*, and *complicity*. The method I used to arrive at these categories was largely informed by Toril Moi's writing on

adventurous reading, where she describes different relationships between philosophy and literature. Moi states that when reading a text, it is important to engage with it not just as an illustration for a philosophical point, but as a text in its own right. Moi states we should endeavour to read work by a literary author in the same way as we would read work by a thinker when we use literature in our philosophy. In this thesis I have read Jansson as a thinker and have compared and contrasted her work *Moominpappa at Sea* with the philosophical texts by Bennet and Chen. Jansson's work can be used as an addition and correction upon the ideas formulated by Bennet.

The categories *control*, *cultivation* and *complicity* are based on how different characters engage with their environment. Moominpappa primarily engages with the island through *control*, which I categorise as a scientific method that assumes that everything acts according to certain unchangeable rules, and by learning these rules it is possible to gain full control. Moominpappa keeps notes and tries to figure out what rules the sea abides by, in order to control it. He has invested a large part of his identity in knowing the sea and grows frustrated when it seems the sea is not following any rules at all.

Moominmamma engages with the island through *cultivation*. She is homesick and misses Moominvalley. Because of this she tries to change the island to make it more like Moominvalley. At first sight, cultivation and domestication do not seem like violent impulses. However, it becomes clear that Moominmamma is trying to force the island into a shape it does not want to take. She tries to clean up and domesticate the island and does not want the island to be wild. Cultivation is necessary to cultivate those plants which may otherwise be taken over by invasive species. However, it is also a force that imposes order upon wilderness and decides what does and does not have a place within the garden. At the end of the novel Moominmamma is still a gardener, but she is no longer trying to make the island look like the picture of a garden she has in her mind. Instead she uses what the island already has to offer to enhance it.

The Moomin family has a dynamic relationship to its own *complicity* in harm. Control and cultivation are ways the Moomin characters seem to be trying to take care of the island. Moominmamma is playing the role of a caretaker – cleaning and tidying up – while Moominpappa states that he is learning to like the sea, and the only way he can like the sea is by understanding it. Both of these attitudes fit into what Bennet highlights as the ideological ways we separate ourselves from matter. We think we can reduce matter to objects, while they

are, in fact, things. Moominmamma and Moominpappa are in different ways reducing the island to an object that can be fully theorised, understood and ordered in the way we find most pleasing. Bennet argues that this is a reduction, and that there is always something left over when we reduce a thing to an object; there is a wildness and a power in things that cannot be fully theorised and ordered. By reducing the island to an object in this way both Moominpappa and Moominmamma are complicit in a kind of harm.

The relationships of the Moomin characters to the island seem to show us that we cannot deny our own complicity in harm. The Moomins are taking up space on the island, and by doing this they are doing harm to some of the creatures that live there. Not doing any harm is not an option for them. In the book, Little My repeatedly points out the ways the other characters are doing harm and not acknowledging it. They are not acknowledging their complicity in harm in order to make themselves feel better. The way complicity appears in *Moominpappa at Sea* seems to be a relationship that we need to attend to and acknowledge, rather than deny. Bennet argues that human bodies are things, and that we are largely no different from our surroundings; we are natural bodies among natural bodies. Being a thing with things would absolve us of much of the guilt the other Moomin characters feel in the face of their complicity. If the Moomins thought of themselves as Little My seems to think of herself, that is as part of the ecosystem, they could take up space without feeling guilty. However, they seem incapable of doing so because they feel responsible for their surroundings. This seems to not be a case of human exceptionalism (or Moomin exceptionalism) but rather a case in which the characters recognise they can only hold themselves responsible. In Levinasian ethics it is clear that the responsibility to the other is a one-way street; we can only recognise our responsibility to the other, the other has to recognise their responsibility to others on their own. The ethical demand is personal. Therefore, the Moomin characters feel this ethical demand to act with care for their surroundings, that do not necessarily extend care to them. Little My seems correct in the way she argues that the other characters need to own up to their complicity without guilt. Moominmamma, on the other hand, seems to be correct in her attitude that they need to take care of the island.

In *Vibrant Matter* Bennet states that in an assemblage responsibility for an outcome or an action can only ever be understood as collective. An action is not determined by any singular agent but by a swarm of agencies of which that agent happened to be part. Therefore, Bennet states that her theory is in conflict with the politics of holding people responsible for harm. According to Bennet, within a theory of vibrant assemblages the best way to act is to remove

yourself from assemblages with harmful trajectories. That is to say, if you see that you are in a situation where you or your presence is participating in harm, you need to remove yourself. Although there are situations in which such a strategy is advisable, I think this is not always possible. Due to the way certain systems operate in the world there are harmful assemblages that you cannot remove yourself from. Structures such as racism or events such as climate change are assemblages that are too big to remove yourself from. The act of trying to remove yourself from them actively causes more harm.

Bennet seems to see ethics as something that needs to be added to the engagement we have with vibrant matter. I argue that it may already be part of our engagement. Levinas introduces an ethics of recognition. He argues that there is an ethical demand that becomes clear to us in our interaction with an Other. When we meet the eyes of the Other, the Other makes an ethical demand upon us. The ethical demand is part of every interaction. This ethical demand is a demand for some kind of care. Levinas describes this as giving or refusing. When we ignore the other and do not give (this giving can be physical like money or food, but can also be time, attention or compassion) we are still making an ethical choice. In this way our engagement with Others is naturally ethical. Levinas very specifically speaks of a human Other that we meet by making eye contact. However, I think that this meeting with the Other can be extended to the more than human. Humans seem to sense an ethical demand from at least some animals and seem to be able to become sensitive to ethical demands of less recognisable Others like insects or trees. Bennet uses Bill Brown's Thing theory to argue that there is a difference between an object and a thing. A thing is an object that we recognise as unique and irreplaceable. These things are not necessarily things with a lot of value, but rather things that we have seen as not usable without considering this specific thing. A hammer is easily usable and requires little thought, it is replaceable by any other hammer. However, when it breaks, we suddenly become aware of this specific hammer. Brown argues that literature and art are good ways to become aware of objects as things. The thing in literature can only appear as thing and not as object because it is unusable for us. We are aware that the sword of the knight is not replaceable with any other sword because this specific sword has been described to us, which has importance to us as the readers. If it is possible to recognise objects as things it may also be possible to recognise the ethical demand things have upon us. The ethical demand as Levinas describes it is also personal and singular. It is a meeting of two people. However, since a thing is hard to separate, I think we can argue that assemblages may also make an ethical demand upon us, ecologies may be an assemblage, but they are not easily

separated. Do we need to consider every rock and grain of sand separately? Or can we speak of the beach as a thing? I argue that we can see certain assemblages as things, such as ecologies, while others will remain more difficult to see as a thing, such as political movements.

When we look at vibrant matter as something that makes an ethical demand upon us, we no longer need to include ethics in our thinking about vibrant matter, because it is already part of every interaction. We can see the ethical demand things or assemblages may have upon us, we can choose not to act upon this ethical demand, but this is still an ethical choice.

In *Moominpappa at Sea* the Moomin family discovers that it is causing harm despite trying not to. At the conclusion of the book they discover that the Fisherman living on the island is the original lighthouse keeper. Moomintroll thinks he left because birds kept flying into the light of the lighthouse and dying, and one day the lighthouse keeper just shut off the light and left. When the Fisherman returns as the lighthouse keeper, the Moomin family is able to form a better relationship with the island. Despite the harm the lighthouse keeper was causing to the birds; he seems to have been a vital element, necessary for the island to be able to form a healthy eco system.

I argue that Jansson in her novel *Moominpappa at Sea* presents a complicated and nuanced view of how to interact with the ecologies around us. I have compared the ethics presented to us in *Moominpappa at Sea* with the ethics of Vibrant Matter. I argue that Jansson's approach to ethics in *Moominpappa at Sea* adds to our understanding of an ethics of care when we take into account the vibrancy of matter. Jansson seems to argue that there are assemblages that both do harm and care and that it is nearly impossible not to do harm if care is provided, since something is always obstructed by trying to clear a path for something else. Some harmful assemblages are assemblages we should remove ourselves from, but some are also assemblages from which we cannot or should not detangle ourselves.

In this thesis I have argued that Tove Jansson's *Moominpappa at Sea* provides a nuanced and helpful addition to the theory of vibrant matter as proposed by Jane Bennet. When we exclude matter from our ethical thinking, we are seeing humans and certain animals as exceptional. By disregarding the binary opposition between subjects and objects, animate and inanimate, we make it more possible to see the ways we are part of larger structures acting in the world. Scheler argues that we cannot imagine a human being outside of their context and argues therefore that the premise of the other minds problem is false. In my opinion, this community

we are always a part of does not only include our human communities, but also our more-than-human communities. Levinas invites us to consider a kind of ethical relationship to other people that is individual as well as communal. A meeting, according to Levinas, is an ethical event. We are meeting the Other and they make an ethical demand upon us, which we can choose to ignore, but that is still an ethical choice. Using this point of view, I argue that we can view our relationship with the world of matter in the same light. We as human beings have an ethical responsibility to matter because it is there, and we exist in a relationship with it.

We need to recognise that ecologies are not just resources or habitats for animals we want to keep alive, they are also beings in their own right, to which we have an ethical responsibility. Jansson makes us aware that it is often impossible to take up space without doing harm, but that feelings of guilt and avoidance are not the way to manage this. Instead we need to learn how to take up space and actively take care, while acknowledging that we will also be complicit in harm. We are a thing among things, like Little My, which makes the harm we do part of a natural cycle. We are also always in relationships with Others which makes us receptive to the ethical demands of the Other, like Moominmamma. We must acknowledge the space we take without guilt, while trying to respond with care to the ethical demands of Others. Sometimes we need to take a bird's nest out of the chimney, but we should try to see if we cannot hang it out of the window instead.

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