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Refraining Co-Becomings: The Affective Pulse of Companionships

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ABSTRACT

This article studies the affective pulsations of relating in the enduring and changing experiences of companionship. In particular, its interest lies in relational arrangements that form outside the categories of romantic and sexual couple relationships, beyond heteronormative and humanist understandings of families and relationships. The research is based on interview data on important experiences of sharing life with friends, animals, ex-partners, and other companions in Finland. I examine the experiences of companionship with a methodological approach of co-becoming, with which I stress the affective and dynamic nature of relating. I also examine the everyday unfolding of companionships through the lens of time. Being interested in the unique affective rhythms and pulsations of co-becomings that do not fit measurable scales of time, I evoke the understanding of time as duration. I do this by developing a Deleuzoguattarian concept of refrain as a lens through which I read the interview data. I show that approaching time as a non-linear duration and refrain allows me to follow the pulse of co-becomings in ways that grasp the minor and ambiguous affectivity of companionships. This article contributes to feminist research on intimacy, time, and temporality through its novel conceptual take on companionships as refraining co-becomings.

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Introduction

This article examines the affective durations of relating in the experience of companionship. Its interest lies in the enduring and changing rhythms of co-becoming within relationships that do not fit the categories of romantic and sexual couple relationships. By affective and enduring pulse of companionship, I refer to the lived temporalities through which meaningful experiences of relating unfold, stay, resonate, and change. This focus on affective pulsation goes beyond examining the calculable durations of companionship. My study hence contributes to feminist discussions that examine close relationships and intimacy through affect theory and time (Coleman, 2012; Kolehmainen et al., 2021; Lykke, 2021).

This study is based on interview data on important experiences of sharing life. The interviewees experienced companionship in relationships with, for example, friends, ex-partners, and animal companions. In my research, the term *companionship* functions as a conceptualization of the experiences of relating that the interviewees in my study held as something of special importance in their lives. Inspired by Haraway's (2008, 2016) work on companion species and Lykke's (2021) work on compassionate companionship, my study paves the way for empirical research to tackle the multiplicity and diversity of intimate relating beyond heteronormative,

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humanist, and individualist understandings of families and relationships. I read the research data with a methodological approach of *co-becoming* (Lykke, 2019), with which I examine companionships as relational processes which do not settle into fixed forms but remain within a process of emergence. This approach elicits an analysis of affective and dynamic relational practices through which the experiences of companionship take shape and enables the sidelining of the normative definitions and categories of intimacy as determining premises of the research.

I draw from feminist studies on temporality by exploring how experiences of relating outside the normative models of intimacy endure and change. According to May (2016, p. 641), the duration of friendship relations is something particularly in need of explanation, whereas continuity is commonly taken for granted in family relations, which entail strong normative pull towards enduring unity. Likewise, my interviewees' experiences of companionship do not conform to cultural images of constancy and permanence. As the interest of my study is positioned both in-between and outside the categories of friends and family, I contribute to complicating the aforementioned distinctions and turn away from studying relationships on the basis of culturally established categories (Dahl & Gabb, 2019; Ketokivi, 2012). Instead, I focus on the affective workings of everyday experiences that build a duration of companionship within the heterogeneity of intimate arrangements. I am interested in how such experiences of companionship that form outside the normative models of couple relationships and family become lived through a continuum of time (Castillo & Kekki, 2021, p. 193), as a duration of relating that reaches beyond understandings of intimacy as a linear progression of a dyadic bond. I examine this by grasping the recurring and changing pulsations of mundane practices and ways of relating that constitute experiences of life-sustaining companionship.

I develop a conceptualization of *refraining co-becoming* as a lens through which to study this affective pulsation. By utilizing the Deleuzoguattarian concept of refrain (Deleuze et al., 1987) I examine how the experiences of companionship unfold with repetition, differentiation, change, and even the prospect of separation while enduring as a sense of connection that is vital to life. I approach refrains in the experience of co-becoming as transforming recurrency, as processes of relating that unfold through unique rhythms of connection that are not measurable with quantitative and uniform scales of time or as a succession of events. Refraining co-becomings instead emerge as the duration of connection in affective and material arrangements of human and non-human bodies. This conceptualization enables me to understand the experience of companionship beyond, if not against, commonsense notions of dyadic intimacy and deepening closeness as a progression of calculable time. Consequently, this article provides novel insights and conceptual openings for the empirical study of close relations as affective and temporal.

I first introduce my theoretical framework and the main concepts of this article, then describe my data and the methodological choices of this research. I then analyse how the different temporalities of co-becoming pulsate in experiences of sharing everyday life, as shown in my research data. I do this in analytical sections, which focus particularly on refraining practices, affects, and tensions and their differentiating becoming and change. Reading the data through the lens of refrain, I bring forward material practices that build important territories of relating, such as regular phone calls and having coffee together. I analyse how co-becomings emerge through tensions with chronic time in cases when time is sparse and strained. I also examine how the experiences of care and belonging unfold with asymmetric power relations and heteronormative life trajectories. In the concluding section of this article, I discuss how the refrain, supported by the feminist theories of time and bodies' material becomings (Coleman, 2012), provides a tool with which the pulsations and temporalities of companionships can be grasped in their ambiguous movement while situated within their entangled power relations. I argue that the concept of refrain opens new paths for the investigation of the affective pulsations and durational temporalities of companionships beyond the understanding of dyadic intimacy.

Non-Normative Companionships, Affect, and Time

Studies on non-institutionalized and culturally unestablished forms of relating (Heinonen, 2023a; M. Holmes et al., 2021; Lahti et al., 2020; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004) have shown the variety of the relational practices which can be important and life-sustaining. Recent studies on closeness and intimacy amongst, for example, friends, ex-partners, acquaintances, and human—animal relations have explored how supporting experiences of companionship are formed beyond heteronormative cultural expectations (Alasuutari, 2020; Innola, 2024; Juvonen, 2020; Kathiravelu & Bunnell, 2018), while also considering how lack of societal structures and support may strain these experiences of relating (Heinonen, 2023b; Ketokivi, 2012; Roseneil et al., 2020). Everyday experiences of relating and companionship may form in shared domestic spaces (Heinonen, 2023a; Törnqvist, 2023), in casual and fleeting encounters in public spaces of the city (Richaud, 2018), or through digital technologies (Kolehmainen, 2022), where experiences of togetherness and intimacy evolve despite and along the experience of distance. Ways of sharing life that develop outside the couple-form (Roseneil et al., 2020) often include negotiations of commitments, dependencies, future trajectories, and struggles to conceptualize the relationship (Heinonen, 2023b; Innola, 2024; Policarpo, 2018). These negotiations can be reciprocal agreements between two or more humans, but also affective mediations and orientations towards a companionship that form in arrangements beyond dyadic human relationships.

Feminist studies that reach beyond normative understanding of companionship show increasing interest towards affective and non-human agency within the practices and experiences of relating. These studies draw from posthuman and affect theories and consider materiality as a part of intimacy and companionship constellations (Hohti & Osgood, 2020; H. Holmes, 2019). Studies such as Méndez de la Brena's (2022) exploration of queer intimacy in human—cigarette relations, Lykke's exploration of co-becoming with an altering materiality of the corpse of a deceased beloved (2022), and Kolehmainen's (2022) study on digital intimacies develop new methodological insights about investigating companionships as affective world-making practices. These discussions draw, as well as I do in this article, on relational affect theory and consider affect as a bodily and more-than-human capacity to emerge and operate through physical and sensorial relationality (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Kolehmainen et al., 2022). My study on companionships as refraining co-becoming completes these innovative openings to understanding intimacy in its ambiguous and complex affectivity. It does this by grasping the recurring everyday practices of sharing and attuning to the other and the alternating and merging affectivity of being close and distant that build the experience of companionship.

In addition to examining companionships as affectivity, I build on yet another theoretical layer by tapping into the discussions on time and temporality of relating. Temporal aspects of relating have been brought forward in recent studies on intimacy and close relations (Baraitser, 2013; Heinonen, 2023b; Luotonen, 2023; May, 2016; Morgan, 2020). Theories of time and temporality have been utilized in feminist and queer thinking to both reveal the heteronormativity of the culturally shared notion of the life-course and its bearing on the ways of organizing intimate life (Lahad, 2017; Kolehmainen et al., 2023), as well as to develop understanding of lived experiences of relational temporalities which break away from linear understandings of time (Halberstam, 2005; McCallum & Tuhkanen, 2011). My question of how the durational time shapes and becomes shaped by the everyday experiences of relating connects particularly to the latter. Affective experiences of intimacy evolve as non-linear, and this can be grasped beyond identifying deviations from a chronological timeline. In the next section, I present the concept of refrain and explain its usefulness in studying the non-linear rhythms in the experience of companionship. I connect the refrain to my approach of studying companionship as co-becoming as well as situate it within the theories of time as duration.

Refrains and Durations of Co-Becoming

When I explore the experiences of companionship as co-becomings (Lykke, 2019), I continue to follow feminist Deleuzian thinkers who theorize bodies and experiences as relational, material, and affective enfolding: *becoming* (Braidotti, 2002; Coleman, 2012; Grosz, 1999). This means that I look at the companionships as enfolding relations rather than relationship types or stabilized arrangements that can be “known” as entities. The concept of *co-becoming* has been developed in indigenous Australian relational ontology (Suchet-Pearson et al., 2013) and in the feminist posthuman thinking of Lykke (2019), from which Lykke develops co-becoming in the context of studying intimacy. I follow her thinking by conceptualizing the companionships as co-becomings to emphasize the distributed and entangled agencies which take part in the experiences of connection and sharing life.

In addition to the notion of becoming, which emphasizes the dynamic emergence of matter and bodies in time, a Bergsonian theory of time as *duration* cuts into the ontology of time itself, calling into question what it means for something to happen in time (Bergson (2013[1889]); Coleman (2012); Grosz (1999)). Understanding time as duration makes a base for examining the continuities of the experiences of companionship through their affectively echoing and flowing temporalities that materialize in the recounting of the practices of everyday life. Opposed to the linear, measurable, and spatialized descriptions of time, duration refers to the relational emergence and differentiation of past, present, and future (Bergson (2013[1889]) and the process of matter differing from itself (Van der Tuin, 2011, p. 33). Following Bergsonian thinking about time, co-becomings endure in memory and exist and evolve simultaneously in past and present, as “a rhythmic organization of the whole” (Bergson (2013[1889], 106), which is why enduring also means a constant change (Al-Saji, 2004).

Similarly, Lykke’s Deleuzian understanding of time separates her work from the Western modernist tradition that conceptualize “time as a container, which moves mechanically ‘forward’” (Lykke, 2019, p. 13). Lykke theorizes companionship through death as vibrant becoming and challenges the notion of intimate relating starting and ending with autonomous, able, and—most of all—living human individuals, tied within the “linear movement along the line of time’s arrow” (Lykke, 2019, p. 16). When time is duration, not a succession, it is thus impossible that the past would stay still in the process of the passage of time, in its constantly unfolding and shifting relations. This is also why it is not feasible to study the development of duration in a quantitative sense, because the passing of time is not spatial and compartmentalizable (Bergson, 2013[1889]).

Against this backdrop of understanding time as duration and studying companionships as co-becoming, I draw the concept of refrain. Simply put, refrain is a repetition. Not a duplication but an enduring arrangement of bodies affecting and becoming affected in concurring encounter. *Refrain* has been used in previous research to indicate a looping affectivity and “durational mattering” (McCormack, 2014, p. 7) in events of movement and connection, and to convey the ways in which this rhythmic looping shapes bodies’ capacities and creates their worlds (Gherardi, 2023; Jackson, 2016; MacLure, 2016; Stengers, 2008). As I examine the refraining co-becomings, which build the pulsating experience of companionship, I do not ask “how often” or “how many times” something is repeated nor as “how much” something changes with time. Rather, refrain illuminates how the experiences of companionship evolve through their unique temporalities and how constancy persists in the changing processes of co-becoming. A refrain retains the past, “the trace of its own temporal becoming” (Al-Saji, 2018, p. 344) as well as leans towards the future (Castillo & Kekki, 2021), both transforming and enduring.

Refrain elicits recounting of lived experiences of companionship that do not follow conventional understanding of trajectories of intimacy. These are, for example, conjectures of dyadic and deepening emotional proximity between two humans and intentional pursuits for developing “meaningful” practices of being together. Experiences of refraining co-becoming outside these trajectories are easily left unacknowledged as something that matter to the experiences of

companionship. The experiences that I analyse through the lens of refrain include “small” moments and encounters, ambiguous affectivity, and material agency—such mundane and familiar affairs that are almost too subtle to analyse but are essential to the experiences of sharing, connection, and togetherness.

Refrain can bring about affective proximity, shared territories, vulnerabilities, and experiences of relating with immediacy and familiarity within companionships regardless of the amount or frequency of the measurable time shared together. Refrain offers tools to cut into the ways of non-linear co-becoming and analyse its temporality with more nuance than merely acknowledging the messy non-linearity of experiences of companionships. This is particularly so because the refrain carries not only notions of repetition but also opens towards difference and change, to the “rhythmic emergence of difference amongst repetition” (Wyatt, 2019, p. 65). Companionships’ practices and modes of relating change, and importantly, the ways in which the practices and modes of relating carry affect also change. MacLure (2016, p. 177): “The refrain is not . . . a closed off space of interiority. Although it works to establish a centre amid chaos and marks the boundaries of a ‘home,’ the refrain also has the potential to open onto an outside, and to connect with others.” From all kinds of movements of refrain, the movement most relevant to this article is the ceaseless movement of companionships’ refraining differentiation and becoming. This means that I follow the enduring experiences of relating while staying open to the complexity and indistinctness of what the companionships can be and become in the accounts of my interviewees.

Data and Methodology

The data of this article consists of 20 semi-structured interviews that I collected in 2020–2022 in Finland. There are in total 27 interviewees, and each interview situation included either one or two interviewees. The interviewees were found through social media (Facebook and Twitter) and public notice board announcements (at public libraries and meeting places) with a Finnish-language call for interviews. In the announcement, I invited participants to talk about their experiences of sharing everyday life with important companions in other-than-couple relationships. My aim was to be as open as possible to the participants’ own ways of understanding companionship and sharing. I used the Finnish term “companion” (kumppani) and “life companionship” (elämäkumppanus) in the call and specified that it is not necessary that the interviewees define their relationship with these same terms. I also noted that the companions do not have to live together in a shared household and that the companions can be non-human. In this way, I laid the emphasis in the interviewees’ own experience of sharing life.

The interviewees experience companionship with friends, relatives, ex-partners, flatmates, as well as animal companions. Most of the interviewees focus on a specific companion, but some of the interviewees recounted companionships as a web of relations without focusing on a particular companion. A majority of the interviewees are women under the age of 40. Two of the interviewees were 20–24 years old, six 25–29, seven 30–34, seven 35–39, two 40–44, one 50–54, and two 65 or older. Twenty-one of the interviewees identify as women, two as gender-non-conforming women, two as men, and two as non-binary. I have translated the quotes myself from Finnish to English and clarified their expression by cutting filler words. I follow the ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) in all stages of my research. I have not requested a statement on my research to an ethics committee, as my research design does not fulfil the criteria of TENK for requesting the ethical review. The data collection is based on informed consent, and I have documented written consent from all the human participants of my research. All names used for humans and animals are pseudonyms.

The interviews lasted approximately one hour. I started them by asking the interviewees to introduce their companionships and how these began and have evolved. This opening question often led to long and in-depth conversations about the everyday life practicalities and sense of meaningfulness of the companionship for the interviewees. The selected quotations in this article

came up in the interviews either in the midst of this kind of freely flowing conversation or in connection to my questions on the participants' and companions' typical ways of spending time together and the nicest things and most difficult things about their sharing of everyday life. The selection itself is the result of a multiphase process of reading data and theory. I first highlighted matters that were strongly present and repeated in the interviews and that the interviewees themselves stated as important or most predominant elements in the everyday life of their companionships. Second, I concentrated on those parts of the selected data which seemed to me to be unexplainable or understandable because of being so ordinary, "small", or ambiguous.

Kathleen Stewart defines ordinary as "shifting assemblage[s] of practices and practical knowledges", which "pick up density and texture as they move through bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings of all kinds" (Stewart, 2007, p. 1). Her work on "ordinary affects" operate in my analysis as inspirational grounding to approach the affective force of the mundane. I also follow Erin Manning's suggestion of attuning to "minor gestures" and beginning the analysis from the middle of "emergent difference" where "force has not yet tuned to form" (Manning, 2016, p. 15). My choices regarding the selection of the data excerpts—tapping into my initial difficulty of understanding how these ordinary matters *matter* in the interviewees' experiences of companionship—were also guided by my broader methodological approach, which I will discuss next.

My methodological approach of examining the experiences of companionship as co-becomings weaves together traditional research methods of interviewing with recent discussions on Deleuzoguattarian relational ontologies, affect, and feminist new materialisms (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013; Fox & Alldred, 2016; Mazzei, 2013; Taguchi, 2012). I build on Lykke's (2019) conceptual work on *co-becoming* and apply it as a broader methodological approach through which I formulate my understanding of companionship as relational and processual experience. On conducting interview research, I am indebted to the methodological insights by Coleman (2012) in her study on girls' and images' co-constitutive becomings. Coleman combines interview data with feminist theory and Deleuzian empiricism and brings forward the relationality and multiplicity of embodied experience. In Coleman's thinking, the embodied experience, or, as in my work, co-becoming, is not only the subject of the research, disclosed in the interviewees' bodies and their agential capacities, but also an ontologically multiple becoming-together of theory and practice through difference. This approach elicits an understanding of experience and co-becoming as the "capacity to embody and live difference, multiplicity, diversity" (Coleman, 2012, p. 59) and calls for creative conceptual work situated within the research design (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013).

This methodological account posits within the decades-long continuum of feminist theorizing of embodied experience beyond identity politics (Åsberg, 2024; Coleman, 2012). As Åsberg writes, a feminist knowledge production¹ is a physically situated "social and imaginative practice" where the "objective truth always stays partial and limited but good to have" (Åsberg, 2024, p. 6). In this article, this means producing the worlds of companionship by arranging the interviews and theories through and with each other, being responsible for pulling the strings together while acknowledging that none of the agents in this knowledge-making process would have come to these conclusions alone. Studying affective movement of co-becoming through the analysis of interview data is therefore not a straightforward process and needs careful attuning to how interviews carry the material and affective worlds within them.

I suggest that the lens of *refrain*, combined with the methodological approach of co-becoming, enables reaching out to the affective, minor, and "unknowledgeable" parts of the co-becoming that emerge and are touched upon in the interviews. Previous interview research on experiences of relating, belonging, and their temporalities have utilized, for example, narrative approaches (Coleman, 2012, p. 56; May, 2016), which unquestioningly agree with the discursive and textual nature of the interviews. Still, the processes of collecting and thinking with the interviews do not stay detained by the textual forms of the data. In MacLure's (2016, p. 174) terms, language is not only a system of representation but "cannot be separated . . . from all the non-linguistic stuff that supposedly lies 'outside' it." I suggest that with the concept of refrain, I can approach my research

questions about the affective and non-linear elements of co-becoming that stay ambiguous and causally unexplainable. The lens of refrain allows for reaching the affective temporalities of co-becoming that will not let themselves to be organized as a narrative, such as the sensations, practices, and habitual memories that evolve with and through the other, things that do not exactly make sense or consist of coherent order.

I propose the lens of refrain, through which to study companionships, as a methodological opening that ties up and make use of the continuities and confluences of the feminist research traditions and the current material/ontological turn. I develop the conceptualization of refraining co-becoming to understand how the encounters of continuously changing bodies in their continuously changing environments and relational arrangements can elicit an enduring sense of sharing life. I experiment with refrain by putting it to work as a connection point between the theory of time as duration,² affect, and (co-)becoming and and empirical knowledge of experiences of important companionships. Refrain becomes a way to grasp the everyday elements of co-becoming, which may be experienced as really mattering to the interviewees and which are not easily explained by established narratives of intimacy and belonging. The methodological choice of tracing refrains enables me to analyse experiences of companionship that vibrate in tones that can simultaneously be past and present, that resonate with bodies that are both absent and present, that recur not only as accumulation but as an enduring yet transforming relation.

Next, I discuss the refrain with accounts from my interview data, examining the pulsating and repeating practices and affects which build durations of important and meaningful co-becoming. The following three analytical sections offer different yet overlapping angles to the refraining co-becomings, firstly focusing on material practices, secondly on tensioned time, and thirdly on differentiation and change that pulsate through repetition. I show how the refraining co-becomings that I discuss through these different angles all constitute an enduring and life-sustaining experience of companionship.

Material Pulsations

In this analytical section, I examine how refraining practices and affects build enduring experiences of companionship and how material and sensory elements take part in this process. The practice of drinking coffee together is repeatedly present in the interview with Nella and Paula. In its mundanity, drinking coffee could easily be dismissed as merely a symbol of something of a “deeper meaning” and not as important as such, as a material practice partaking in the experience of relating. However, when examined through the lens of refrain, such material and sensory practices and small moments of bodies co-becoming can be understood as integral in shaping the rhythmic durations of companionship.

ME: *On a typical day together, what do you do?*

NELLA: *We drink coffee. [Laughing.]*

PAULA: *Yes. [Laughing.]*

A mundane pleasure of coffee is abundantly allowed for two mothers as it can be enjoyed together amidst errands at home, away from domestic environment when visiting a nice café, or in day-dreams of future summers at a cottage. Nella’s and Paula’s accounts of spending days together “only” drinking coffee pictures an exaggerated and humorous image of a shared territory. The coffee, however, provokes bodies in material ways in its ability to repeatedly take part in the shaping of the companionship. For many interviewees the companionships include such recurring themes, things, and embodied practices which hold special affectivity. This affectivity becomes through experiencing and remembering those practices as important sites for connection and belonging. Practices like “drinking coffee” exemplify refrains that build a shared territory that helps

interviewees to bear the ordinariness of daily life, which can be burdensome and yet carry the most delicate and precious matters.

Drinking coffee refrains both playfully and seriously. Nella and Paula first met six years ago at a playground when both had small children and marriages falling apart. Amongst the laughs, Nella and Paula are also moved to tears when Paula describes them being “limbs” to each other, Nella accounting that she has never in her life been so close to anyone. In addition to my question of an average day together, quoted above, drinking coffee comes up many times during the interview, connected to different kinds of mundane, fun, and difficult moments. Having coffee crowns the imaginary “dream day” in the future that will be spent together at Paula’s new cottage, which Nella particularly has been renovating lately. Having coffee also highlights occasions that are “terribly mundane” like being at home together with the kids. It also takes part in dealing with Nella’s burnout:

NELLA: *I was burned out and totally did not write anything. But basically, even then we drank coffee and talked. [Laughing]*

PAULA: *Yes! Exactly. Like the drinking coffee.*

NELLA: *Drinking coffee, yes.*

Having coffee together is here not merely a conventional metaphor used when arranging a meeting, like it commonly is in Finland. Coffee refrains into the substance of Nella’s and Paula’s co-becoming. Having coffee takes part in the experience of sharing and being together. The refraining practice creates a territory that can be named and used symbolically without undermining the importance of the practice. Coffee is material and vibrant, it is in the making, in the cup, touching the lips, and in the body, offered and served. Drinking coffee invites bodies to a temporal affective shift to pause and to become stimulated together. The refraining practice brings continuity in the constant change and bustle of life and reaches beyond linear time, vibrating both in the past and the future. The duration of Nella’s and Paula’s companionship pulsates along the coffee refrain, sustaining a shared territory in the midst of ordinary yet unpredictable everyday life. Small and mundane things such as drinking coffee matter to the experience of companionship because of their refraining potential to increase the affective capacities of bodies to relate.

Tensioned Time

In addition to soothing practices, tensions also pulsate in the companionships as refraining affects that constitute the co-becomings. The interviewees recount tensions and difficult moments, such as a suddenly emerging sense of distance, a cold atmosphere, or disagreement. These tensions and difficulties can be startling, bring about uncertainty, and expose vulnerabilities. When seen through a lens of refraining affective pulsation, the tensioned atmosphere both poses a challenge for the co-becoming and simultaneously becomes part of it. Tensioned affects both disrupt the experience of connection and take part in its duration, building refraining streaks of staying with and overcoming troubles and sustaining with the co-becoming. Kolehmainen and Mäkinen (2021) note how inclusions and exclusions take shape in the co-creation of atmospheres in both conscious and unconscious ways. Through the alerting and easing pulsation, the companionships gain affective ground to sustain their continuities while producing and becoming through changing atmospheres.

The refraining movement of tensioning and easing emerge from the bodies’ capabilities to sound each other. Refrains of co-becoming can also become tensioned by the chronic time, on which I focus on this section. Nella and Paula, whom I introduced in the previous section, say that their hectic family lives or other personal reasons make them occasionally not being able to spend regular time together. This is also the experience of several other interviewees of

my study. As has been examined in previous research on friendship, such pauses, however, do not necessarily weaken the enduring sense of togetherness in the companionships, as durations work in different registers of time than the chronological timeline (Luotonen, 2023; May, 2016). However, while pressures concerning time management do not dictate or necessarily break the refraining durational experience of companionship, they still touch on the everyday realities of the companionships. The pressures of chronic time take part in the affective pulsations of co-becoming, conditioning the durational experience of companionship. The compulsion of living through chronic rhythms may strain the possibilities of relating, but the rhythms of co-becoming may also break away from chronic time or help to bear its difficulty.

The companionships can thus shape and become shaped by the refraining pulse of tensioning and easing pulsation, such as bearing together the pressures of chronic time. This is the case for Lise, for whom regular phone calls with her cousin helps to rhythm her everyday life. Lise recounts having long phone calls with her cousin Anna almost daily. They share the experience of having a same type of neurological disorder that creates challenges connected to time management and getting things accomplished. The phone calls help Lise and Anna to handle everyday tasks and build a rhythmic safe space in their everyday lives.

LISE: And Anna has the same, she sometimes calls me and is like, damn, we have visitors coming in an hour and it's such a mess, where should I even start? And then I start to organise what to do and in which order, together with her.

The chronic time keeps Lise and Anna in a tensioned relation with the world but the refraining affective experience of being supported and understood by each other makes these challenges more bearable. The importance of phone calls additionally illuminates how intimacy refrains along physical distance and through technological agency. Two other interviewees brought up recurring phone calls as an essential medium for sharing everyday life with important long-distance friends. The phone calls work as “keeping in touch with each other’s time”, as one of these interviewees described it. Phone calls arrange the bodies’ sensorial connections through a mixture of distance and closeness. The phone technology is then not only helping the companions to stay in touch but also engages in shaping the material worlds of their co-becoming and, in Lise’s and Anna’s case particularly, the refraining pulsation of tensioning and easing relations with time.

Tensions with time are entangled with power relations, as different bodies posit differently within the humanist and ableist temporal structures. Time lived as chronic temporality and durational experience merges and conflicts in ways that are not always possible to agree on, and with a non-human companion this is even more evidently the case. The routines of taking care of a non-human companion—for example going for walks together with a dog—are important in constituting the everyday rhythm of life for those interviewees who talked about a non-human companion. Even if these everyday routines are important for the well-being of each party, no less than keeping up the bodies’ ability to function, they can be stressful sites of materialization of power relations and control. The interviewees with animal companions acknowledged the questions of power and their limited possibilities to always provide ideal circumstances for their companions’ well-being.

For Tomi, the “best” kind of being together with an important dog companion, Rekku, and their fellow dogs in the family is when the dogs can “set the pace” and lead him. This can happen, for example, when walking freely in the woods, leashes off and without hurry. These two following accounts exemplify firstly the ideal way of “letting” the dogs set the pace, and secondly the affective attunement of sensing the world with the other when this happens, when hurry does not dictate the being together.

TOMI: That I can give them the power to turn to where they want, stop where they want, set the pace at which we go somewhere and for how long.

TOMI: . . . *Rekku takes me to new places and teaches me new ways of being or communicating. But before anything, he is so . . . he really takes me to the tree that is in the middle of the big forest.*

The rhythm of learning and sensing the environment through each other cannot be scheduled, and it pulsates a very different kind of affectivity than the hectic everyday timing of life. While striving for an ethical co-becoming, Tomi acknowledges how his position of power over his non-human companion materializes through human-centred chronic time. The tension between the linear measurable time and the duration of Tomi and Rekku's co-becoming has intensified in a current situation where the everyday schedules of life have become busier after welcoming "a human baby" into the family. Everyday life is constituted by routines such as trying to ensure that "no-one has to be home alone or to hold their pee for too long". All repetitions do not assemble as refraining affective pulsation of co-becoming: the repetitive "taking a dog out for a walk" does not automatically build a meaningful connection. The co-becoming refrains that Tomi describes as inspirational, important, and calming for both him and Rekku emerge through the enduring connection that breaks away from the dictating chronic temporality.

Tomi describes the active role Rekku takes in their calming each other down in stimulating situations like travelling together. Yawning and observing each other tie Tomi and Rekku intensively together in a caring refrain, creating an enduring territory of co-becoming in the unfamiliar and unstable setting of travelling:

TOMI: *Rekku also takes up this role of calming others down in every new and intimidating situation. He uses these calming signals and, for example, yawning, stretching, and such. So, there is a lot of, how I could say, like, continuing interaction, which I might not have in other relationships, not in such a strong way, or so intensively. Like, if we go on a train for two hours, it's all about that—we both yawn to each other and observe each other.*

The yawning together can be seen mutual and reciprocal practice yet without symmetrical intentionality originating in human subjects. Tomi and Rekku might have very different ways of making sense of the situation, but their bodies affect and become affected by each other through observing and yawning and produce together a calming and comfortable refrain. Within this rhythmic co-becoming, the human-centred chronic time sets aside when Tomi begins to sense the world together with Rekku, creating a mutual rhythm. For Tomi, practices of walking together and yawning to each other constitute not only "taking care of" Rekku but also being taken care of. The caring refrains become through unsymmetrical power relations, as Tomi may "give" Rekku the power to set the pace or abstain from it. The absence of equality does not yet preclude the co-becoming refrains from producing mutual well-being and care.

Pulsating Difference

In addition to enabling the focus on everyday practices, material agencies, and tensions of time, examining companionship through the lens of refrain also sheds light to the affective and sensory registers of change—to such shifts that do not have to be recognized or agreed on for them to matter. As a rhythmic repetition which brings about change (Wyatt, 2019), refrain aids understanding of the affective pulsation of companionship as heterogeneity and differentiation and as unfolding along the prospect of separation.

For Emilia, the experience of companionship materializes through being together with her "pack": Markus and two dogs. Emilia brought up the difficulty in naming her relationship with Markus because of their continuing closeness after the break-up of their couple relationship several years ago. Emilia also emphasizes the importance of their two dogs and the shared caring responsibilities—their life as a pack. According to normative standards, the status and even the perceived depth of Emilia and Markus's relationship should have gone through a remarkable change when they decided to end their couple relationship and continue to be friends. While some of their practices and ways of sharing life have indeed

changed, the break-up has still not disrupted the continuity in their co-becoming. The everyday physical closeness with Markus and the dogs continues to mark the territory of feeling safe and sound for Emilia:

EMILIA: *This pack of ours is, in a way, my primary family. Precisely this pack of ours. And our being together is best portrayed as a random Sunday afternoon, when we lie on a sofa or on a bed as a nondescript human—dog pile, where all, like, one scratches someone, another one licks someone, there is stroking and such. It's very physical. A big part of the sense of security and the sense of togetherness is physical to me, this kind of petting and scratching and taking care, like in a very concrete way.*

Examined through the lens of refrain, the companionship endures through recurring material practices of care which move along small registers of sensation. Touch, caring, and the experience of safety keep within the rhythmic becoming, continuing while changing and assembling differently. Refraining co-becoming as a “human—dog pile” is an example of such a minor rhythm that easily remains secondary in the narratives of life-course and relationship trajectories but holds huge importance to the lived experience of relating and sense of belonging. Manning (2016, p. 1) writes: “The grand is given the status it has not because it is where the transformative power lies, but because it is easier to identify major shifts than to catalogue the nuanced rhythms of the minor. As a result, these rhythms are narrated as secondary, or even negligible.” The lens of refrain enables grasping the minor rhythms of companionship, which, following Manning, remain overshadowed by “major shifts” of intimacy, such as a normative understanding of a “break-up”.

I do not suggest that the break-up did not have considerable effects on the practices and experiences of sharing life for Emilia. The break-up clearly emerges as a significant affective process that continuously takes part in the arrangements of relating between and within Emilia's, Markus's, and their dogs' co-becoming. It becomes part of the affective pulsation of their pack. However, even if bringing on a “major shift”, the break-up does not pose a straightforward interruption to the durational experience of companionship as such. The feeling of security and togetherness are sustained by the refraining assembling of bodies “in a very concrete way”.

This refraining co-becoming of Emilia's pack repeatedly overpowers the difficulties of the clashes of the normative expectations. The resistance towards couple normativity shows in Emilia's accounts as not caring about what others think and in her questioning of the idea of marriage and kids as the prioritized way of arranging family and experiencing intimacy. However, along the refraining closeness, normative order entangles in the affective pulsation as a prospect of separation. The realities of life as constant change, in general, and the power of couple-normativity materializing as an atmosphere penetrating their co-becoming, in particular, make the refrain both enduring and life-sustaining as well as making way for change and loss. The refrain of becoming a human—dog pile on a Sunday is in a process of emerging otherwise, someone scratching someone and someone licking someone always in the same way and never exactly alike again.

EMILIA: *This kind of a dramatic proclaiming, that I wish this [situation] would always be like this, is a bit useless, because probably it won't. Probably it won't.*

While Emilia's experiences of security and togetherness are tied into the continuing physical closeness, she simultaneously comments that it is useless to think it will last forever. Emilia is rather sure that the human—dog pile will “probably” someday cease from assembling or that its affective pulsation will change in a way that stops producing the closeness and care which is important to her. This change might happen gradually and through minor changes which do not require to agreeing upon in the same way as a break-up. Importantly, minor affective pulsations make bodies susceptible to be hurt as readily as feeling safe. Emilia is weaving her grief of separation into the refraining closeness. The affective pulsation of the co-becoming of her pack encloses the

possibilities of overcoming the heteronormative life trajectory at the same time as becoming brittle by it, becoming simultaneously powerful and vulnerable.

In addition to couple normativity, other conventional conceptions of intimacy, such as emotional and physical proximities, intimate knowledge about the other, and mutually agreed aspirations to build a relationship of special importance can overshadow other minor and peculiar strings of co-becoming. Mundane practices of “doing nice things together” can simultaneously be modest and partial (Vehviläinen, 2017) and bring about life sustaining energy and sense of togetherness. For Ulla-Maija, a single mother, the recurring swims and jogs together with other parents and their children pulsate in her recounting of her everyday friendly connections. These casual joint activities form an important and caring web of relations for Ulla-Maija. The lens of refrain enables understanding of the vital importance of this web of relations that forms outside the abovementioned conventional conceptions of intimacy.

ULLA-MAIJA: There, ruminating over the kids' lives and one's own, like, in a swimming pool, and I find it extraordinarily meaningful. Like, maybe not in any way that someone would look and recognise that, hey, we have a significant relationship here going on, and we have something special here. But it becomes like [that] through practice.

Ulla-Maija describes her everyday encounters, particularly with three of her friends and their families. She does not always specify which of her friends she is talking about at a given point in the interview, and she never emphasizes the importance or depth of one specific relationship. She also mentions that she assumes that her friends might not hold their relationship to be equally as important or meaningful as she does. Rather, Ulla-Maija focuses on the importance of doing nice things together with nice people, which has provided her a fruitful ground for “growing as a human being”. Ulla-Maija explains that the meetings for sporty activities carry her to a feeling of being accepted “as who you are”. With these friends, she does not feel the need to explain and justify herself as a single mother. The refrain of swimming and chatting that repeats in Ulla-Maija’s recount emphasizes bodily movement and togetherness, the practice of sharing an activity while “being there” for each other as adult humans. Ulla-Maija makes it clear that she does not care for “deep” conversations that deal with unpleasant and difficult things, as she finds such encounters quite burdensome. She speaks of being rather pleased that this kind of sharing is not included in her relationships at this point of her life, in her 50s.

The experience of companionship for Ulla-Maija can be understood as constituted through the refraining affective pulsation and through its transforming relationality that is not exclusively tied to any given bodies. The moments shared with friends become a soothing rhythm that attaches and grows through multiple surroundings, activities, and people. This does not transcend the co-becoming away from material bodies and conditions. The location of the swimming pool and the friend who shares the moment together are not insignificant, as they, on the contrary, shape a particular territory of co-becoming that is vital for Ulla-Maija:

ULLA-MAIJA: I have felt like I'm being filled up. For example, in a swimming pool, like, kids are swimming there and there's an exchange of a few words about how it's going and such, and it has maybe, like pretty much given me this feeling of being filled. . . . Before, I would probably have thought that something like jogging together or going for a swim is something that, like, can't be that meaningful, but it just is, somehow it just is. It keeps me, in some ways, of course, alive and such.

Importantly, the refraining co-becoming enables moments in the swimming pool with one friend to entangle with, for example, jogging together with another friend. Together, these various encounters are more than separate practices of seeing friends. They constitute a refraining and heterogeneous experience of companionship which enables Ulla-Maija to feel she is “being filled up”. The

variation is also temporal: the experience of life-sustaining companionship endures through pandemic times and other periods when Ulla-Maija says that the actual meetings were rare or ceased. As May (2016, p. 644) analyses, the durational experience of friendship differs from chronic time and holds potential to make it “fall away” as a determining factor in the friendship. The refraining of the nice activities with nice friends differentiates and ruptures. Yet this co-becoming endures and holds power to keep Ulla-Maija “alive and such”.

Conclusion—Companionships That Cannot Be Known

In this article, I have evoked time as durational becoming to shed light on the experiences of companionship. I have approached these experiences specifically as refraining co-becomings that emerge in and through time as chancing and sustaining. I have done this by analysing how the everyday experiences of sharing life become shaped through refraining arrangements of human and non-human bodies, which are affective and relational. I have shown how affective pulsation of practices of relating, such as drinking coffee together, supportive phone calls, practices of care in the midst of temporal pressures, and chatting in a swimming pool carry and produce an enduring sense of connection.

I have particularly shown how the lens of refrain enables examination of mundane material practices, tensions, and vulnerabilities that build connectedness in the companionships. The tensions that strain the companionships can be felt as “outside” pressures, such as a feeling of not having enough time or pressures about deviating from normative relationship expectations. The tensioning affectivity is also integral in the pulsation of relating. In this tensioning and easing pulsation, the experiences of connection and disconnection become intertwined and constitute each other. The ambivalent arrangements of co-becoming that unfold through refraining pulsation of continuity and change challenge normative qualifications of close relations, such as the notion of linear progression and reciprocity.

The lens of refrain elicits the refraining separateness as part of the durational co-becoming (Castillo & Kekki, 2021, p. 195). Experiences of companionship unfold with asymmetries and ambiguities, and the lens of refrain allows us to stay with them and not to turn away. Asymmetries in my data were evoked by, for example, a human—animal power relation in which one can decide for the other. The differences in relational arrangements might entail that the companionships are not felt to be equally important for all parties involved or that their permanence is questioned. Power relations unfold in the temporal pulsation of desires and needs in everyday relating, making the non-normative arrangements of intimate relations vulnerable and opening space for resistance. These asymmetries and ambiguities question the ideals of reciprocity and autonomy, which are sometimes framed as normative prerequisites in the individualistic understanding of “positive” adult human relationships (Bowlby, 2011; Graham, 2008). Turning to posthumanist thinking, autonomous human agency is an unattainable ideal, and keeping it as the premise when examining the experience of companionships would ignore minor gestures (Manning, 2016) of co-becoming that partake in the companionships. Important companionships are not necessarily openly articulated agreements, and they might entail vulnerabilities and dependencies that move along affective registers of human and non-human agency.

By pulling the threads of affect theory and duration together with my reading of companionships as co-becoming, I have offered refrain as a methodological lens through which to grasp the lived experience of durational time. In other words, in addition to examining companionships through durational time, I have tried to grasp durational time through the companionships. Attuning to the pulsating and differentiating repetition of co-becoming may open a route towards understanding “life and reality as movement or flux” (Van der Tuin, 2011, p. 32) which becomes, as van der Tuin puts it, “structured by duration rather than spatialized time” (ibid.). Refraining co-becomings unfold as affective

and durational entanglements of matter and meaning, in which affect and duration become examinable through each other while not entirely distinguishable.

The Bergsonian theory of duration offers a shift in the humanistic tradition of considering what is at stake in experiencing and studying intimacy. My analysis of refraining co-becomings brings new insights to empirical social-scientific study on how durational time unfolds in the everyday life of intimate relations. It turns away from “knowing” the companionships as representatives of certain types of intimate arrangements and instead grasps the implicit and minor pulsations of co-becoming. The duration of the affective pulsation of companionship is in its movement as a repeating and changing “rhythm of duration” (Al-Saji, 2004, p. 220). The pulsations of co-becoming are not tied only to certain bodies and to the actualizations of their relating, thus allowing for change while still enduring as co-becoming. Refraining co-becomings build territories for the companionships to endure in minor, ambiguous, and vulnerable arrangements and atmospheres, allowing distance to be part of proximity and discontinuation to flicker in the life-sustaining sense of safety and belonging.

Notes

1. Åsberg refers particularly to such feminist thinking that carries the lessons of Donna Haraway’s thinking/worlding practices, or “cyborg knowing”.
2. Both the concept of refrain (Deleuze et al., 1987) and the Bergsonian understanding of time as duration (Deleuze, 1988) are discussed and reworked by Gilles Deleuze, with and without his colleague Félix Guattari. These works are influential in the current discussions on Bergson’s duration.

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Tuuli Innola is a PhD researcher in gender studies in the Doctoral Programme of Social Sciences at Tampere University, Finland. Her doctoral study raises the visibility of those intimacies that are experienced as significant and life-defining and fall outside normative and humanist categories of intimacy. Innola draws from affect theories, post-human thinking, and feminist new materialist methodologies while conducting empirically embedded research.

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