

An Emergent Practice of Applied Doubt and Wonder: Dismantling Imagined Boundaries and Awkward Repositioning for Wayfinding in the Anthropocene

By

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Abstract

This research based practice investigates a contemporary relationship to environment in the age of the Anthropocene. Conceptually led, this interdisciplinary practice ranges from drawing, photography, video, sculpture, to site-sensitive installation and performance while employing strategies of philosophical inquiry, characterized by applied doubt and wonder. Mindful of situation and context, this practice's environmental ethic is drawn in specific materials and methods, which are often light, provisional and sustainable.

Research within this practice spans the humanities, natural sciences, science fiction, history, philosophy, and arts. With a mindful attention to an awkward and multi-directional problem solving methodology, this practice works to research ways for re-imagining and weaving bonds with flora, rock, soil, water and sky. The thesis project titled *sympoiesis*, sought to reposition and propose alternate ways of perceiving and knowing the natural world. Inspired by the contemporary environmental writing of Jamie Lorimer and Donna Haraway, and responding to their calls of 'awkward environmental humanities' and 'tentacular thinking', *sympoiesis* reconsiders the social behaviours of plants and our likeness and relationship with them. Each artwork is a proposition that operates simultaneously as suggestions and possibilities for wayfinding in the Anthropocene.

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In Dedication

For those in my heart who share in wonder and curiosity, Sophia, Frieden, Eric, Nicolle and Colleen,
and for Dennis who has gone ahead.

For love.

“There was a wall. It did not look important . . . where it crossed the roadway, instead of having a gate it degenerated into mere geometry, a line, an idea of a boundary. But the idea was real. It was important.” Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

An Address to Reconciliation: Listening, Learning and Responding

My home is in Calgary, Alberta, in the foothills between the prairies and the Rocky Mountains. This is the historic lands of the *Kainai*, *Piikuni*, *Siksika*, *Tsuu T'ina*, and *Īyāñé Nakoda*.¹ I am taking this space at the beginning of the thesis to acknowledge my settler descent, my inherited histories and responsibilities, to share that I am on a journey of reconciliation, and to not only recognize but to honour that I am a Treaty 7 person. Reconciliation is not the content of my work as an artist in this Masters of Fine Arts program, but rather a broader context within which I situate myself as I work to dismantle colonial ways and re-envision relationship and responsibilities with land and people. I feel the time is for me to listen and hear, to witness, to honour Indigenous and First Nations perspectives and knowledges, and to wayfind for harmonious possible futures.

¹ Calgary is within Treaty 7 lands, which remains a contested treaty.

Treaty No. 7. *Copy of Treaty and Supplementary Treaty No. 7 between Her Majesty the Queen and the Blackfeet and Other Indian Tribes, at the Blackfoot Crossing of Bow River and Fort Macleod*. Reprinted from the Edition of 1877, by Roger Duhamel, Queens Printer and Controller of Stationary, Ottawa, ON Canada, 1966. <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028793/1100100028803> Web Sept, 2016.

Research. Question.

Broadly informed by research and interests spanning the humanities, natural sciences, science fiction, history, philosophy, and arts, this approach reflects an interdisciplinarity and entangled method and methodology that informs what it might mean to be thinking and making in this contemporary moment. I have been working with a research question that takes up all of these interests and frames the work generated during the MFA program.

Through methodological tools of applied doubt, and wonder, how can art prompt an awkward repositioning to trouble contemporary experience of disassociation with environment?

This thesis is the story of my research based practice wherein each artwork is treated as a proposition; operating simultaneously as suggestion and question, as I task myself with seeking new ways of looking, new ways of understanding kinship with land and thereby new knowledge and future possibilities.

Of the Land: Doubt and Departicularization: an Introduction

This research based practice looks at land with an awkwardness that is characterized simultaneously by curiosity, intuition, wonder and questioning. Through questioning or applied doubt, there is a deep investment in broad theoretical research, because to engage with environment, is to engage with the histories, the current challenges and future possibilities. This thesis, while honouring the complexity of human relationships to land, will aim to explore a few aspects of my contemporary experience of environment as a person of settler descent whose experiences of land range from urban, sub-urban and rural, to prairies, foothills and mountains. Early research explores my relationship to land through abstract notions of space while later research transitions into more present and tangible ways to reconsider contemporary relationships to nature and environment as well as consideration to the potential of these new perspectives as awkward² and multi-directional wayfinding through contemporary and future challenges.

I find myself in a diversely destabilized time and place. Advancements in science technology, knowledge, communication and travel are rapidly increasing and expanding globally as is the human impact upon the Earth. In her book, *One Place After Another, Site Specific Art and Locational Identity*, curator and writer Miwon Kwon describes the relationship of site-specific arts and contemporary experience of dislocation and departicularization that leads to a destabilization of placeness³ and its overall effect on art and ontologies within conventional western culture. Early in my

² Awkward in this thesis is used to mean: ill at ease, out of the way, of a tangential direction, and uncomfortable, but also to be inherently relational, “generative and productively troublesome” as J Lorimer describes it in his Essay *On Auks and Awkwardness*. (Lorimer 195-196) Awkwardness is in this sense a methodological tool and a strategy of making as it applies to the art and research in this practice.

³ Art critic, curator and theorist, Lucy R. Lippard's writing is formative for my understanding of *place*. In *The Lure of the Local*, Lippard claims: “All places exist somewhere between the inside and outside views of them, the ways in which they compare to, and contrast with, other places. A sense of place is a virtual immersion that depends on lived experience and a topographical intimacy that is rare today in ordinary life.” (Lippard, 33)

thesis project research I read this book and it both planted and nourished my inquiry. Kwon writes; “The intensifying conditions of such spatial undifferentiation and departicularization - fueled by an ongoing globalization of technology and telecommunications to accommodate an ever expanding capitalist order – exacerbate the effects of alienation and fragmentation in contemporary life.” (Kwon, 157) Kwon’s inspired discussion of sensitivity to place and responsiveness to site, informs my own thinking and making as an artist, particularly in terms of how site sensitivity is methodologically “both a compensatory symptom *and* critical resistance to such conditions.” (Kwon, 8) Additionally, through research I have explored how to investigate and work within these pervasive qualities of spatial undifferentiation,⁴ this destabilization of placeness and departicularization⁵ in contemporary life as they are poignantly familiar to me. As a strategy of making, I employ philosophical inquiry characterized by doubt and wonder to envision new perspectives and emergent understanding focusing on connection with land and the possibility of sameness with land.

From Kwon’s examination of placeless and dislocated contemporary life, I was inspired to look deeper into concerns of space, place, land and environment and setting to examine these concerns from multiple research directions in art to find ways to better understand, or rather, to reposition understanding. Beginning from philosophical inquiries into abstract ideas of space, I made site sensitive works inspired by this inquiry. Later research invested less in abstract explorations and more in tangible experiences of place. Researching my local area and the areas in which I was working, in Alberta and British Columbia, Treaty Seven lands and unceded Coast Salish territories, I was particularly interested in the

⁴ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, to differentiate is to perceive the difference between, or to change or alter some particular to make it distinguishable from another. Therefore to *undifferentiate* or *undifferentiation*, is the absence of this ability or to remove the distinguishing quality. I understand Miwon Kwon to use the term in a sense that refers to what she describes as the “sea of abstract, homogenized, and fragmented space of late capitalism” (Kwon, P.8) and its effect upon site, and the individual. I use the term with this understanding and application to my practice.

⁵ Departicularization is to take away the particular, sense of particular, or quality that particularly/specifically identifies. Through the writing of Miwon Kwon I have come to understand this word to refer to the de-particular-izing, or universalizing effects of late-capitalist culture upon both site and the experience of the individual (as above with undifferentiation).

knowledge of land and social histories as shared from multiple perspectives both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous. Acknowledging my concerns of environmental degradation in the current advancing state of Anthropocene leads to a disconnect in my relationship with environment and is characterized by feelings of departicularization, fragmentation and placelessness. I was thus inspired to seek through art slow and proximate ways to question, reposition and respond.



Figure 1 – Jennifer K. Ireland, *Study in Interventions, The Mountain Series* (part 1), 2015, a series of photographs documenting site sensitive performance

Wonder: Art/Research: Method and Methodology

I configure my artistic method through an open and direct engagement with my environment, characterized by responsiveness and making space for possible strategies for problem solving to emerge through the material research. I am particularly invested in ideas and experiences of the non-urban spaces and specifically how our relationship with the earth has shifted in the age of the Anthropocene⁶. Integrating ideas of alternative approaches to problem solving in this research based practice, I work to reach multi-directionally through interdisciplinary works, positioning awkwardly (conceptually and materially), and embracing doubt and wonder simultaneously to ask essential questions aimed to envision new ways of looking, ways of knowing and ways of being. I have developed the following methods for making as wayfinding;

- applied doubt⁷ and wonder: philosophical questioning that informs and inspires the work
- awkwardness, deliberate repositioning to find new perspectives of proximity and kin
- slowness, closeness and site-sensitivity: purposefully out of pace, and a generosity of time with space, place, materials and contemplation
- conceptually led: artwork begins with ideas which then inform and direct material decisions (selection and

⁶ The Anthropocene denotes the current geological age, viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment. According to Donna Haraway in her book *Staying With the Trouble*, the Anthropocene is described as the geological era in which we find ourselves, characterized by the depth and breadth of human impact upon the earth, measurable in the rocks. The term was first coined by ecologist E. Stoermer and later popularized by P. Crutzen. As Donna Haraway describes it; "It's more than climate change; it's also extraordinary burdens of toxic chemistry, mining, depletion of lakes and rivers under and above ground, ecosystem simplification, vast genocides of people and other critters, etc."

⁷ I use the word doubt in this thesis not as a pejorative, but rather in a manner that acknowledges the breadth of applications for doubt as a tool for inquiry, thus shaping doubt as a methodological tool for my practice - to *apply doubt*, to question everything (materials, context, meaning, methodology, theories, ideologies and conventions).

processes)⁸

- performativity⁹ as an ethic of embodying the concepts that inspire the work
- story-sharing as a way of learning and knowing, positioning stories as a valid epistemological form

Within this interdisciplinary practice, the inspiration for artworks are often borne of varied and broad research. The research then inspires material selections which best embody the concepts and from there the materials guide the making with the potential, capacities and opportunities that each material brings. With an environmentally engaged sensibility I strive to be low-impact in material selection and use, thus using materials that are temporary and light, and favouring performative gestures over conventional materials. Importantly, I use and re-use materials, finding and collecting objects for works and then repurposing them later in future works. Often all that remains of a work is its documentation. Materials common to this practice are fabrics, paper, graphite, ink, photography, video and performance. I will discuss three projects as examples of my entwined method and methodology, *By the River*, *Study in Interventions - Mountain Series* and research during my residency with Glacier National Park.

⁸ Language is a particularly inspiring conceptual muse, as it ignites questioning the histories and meaning and inspires the changeability of words and thereby a consideration of alternative and more poetic future possibilities. In the course of this program I have researched terms such as liminal, vulnerable, nature and wilderness, and made works in response to each.

⁹ Performative art engages with speculative possibility as a sort of conceptual medium, bringing possibilities and opportunities to life through action and language. In her essay *Performativity and Its Addressee*, Shannon Jackson explores the meaning and breadth of possible applications of performative arts and the implications of these complexities across the field of contemporary art. Jackson defines 'performative' as an umbrella term that clusters "recent cross-disciplinary work in time, in space, with bodies, in relational encounters." More specifically the term refers to and in practice explores the potential "to bring a world into being with its action." (Jackson)



Figure 2 - Jennifer K. Ireland, *By the River* (part 1), 2015, temporary site-sensitive installation completed on the bank of the Bow River

Departicularization: By the River

“Rivers connect us with cycles of rising and falling, flooding and drought, diurnal, seasonal, and dynastic destruction, renewal and regeneration. The river as blood sustains life by nourishing and cleansing in circulation. There is a circle of eternity in the river.” H.V. Nelles, *The River Returns*

By the River (series, Fig.2, 3 & 4) was made in the Bow River valley near my Calgary, Alberta home. I have been rooted near the Bow River for most of my life and inspired by it. Thus, I intuitively began researching place here and exploring a connection to the river, the life source of this multi-species community. In my lifetime, I have known much of this river’s length. I have played, fished, camped, walked along, swam in and dipped my feet in this river countless times. The Bow River valley was created by glaciers at the end of the Pliestocene¹⁰ and has been known by several names. The ȩyāǰé Nakoda know this river as the *Mĩnĩ ȩnĩ Wa-pta*, which means cold water river (most of my experiences of this river are from the region where it is known as such, and this name characterizes my experiences of it also). This is a fast, cold, and turbulent river and these very properties also make it a river with immense capabilities to cleanse and renew, as will be needed to help heal the recent violence of settlement and industry that this valley endured.

¹⁰ This history of the Bow River is described in *The River Returns: And Environmental History of the Bow*, by Authors: C. Armstrong, M Evenden and H.V. Nelles. Of the Bow River they claim: “The Bow River has a history that is very much bound up with human imagining, engineering, design, and profit. It must be one of the most thoroughly engineered and regulated rivers on the continent.”



Figure 3 - Jennifer K. Ireland, By the River (part 2), 2015, temporary site-sensitive installation completed on the bank of the Bow River

As an urban person of settler descent, concerned about the ongoing troubles with land and environment, I question my sense of place in my local environment with respect to the land's histories and possible futures. My research begins thereby investigating my own sense of departicularization and dislocatedness through symbolic gestures in immediate response to the environment.

The method of closeness and site-sensitivity begins by close looking and careful attention to sensory experience, with an applied phenomenological¹¹ sensibility toward place and attention to the place's stories. The river is a boundary by the lines it draws on the landscape, and like the river, I am a boundary, a surface and division within the space I occupy and the lines I draw both abstract and real in daily life through decisions, pathways and footsteps.

¹¹ My practice of applied phenomenological sensibility toward place' is informed by the writing of M. Merleau Ponty and his descriptions of the importance and ways of perceptual experience.



Figure 4 - Jennifer K. Ireland, *By the River* (part 3), 2015, temporary site-sensitive installation completed on the bank of the Bow River

In this particular group of works, *By The River*, the exploratory gestures were made with repurposed biodegradable paper that served as both a figuration of self and an intervention in space. In this way the piece acts as representation of a person as boundary and surface simultaneously. The manufactured paper was an awkward and somewhat misfit intervention in the environment. The first work was a panel of paper in a pathway to the river, which functioned as both a figure occupying the space of the pathway and a surface, which gave form to the shadows and light of the path through the trees. Once at the river, I placed the same paper in the water and documented the motion and light, and the interplay between the surface of the water and the paper. I then completely covered approximately thirty to forty rocks of varying size with the paper and made a pathway of covered stones intersecting with the water's edge. The rocks on the shore were all covered in a fine pale silt from a strong flood and the paper over the rocks mimicked the bright mud in the sunlight. With these material led impermanent gestures, I moved through this project, in an intuitive manner. I purposefully conflated formal and conceptual surfaces as mediations to connectedness, and allowed this proposition to inform material decision making while also responding to the material qualities and potential of the paper in this place. Very soon after this work was made it was covered by an early snow that lasted the winter. When the snow and ice melted in the spring, all trace of the work was gone.

Spatial Undifferentiation: Transparent Things



Figure 5 - Jennifer K. Ireland, *Study in Interventions, The Mountain Series* (part 2), 2015, a series of photographs documenting site sensitive performance

The photographic documentation of *Study in Interventions, The Mountain Series* (Fig.1, 5 & 6) features landscape near Canmore, Alberta, also located in the Bow River valley. I made a screen (using a repurposed window screen and lilac stalks) that could be stood up in a landscape and yet was impermanent and provisional. Bringing the screen and some recycled fabrics to the mountains and similar to the *By the River* series, I went walking to begin and to inspire a material led engagement and research with the environment. I explored different placements of the screen and fabrics in the landscape and photographed these material gestures.

During the making of this series, I was immersed in researching ontological questions of being in space.^{12 13} I was asking questions about space, time and motion as properties of being, and questioning the categorical delineations between them. Through strategies of awkward positioning and material questioning, I was investigating the transparent and permeable qualities of the screen and fabrics and their potential to illustrate or propose that space, time and motion were together interrelated qualities of being. Wondering, if so, then could this metaphysically wholistic way of understanding being lead to question and doubt what divides and alienates us from land?

¹² The Oxford English Dictionary (O.E.D.) has eight definitions for 'space', as such it is clearly a word that carries a complex set of relations. Hence the need to define it here and to offer clarity to the way in which I am contemplating relations of subjects in space. The first definition the O.E.D. offers is this: "a continuous unlimited area or expanse which may or may not contain objects." This definition is how I am understanding it when I am immersed in philosophical explorations of 'being in space'. The use of the word space stands in contrast to the cultured and subjective specificities that would apply to understanding and experiences of place and site.

¹³ The writing of Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space, The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* (1958) was informing my research during this time alongside the writing of Aristotle, Tacita Dean and Maurice Merleau Ponty, the art of Nancy Holt, Gordon Matta-Clark and the exhibition catalogue *Ends of Earth: Land Art to 1974*, curated by P. Kaiser and M. Kwon.



Figure 6 - Jennifer K. Ireland, *Study in Interventions, The Mountain Series* (part 3), 2015, a series of photographs documenting site sensitive performance

Through research based practice I was investigating connections with environment using temporary and transparent materials and symbolic gestures. The documented outcomes endeavoured to bridge the perceived divide between subject and environment. This idea is carried throughout my practice and is examined from many angles, with later works striving to dismantle the perceived divide.¹⁴ I worked to see if the transparent interventions could create a new positioning troubling the binary encounter.¹⁵ The interventions of the screen and the fabrics serve as both subject in the landscape while operating as troubled boundary between figure in and of space. While not explicitly the content of the work, the philosophical research informs and inspires the work.

Looking through the gentle grids of the images in *The Mountain Series* through the re-purposed window screen and fabrics, one sees sky, clouds, mountains, hills and grass. Each distinct element now shares the same texture, a soft pattern of waves through a rectilinear matrix. The undulations of the fabric captured in motion mimicked the natural landscape that they concealed, creating a new space within which both the original landscape and the new space are troubled with an effect of highlighting a self-awareness of looking. The idea of altered spaces that emerged from this project foreshadowed works that would follow in my research, particularly those presented in the Interim Thesis Exhibition in July 2016, of which, each piece was rooted in ideas of liminal spaces.

Employing methodological tools of applied doubt and wonder I am exploring the potential of art to prompt a repositioning of perspectives, which trouble an experience of disassociation with environment. I make art to ask questions. The ideas that inspire and inform the questions are broad, but through the artworks, quiet and subtle possibilities emerge as hypotheses and propositions.

¹⁴ One of many great thinkers to explore this matter, G. Bachelard in his book *The Poetics of Space* poignantly describes the conceptual space between self and land common to dominant western culture, stating; "Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play." (Bachelard, 211)

¹⁵ In reflection after the making of this series, I wondered of the efficacy of highlighting the boundary – how troubling is this and does it serve to reinforce the binary?.



Figure 7 – Jennifer K. Ireland, *Glacier National Park Residency: field notes* (part 1, 2, 3 and 4), 2016, material and performative explorations - processes in research based practice, clockwise: part 1: graphite rubbing at summit near the Illecillewaet Glacier, part 2: silk wall rubbing of old Glacier Hut ruins, part 3: video still: *meeting of the waters*, part 4: documentation of performative gesture with Glacier Hut ruins

Fragmentation: Lines, Boundaries and Surface

In August of 2016, I participated in an artist residency with Parks Canada in Glacier National Park, near Revelstoke BC, where I stayed at the A. O. Wheeler Hut. There was a mixed experience of technological comforts and convenience as well as genuine risk from elements of the environment (like other animals and exposure in alpine terrain) yet the reality is far less 'wild' than the imagined ideal that dominates our culture's popular definitions of wilderness and nature. While in the park I carried with me a camera and other materials for making as well as awkward ethical questions about how to represent nature and wilderness with environmental responsibility. In conventional western culture, there is an unreconciled and uncertain tension about the role of humans in a natural environment, about where people belong and how to define relationships and responsibilities with the natural world. There is a wide spectrum of opinion, belief and theory on the human versus nature dualism that is traceable throughout western history and entwined with colonialism and colonial relationships with land and environment.

Through a methodology of applied doubt and questioning I examined the perceived duality and divide between nature and humans.¹⁶ During the residency I was keen to explore these examples of accessible wilderness and nature as they

¹⁶ The Oxford English Dictionary defines nature with respect to land and environment as: (often Nature) "the physical power causing all the phenomena of the physical world, these phenomena, including plants, animals, landscape... an uncultivated or wild area, condition, community, etc. and the countryside, esp. when picturesque." By definition, humans are often excluded from the understanding of nature, often understood to be other than, and not belonging to the natural world. This distancing, troubled identification and constructs of 'other' are part of a larger conversation. When discussing ideas of nature as 'other' I am drawing from the history of feminist, deep-ecology and ecofeminist theories wherein the history of segregation, domination and oppression of women by men is described as being enabled through a disassociation and a disconnection with the other sex that leads to an understanding and practice of difference and hierarchy. This oppressive structure is similarly applied to the natural world as a deeply rooted separation of human versus nature is traceable back through conventional western and colonial history. These conversations about 'other' and 'nature' have greatly evolved as they work to uncover, understand and atone for the disassociation and oppression, and it is from this conversation that my own ideas are informed by and emerge from. Some influential thinkers on this matter that

are lived in our culture currently. Through research based practice in the park I investigated surfaces, boundaries and lines both conceptually and formally. While in the park I photographed and made rubbings of surfaces, performative works, a wall rubbing on silk (with the soil, moss and rust from a remaining wall of the Glacier Hut built during the railway expansion) and a video at the *Meeting of the Waters* (where the two glacial valleys meet). These works aimed to question the ways in which lines, boundaries and surfaces both divide and bridge space and experience, and in turn, mold the stories we tell of place. Through this research based practice, I learned that *nature is not what I am divided from but rather an idea that divides*, and disassociates me from environment. By its very definition, nature is a problem - for the definition sets up an inherent binary and a division that is abstract in inception and real in consequence.

In her book *Manufacturing National Park Nature*, author and scholar K. Cronin raises similar questions about the representation of nature within Jasper National Park and how representing the National Park as a pristine wilderness creates a “gap between what is pictured and the actual conditions of the physical environment [that] has resulted in significant cultural and ecological consequences.” (Cronin, 142) Cronin explains that the constructs of Nature and Culture, as separate and distinct, “has continued to reinforce significant discrepancies between landscape representations and realities, even as environmental concerns have received increased media and popular attention in recent years.” (Cronin, 142) As an artist concerned with land, environment and considering ways to responsibly represent nature in this time of the Anthropocene, lessening the discrepancy between reality and the ideal is of essential importance as upholding the construct is a means of perpetuating the ‘othering’ of nature, which leads to a disassociation from, and enables colonial and consumption based engagement with land. Each art work in my practice is a question and proposition for ways to move forward respectfully and responsibly.

I have encountered through my research are D. Haraway, L. Irigaray, A. Naess, A. Loepold, M. Foucault, A. Kay Salleh, K. Cronin, A. Collett, and M. Crosby, S.de Beauvoir, to name only a few.

Other Spaces: Liminal Experience

“What worlds are we intentionally and inadvertently creating, and what worlds are we foreclosing while living within an increasingly diminished present?” E. Turpin and H. Davis, *Art in the Anthropocene*

Ignited by research of abstract spaces and experiences thereof, I investigated ‘liminal’ as both a state of being and a physical attribute of spaces. I then produced a series of works for the Interim Thesis Exhibition inspired by concepts of liminal that examined the way barriers (both perceived and real) are built between ourselves and the spaces we inhabit.¹⁷

With research ranging from social anthropology to poetic explorations of liminal, an understanding emerged of liminal as a threshold inherently filled with potential both conceptually and formally. A liminal space and/or experience is not determined in its function, other than to be open, set apart and ready. These spaces and experiences set apart from the everyday, then become useful for a variety of functions; passageways, transitions, waiting rooms, sites and times of ritual as well as spaces of contemplation.

The writing of Michel Foucault in *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*¹⁸ wherein he builds the foundation for

¹⁷ Liminal is defined in several contexts: liminal is used in a social anthropological context (developed by Anthropologist V. Turner) describing a time of crisis and transition associated with ritual and rites of passage. Liminal also has an architectural definition in which it refers to a space that occupies both sides of a threshold or boundary. Other influential writing on liminal spaces explored in this research was the philosophical and poetic writing of G. Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*, as well as selected readings in *TIME: Documents of Contemporary Art* (Edited by Amelia Groom).

¹⁸ Michel Foucault. *On Other Spaces; Heterotopias*. *Foucault Info, Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias, Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (1984): 46-49. Original Publication: *Conférence au Cercle d'études architecturales*, 1967. <http://foucault.info/doc/documents/heterotopia/foucault-heterotopia-en-html>

understanding of heterotopias and their increasing influence on expanding notions of space, became a major influence for the Interim Thesis. I took from his work contemporary concepts and approaches to understanding space that inform my interest in the perceived and real distances between where one is and ideas of elsewhere. In discussing how spaces are cultivated through cultural perceptions and practices, Foucault explores the oppositions of public and private spaces and links them to external and internal spaces. Foucault states; “life is still governed by a certain number of oppositions that remain inviolable . . . we do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another.” (Foucault, 2) Foucault’s descriptions of space inspired me to question ‘what are the boundaries and mediations that delineate these relations of spaces?’ It also inspired me to wonder about abstract and real spatial constructs and how or if they could be bridged and inspired me to dream to build a conceptual bridge linking together where one is and an experience of elsewhere. These ideas influenced the series of works for the Interim Thesis Exhibition and in particular *Sky-Audio* where I was inspired to wonder what parts of our spaces were set apart and to question the possibility of accessing these liminal spaces through imagination.

Each of the works produced for the Interim Thesis Exhibition featured tangible barriers and layers of constructs that mediate experience, acting as veils that obscure or alter our perception of space. I will focus here on *Sky-Audio* as it highlights both my working method and research. *Sky-Audio* was a sound installation of an inaccessible space. As a subtle intervention in the Concourse Gallery, the work sought to bring the outside in, through sound to create opportunity to be physically present in a common and publicly shared space but to be transported through your imagination to another space that would otherwise be inaccessible – like the rooftop where the birds live, with the sound of the birds as the liminal bridge between these two spaces. A microphone was placed on the roof of Emily Carr University for the duration of the exhibition. This microphone was connected to the speaker system in the Concourse Gallery wherein a live sound feed from the sky above Emily Carr was broadcast into the gallery.

The idea for *Sky-Audio* was born of the experience and site responsiveness to the Emily Carr campus on Granville Island. In my early encounters with the space I noticed how seagull cries could be heard throughout the building and often would interrupt a lecture. Though I was startled by these sounds, as my time at the school unfolded the sounds became more common and I observed how to others the sounds went unnoticed or tolerated. Later, informed by the work of Yoko Ono, in particular her piece *Sky TV* (1966)¹⁹ wherein she had a live video of the sky above the gallery broadcast on a television inside the gallery, I conceived of a way to bring in the sky sounds to allow people in the gallery the opportunity to not only hear these sounds afresh but to consider what had become commonplace. The title *Sky Audio* is an homage and a reference to Ono's inspiring work. Ono sets an example of how wonder can be a central focus in an artwork. *Sky-Audio* reflects my wider engagement with temporary site-sensitive projects that are low-impact interventions where the work is not an object so much as an encounter with space, and of course in this case, sound.

Sky-Audio sound installation captured the ambient sky sounds above Emily Carr University which included the buzz and hum of the cement factory next door and the general din and noise of the cars and crowds of people who visit and work on Granville Island. This was a purposefully subtle and simple artistic gesture that allowed the dominant influences of the island to rise to the surface and to our attention; like the white noise of the people and the cement factory being interrupted and punctuated by the loud calling of the seagulls. The seagulls are classified as Herring Gull (*Larus Argentus*) and according to C. Fisher, author of *Birds of the Rocky Mountains*, the Herring Gulls (also found in Europe and coastal Asia) is one of the most common gulls in North America and is an "adaptive species over most of its range, and its population has increased as a result of human development" (Fisher, 128) – a species adapted to colonial expansion and urbanization.

Granville Island is a place greatly transformed by colonization and industrialization. In her essay *Goodbye, Snauq*, Lee

¹⁹ Yoko Ono. *Sky TV* (1969) is discussed in the exhibition catalogue *Ends of Earth, Land Art to 1974* curated by Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon. Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA, USA, and Haus Der Kunst, Munich, Germany, Prestel Munich, NY, USA, 2012.

Maracle describes the changes Granville Island and the surrounding area of False Creek have known, recalling how the land known as Snauq was shared with friendly neighbouring tribes and was once a common garden. “Snauq was a garden. Now it is a series of bridge ramparts, an emptied False Creek, emptied of Squamish people and occupied by industry, apartment dwellings, the Granville Island tourist centre, and the Science centre.” (Maracle, 214)²⁰

Sky-Audio was a site sensitive work that aimed to highlight the awkward in liminal experience. Upon hearing the bird calls in the gallery, people were sometimes startled, curious or even affronted by the unusual sound experience. People reacted with laughter, smiles, curious glances at the ceiling looking for the birds that they could hear were so close but they could not see. There was a nest on the roof, not far from where the microphone was placed. The daily shutting down of the cement factory (with a palpable relief of the cessation of the white noise the factory generates) and the ensuing quiet would give center stage to the young seagulls calling out for what might have been mealtime or the coming together of parents and babies at the nest. *Sky-Audio* points to the awkward space in between, the gap between the lives of the seagulls and our own busy human lives that cohabit in this urban space. It explored how we access through imagination spaces that we cannot inhabit and the perceived distance between these phenomena. The work sought to generate an awkward intervention with the white noise of human activity and the cacophonous sounds of urban wildlife as a means to reconsider the distances between.

²⁰ *Goodbye Snauq, Our Voices: Aboriginal Voices on Canada's Past*. Edited by Tomas King, Doubleday, ON, Canada, 2004.

Sympoietic

The thesis exhibition collectively titled *sympoiesis*,²¹ comprised of the following individual works; *slow spin*, *places we've been*, *sunlight and the blue of distance / pines*, *sunlight through a dying leaf / oak*, *sunlight in petals / peony*, and *sunlight through a young leaf / lilac*, were informed by researching tangential ways toward a reconsideration of kinship with the natural world. These works are both formally and conceptually divided in three parts: light (studies ways of perceiving), space (explores embodied knowing) and stories (engages with alternative epistemologies). I will first describe the work and then discuss the research that informed the realization of the project.

²¹ “*Sympoiesis*, is a simple word; it means ‘making-with’” (Haraway, 58) Donna Haraway has defined sympoiesis as such in her book *Staying with the Trouble; Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Though each work I contributed to the Thesis Exhibition had their own title, I selected this term for the title of the group of works together. They were conceived to be in conversation with each other as they each ask similar questions from different material perspectives. Sympoiesis could refer to the photosynthesis processes in the videos, the story-sharing and the cycles of reciprocity demonstrated in *slow spin*.

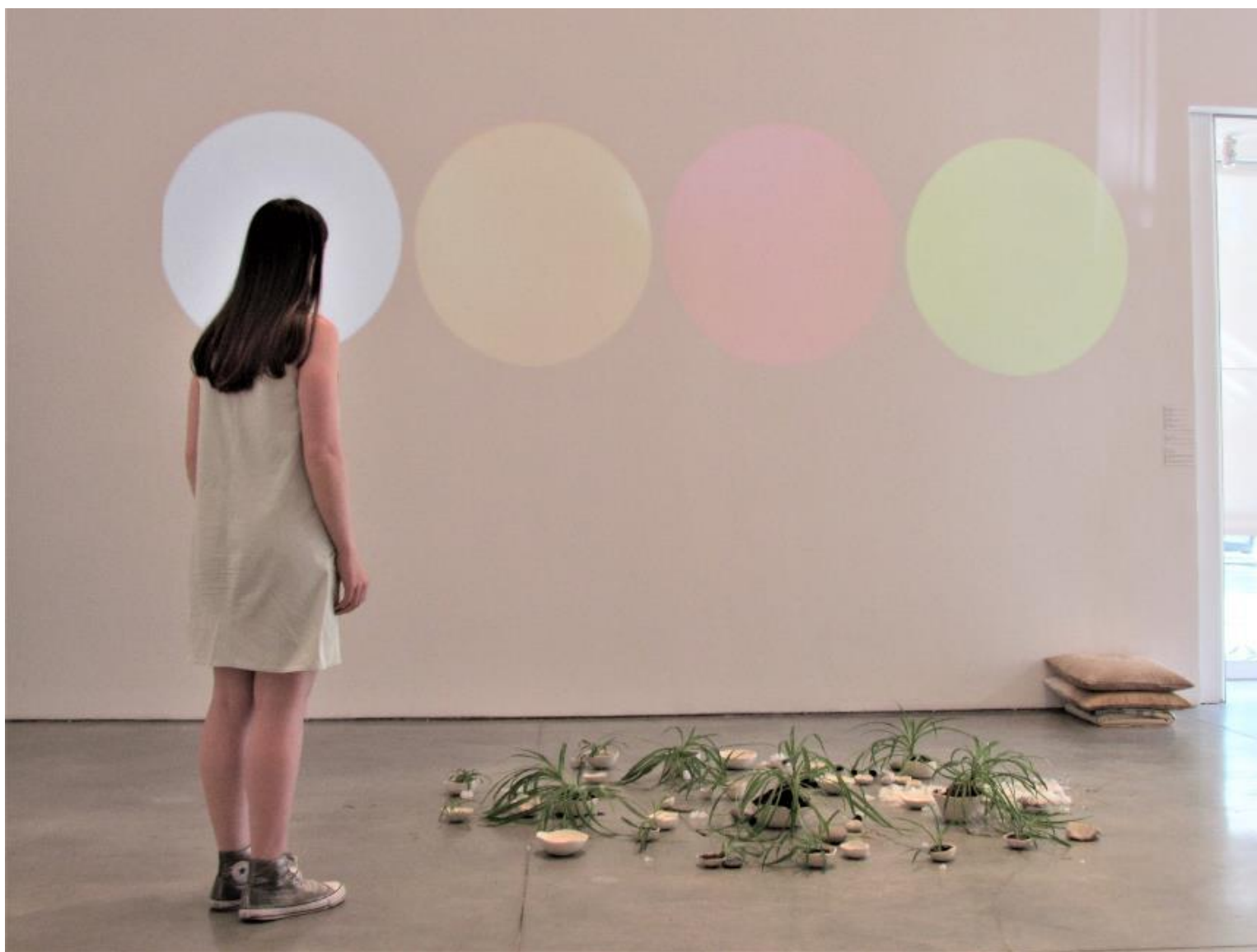


Figure 8 – Jennifer K. Ireland, *sympoiesis: sunlight and the blue of distance / pines, sunlight through a dying leaf / oak, sunlight in petals / peony, sunlight through a young leaf / lilac, slow spin and places we've been*, 2017, installation with mixed media sculpture, video and performance

The light based group of works are four videos respectively titled; *sunlight and the blue of distance / pines*, *sunlight through a dying leaf / oak*, *sunlight in petals / peony*, *sunlight through a young leaf / lilac*, *slow spin* and *places we've been*. The videos are projected in circular form on the wall of the gallery. Each video is four minutes long and set to loop, and each is of a particular plant or plant family. The blue video on the left was shot from the ridge over the river valley by my home looking out to the mountains, capturing the blue hue of a family of pines on the side of the mountain through the atmospheric haze. The gold video is sunlight through the body of a dying oak leaf as it moves in the wind and the sunlight shines through the small cracks in the leaf. The pink/red video is sunlight in petals of a large peony flower, resembling the experience of leaning in close to the flower to smell it and feel its soft petals. While the green video on the right represents four minutes of sunlight photosynthesizing in a young lilac leaf in the spring.²² These works were informed by considering ways of looking and perceiving with slowness, the role of mediating technologies and a sensitivity to environment. The four videos are saturated with colour from the interplay of sunlight on or through the plants. These videos were shot with the intention of being shown in the ambient day light of the gallery thus creating a changing, diffused and obscured condition for the videos. The ambient sunlight in the gallery makes the tonal shifts that reveal the movements of the plants and demonstrate the passage of time barely perceivable. This purposeful awkwardness in the visual accessibility of the videos offers the viewer a space for contemplation and prompts an opportunity to consider different ways of perceiving. The circular and cyclical motif in the videos becomes a formal theme that repeats in the more sculptural work called *slow spin*.

Slow spin is an assemblage sculpture with plant families housed in handmade porcelain pots, surrounded by stones, crystals, seeds, pollens, hoops, small helical metal pieces and music - all expressing cyclical patterns, earth cycles and potentials. The music is an album released in 1976 by Mort Garson, entitled *Mother Earth's Plantasia, Warm Earth Music*

²² Of the four plants selected for the videos, only the Lilac is a non-indigenous plant in North America.

for Plants and People Who Love Them.²³ It was performed largely on the moog synthesizer which was a futuristic and innovative instrument during the early New Age era. The music is an offering for the plants, a gesture of reaching out, with a nod to the popular pseudo-science of playing music for plants so they are happier and healthier. This work was inspired by recent and significant leaps in research of plants which highlight their abilities to communicate, interact with their environment and engage 'socially'; such as recognizing kin and working to physically / biologically advantage kin and community through specific resource sharing.²⁴ The *chlorophytum comosum*, (commonly known as spider plants) in *slow spin* were cultivated to illustrate the system of 'kinship' they have through their stolons that grow outward from the plant and begin a new plantlet whose growth and development is supported through the stolons. The cyclical form is embodied in the work through the helical metal pieces, stones, crystals, hoops, seeds, pollens, and the arrangement of the plants. All of which were from my home and re-integrated after the exhibition. Each returning to their previous place before their sojourn in the gallery, demonstrating an environmentally sensitive methodology to the work. The pots were

²³ Mort Garson. *Mother Earth's Plantasia, Warm Earth Music for Plants and People Who Love Them*. Homewood Records, USA, 1976. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUVmcKcTZ4A> Web. Jan, 2017.

²⁴ Nic Fleming. *The Largest Living Thing On Earth is a Humongous Fungus*. British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC earth – Nov. 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20141114-the-biggest-organism-in-the-world> Web. Jun, 2017.

Bob McDonald. *Threes Have Their Own Fungal Internet*. *Quirks and Quarks* – Sept, 2016. <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/quirks/quirks-quarks-for-september-24-2016-1.3774759/trees-have-their-own-fungal-internet-1.3774946> Web. Feb. 2017.

Bob McDonald. *Threes Talk to Each Other Using A Fungal Network – 2016/09/24 – Pt.5*. (Podcast) CBC Listen, *Quirks and Quarks*. <http://www.cbc.ca/listen/shows/quirks-and-quarks/segment/10269935> Web. Feb. 2017.

Nature of Things, The. *Manufacturing the Wild*. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation CBC. Web. Jan, 2017.

Nature of Things, The. *Smarty Plants: Uncovering the Secret World of Plant Behaviour*. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation CBC. Web. May, 2015.

Simard, Susan. *How Trees Talk to Each Other*. Ted Talk, 2016. https://www.ted.com/talks/suzanne_simard_how_trees_talk_to_each_other Web. Jun, 2017.

made for the exhibition as temporary homes for the plants and after which time they became gifts, creating an open ended helical like opportunity for future possibilities.

Places we've been, was a performative story-sharing which took place daily in the gallery. I would make myself available while attending to and re-arranging the plants, drawing or reading, ready to meet with members of the public to share stories of place, and discuss constructs of nature, wilderness. Each day I would sit in the sunlight, alongside the plants and stones, on pillows with hand dyed covers (made from the pinecones and dandelions from my yard) and on an inherited blanket. Each conversation left me with a gift of insight and new understanding. Though I would give room for each story-sharing to take their own form and direction there was a scripting to the process: beginning with introductory conversation about the work and the context, then sharing stories of places we feel a sense of connection, then further prompting the sharing to encompass questions about nature as a social construct and how this has been experienced. Each encounter was different, bringing new perspectives to these ideas and ending with warmth, and gratitude.

The physical materials of this work; the pillows, the blanket, the space and the sunlight were each very carefully considered. To sit on the floor is disarming and to sit in the sunlight is warming. The pillows and blanket were an offering of comfort and respect to anyone who was interested and willing to sit and share stories. The pillows were made from canvas dyed with natural dyes (made from materials gathered in my garden and the river valley). The raw canvas spoke simultaneously to formal painting and the methods and materials of wildcrafting, sourcing locally, hand-dying, and their respective interpretative potential. The blanket is a wool blanket that once belonged to my grandmother, it is old and speaks to my family settler history. I strongly believed that if I were to sit with others and share stories of land, nature, place and wilderness then I must acknowledge my own histories, situation, relationship and responsibilities to land as a

Canadian of settler lineage living on Treaty 7 land. This blanket served both as symbolic acknowledgement and opportunity to prompt conversation.

Theoretically, the most essential element of *places we've been* was the act of story-sharing itself. I called it story-sharing rather than the more common storytelling because it was intended more as sharing of knowledge than telling. I believe there is a unique opportunity of understanding and knowledge sharing that happens particularly in conversation (in contrast to reading and writing) as it generates a multidirectional learning opportunity. Secondly, part of my journey as I work through the process of reconciliation has been to educate myself about indigenous ways of knowing. Through this process I was introduced to the value of storytelling within indigenous practices.²⁵ I brought this to what I know of my own western experiences of story-telling and I was struck by the disparity between the ubiquity of stories within dominant western culture yet the lack of formal importance and value they are given epistemically.²⁶ I know the deep value of stories in my own life and learning, thus I sought to challenge what I perceive as western practices towards story that I feel are the result of reductive empiricism and rampant capitalism that obscure the value of knowledge inherent in story through mistrust and overuse. Seeking to address what I perceive to be a troubled relationship to story in my own culture, my performative work of story-sharing was conceived to honour the process of sharing stories, the importance of listening (the conversations and stories were not recorded or documented), and as an experience based opportunity to value stories, shared experience and knowledge therein learned as a valid epistemic form. Furthermore, the stories and knowledge shared were about land and environment, and sought to investigate constructs of nature thus the story-sharing

²⁵ Particularly the work of Jo-Ann Archibald, that I was introduced to through the course I studied in the spring of 2017; *Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education: Advancing Reconciliation in Classrooms, Organizations, and Communities Through the Teaching and Learning of Indigenous Ways of Knowing*, through the University of British Columbia.

²⁶ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson makes a strong argument linking story and theory in her writing *Land as Pedagogy*, wherein she states “a ‘theory’ in its simplest form is an explanation of a phenomena, and Nishnaabeg stories in this way form the theoretical basis of our intelligence.” Here Simpson is comparing Nishnaabeg ways of knowing to settler education systems (specifically ‘theoretical’ knowledge) and makes a compelling case for her culture’s stories and land based education model.

engaged embodied experience to reinforce the importance thereof and the inseparable relationship of body and environment.



Figure 9 - Jennifer K. Ireland, *slow spin* and *places we've been*, detail, 2017, mixed media sculpture and performative story-sharing (documentation of performative story-sharing with J. Ireland and visitor to the exhibition) photo credit: Ross Kelly

A Graceful Balance of the Gravity and Lightness of Open Ended Potential

The series of works for the Thesis Exhibition ranged broadly in materials and modes of making, consisting of video capture and editing, cultivating plants, making porcelain bowls, assemblage, textiles and performative story-sharing. The artistic influences that inspire my making are many and draw from different disciplines and practices. A contemporary artist whose work greatly inspires me both in terms of the range of material practice, and methodology is Maggie Groat.²⁷ From collage and assemblage to textiles and installation, Groat works with site-specific interventions with a graceful balance of gravity and the lightness of open ended potential in her work. Groat blurs boundaries of value and productively troubles ideas of value through the use of salvaged objects, re-contextualizing them to prompt reconsideration of their potential. “Her current research surrounds site-responsiveness with regards to shifting territories, alternative and decolonial ways-of-being, methodologies of collage, and the transformation of salvaged materials into utilitarian objects for speculation, vision and action.”²⁸ Groat’s methodology of wayfinding, provisional use of materials and the poetry of her making are qualities my art connects to and continually strives toward. I deeply respect Groat’s collage methodology with which she re-contextualizes objects invites her audience to consider all the things the objects *could* be.

²⁷ Maggie Groat. Erin Stumps Projects, [http://erinstumpprojects.com/artists/maggie-groat#picture\[Maggie-Groat\]/0/](http://erinstumpprojects.com/artists/maggie-groat#picture[Maggie-Groat]/0/) Web, July, 2016.

Maggie Groat. *The Fraud That Goes Under The Name of Love* (2016, Group Exhibition). <https://www.sfu.ca/galleries/audain-gallery/The-Fraud-That-Goes-By-The-Name-Of-Love.html> Web, July, 2016.

²⁸ Maggie Groat. Erin Stumps Projects, [http://erinstumpprojects.com/artists/maggie-groat#picture\[Maggie-Groat\]/0/](http://erinstumpprojects.com/artists/maggie-groat#picture[Maggie-Groat]/0/) Web, July, 2016.

Sympoiesis: In Theory: In Tangential Ways

Sympoiesis evolved from conceptual beginnings in research being inspired and informed by; Michel Foucault's book *The Order of Things*,²⁹ discourses in contemporary environmentalism of Donna Haraway and Jamie Lorimer, and recent development in research about the fascinating social lives of plants.

Foucault examines ordered knowledge (especially with respect to language) and describes how understanding evolves through a breaking and rebuilding of ordered knowledge. Here Foucault is “attempting to uncover the deepest strata of western culture . . . restoring to our silent and apparently immobile soil its rifts, its instability, its flaws, and it is the same ground that is once again stirring under our feet.” (Foucault, xxvi) Foucault describes how words evolve, develop, grow and transcend their original vessels that nurtured and contained them. As Foucault explains, words naturally evolve and so too does knowledge itself as from within the linguistic framework that shapes knowledge, knowledge grows and expands and transcends the framework in which it grew - akin to the ways in which plants outgrow their pots and spread out into the garden.

Foucault's theory of the evolution of ordered knowledge inspired me to consider how challenging the meaning of a word, like nature, can affect understanding of the world and our place in it – thus offering the potential to redefine relationships with the natural environment. Dominant western understanding of nature and wilderness are structured in a categorical and ordered way, dividing what is human and what is natural or wild. As long as humans consider themselves removed from and 'other' than nature, then this disassociation enables the perpetuation of the oppression and degradation of the natural environment. In this time of environmental crisis, a

²⁹ Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things; An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Routledge, NY, USA, 2002.

unique opportunity exists to expand ontological and epistemological understanding and like Foucault suggests, break the current orders of knowledge.

The pots in the *slow spin* sculpture were specifically inspired by Foucault's ideas. The pots were sometimes too big, just right and too small for the plants they held. Some of the pots were fired and hardened into their form while others were turned back into wet clay, ready to be re-formed. They were physically and metaphorically inspired to be operated as vessels for life, culture and ideas. The plants these pots held were selected for their demonstration of the way they outgrow their container. Selecting the spider plant specifically, was inspired by recent discoveries of how plants; communicate, behave socially, support community, share resources, recognize kin, and how the spider plant embodies and demonstrates these discoveries through their stolons and plantlets. The plant's behaviours open up new opportunities to deeply and more closely observe and understand plants, thus creating a fertile context to re-envision our kinship with plants and possibly grow toward sympoiesis.



Figure 10 - Jennifer K. Ireland, *slow spin*, 2017, detail, installation with mixed media sculpture

Donna J. Haraway, Distinguished Professor Emerita with the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California has recently written *Staying With the Trouble; Making Kin in the Chthulucene*,³⁰ wherein she defines and describes a particularly charged, broadly informed and inspiringly troublesome approach to contemporary environmental discourse. Haraway employs theoretical, historical, mythological, scientific and science fiction methods of exploring and describing her ideas about ‘tentacular thinking’, ‘making kin’ and collaborative ‘sympoiesis’ (making with) all as a means of reaching out cooperatively with other life forms, and to explore the possibilities and reciprocities of inextricable links between all critters. Haraway investigates future possibilities in a creative and speculative multi-species feminist method that encourages a reaching down to the soil of environmental problems to find muddy and ‘productively troubled’ solutions that address the causes or the ‘root of the problem’. In her introduction she states: “*Trouble* is an interesting word. It derives from a thirteenth-century French verb meaning ‘to stir up,’ ‘to make cloudy,’ ‘to disturb.’ We – all of us on Terra – live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times. The task is to become capable with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of responses. . . . The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice to live and die well with each other in a thick present.” (Haraway, 1)

How Haraway defines and uses the word *trouble* is akin to my own efforts to trouble, to make propositions and ask questions awkwardly or multi-directionally. I worked to respond to Haraway’s call and challenge of ‘staying with the trouble’ and of ‘making kin’ in my art by first proposing opportunities and ways to look differently and re-examine our relationships with plants through; close video portraits, assemblage sculpture with plants (including music for them), story-sharing (knowledge building), using local wildcrafted and found materials and by repurposing the materials after the exhibition (the art only existed during the exhibition). All of which were efforts to create art

³⁰ Donna Haraway. *Staying with the Trouble; Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, NC, USA, 2016.

with a small environmental impact, sympoetically with plants. Moving past the alarmist environmental discourse, the works in *sympoiesis* are not loud trouble makers but rather gently stir together elements that are subtly unsettling and awkward.



Figure 11 - Jennifer K. Ireland, *places we've been*, 2017, detail, performative story sharing

Jamie Lorimer, a Professor of Human Geography at Oxford University, in his essay; *On Auks and Awkwardness*,³¹ writes of awkward and productively troubled approaches to environmentalism in the Anthropocene. Lorimer's ideas are in conversation with Haraway's and further excited my interest in the potential of tangential ways of thinking about and responding to contemporary environmental conversations. I feel in sympathy with Lorimer's ideas when he states:

"I sense there is great ontological, epistemological and political promise in awkwardness. Awkward environmental humanities offers compelling alternatives to the prevalent forms of environmentalism that are becoming ascendant in the Anthropocene – an epoch whose naming threatens to negate the strange, clumsy and obscure more-than-human natures of planetary life to which awkwardness attends." (Lorimer, 204).

Here Lorimer is proposing that the potential to move through this time of environmental crisis, and to change the tone of the discourse, lies in the opportunities to re-envision the potential of philosophical inquiry to re-shape perception, belief systems and behaviours. Before we can fully address current environmental problems, Lorimer is suggesting we need to examine the deeper epistemological and ontological foundations of the problems and productively destabilize the anthropocentrism that leads to centering of humans in their own worldview and the othering of the natural world. In *slow spin* I worked to reframe tropes of nature, and in *places we've been* I positioned story-sharing as a valid epistemological form and through the conversations themselves explored connection to land and troubled human constructs of nature. Asking questions about how we define nature and wilderness, is awkward as it reaches down to the core of ordered western knowledge. I modestly follow in the footsteps here of philosophers and environmentalists who have explored these ideas before me and I take up the

³¹ Jamie Lorimer. *On Auks and Awkwardness*. Environmental Humanities, Vol. 4, 2014, pp. 195-205, www.environmentalhumanities.org. ISSN: 2201 – 1919, www.academia.edu, web. Jan. 2017. https://www.academia.edu/25481425/On_Auks_and_Awkwardness

call by bringing into life these conversations with the work *places we've been*. It can be awkward to question basic definitions but this is exactly the type of productive troubling, as Lorimer outlines, the awkward, tangential thinking and questioning that might give hope, bring new conversation, and serve as wayfinding in the Anthropocene.

Like Haraway's ideas of tentacular thinking and like curious, tentacular roots of a plant hungrily reaching out through the soil and even above ground occasionally, exploring for opportunities in every direction, optimism for the future in the Anthropocene may rely on awkward and multi-directionally perspectives because as Lorimer describes it "to be awkward is to be generative, and productively troublesome". (Lorimer, 196) Thus in this state lies the opportunity to break down what constrains, like in Foucault's disruption of ordered knowledge, new possibilities can emerge. This making kin, growing new bonds, new knowledge and new ways of understanding by breaking apart what divides and overgrowing outdated ideas of otherness is where the hope and optimism of Haraway, Foucault and Lorimer's reasoning can give direction for wayfinding in the Anthropocene.

Applied Doubt and Wonder: A Reflection

Sympoiesis was born from doubt and wonder. In the public critique of the work I was asked what the role of ‘new age’ tropes and presenting the common house plant as ‘natural’ had in our culture of skepticism. My response to this, now blended with further consideration, is that skepticism and wonder are each very generative tools but when applied out of balance they can paralyze. Contemporary environmental discourse can be so charged and fraught with uncomfortable emotional responses like guilt, fear, panic and despair that it can become unproductive and overwhelming. Lorimer suggests bringing an awkward approach to environmentalism and Haraway suggests similarly with her propositions of sympoiesis, tentacular thinking and making kin as strategies. I responded to their inspiring theories by working to apply both philosophical questioning and wonder in my work *sympoiesis*, and making work that while nurtured in philosophical questioning, was gentle, light, and by example embodied new perspectives and tested the path in its wayfinding efforts.

The methodological strategy of applied doubt emerged in the form of philosophical inquiry into the epistemological and ontological structures that support the separation of humans and nature. The othering and commodification of nature excites existential challenges characterized by fragmentation and alienation, and as Miwon Kwon explains “the search for place-bound identity in an undifferentiated sea of abstract, homogenized, and fragmented space of late capitalism is characteristic of the postmodern condition.” (Kwon, 8) Therefore if alienation and fragmentation are the pervasive negative effects of such spatial undifferentiation then perhaps awkward tentacular thinking could be the *wonder* inspired balance characterised by curiosity and the willingness to reconsider things we think we know.

Wonder, is the quality with the most potential for playful and productively awkward approaches to making. *Sympoiesis* was seeded with alternative approaches to environmental discourse, scientific advancements in understanding the nature of plants and their ‘social behaviours’, through repositioning ‘new age’ music and crystals, and through opportunities to ask ‘what is natural?’ This is not a naive musing but rather a wonder that is broadly informed and fueled by genuine

curiosity of potentials. For example, the heavily technologically mediated processes of the videos in *sympoiesis* were designed to trouble looking; to invite the consideration of the role of technology in looking and to highlight close looking with natural phenomena as much through imagination as with what was physically offered in the diffused light of the videos themselves. The titles of the videos; *sunlight and the blue of distance / pines*, *sunlight through a dying leaf / oak*, *sunlight in petals / peony*, *sunlight through a young leaf / lilac*, tell more of the content of the videos than the images, and so in effect there was potential for the images to be perceived in part through what was *imagined*. Next, with *slow spin*, by cultivating spider plants, a plant many of us cohabit with (a plant that notably carries a colonial history and both innately possesses and has been ‘cultured’ to possess the ability to adapt to many different climates) and highlighting the ways in which it behaves similarly to humans through its social behaviours, I was prompting reconsideration of what is natural. By using the spider plants with colonial histories I was inviting opportunity to sit awkwardly with the trouble. Adding to the plants a space filled with crystals, river stones and re-framed music from the past, I was aiming to prompt a new context to understand, come to know and consider future possibilities. The performance opened opportunity for understanding story-sharing as a viable epistemological form and therefore knowledge building. In addition to this the performance was loosely scripted for conversation around questioning constructs of nature and wilderness. Doubt and wonder are difficult and awkward to balance, and going forward in my practice I will aim to find a productive balance of these elements in my work by asking questions of how this can be expressed through formal considerations. I brought philosophical questioning and wonder together as methodological tools and I found them to be indispensable in asking informed and inspired questions as a wayfinding strategy in the Anthropocene.

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