

/ expectations in material culture & re-thinking our separation of space

avery shaw

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Master of Design at Emily Carr University of Art + Design

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: abstract

There is a pressing need to shift present expectations of urban lifestyle in contemporary western society — to reconsider how we can sustain ourselves and our planet. Shifting understanding of our relationship to our built environment may play a role in adjusting expectations of the future. In doing so, we can start to look towards alternate ideas and new possibilities for the material culture found within the home. This thesis seeks to expose how we see and organize our homes through aesthetics, language and meaning. It considers how this affects our perception of our built and natural environments — our separation of space — in a social sense. A generative process-led design practice is used to find means, through artifact, to have others (first the designer, and in turn, users/consumers) think critically about current understandings of urban lifestyle, and aspirations connected to desired standards of living. A series of small projects that explore themes of care, control and expectations are used as a catalyst for discussion. The intent is not to find solutions for sustainable design but rather to communicate and promote consideration about sustainability, the home environment, and material culture.

keywords —

nature, environment, home, objects, care, control, expectations, perception, language, aesthetics, value, sustainability

: acknowledgment



Janet, Ralph, Jordan
Mal

2018 Master of Design cohort
Arhea, Emily, Eugenie,
George, Ian, Jesi, Jordache,
Kanak, Nasim, Roy,
Roxanne, Sam, Shruti,
Theunis, Truong

Hélène
Deb, Louise, Katherine,
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Bonnie

O+L

+ everyone else who has listened
to me go on about design
and my thesis.

Thank you.

: letter to the reader

Dear Readers,

Conflict is something I have been considering for some time now. I am aware that my personal values often do not easily align with my chosen career path as a product designer. Academically, my background is in Art History and English. Through these studies, I was exposed to a specific set of principles. In Art History, I learned about the importance of visual representation — the representation of culture, values in the chosen composition, colours, and symbols. In English, I learned about the importance of wording, narrative structure, and the stories we tell and how we tell them. My design education, in contrast, has been an experiential one. It comes from working in the industry at a small design office in Toronto. Mostly self-taught, I have learned about design through hands-on work in manufacturing. In this industry context, I was taught that design was driven by purpose and function, aesthetics, sales, and cost of manufacturing. In my small role, as part of an immense global system, the option of making sustainable choices or acting as an influencer and change maker were hard to fathom. It is important to note that when I chose to return to academia — this time to study design — I was not aware of all of the methods and approaches being taken by designers. At the start of my Master's studies, I struggled to find my footing. I had to learn other ways to design — ones that were not necessarily product driven or based in manufacturing.

My work is as much a plea with designers (and in turn, consumers), as it is a form of self-education. I have chosen to use my time at Emily Carr University of Art + Design as a means to evaluate what I know about design in the industry and its product-driven context. I have intentionally opened myself up to alternate approaches and roles for design. Rather than taking the obvious route for a product designer (designing projects), I decided to seek out means that would allow me to address and converse with others critically — intending on contributing to the growing and substantive discourse about the role of the designed artifact (product) in contemporary Western society.

This thesis is structured around a series of keywords that kept surfacing and could not be ignored. They turned up in readings, conversations, and findings through a heuristic practice. I acknowledged these words, and focused on finding their meaning and relation by linking them through punctuation. I gradually developed a means to re-contextualize my practice. This rough “framework” is one that has been useful to me and has possibility for other designers. The following pages will detail vital elements of this process.

Kerry Shan.

nature. environment;
dwelling — house (home)
/objects
care {control} / expectation
perception ([language][grammar][value]/meaning) — [code]

growth.

ending	. ? !	pause	, ; :	contains words	further thought	()
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: introduction

How we perceive our surroundings and make sense of the world can significantly influence our expectations and understanding of it (Armstrong, 1995; Moustakas, 1990; Sterling, 2009, 2017). In a socially constructed¹ sense, we (as humans) have separated ourselves from our natural environment. We have created built environments seemingly disconnected from the natural one. This, however, is a false conception. In our construction and territorialization of space, we never entirely leave nature² behind. The control we have over our lived space (and actions within)³ are arguably just an illusion (Pollan, 2001; Suzuki, 1997; Walker, 2016). The *othering*⁴ we try to impose that “separates” the built and the natural, the human and the environment, the indoor and the outdoor, and the smooth and the striated⁵ is tenuous at best.

There is no denying the collective urgency to improve our consumption behaviours and practices. In the everyday North American experience, concerns about environmental sustainability are flooding our news feeds, social media, newspapers, and the evening news. Depletion of our natural resources, global warming, population density, and diminishing biodiversity cannot be ignored. This thesis sits within this field of collective experience and concern. While it does so, it is important to clarify that I do not address consumer purchasing habits nor product production practices directly. Instead, I have chosen to concentrate on assumed choices connected to urban lifestyles⁶ in the context of North American. My work assumes that a re-adjusted understanding of our relationship to our built environment is needed if we are to sustain both our planet and ourselves. It seeks means, through artifacts, to think critically

¹ see social-construct in glossary

² see nature in glossary

³ see glossary for the Michel de Certeau's definition of space + place

⁴ see “othering” in glossary

⁵ smooth and striated in reference to Deleuze & Guattari, 1987

⁶ see lifestyles in glossary

about our current understanding of urban lifestyle. It re-situates expectations, desires, and aspirations connected to current, assumed standards of living. Our understanding of how we and others live serves as a comparative framework. It sets our desires and aspirations, and it moulds our own expectations, orienting us towards the things we strive towards (Shove, Watson, Hand, & Ingram, 2007; Sudjic, 2008; Thorpe, 2010; van Hinte, 1999; IKEA, 2017).

I have chosen to focus on the built environment of our dwellings — our homes. Throughout my practice, I've been asked — why the home? In design, it is what I know. Coming from an Art History and English background, I was not trained as a designer. I gained the knowledge I have of this field while working in an industry context for a home furnishing and décor company. It was clear, to my colleagues and me, that people were seeking out affordable furniture for their urban home that was not throw-away and not IKEA. I did not see this as a gap in the market, or as a business opportunity, but as an environmental concern. I saw my Master's studies as my opportunity to respond to this unmet need — to address my own concerns connected to sustainability. Over the past 18 months, I have realized that many issues pertaining to sustainability are often inadequately addressed within both the interior and industrial design⁷ context. My understanding of this space has become far more nuanced. In my experience, product designers⁸ in industry tend to avoid the social and individual psychological aspects of the problem. There is a misfocus on beautiful, welcoming, appealing, alluring lived environments, and notions of improvement. These properties, while they do make people feel better, do not address issues connected to sustainability. Arguably the ongoing encouragement of purchasing habits (to feed our emotional needs and make us feel better) (Berg, 2010; Thorpe, 2010; Verbeek et al. 1998) fuels an unquestioning production and consumption of more stuff. This industry's tendency to romanticize the “rustic” and the “natural” is not innocuous. These style labels are applied as means to project desire and pull on aspirations for idealized and/or glamorized lifestyles that are inherently problematic for goals of sustainability. I started this program because I believed there had to be a better way to produce home furnishing that was more sustainable. What I didn't expect was the shift in my approach to design; moving from a structured, functional view to an abstract, generative one.

I began the program asking questions about small space living: *is it possible to provide a more sustainable option to affordable furniture pieces that can compete with mass-manufacturing? Is slow design a feasible solution in production? What new materials can be applied to home furnishing? What makes it someone's space?* As I started working with mycelium in the spring semester of 2017, my research question shifted. I began to look at design from a different perspective and moved away from questions that centered around manufacturing. At this stage I was questioning: *the sense of control and expectations of our home, how design as a form of care can change our habits, and our connection to nature and the current separation of space between the built and the natural.* Again, my guiding research questions shifted over the summer semester of 2017. Adapting to the insights from my design practice as I turned to heuristic inquiry. I began wondering *how working closely with natural growth has shifted my values as a designer, how the notions of care, control, and expectations relate and*

⁷ see industrial design in glossary

⁸ see product design in glossary

influence our choices, and how aesthetics, language, and coding of our objects and surroundings have an influence on our understanding of the world around us.

The document to follow is a tangible account of my generative design practice through the Master of Design program at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. It is indicative of the arranged logic that I have used to make sense of my work. It demonstrates practice-led findings and the lens through which I have approached the topic of industrial design and environmental sustainability. Of course, the path to this polished document, as with the problem area it addresses, was not narrow or straightforward. Rather, it was messy and disorganized with various paths and directions. Design Researcher Lisa Grocott (2012) notes that today, the role of the designer is to navigate and create meaning, pulling from multiple disciplines in collaboration. If sustainability is to be addressed truly and moved forward, the greenwashing of products or the production of versatile-functional products must be accompanied with alternative norms to how we consume and use them. A change to our mindset is needed (Manzini, 2007, 2010; Thorpe, 2010). Design interventions may offer a possible means to this goal — a way to get designers to think critically about how their designed artifacts will have an affect on the user's desires, aspirations and therefore lifestyles. When there is no consideration of the designed artifact through a lens of sustainable consumption, it is problematic for goals of sustainability. Just as style labels are problematic. My intention in pursuing this approach is not idealistic. I have not been seeking simple “solutions” to sustainable design but rather aiming to communicate the issues around sustainability, the home environment, and our objects. I know that each time I do, I uncover a new perspective for myself — a new lens to address the issue. I am interested in what we can learn, as designers, from observing, actively engaging and knowingly existing with the natural world. I am sure that unusual interactions with nature will have an influence on the designer and their designs. I am the primary research. I am the example.

In the sections below, I will discuss how we see and organize our home through aesthetics, language and meaning, and how this, in turn, affects our perception⁹ of our built and natural environments — our separation of space — in a socially constructed sense. The work focuses on the notions of *care*, *control* and *evolving expectations* as a means of addressing issues of sustainability in design and the home. Different materials (including paper, wood, textiles, readymades) and medium (including natural — mushroom — growth, print, photography, film) were used throughout. My process-led design practice regularly applied tactics of contrast, remix and mashup. Over the course of my Master's studies, I have taken on a series of projects that explore our connections and relations to the natural environment. Each project offered up new insight for myself, my process and my practice. Within each project, the actions of making consistently exposed how perception and assumptions about the natural environment shape our relationships to objects. Through these actions, I was afforded a means to consider — from a material perspective — how our views of the world influence our understandings and our habits. It is useful to consider my work through this practice of taking on *actions*. Each action that I have taken on has allowed me to work through different themes: nature and environment; dwelling

⁹ see perception in glossary

and home; our objects; care, control, and expectations; and perception. These themes have built upon one another and gradually taken on importance in my research. This reflective document will focus on two projects and the *actions* within these projects. I have analysed these projects as case studies (*cases*) with *actions* within. These *cases* are organized and identified by their medium (no. 1. *mushroom* and no. 2. *magazines*) with each *action* as a continuation to the research providing direction for the next step. The two *cases* move through the themes noted above with insights from each *action*. Through these two *cases*, I provide different contrasting perspectives that exist — almost — in opposition to one another: natural/built, dirty/sterile, living/represented, and 3D/2D.



/ case no. 1

[mushroom]

Case no. 1 started as a material exploration, looking at the decay of wood (and the possibility of new growth from this decay) by using wooden furniture pieces to grow mushrooms. It was framed within a critical design¹⁰ context rather than a functional one — I was intent on provoking questions. I wanted to challenge functional expectations (a chair is used for sitting) and encourage people to consider how we approach the natural environment. Informed by work done by Front Design, *Design by Animals* (2004) and the philosophies of Wabi Sabi,¹¹ my goal was to question perceptions of natural materials and shared environments. The study, which was generative in nature, turned out to be much broader in scope than I had anticipated. To start, I was intent on experimenting and learning the capabilities of mushroom growth. I did this by manipulating them (through their growth, shape, location, and conditions). In the end, it was me who was being manipulated.

While the growing of mushrooms was an experience, the process, actions and themes that happened around the mushroom work would be the most relevant. *Mushroom* served as a starting point for my practice-led research. My initial exploration led to different *actions*. In these *actions*, mushrooms increasingly came to represent, and act as, a seed for discussion about the growth we can or might develop with an object and our current and prevailing disconnect to the very systems that sustain us.

action no. 1	{ <i>purchasing</i> }
action no. 2	{ <i>adapted vs. found space</i> }
action no. 3	{ <i>mushroom objects</i> }
action no. 4	{ <i>rot and decay</i> }
action no. 5	{ <i>observation + sighting</i> }
action no. 6	{ <i>processing + coding</i> }
action no. 7	{ <i>in vs. on</i> }
action no. 8	{ <i>mushroom chair</i> }

(These actions will be discussed and contextualized in further detail below)

¹⁰ see critical design in glossary

¹¹ see Koren, 1994

no. 1



no. 2



no. 3



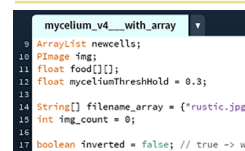
no. 4



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no. 7



no. 8



no. 1



no. 2



no. 3



no. 4



no. 5



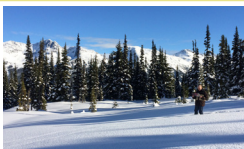
no. 6



no. 7



no. 8



/ case no. 2

[magazine]

After getting my hands dirty, and spending time developing close connections to our natural environment, I shifted my attention to a sterile space. I began to explore influences that affect our expectations of our built environments. Still focusing on the contrast between our socially constructed perceptions of the built and natural environment, I considered our tendency to separate. I sought out factors that influence our perception of the interior spaces we live in and of their relationship to the natural environment: organization, aesthetics, and language.

Case no. 2 draws on and plays with print media, specifically home décor/design magazines (Dwell, House & Home, and Style at Home, etc.). Starting as an observational study of discourse analysis (Rose, 2001), these magazines, which drive and influence expectations and desires in the home, were examined to identify language usage. I scoured their copy in search of references to the natural environment. I soon moved beyond my initial anthropological mindset, and the magazines quickly turned into a medium. I began to manipulate the publications. Shifting their function from their original purpose as lookbooks for social and domestic desires, I turned them into a means to explore meaning and resituate value. This conscious act to force the form (a publication) to disembark from its original purpose was, arguably, an act of making strange (Bell, Blythe, & Sengers, 2005). I was able to shift artifacts intended to propagate yearning towards a new set of desires — altered; they served as prop and tool. *Magazines* developed into several *actions* that provided me with endless opportunity to play and provoke.

- | | |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| action no. 1 | { <i>lack of nature — audit</i> } |
| action no. 2 | { <i>house hunting + packing</i> } |
| action no. 3 | { <i>value</i> } |
| action no. 4 | { <i>zine</i> } |
| action no. 5 | { <i>cutting</i> } |
| action no. 6 | { <i>layers</i> } |
| action no. 7 | { <i>framing nature</i> } |
| action no. 8 | { <i>reading environments</i> } |

(These actions will be discussed and contextualized in further detail below)

My eighteen-month journey of research, observation, and reflection has pulled on methods of heuristic inquiry, making strange, discourse analysis, and narrative. I have taken an autobiographical approach to my work. A flowing dialogue that is immersive, self-directing and open-ended in experience, inquiry, and searching has tied what might seem to others as drastic actions (Moustakas, 1990). I have applied these tactics to a practice-led design approach as a means to gradually build knowledge — insight, understanding, awareness. Upon reflection, I have realized that I consistently respond to my own lived experience, a lived reference — observation. Often innocuous details in my everyday lead to internal reflection of “hypothetical consideration.” Here, I seem to be pulled to extremes, absurdity or making strange (Bell et al., 2005) of the situation. I considered the “what if?” — and might I invoke/invite conversation, inquiry, reconsideration. This invariably leads me to acts of “making”— the development of tangible objects and artifacts relating to the themes and issues discovered in the “lived experience.” Here, I turn to use my creative practice and apply it in particular ways — to explore through:

- Growth with the natural environment. Best described by earthbound prototyping as characteristics of engaging with nature, loosen control, follow curiosity, making with self-originating material, embracing and acting on unexpected outcomes (Camozzi, 2017).
- Deconstruction of different medium to manipulate their function, meaning, and value. This allows speculation of alternative perspectives towards and through the medium.
- Decontextualization of objects or mediums, removed from their intended context to question how they function out of context. Similar to deconstruction in the sense that it allows for speculation of alternative perspective, but instead, towards and through the discourse.¹²

¹² see discourse in glossary

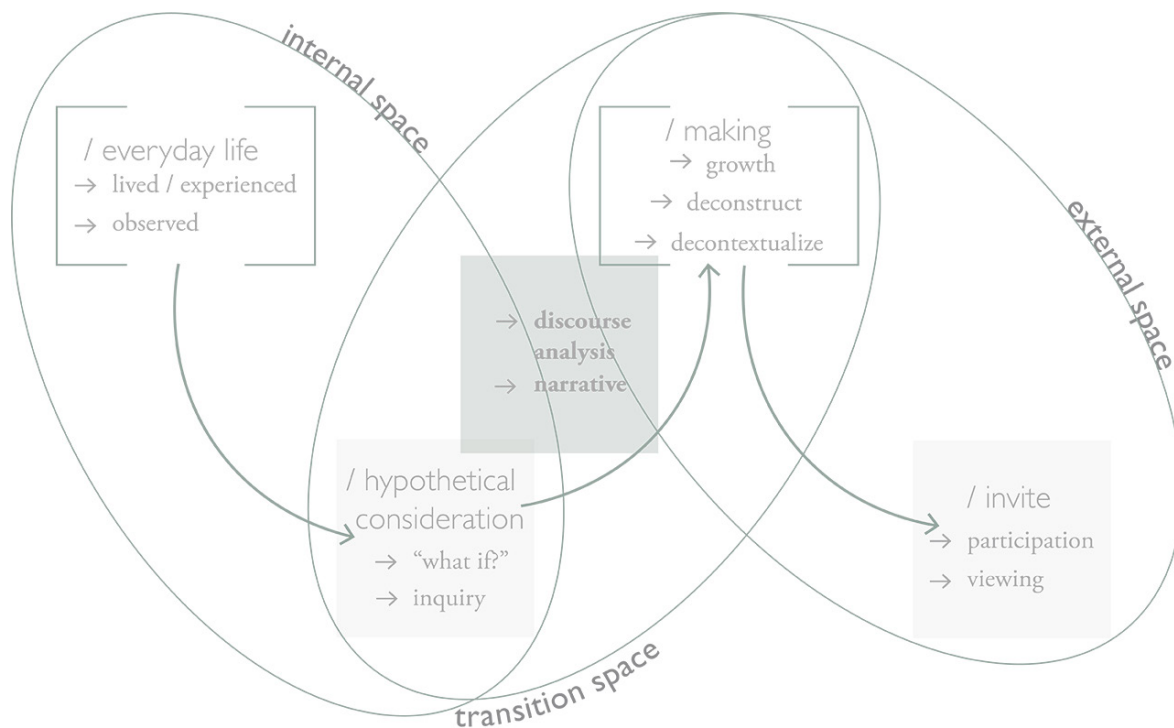
All of these steps led to sites/artifacts for external reflection as means to invite others into the “what if?” Sometimes this is through the act of viewing, at other times it is through participating.

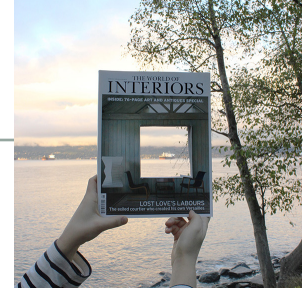
It is in the transitions, the shift between these different spaces: *everyday life*, *hypothetical consideration*, *making*, and *invite*, that I open up places for myself (and others) to redirect and reconsider. The transition spaces between “*hypothetical consideration*” and “*making*,” are potent for heuristic sites. Here, as a designer/creative, I am afforded a means to notice and view things from the outside. Discourse analysis and narrative (storytelling) play an important role here. As a method, Discourse Analysis I (Rose, 2001) is used to explore the construction of specific views of society through images and texts. Narrative

serves to direct and guide, to create meaning and shape to tell a certain story (Bertolotti, Damm, Piredda, & Tassinari, 2016). In the case of my work, the narrative usually develops through conversations about the making as I collect material and resources for making. Questions begin to be asked.

Secondary readings and narrative (again) play a significant role throughout the process. Readings provide direction and alternate perspectives, while narrative provides influence, embellishment and alternative awareness. Both provide insight at various points. These are often (pleasantly) unexpected.

The process I have described above tends to repeat or continue. Not always, but most times. My practice has been led by, what design researchers Krogh, Markussen, and Bang (2015) refer to as “probing.” Probing is the act of “exploiting opportunities and exploring design ideas as they emerge through design work” (p. 47). The outcome of each action influences the direction of the next step and the overall research developed as a generative and reflective practice. While the process was a generative one, developed through a linear narrative (time passing, me taking things on), my insights and findings were not so sequential. For this reason, the reflections of my practice have been laid out in the non-linear manner below.





nature. environment;

We're prone to overestimate our own agency in nature. (Pollan, 2001)

“Does nature exist?” Not surprisingly, my work may provoke this response. It is central to the discourse of contemporary design academics such as Stewart Walker and Clive Dilnot. Stewart Walker’s (2016) work discusses the forceful imposition of the modern worldview of nature for resources. While Clive Dilnot (2015) discusses the artificial as the “emerging determining condition of our time” (p. 167), that is affecting our relations with the natural environment as the scale of our man-made actions impact the natural system (that includes humans) as a whole. I have come to realize that the debate is not central to my work or intent. Instead, I consider my/our relationship to nature from the vantage point of urban lifestyle expectations (Manzini, 2007; Shove et al., 2007; Thorpe, 2010). Concentrating on artifacts in relation to their surroundings and considering our own agency, I seek to deconstruct — to change current problematic tropes, that separate ourselves (as humans) from the system that sustains us. As Uzma Z. Rizvi (2017) explains:

More and more we are propelled into a system that requires all labor to produce at breakneck speed, suggesting that somehow the survival-of-the-fittest model of labor capitalism is achieved with a lack of all human needs: food, sleep, air, love, et cetera. The late capitalist model has alienated the human body to such a degree that we no longer are allowed to be human to be considered successful. (p. 93)

Our current condition, which privileges a “human-centric approach to the world” (Rizvi, 2017, p. 92), has dominated our societies’ access to knowledge (Armstrong, 1995; Merchant, 1990; Suzuki, 1997; Sterling, 2009) since the



Scientific Revolution. This perspective fosters a binary separation of ourselves from the natural environment. Our built structures (homes) and systems (urban environments) further support the disconnect. In *The Sacred Balance*, David Suzuki (1997) notes that, “in big cities, it becomes easy to assume that we differ from all other species in that we create our own habitat and thereby escape the constraints of nature” (p. 12). This forced separation has created an illusion of control and enforced notions of othering (Merchant, 1990; Pollan, 2001; Suzuki, 1997).

Human views of nature have not always been this way. In *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1990), Carolyn Merchant describes two concepts of nature and the shifts that have occurred over time. She writes, “the metaphor of the earth as a nurturing mother was gradually to vanish as a dominant image as the Scientific Revolution proceeded to mechanize and to rationalize the world view. The second image, nature as disorder, called forth an important modern idea, that of power over nature” (p. 2). These two concepts of earth — the shift in view of the nurturing mother to that of a wild force which we need to exert power over (a mechanical, rational perspective) — have set the tone for our current relationship with nature. It has provided the foundation for our social-constructed idea of separation.

For me, this social-construct became clear, on a rainy March day in Vancouver. I was in a multi-level car park downtown at W Pender Street and Seymour Street. Standing on the fifth level of the parkade, I looked out across the street to see a fern growing on the side of the building opposite.¹³ What I

¹³ see images above

saw struck me, it emphasised our notions of our built and natural environments. In the heart of this urban center, fixed unassumingly above street level, was an undesigned set of circumstances that messaged and provoked what I was seeking to evoke through my own work. A few months later, I was reminded of this again. Scrolling through Instagram, I came across a post by the Vancouver newspaper *Georgia Straight* — a photo of the robust greenery of Stanley Park with the city behind.¹⁴ This time it was language (not the visual) that provoked and provided the disconnect — the caption read “city vs. nature.” Here, the important “modern idea” Merchant described as power over nature — an illusion of separation — the built and the natural, human and environment, indoor and outdoor, the smooth and the striated were justified/declared. French philosopher Deleuze and psychiatrist Guattari (1987) discuss the relationship between the smooth and striated space, stating “we must remind ourselves that the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into striated space: striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space” (p. 474). Like the built and the natural environment, we exist together in mixture. Considering the divide that designers continually and inadvertently endorse, I wondered how I might be able to pull on artifacts, sites, or actions to remind myself and others of this connection, and reframe our assumptions of the divide between the built and the natural world.

¹⁴ see image below





/ case no. 1 — action 5

[observation + sighting]

As I worked with mushrooms (trying to get them to grow on things), I began to notice the unprompted fruiting body of the fungi in my surroundings. I visually documented any sighting I had of them in my daily life between the Spring 2017 to Fall 2017. The act, an exercise in observation of nature, shifted my assumptions towards their appearance, location, growth. Becoming an impulse, my act of documentation led me to notice something, which previously, I had been “blind” to — there were a lot of them! I documented over 100 in the Vancouver and Toronto area.¹⁵ My observations challenged my assumptions. Initially,¹⁶ I had planned hikes to search out and document fungi but soon I noticed them everywhere, literally right outside my front door.¹⁷ This personal revelation, that our environment co-inhabits much of the same space, adjusted my lens on the urban environment. I started noticing signs within the city where nature and the built were mixed.

Analysis of the images I took brought about another realization. I had decided to identify and name each mushroom I photodocumented. However, even with online sources and reference books, I was unable to determine many. I was also not confident with the ones I did. I came to realize how little I knew about local nature.

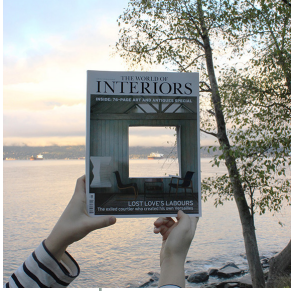
¹⁵ see images below

¹⁶ see images on p. 27

¹⁷ see images on p. 27







/ case no. 2 — action 7

[framing nature]

¹⁸ discussed further below:
/ case no. 2 — action 1
on p. 36

¹⁹ see scenery in glossary

²⁰ see images on p. 29

Having identified the lack of reference to nature in home décor/design magazines,¹⁸ I shifted my engagement. In Fall 2017, I began cutting away single objects of desire from the front covers of the various magazines and lookbooks I had on-hand. I meticulously cut around images (of chairs, houses, sofas, etc.) on the front covers of different magazines. With each magazine, I proceeded to take the same shape out page after page — burrowing through the magazine to the back page. Through the process, each magazine became a frame of sorts. I realized I could use these frames to isolate content (scenery)¹⁹ in my lived environment. By holding a magazine up, I created a contrast — the idealized magazine world juxtaposed to my living reality.²⁰ The magazines became a means to deconstruct misalignments (of nature/built environment). My more than fifteen cut-out magazines became tools for searching out and filling in “missing” content — a tool for framing. John Berger (1972) discusses the act of framing on our perception in *Ways of Seeing*, “every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph, for photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Everytime we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights” (p. 10). A magazine, cut and used as a frame, made me aware of the influence of framing on perception. Through this act, the magazine as a frame became a prop. Headlines and blurb callouts set in contrast to my framed scenery became a method to play — I found myself seeking out and creating puns between the language of the magazine and the visual content framed. Phrases like ‘Bring on Spring,’ ‘Master the Mix’ or ‘Welcome Home!’ took on new meaning. Re-contextualizing, reframing (actually), re-situating (Rose, 2001), making strange (Bell et al., 2005).





dwelling — house (home)

Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)

Our built environment — the home. It is the space that we have the most contact with, the most influence over. We assert a significant amount of control over our homes — we control the temperature, the humidity, the lighting, the function of the space, the objects in this space. All for good reasons, and ideally so that we can live comfortably and safely. This control, however, is a luxury that is relatively new in the long history of humanity (Design Museum, 2010; McLuhan, 1964). Our understanding of home as shelter has significantly shifted over time. In the contemporary North American context, the home has become the place “where we retreat from our public lives, where we can relax and be our true selves. They are places of stability, belonging and identity, of psychological as much as physical comfort. The house is where environment is tamed, domesticated and made personal” (Design Museum, 2010, p. 13). Beyond (but also connected to) the home as a constructed, domesticated environment, a reflection made by Michael Pollan (2001) in *The Botany of Desire* is worth considering:

I suspect it's at least partly the fault of the word. 'Domestic' implies that these species have come in or been brought under civilization's roof, which is true enough; yet the house-y metaphor encourages us to think that by doing so they have, like us, somehow left nature, as if nature were something that only happens outside. This is simply another failure of imagination: nature is not only to be found 'out there': it is also 'in here.' (p. xxiv)

The domestication of space is connected to our cultural constructs of nature. When nature is brought into our space, it is under our terms, under

our conditions — even if these terms and conditions are only constructed. Heidegger's reflections on man and space speak to this perspective (Heidegger, 1971, p. 154).

Tied to domestication, is the view of the home and its cleanliness. Peter Corrigan (1997) in *The Sociology of Consumption* discusses the notions of the clean and the dirty for the contemporary home. The idea of cleanliness (now mostly based in the appearance of) has become accepted as an important objective and powerful marketing tool connected to products for the home. Corrigan states that the change in the theory of disease at the end of the nineteenth century caused an increased interest in cleanliness that has directly influenced the architecture and design of our homes. Further, he observes that many domestic spaces (bathroom or kitchen) or domestic appliances (fridges or stoves) are designed to embody qualities of cleanliness: the white fridge for example (p. 101-102). The importance placed on cleanliness practices in contemporary Western society is further discussed in the parenting book, *Let Them Eat Dirt* (2016). Here authors Brett Finlay and Marie-Claire Arrieta explain how our current cleanliness practices are more a cultural construct based on the “the cleaner the better.” Why?:

This is an ingrained perception cultivated over decades — the idea that ‘dirty’ inevitably means the potential for infectious disease. We spent generations avoiding harmful infectious agents in the environment and cleaning up our world[...] Western societies have taken hygienic practices to the extreme. The concept of cleanliness (often cited as next to Godliness!) is not necessarily associated with health benefits but with physical appearance, and our modern societies have never been so clean[....]Being clean is our standard of living. (p. 127-128)

In contemporary society, the home has become more than just shelter. It is also a domesticated, clean space that is very personal. Heidegger (1971) assertion that to dwell is to spare, to preserve, to bring under our care to keep safe (p. 149) back this. Marshall McLuhan (1964) argues in *Understanding Media*, that “housing as shelter is an extension of our bodily heat-control mechanisms — a collective skin or garment” (p. 123). The home is an extension of ourselves, and therefore is an expression of ourselves. It is a space that embodies our choices and beliefs, making it an important link to our lifestyle choices and a significant influence on our habits and behaviours.

/ case no. 1 — action 2

[adapted + found space]

I have a green thumb and have always cared for plants in some shape or form, whether it be growing vegetable gardens or houseplants. I approached the act of growing mushrooms with this knowledge of growth and also with assumptions based on this knowledge. I was rather naive. Mushrooms are not like plants. The assumptions, preconceived notions, and expectations I brought into this shared space between the mushrooms and myself led to the influence cultivation took on my personal space. Living in close contact with this “other” organism challenged my sense of control over my built environment.

Mushrooms grow best in colder temperatures between 10-15 degrees Celsius with ten hours of indirect sunlight — ideally a north-facing window. I purchased the first mushroom blocks in February — the middle of winter — when growing them outside was not an option. Finding the perfect location for the mushrooms to grow in became key to their survival. In the studio,²¹ I found a spot that met their ideal growing conditions, a classroom that was colder and had a north facing window for indirect light. At home, I adapted my living space to their needs. I turned the temperature down in my studio apartment and opened the window to try to get the temperature to 15 degrees. Adapting myself to their space — in my home,²² I had to wear layers — two bulky sweaters, two pairs of socks and a toque. It became a waiting game.

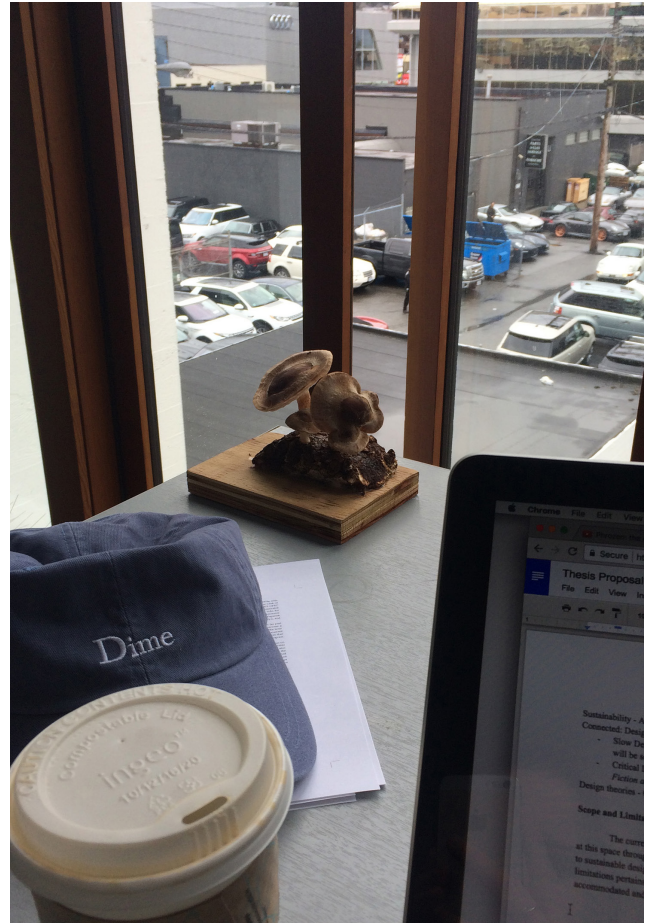
The mushrooms growth patterns were unpredictable. Some blocks grew slowly, while others developed overnight. Some oozed smelly “mushroom juice,” while others would dry out. I tried to anticipate and understand their needs. I found that by adapting my space (at home), I was more invested in the growth progress. The ones in studio (that I did not live with) were more neglected.

In my personal experience (and growth), I adapted to the lower temperature in my apartment and did not change it back even after the mushrooms had grown. I adapted. I found the colder temperature more comfortable after weeks of mushroom growth. This interaction ultimately changed my own habits to accommodate them. The act of growing takes on a level of care that influences the relationship. When the notion of care becomes involved, I shifted my approach. When that notion of care was tied to my environment, I adapt my approach (and ultimately my perspective). This shift in perspective had me question the shifts that could happen when care is involved in the relationship between user and objects. What happens when we care for our objects? What happens when that care is connected to our environment?



²¹ see images on p. 34

²² see images on p. 35







/ case no. 2 — action I

[lack of nature — audit]

I began examining popular home décor/design magazines to identify how they referred to the natural environment in Spring 2017. Searching through these magazines, I flagged any references to nature. Quotes were isolated and documented on a spreadsheet. Unexpectedly, this act of sorting revealed the almost complete absence of nature. In the text, when nature was referred to, it was most often noted in relation to a material or location. I wondered about this. We have domesticated ourselves and left nature “out there,”²³ and yet we surround ourselves with objects and materials that are extracted from nature. Homes are made of wood, stone, and/or metal, furniture is made from wood, ceramics are made from clay (earth). While, on one level, we may think we have separated ourselves in our built spaces from the natural environment, we have brought the natural inside — altering its form and purpose. We bring many elements of nature inside our homes, but we bring them in, almost always, under our terms and conditions. There is value in considering these terms and conditions for both the designer and the user.

In examining the grammar and language (object/subject, adjectives, tone) of the copy/text in the magazines,²⁴ I came to the realization that these were documents intended to be consumed visually. Their images, layouts, and spreads provide visual and aesthetic information that allow us to create our own idealized narratives. They idolized staged spaces made up of furniture and objects in sterile environments that often lack any human presence. The furniture and objects, at the same time, act as means for the viewer/reader to project: a human’s touch or personality onto a space (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991, p. 27). These objects and their placement in our homes manifest our beliefs and act as sites of personal expression connected to our sense of self. It is what connects the human to a particular space. So I used these magazines as a means to deconstruct this misalignment — to make strange (Bell et al., 2005).

²³ see Pollan’s (2001) quote on p. 31

²⁴ see images on p. 37

Happy Campers

Designer Jordy Fagan's sublime urban cabin offers a rustic escape in the heart of the city.

TEXT CHRISTY WRIGHT | PHOTOGRAPHY ANGUS FERGUSON
STYLING MORGAN LINDSAY



GARDENS

GARDEN GOALS

10 clever tips to turn your city backyard into an inviting oasis.

Text by EMILY EVANS
Photography by DONNA GRIFFITH



COTTAGE
STYLE
TIP

Add eclectic accents like this bunting made from vintage maps for playful whimsy in rustic surroundings.

What a way to wake up: coffee at the counter with the windows swung open to the trees and birdsong outside this quaint rustic bunkie. This spot is also a great place to unwind with wine and an evening breeze.

DESIGN, Design the Life You Want to Live, lmmeknowlton.com; Simply White OC-117 **WALL & FLOOR PAINT** (throughout), Benjamin Moore; vintage **WINDOWS** (throughout), Fieldstone Windows & Doors; **STOOLS**, Wayfair.ca; **BUNTING**, Decor & Crafts.



/ objects

Just as the home is an extension of the body, it is the objects that are brought into the home that create/form personal identity. Furniture and household objects project an individual (human's) touch or personality onto a space. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihaly (1991) discusses this connection in "Design and Order in Everyday Life" based on a study conducted in the Chicago area, where families were interviewed to assess how art and design objects are responded to by "normal" people in their own environments. He writes, "each home contained a symbolic ecology, a network of objects that referred to meanings that gave sense to the lives of those who dwelt there" (p. 27). These objects are what manifest our beliefs and are expressed through our home. It's what connects the human to a particular space. British writer, broadcaster, and director of the Design Museum, London, Deyan Sudjic (2008), provides an alternative perspective, noting that "to collect a sequence of objects is, for a moment at least, to have imposed some sense of order on a universe that doesn't have any. Objects are the way in which we measure out the passing of our lives. They are what we use to define ourselves, to signal who we are, and who we are not" (p. 21).

In contemporary Western Society, there are various reasons for consuming items. These reasons vary from person to person, from space to place. The field of consumer culture indicates there are a multitude of reasons for this. However, when looking through these home décor/design magazines, it is easy to assume we place less emphasis on our need for objects in the home based on meaning or personal value. In these magazines, the interiors

and the articles do not reference personal meaning or connection to the reader. Instead, they focus on our consumptive tendencies (Shove et al., 2007; Suzuki, 1997; Thorpe, 2010; Van Hinte et al. 1999) playing on desire, aspirations, and perceived needs. Prasad Boradkar (2010), notes “needs are dynamic in nature and they often grow over time as patterns of consumption change. This growth, however, is infinite, and the satisfaction that is expected never arrives. Often, needs are not satisfied; they are merely replaced with other needs” (p. 14). This problematic and finite connection to objects within our home needs to change. While it’s important to find meaning and connection to our objects, these need to be true, meaningful ones. In “Design’s Role in Sustainable Consumption,” Ann Thorpe (2010) describes material objects as symbols that construct. She states, “in our fast changing world, we increasingly rely on consumer goods and the process of consumption to continually construct, reconstruct, and project our identities and social relationships” (p. 13). Our reliance on consumption to create identities and social relationships is a major challenge when trying to overcome it. We need to consider what are the possibilities of value between material objects and people when they are not based on social constructs. How does the relationship shift? It is no longer enough to focus on sustainable manufacturing or sustainable consumption. We need to move the discussion of sustainable design forward, “as the field of sustainable consumption has matured, it has moved from largely technical concerns about efficient resource consumption and minimizing waste in our existing industrial systems to a more recent focus on the very social issue of lifestyle change” (p. 3). Two important factors related to this are our interaction with nature and our tendency to be drawn to objects with no actual value or meaning to the consumers. The shift in these two factors can come from the designer — with their role in constructing (or not constructing) objects — and also from the user — by assessing how they consume. It is important to note the relationship between the designer and the user here — they are connected, influencers to each other. For the designer, the object is the form of communication. It is the coded system, a language — of shapes, colours, tactile, even fonts — that signals to the user and reflects the values of a society (Sudjic, 2008).

/ case no. I — action 7

[in vs. on]

In summer 2017, I continued my material explorations connected to acts of growing mushrooms. I built growing environments out of PVC tubing that would allow the mushroom medium to thrive. This would challenge my assumptions but also the ways in which I developed sites for discussion about growing mushrooms: *on* rather than *in*.²⁵ Growing *in* would provide a solution to the mycelium medium from drying out. However, I realized the point was not to grow the mushroom *in* the objects — to be utilized by humans as a material — but to grow the mushrooms *on* the object to share the structures. I needed to find means to make them our equal to encourage reciprocal relations.

This realization was important. My shifted perspective changed how I approached my design practice. Living Wall²⁶ was the very first design project I did in the Master studios. I approached this project with a classic functional design approach. I intended to remind student peers of the human/nature relationship through the use of recycled material that would have taken centuries to break down. The Living Wall, despite its intent, was very much made with human interest at the forefront. In contrast, *on vs. in* was approached entirely differently. Allowing myself to shift focus away from the human-centric functional aspects I was used to working within manufacturing design, I embraced working with the gritty and dirty aspects of designing with nature. I was working with growth, contending with mould, rot, and decay. I was more open to alternative approaches, different design outcomes, and shared use of objects. I began to focus entirely on the gritty aspects of designing with nature. I was more open to a generative design practice.



²⁵ see images on p. 42

²⁶ see appendix p. 74



/ case no. 2 — action 3 + 5

[value + cutting]

A space is a practiced place — contingent and made up of an assembly of movements that are deployed within it (Ceteau, 1984). The home is a space, not a place. Moving homes is the act of turning the place into a space. In the summer semester (2017), I had to go through the process of yet again finding a new living space to turn into my own.²⁷ It wasn't easy — Vancouver's housing market is one of the most competitive and expensive in the world (Pawson, 2017). The prospect brought on anxiety and uprooted feelings by being forced to leave my space to find a new one. House hunting began to take up most of my time and merged into my summer research. Through the process, it became increasingly evident to me that what we include in a place, shifts it to a space and makes it a home.

Each viewing of each potential new accommodation is a search that involves imagining — trying to visualize how and if the place can become a space or a home. As a prospective renter, I spent much of my time considering how my belongings might fit into each place and make it my own space. The moving process²⁸ is implicit to this — cause and effect. The act of packing up belongings, of purging/discarding, involves going through what is/might still/will not be useful in the new space. The process clarifies what you are attached to and also what not. When my things/objects were packed in boxes — I felt guilty, overwhelmed with the quantity of things I had. When I unpacked the boxes later — in the new space — the meaning and value of the possessions became apparent. They contained possessions that I absolutely could not part with. Each object held a personal narrative and sentimental value.

The IKEA (2017) home report, *Life at Home: Betting the Battles*, accounts 27% of people feel society is putting pressure on them to live minimally, while 49% of domestic arguments are over disagreement over clutter (p. 6). This pressure is in constant conflict with our desires, our personal values, and marketing techniques. As I was struggling to purge my belongings and downsize, I was also reading through the home décor/design magazines and assessing how they valued nature. I couldn't help but notice how they also appraised the value of objects. The pages of home décor/design magazines are filled with aesthetically pleasing objects within equally aesthetically pleasing spaces. They include features that focus on monetary value — facing spreads that offer up “cheaper” alternatives for



²⁷ see appendix p. 77

²⁸ see appendix p. 77



²⁹ see images below

³⁰ see images p. 45

the same look.²⁹ Here the quality, manufacturing or personal value of the products are not addressed. How do these features influence our perception of value? And what does this say about of society's positioning of value?

These questions about value led me to the tactic of commandeering and re-situating the magazine medium. I began deconstructing the home décor/design magazines by cutting into them.³⁰ The cutting process was one that took time and attention to detail. Using an exacto knife, I carefully outlined and removed the object of desire from the front cover. The object's form, cut by hand — was a tracing, a precise outline of the shape/detail of the item of desire. Once cut and removed from the front, the object became a shape in isolation. Sometimes it was simple, other times detailed, but always, it became the lens in which each page — each layer — was viewed. Over the course of a month, the forms I cut into the magazines shifted from the shape of an object (house, sofa, chair, lounge, painting) into simple primary shapes (square, circle, triangle). Some attempts were more successful than others. The circles and squares remained abstract. While the act of de-contextualizing the form of the desired object created a useful tension that discontinued the magazines capacity to elicit longing. Shifting the shape from the desired object to a primary shape removed any association to the content of the magazine. Content, in this case, was neutered. The power of the medium to create desire and aspiration was truncated. The focus was no longer on the message of the glossy images but on the missing shape and forms that was drilled through its center. Through this process, the cut-out magazines became altered in their function, their role in our society. It shifted the magazines we commonly know — to flip through, to pass the time with — to a sequence of objects in and of themselves.

SHOPPING

MORE OR LESS

Add polish to a cottage bedroom with pale linens and tailored accents.

Produced by JEN MASSEAU

ARTICULATED SCIENCE

\$1,463* Small Marlin mirror in Blackened Pewter with Polished Rubber Accents. Pewter coated. 39" h x 14 1/2" w x 8" deep. (Shown) Through The Urban Farmer Co.

\$837 Garden City Trunk source in Old Bronze by Madison Valley Lighting. Brass. 23" h x 13 1/2" w x 8" deep. (Shown) Through Savatelli

\$466* In-CR Hubbell Bronze. Brass. 20" h x 17 1/2" w x 8" deep. (Shown) Through Savatelli

LINEN BEDDING

\$410* Duvet set in Sage Green. Queen. 92 1/2" L x 96 1/2" w. (Shown) Through Caliber

\$362* Duvet cover and sham in Pale Harbor Linen. Full/Queen. 88" L x 92" w. (Shown) Through Caliber

\$299 Pufferline duvet cover and sham in Sage Green. 88" L x 92" w. (Shown) Through Caliber

FLOOR MIRROR

\$399 Dimension Standing mirror by James Ellerbe. Acrylic glass. 67" h x 25 1/2" w x 1 1/2" d. (Shown) At CB2

\$214* Lining Chisel Wall mirror in Natural. Wood-covered glass. 59" h x 13 1/2" w x 1 1/2" d. (Shown) Through AllModern

\$150 Oak mirror. Oak glass. 64 1/2" h x 17 1/2" w x 1 1/2" d. (Shown) At Macy's

TRUNK-STYLE DRESSER

\$2,110 Ludlow dresser. Plywood particleboard. canvas, leather, mahogany. 36 1/2" h x 42" w x 27 1/2" d. (Shown) At Pottery Barn

\$1,799 Antique Trunk Trunk Vase dresser in Pale Harbor Linen. Leather, canvas, wood. 36 1/2" h x 42" w x 27 1/2" d. (Shown) Through The Urban Farmer Co.

\$649 Allure Media in Tan & Espresso by Three Posts. Leather, (Shel) black, (Shel) brass. 34 1/2" h x 27 1/2" w x 17 1/2" d. (Shown) Through Wayfair

30 H&M AUGUST 2017

For more cottage bedroom decorating ideas, visit houseandhome.com and click on the current issue.

SEE SHOPPING LIST







care {control} / expectation

Throughout this journey, my studio practice has consistently forced me to consider and address notions of care, control, and expectation. This has been a generative process of discovery, realization, and reframing. First, with the notion of control. I challenged myself to let go of the impulse to control through a paper fold and scoring exercise.³¹ In a sense, this shifted my approach to design away from a structured practice with deadlines and specific outcomes to one that was open to learning and exploring through the work. T.W. Allan Whitfield (2005) discusses the drive of control in “Pre-linguistic Knowledge: A Psychological Perspective,” “it can be argued that aesthetics is fundamental to human life simply by observing the extent to which people design their environments. There exists a powerful drive to control the visual appearance of all artifacts, habitats and selves” (p. 12). My letting go of the impulse to control led to the discovery of care. Why do I control? — because I care. Care through control? Grappling with this condition that links care to control came to the forefront. Care was integral to my relationship with mushrooms.³²

Anthropological archaeologist Uzma Z. Rizvi (2017) discusses the act of care in research in “Decolonization as Care”:

The act of research becomes praxis through which critical awareness of one’s own condition and the condition of others comes into high relief. One aspect of this praxis, includes bodies co-producing the work. There are intricate processes that situate us between theory and practice as praxis, which must begin to take into account the many ways in which we are identified, the modes of address, our different bodies, and varied epistemologies. (p. 86)

³¹ see appendix p. 74

³² see case no. 1 — action no. 2
adapted + found space
on p. 33

She continues by identifying the importance of care in research, arguing “ultimately, that care for and with others is also self-care. Once we recognize ourselves, we begin to recognize our positions, and how our positions may be at the expense of others, be those others human or non-human” (Rizvi, 2017, p. 94). When we take care of this “other,” we are caring for ourselves. When we care for the environment, we care for ourselves. We are sustaining ourselves. In today’s modern society, this direct relationship seems to be forgotten.

Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) echoes this discussion of care in *Matters of Care*, where she discusses the “disruptive and creative potential of thinking with care as a way of cutting across existing divides” (p. 78). She explains, “thinking-with belongs to, and creates, community by inscribing thought and knowledge in the worlds one cares for, this is, however, to make a difference rather than to confirm a status quo” (p. 79), as oppose to thinking-for, which causes othering, oppression, marginalization, and positions ourselves as spokespersons. The important message she argues is that “the heart of the doing is in *how* we care rather than the intention or disposition to be caring. Too much caring can be consuming” (p. 85).

My exploration of expectations simultaneously developed as I was working through the notions of care and control. The sets of expectations I tried to grapple with were directly connected to the societal notions of control and care that I was uncovering in my making and engagement with, at first the paper folds and later with the mushroom blocks. As soon as I was able to let go of my need to control, I approached the notion of care differently which altered my expectations of others — human or non. My expectations turned less rigid to more opened ended, and I became more adaptable and flexible.

Designers are trained to follow a process system of formality, of production. Letting go of control, walking away from set end goals and expectations can lead to unexpected revelations and enlightenments. These notions are important in how designers approach their design practice. Elizabeth Shove (2007) explains in *The Design of Everyday Life*, the implications of designers influence on the user’s expectations. She writes, “more abstractly, product developments and design innovations have implications for what people expect in the first place and for how they then conceptualize what is ideal, normal and necessary” (Shove et al., p. 34). She argues that for the consumer, it’s not just about *having* the new, it’s about the *doing* associated with the *having* in the domestic space. Referring to the kitchen, “things are acquired, discarded and redesigned with reference to culturally and temporally specific expectations of doing and of having — not of having alone” (p. 37). The objects are no longer passive but active in their possibilities for the future. Further discussed is the emotional effect of these standards for the consumer, when our homes don’t live up to these references, the result can be of restless dissatisfaction or a feeling of failure (p. 33). In the general sense, when we stick to these structured/rigid expectations, we set ourselves up for disappointment and dissatisfaction. Care, Control, Expectation — all condition of interaction with nature and our homes.

/ case no. I — action 4

[rot + decay]

As discussed in action 2 — adopted + found,³³ the act of growing mushrooms came with a heightened awareness of my own feelings of lack of control. This feeling, at that particular point in time, was very foreign and uncomfortable. I felt entirely out of my element. My mushrooms were unpredictable. They did not play according to my rules or expectations. Implicit in the act of fostering growth are degrees of care. This quality invariably influences any relationship (human, non-human, artifact). When we recognize ourselves, our positions, we can acknowledge how that position could be at another's expense.³⁴ When the notion of care becomes involved, we shift our approach — we pay more attention and we change our habits for the benefit of the others. We start to see another perspective to the world, that will influence our design approach, which in turns influences users (Norman, 1988).

Rot and decay are most often considered as the antithesis to growth. As I took on my projects of fostering growth (of mushrooms), rot and decay tripped me up. I was approaching the mushroom as a material, and had never worked with a material with such a short life cycle. I was forced to deal with the life-span of materials directly. I had to change my view of the mushrooms — they were no longer a stable, reliable, steadfast material to work with. I could not approach it as a material. While care, control, and expectations were implicit in growth, they seem to be lost when rot and decay take over. It becomes an inevitable outcome regardless of the actions you take. I witnessed two mushroom mediums rot and decay: a mushroom, a bowl.³⁵ The first, a mushroom block had been reluctant to grow. Over the four months, it developed into a weird coral like mushroom growth that was fascinating in shape and form. In midsummer, much to my dismay, it started to age. The second, a crochet bowl, had been stuffed with mushroom medium. Over time mushrooms took over its surface, growing out of the fabric. This too, like the mushroom, reached a point and then started to crumble and deteriorate. I was anxious to touch, to interact, with the objects as they began to disintegrate — they felt fragile. Again, I felt like I was being manipulated by the mushroom medium — no longer in control of the outcome. These interventions shifted my approach. They set in place situations where I had to contend with rot and decay, and led me to give up on my earlier tactics of exploration that were connected to notions of care, control, and expectation. I moved from cultivation to observation.³⁶



³³ see p. 33

³⁴ see Uzma Z. Rizvi
on p. 47

³⁵ see images on p. 50

³⁶ leading me to action 5
— sighting + observation
on p. 26



/ case no. 2 — action 4 + 6

[zines + layers]

Magazines served as a counter to *mushroom*. Dirt and rot aside, my magazine explorations were made up of meticulous and careful actions that allowed me to consider care, control, and expectations from a different angle. It also allowed me to examine my assumptions in other ways.

My initial intention of cutting and deconstructing magazines was to create zines. They were to act as a visual representation of the keywords I was pulling from readings, conversations, etc. I was looking to find meaning in visual contrast from magazine clippings. The issue, in the initial stages of the project, was that I could not find any images to contrast with the unstaged. In hindsight, this deficit on the part of the magazines was an obvious omission — why would a magazine publish anything we do not want to look at or aspire to? This ended up becoming the crux and main drive in my research for case no. 2 — the major shift. How could I inject nature into these staged environments within these magazines?

Letting go of control as well as expectations in one's practice — allowing oneself to follow a process, can bring about unexpected revelations and enlightenments. Through this process, I realized that home décor/design magazines function as a source of social expectation — one that implicitly requires an expected level of care and control. Magazines set a point of reference that in turn set standards that influence our home environment. In my cutting, the action opened up a hole (of sorts) — the expectations that these magazines set for the “home” seemed increasingly unrealistic and unapproachable. For others (readers/observers), the removed content provides a means to consider what else is missing; humans, personal objects, the mess; the dirt.

I cut through these magazines³⁷ page by page — layer by layer. With each layer, the cutting became more passive, with the previous layers acting as a template to cut the page. The deeper I cut, the more structured the cutting template became — going through the actions following the motions, I became less aware, less conscious or mindful of the details of the shapes. Each layer revealed a fragment of the page below, framing the content in pieces, altering my understanding and changing the context. Some layers provided the same content, for example, a sofa cut out revealed layers upon layers of more sofas. Others offered little, blocking my understanding of the content. While others provided new content that had shifted from the pages original intention, for example, the words “r rage” were isolated from the original message of “your storage.” The magazines were photographed as each layer was peeled away revealing the layer below. Each layer was altered in meaning and value through a narrow frame used to deconstruct.



³⁷ see images on p. 52-53







perception ([language][grammar][value] / meaning) / — [code]

As designers, we still organize and create order through design. As Deyan Sudjic (2008) exemplifies in *The Language of Things*, “design has become the language with which to shape those objects and to tailor the message they carry. The role of the most sophisticated designers today is as much to be storytellers, to make design that speaks in such a way as to convey these messages, as it is to resolve formal and functional problems” (p. 21-23). Language is a type of coding that can be visual, spoken, written. A way to communicate our thoughts but in many ways also speaks to our values and beliefs, just like our homes do with our objects. It’s all a way to create meaning and narrative. The objects we create, and the things we design, speak to a larger framing of our culture and our worldview. It speaks to our relationship with nature and our understanding of our place within the natural environment. In our homes and with our objects “each person, each family unit must discover a visual language that will express what they most deeply care for” (p. 30). Designers must decide their perspective and how their objects speak to this through the language of design—a visual transfer of knowledge. Before language, our understanding of the world was largely visual. As Whitfield (2010) states:

Before the twentieth century, however, the dominant theories of the mind were essentially perceptual, in which images and sensory meaning provided the foundation of knowledge. The emergence of language theories and behaviorism in the early twentieth century, followed by the cognitive revolution in the mid-twentieth century, effectively undermined the perceptualism position. This period also witnessed the demise of emotion as a mainstream psychological domain, and, as might be expected, aesthetics as a quasi-emotion followed emotion down. (p. 5)

Now, following the “cognitive revolution,” language has become an expression of culture, values, and meaning. It is through language that culture is expressed because it contains culture. As Merchant (1990) states “when language changes, a culture is also changing in important ways. By examining changes in descriptions of nature, we can then perceive something of the changes in cultural values” (p. 4). I began thinking about this connection between how language influences our understanding and our relationship to nature while reading a passage from Michael Pollan’s (2001) book *The Botany of Desire*. Pollan writes, “I choose the plants, I pull the weeds, I harvest the crops. We divide the world into subject and objects and here in the garden, as in nature generally, we humans are the subjects. But that afternoon in the garden I found myself wondering: what if grammar is all wrong? What if it’s really nothing more than a self-serving conceit?” (p. xiv). This insight became a driver for me that led to several discoveries and more reflections.

In *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, Henry David Thoreau (1854) expresses the narrative from the first person, “we commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience” (p. 1). This perspective is echoed and expanded on in Uzma Z. Rizvi’s (2017) writing:

In setting up objectivity as criteria to uphold western academia has distanced us from ourselves.... By granting myself the ‘I’ everything was granted an ‘I’ and there was an intersectional subjectivity that provided a network of kin and care that went beyond a human centric approach to the world. This included the many sets of relations I have with the built environment, with trees, with soil, with ancient ceramics, with other/non-human animals, with everything around me. By reclaiming myself, I recognized the larger world within which I was deeply entangled. (p. 92)

We construct the world around the *I*. English as a language is a very *I*-centric language, meaning *I* usually starts a sentence. Our narratives are told from the point of *I*. Acknowledging our approach to the world, can help to enlighten how we think and therefore act in it.

Our ability to understand ourselves in relation to everything else is predicated upon the ability to understand and contextualize the real, tangible, sensory aspect of moving through the world as compared to conceptual, abstract notions of things of our bodies in the world. It is important to understand that recognizing systems of power and one’s place in them is a tool that can be utilized and continued to affect our work. (Rizvi, 2017, p. 86-87)

Humans need to create meaning and order to understand the world. David Suzuki (1997) explains this in *The Sacred Balance*, that the brain does so by creating stories wherein it selects and discards certain information. The narrative does not just tell what happened but also why. It selects and orders, creating connections and relations to create meaning as the stories we tell ourselves (p. 20). We create this meaning through narrative that expresses a perception of our reality.

/ case no. I — action I

[purchasing]

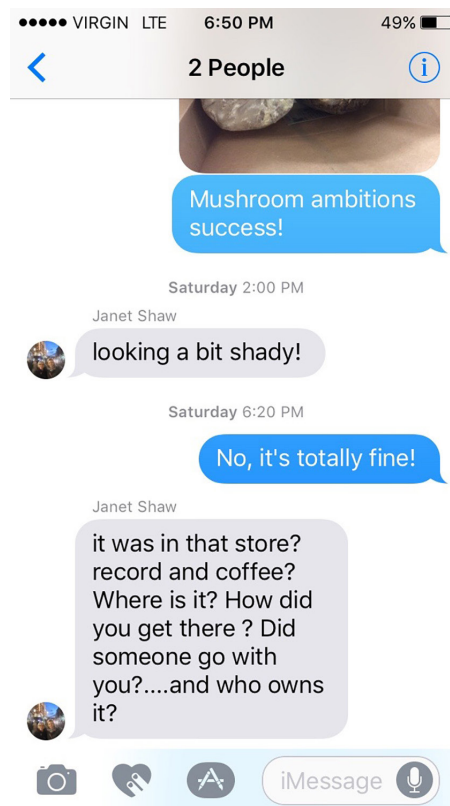
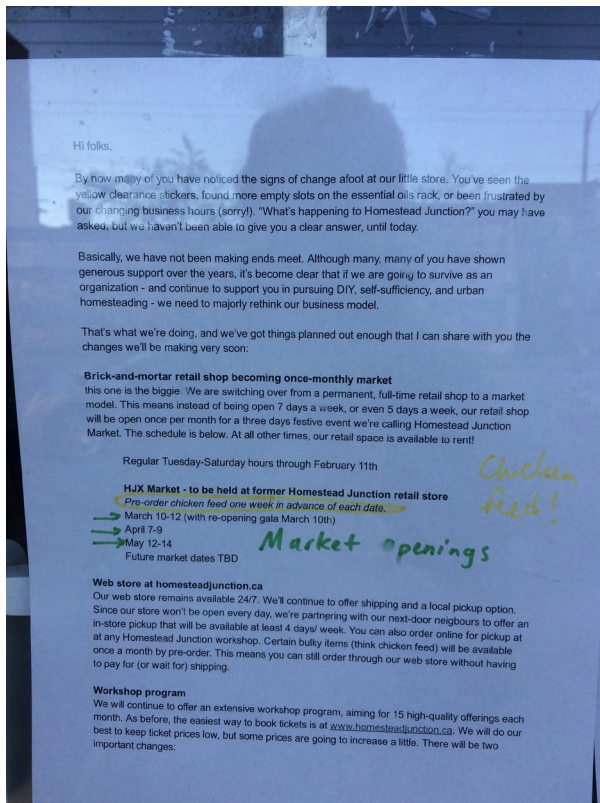
My mushroom narrative started with the purchase of mycelium block to grow. Homestead Junction is a shop on East Hastings St. in Vancouver that sells mushroom blocks from a local supplier — a logical, point of purchase! Their storefront, however, had closed just days before I went on my mushroom purchase expedition. The notice on their door stated that they were restructuring their business to focus on workshops and their online store. So now when you order from them online, you pick up your purchase from a record shop next door.

This situation precipitated a set of unintended conversation revolving around how I was to acquire my mushrooms.³⁸ My mother had some concerns. The more I tried to explain the situation the worse it sounded. I was picking up mushrooms from a store on East Hastings that had closed but I arranged to pick them up from a record store next door. The response of others to this scenario heightened my own awareness to the conversations — via texting, social media and in person — surrounding mushrooms. I started to note the comments and reactions I was receiving from others. My mom and brother have started to refer to this as my “mushroom ambitions.” My dad was giving me advice about growing them on manure piles. My friends from out East were calling me a hippy and that “I’m so West Coast now.” And there were also a lot of “shroom” comments. What was most surprising was how many people had something to say about their experience with them — how they’d been foraging for them or knew people who grew them. This really highlighted people’s assumptions around material and artifacts for me.

As I’m finishing my masters at Emily Carr University, I am still purchasing mushrooms. Homestead Junction is now fully closed, meaning I now purchase mushrooms directly from a supplier. The supplier will deliver right to your door in a white van. He only accepts cash. While this sounds bad or sketchy, no one seems to make comments anymore — as if this is what is to be expected — adapting to this narration.



³⁸ see images on p. 58





I grappled (a lot) in the Fall of 2017, after being challenged to create a further disconnect between magazine content and visual language, with how to broaden my approach. I had been prompted to consider moving away from home décor/design magazines and to turn to gossip magazines instead. This was hard to wrap my head around. Initially, as with the home décor/design magazines, I used the gossip magazines to cut into — to create a frame. Cutting through the gossip (literally) did not cut it. I felt a complete disconnect from the process — between myself and the magazine. The satisfaction and tension that had been there with the magazines (and their high quality-paper) were no longer available. After a couple of weeks of working through the “rags,” I gave up.

Not content to let go of the challenge and with some encouragement, I revisited my approach to the gossip magazine. I realized I had to approach these magazines differently. If not manipulation of form then perhaps of language and sound. I asked people to read the gossip magazine content aloud in nature.³⁹ Here, I was returning to the notion of narrative that I had encountered in my purchasing of mushrooms. This time, however, the gossip magazines were speaking to the instinctive nature — of being human. Each reading in different settings provoked the opportunity for another rendition. I have accumulated a series of short films of various individuals reading aloud surrounded by nature at the top of a mountain in Whistler, in the Rouge Valley, on the Sunshine Coast. The films are staged with the reader to on side of a wide framed shot as the dialogue is juxtaposed with the surrounding natural environment. Through the course of the film/video, the narrator flips through and reads the content to the viewer — the latest celebrity gossip.

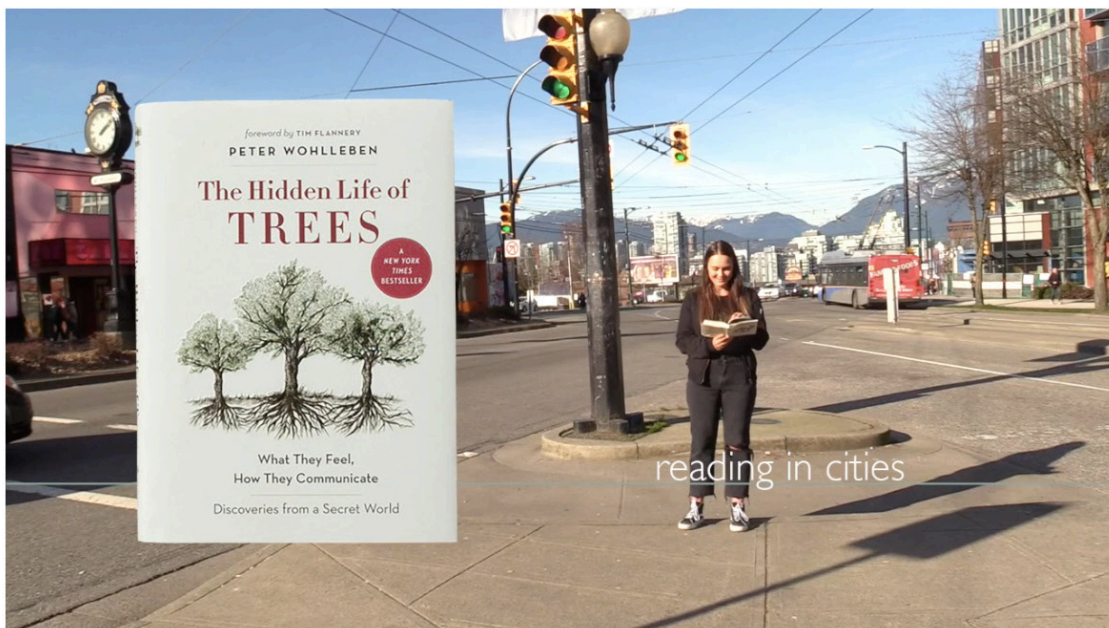
These videos are inviting the readers to make strange, where the act of reading in contrast with their surroundings, create an immersive, embodied experience. While the framing and set up is staged, the readers were encouraged to act (and read) at their own discretion. The readers have each provided insight into the experience. This feedback has varied and included: feeling self-conscious, being embarrassed and outside of their comfort zone, vaguely resenting the intrusion of the magazine in what should have been a genuine experience of being outdoors.

In contrast, I had the individuals read nature literature in the urban centers of Vancouver.⁴⁰

³⁹ see images on p. 60-61

⁴⁰ see image on p. 60-61

These videos were staged the same, with the reader to one side of a wide framed shot, however, this time the dialogues were barely audible as the overpowering noise of the loud, busy, heavily trafficked city takes over. In these, viewers take in the visuals and sounds as they read the subtitles of barely audible stories of the natural environment.





Dressed down in jeans and a striped sweater, the late-night TV host appeared to be letting loose



Bieber and Gomez are already discussing their future.



Plants are so unlike people that it's very difficult for us to appreciate fully their complexity and sophistication.


```

mycelium_v4___with_array
9 ArrayList newcells;
10 PImage img;
11 float food[][];
12 float myceliumThreshold = 0.3;
13
14 String[] filename_array = {"rustic.jpg", "natu
15 int img_count = 0;
16
17 boolean inverted = false; // true -> white bac
18
19 void setup()
20 {
21   size(1200, 750); // Width and Height of the
22
23   cp5 = new ControlP5(this);
24
25   cp5.addSlider("myceliumThreshold")
26     .setPosition(100, 50)
27     .setRange(0.0, 1.0)
28   ;

```

growth.

This thesis is a condensed documentation of my practice, over the 18-month Master's of Design program at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. It highlights the shifts in my approach — it documents my growth. Set up as two cases (no. 1. *Mushroom* and no. 2 *magazines*) the work speaks to the themes of: nature and environment; dwelling and home; our objects; care, control, and expectations; and perception. The *actions* that were encompassed by these cases offered up a range of insights. These located the research, acting as continuations and markers that pointed to next steps (the direction) to be taken. My actions helped to establish a generative practice-led approach to my design explorations. As an established part of my practice, they enabled me to reconsider how we see and organize our home through aesthetics, language and meaning and how this affects our perception of our environments: natural and constructed. Over time, and through my actions, I became increasingly aware that even when we set ourselves up in our built environments, we do not leave the natural one behind. The built and the natural, human and environment, indoor and outdoor, and the smooth and the striated only exist in mixture. The socially constructed idea that we have separated ourselves from our natural environment has provided us with a potent illusion of control — the illusion of us and them.

I would like to end on a reflection of a project that, while not discussed above, will summarize the importance of the work I conducted in both of the detailed cases: (no. 1.) *mushroom* and (no. 2.) *magazine*. In Summer 2017, as a self-directed elective, I set out to learn Processing — the computer software

⁴¹ see images below

and language for coding within a visual arts context. I intended to create a visual representation of mycelium networks⁴¹ based on mycologist Paul Stamet (2005) reference as “Earth’s natural Internet” (p. 7). Instead, I found myself in a space where I was learning a new language — coding. Processing code is a very basic language. It does not assume anything; it is not intuitive, it does not use logic — everything needs to be laid out. But coding is not just in computer programming. During this time, I came to Sudjic’s (2008) writing in *The Language of Things*, that provided me with another perception of the term code:

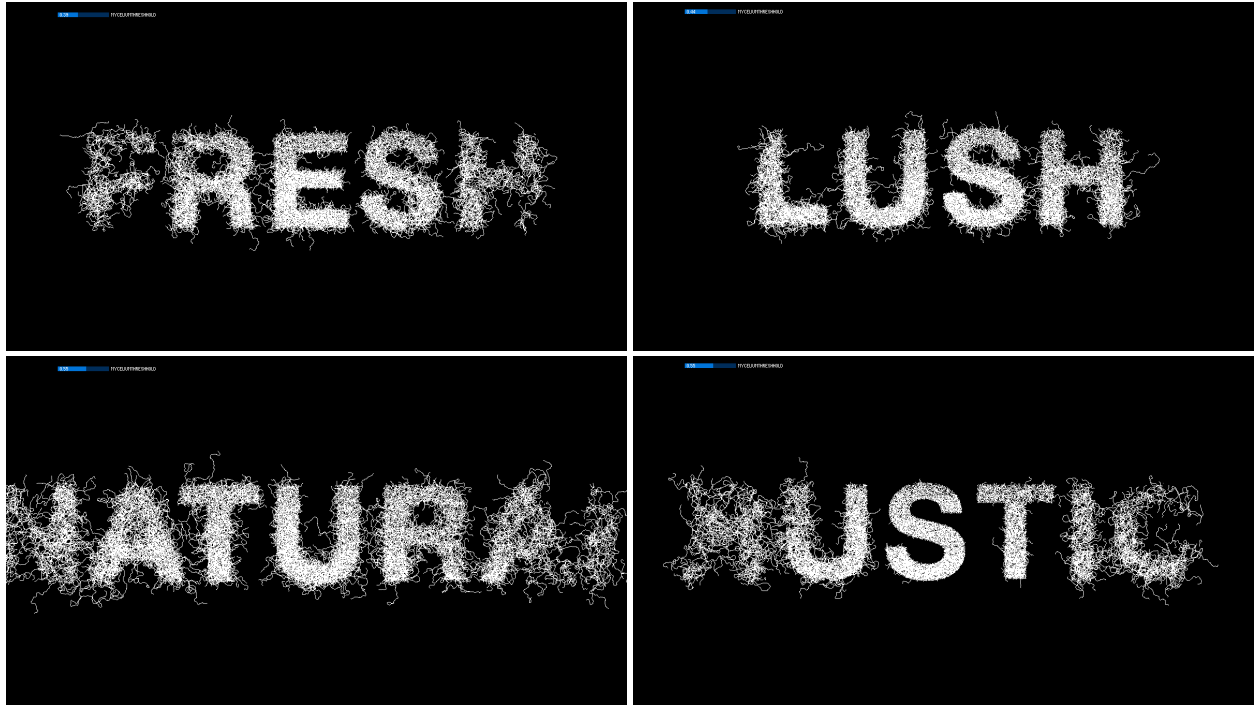
The spoon could be understood as a fragment of genetic code — a code that can grow into any kind of man made artefact. Traces of the same code can be found in anything that shares the same design roots — a chair, a car, a typeface, even an aircraft, never mind a skyscraper or a city. The code is partly a reflection of how the object is made, but also of its symbolic meaning. (p. 35-37)

We rely on code to create this symbolic meaning, but we also rely on each other to create and understand what these codes mean. Processing heavily relies on the community of programmers and coders. It is an open source program that encourages shared resources and knowledge to build on and as continuations. Lines of code are available to pull from and develop into separate projects, which led me to connect this concept to Peter Wohlleben’s (2015) writing, *The Hidden Life of Trees*. Wohlleben discusses the intricate connections and systems between trees in a forest. The isolated tree has a far shorter lifespan comparatively because the forest creates a suitable microclimate for trees to stimulate growth and sustenance. In a forest, trees can communicate and share food. They are in need of each other.

In the end, I did not become the proficient Processing coder I had hoped to be, although I am able to create very simple interactions.⁴² While the

⁴² see appendix p. 74

```
mycelium_v4___with_array
9 ArrayList newcells;
10 PImage img;
11 float food[][];
12 float myceliumThreshold = 0.3;
13
14 String[] filename_array = {"rustic.jpg", "natural.jpg", "lush.jpg", "fresh.jpg", "raw.jpg", "quaint."};
15 int img_count = 0;
16
17 boolean inverted = false; // true -> white background
18
19 void setup()
20 {
21   size(1200, 750); // Width and Height of the base image
22
23   cp5 = new ControlP5(this);
24
25   cp5.addSlider("myceliumThreshold")
26     .setPosition(100,50)
27     .setRange(0.0,1.0)
28   ;
29
30   //Reading image code
31   img = loadImage("images/base/" + filename_array[img_count]);
32   img_count++;
33
34   food = new float[width][height];
35   for (int x = 0; x < width; ++x)
36     for (int y = 0; y < height; ++y) {
37       food[x][y] = ((img.pixels[(x+y*width)] >> 8) & 0xFF)/255.0;
38       if (inverted) food[x][y] = 1-food[x][y];
39     }
40   if (inverted) {
41     background(255);
```



outcome of this practice was not what I had intended or expected, I did learn three important things from this intervention that can be applied to the whole of my practice through my Master's studies: the nuance of coding and language that creates meaning and, in turn, influence perception in the everyday; the need for connection/entanglement with shared resources (whole systems — including natural ones); and what we can learn as designers when we observe, engage instead of direct, structure.

The assumptions we (as designers and consumers/users) have developed to the natural world and the perceptions of the everyday laid out for us (by designers, for designers and consumers/users) in the print medium of the magazine set our social-construct as to how we separate from the natural in our built environments. They both also, set how we see and relate to things in nature — how we value aspects, but not everything (the gross or dirty) — and our value of control over nature (Merchant, 1990). If these are the influences in the design industry — for other designers, producers, user/consumers — how can we educate designers, so they are able to make a difference to the design industry to improve and evolve our consumption behaviours and manufacturing practices?

My actions were important acts of speculation and investigation. The insight gained from these actions were only possible when I let go of the functional industrial production element that is often argued to be the defining aspect to design. Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby (2013) define this design space as “conceptual design — design about ideas” (p. 11). This separation removes the pressures of the market, freeing the design space to be able to explore issues, ideas, and new possibilities in design. Conceptual design sees the “potential to use the language of design to pose questions, provoke, and inspire” (p. 12). This design space is so important because product designers are in a conundrum when

it comes to sustainable design — their role is to design new products in a world overloaded with things/objects/stuff. What I am suggesting here are interventions in personal design practice for critical design — opportunity to make strange. If we have designers open to inquiry and thinking outside the status quo, it will filter into the design industry and into functionality.

This methodology is how I shifted my design thinking to encompass conceptual design. While I have used the term “framework” throughout this document, I was reluctant to do so. It feels too structured, too formal, and too dictating. However, it was used to best explain my practice in a concerted, comprehensive manner. I much prefer the term Stephen Sterling and Bob Jickling (2017) uses in their work to discuss framing issues in education:

Frameworks provide more concrete visions about how things are, how they should be, or roadmaps for getting to a new place. But heuristics are agents in the process of discovery — provocateurs at the intersections of imagination and praxis.

This document is evidence of the possibility of change in approach for designers when there is no concrete vision or roadmaps, but rather, openness to inquiry in design interventions. As designers, we never stop learning, sorting and organizing, or making sense and meaning of the world around us. In the current design industry, designers are being taught to design in a direct and structured manner. I was educated in that manner, and it left little room to consider other (alternatives) perspectives. Instead, I was taught how to conform to an immense global system — to contribute but not change or influence, and to accept established practices of the industrial design industry. It also taught me to adapt to a system that does not sit well with my personal morals. I write this for designers, with the knowledge of their influence on the consumers/users/real people — leading real lives. There is an integral relationship between the designer and the users — a thread between them, connecting them. This needs to be acknowledged. Equally important are the codes that designers explore with and use to set ideas and outcomes in place. These have the capacity to allow designers and users to see outside the system. Designer, producer, user, other — I see these codes (along with their glitches) as mechanisms to inspire, change and improve our choices and everyday hab

nature. environment;
dwelling — house (home)
/objects
care {control} / expectation
perception ([language][grammar][value]/meaning) — [code]

growth.

ending	. ? !	pause	, ; :	contains words	further thought	()
shift	—	conflict or connect	/		explanation/clarify	[]
					contains text or lines	{ }

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Critical Design

As defined by Dunne and Raby (2007):

Critical Design uses speculative design proposals to challenge narrow assumptions, preconceptions, and givens about the role projects play in everyday life. It is more of an attitude than anything else, a position rather than a method. There are many people doing this who have never heard of the term critical design and who have their own way of describing what they do. Naming it Critical Design is simply a useful way of making this activity more visible and subject to discussion and debate.

Its opposite is affirmative design: design that reinforce the status quo.

Discourse

As defined by Gillian Rose (2001):

Discourse has a quite specific meaning. It refers to groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words, discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it. (p. 136)

Industrial Design

A more generalized term that includes product design. It can be applied to cover a broad variety of types of products. The design focus is on shape, aesthetic, features, function of manufactured products on a larger scale.

Lifestyles

Choices, and habits individuals make in the everyday and the mundane that dictate their way of living and behaviour according to values, beliefs.

Nature

I have come across several definitions of the term nature. Michael Bonnett (2002), philosopher of environmental education defines it as:

Self-originating material/ spiritual world of which we are a part, including the powers that sustain and govern it. (p. 12-13)

In the “does nature exist?” context, it is argued it does not exist because humans cannot exist outside of nature. We are all one. Our systems are not separate, but are together and influence each other. See philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2007) and design academics Stuart Walker (2011, 2016) and Clive Dilnot (2015) for examples.

“othering”

The act of separating by view or treatment of humans (historically through racism, sexism or class) that are different or distinct from oneself. Often grouped by a generalized understanding (Jensen, 2011). Here, I use it in reference to the act of separating the non-human.

Perception	Our ability to interpret, be aware, acknowledge, understand things in our surroundings through our senses — leaving an impression. Make sense of actions and outcome — comprehension, meaning. Constructed through a variety of influences, including language (visual, written, oral), codes, narratives.
Place	<p>As defined by Michel de Certeau (1983), in relation to space:</p> <p><i>A place (lieu) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (place). The law of the “proper” rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own “proper” and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability. (p. 117)</i></p>
Product Designer	Someone who creates (through planned form, look, function) artifacts for manufacturing and sale to consumers. Their process often is informed by anticipating and predicting consumers wants, needs, and/or styles. These artifacts often are an improvement of existing ones or developments of the initial idea to final product — developing concepts.
Scenery	The appearance of natural feature — geographical area — in a genuine and authentic manner. The setting and conditions around a person, one’s environment — surrounding. It is used here not to be picturesque or romanticized.
Social-Construct	Beliefs, ideas or theories of various concepts prompted by social influence related to society and its organization. These various concepts are typically subjective and constructed over a period of time.
Space	<p>As defined by Michel de Certeau (1983), in relation to place:</p> <p><i>A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. On this view, in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a “proper.” In short, space is a practice place. (p. 117)</i></p>

[living wall]



Living Wall was designed based on the stretch Lexicon term Biocentric Design. The frames were constructed out of styrofoam, repurposed material that would have otherwise ended up in a landfill. Hanging in the Masters of Design's studio space, the intention was to remind student peers of the relationship between humans and nature, and how we can rethink that interrelationship and correlation.

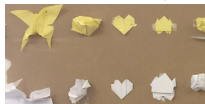
Discussed on page 41.

[beehive with seed paper]



Building on *Living Wall*, *Beehive with Seed Paper* was a project in creating a welcoming habitat for bees in the urban environment. Beehive's included seed paper to be planted nearby to attract them to the hive.

[origami]



Origami was an exercise in self-learning through hands-on making and repetitive actions.

[paper folds]



Paper Folds was a personal research study intended to provide the feeling of complete discomfort in producing and making objects with no function. Working with various paper weighs and textures, the material was able to manipulate me as much as I manipulated it. The process provided insight into expectations of material and the notion of control.

Discussed on page 47.

[.control/uncontrol term wall]



Control/Uncontrol Term Wall was an exercise in term mapping. I mapped out keyword, from studio, class, and readings, on a scale between the two terms. This action highlighted for me keywords like “point of view,” “expectations,” “narrative” and “life-cycles.” Over a period these keywords would move in placement. The exercise emphasized for me that what we control isn’t black-and-white, but rather a spectrum between the two, where things often shift.

[“i need more light”]



Video Sketch was an experiment in video sketch prototyping. This method was used to play with the unreal, and imagine other possibilities. Here it was applied to discover my core values as a designer.

[shapes + forms]



Shapes and Forms was an exercise playing between 2d and 3d. Using the 3d form from the paper folds project, I reproduced them into 2d shapes through sketches and photography.

[kintsugi mugs]



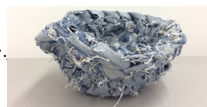
Influenced by the philosophies of Wabi Sabi, *Kintsugi Mugs* focused on the tradition of honouring the breakage and repair of an object for the history and story it adds to the piece. Discarded thrift store mugs, chosen for their commercial logos, were taken apart (smashed) and carefully put back together. What happened, unexpectedly, was the feelings around smashing the object that by tradition was suppose to be cherished and cared for. Throwing and breaking the first mug was hard and felt wrong. Notions of personal connection to objects and caring through control were explored.

[natural stains]



An experiment in natural staining on wood. Using apple cider, teas, oils, butter, spices as natural dyes.

[crochet bowls]



Again influenced by the Japanese philosophy of Wabi Sabi, *Crochet Bowls* focused on objects and material, rustic aesthetics and beauty in the irregular and imperfect. The bowls were woven using yarn made from discarded pant fabric. Once the bowls were completed, the material was taken through several different natural aging methods. This included burying in dirt, growing mycelium inside, and planting a succulent within, so every time the plant was watered the soil would affect the fabric material. These methods created beautifully weathered and worn effects.



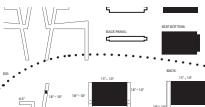
[wooden shelf]

Wooden Shelf was designed and build with the intention of tying the ideas developed through the first semester of the Masters of Design program. The form was inspired by the forms in Paper Folds and was combined with the Wabi Sabi ideas of the rustic, unfinished, and imperfection in Crochet Bowls and Kintsugi Mugs. The most visual aspect of the shelf is the gold leaf that highlights any cuts, tears, or blow-outs in the wood. This caused a liberating effect that allowed mistakes to be sought after.



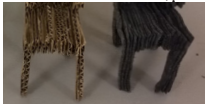
[laser cutting]

As a material exploration, *Laser Cutting* was used to score thin sheets of wood in a diamond grid. This was an experiment inflexibility of the material.



[cnc manufacturing]

Investigating individualized manufacturing of furniture pieces using CNC cutting.



[mini chairs]

An exercise in scale, *Mini Chairs* were miniature versions (4" in height) of a chair designed a year earlier. The miniature chairs were constructed from cardboard and felt.



[mushroom purchasing]

Mushroom Purchasing is the narrative surrounding the acquiring of mycelium block to grow mushrooms. This became a shifting point to my design research.

Discussed on page 57.

[adapted vs. found space]



Adapted vs. Found Space, was the action of finding the mycelium blocks their ideal space to grow. At studio, I found a spot that suited the block ideal growing condition. At home, I adapted my space to suit their needs.

Discussed on page 33.

[mushroom objects]



Mushroom Objects are the outcome of a generative research study. By growing mushrooms on the everyday object and interacting with them, the intention was to question the sense of control and expectations of our home and how design as a form of care can change our habits. It is also questioning our connection to nature and the current separation of space between the built and the natural.



[rot + decay]

I had to contend with rot and decay throughout the growing process with mycelium. Specifically in the Summer of 2017, when I had to contend with a rotting oyster mushroom and crochet bowl.

Discussed on page 49.

[observation + sighting]



As an exercise in observation of nature, I documented (through photography) any mushroom sighting. This act challenged my assumptions of natural growth in the urban environment. Later, I took a handful of these images and stamped them with types of identifiers — dates, names, and locations. I created other means of representation through words and numbers. These stamped images also playing with the concepts of language, coding, and visual representation.

Discussed on page 26.

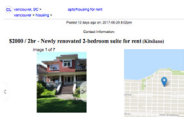
[lack of nature — audit]



Developed from a quote from Michael Pollen's (2001) book *The Botany of Desire*, I examined popular home décor/design magazines to identify how they referred to the natural environment through language and grammar. Any reference to nature was documented in a spreadsheet. The adjectives used in these references were later used in *Processing + Coding*.

Discussed on page 36.

[house hunting]



Less of a project and more out of necessity, *House Hunting* was the process of finding a space to turn into my own. I reached out to over 60 listings for apartments and viewed 16 potential places. The process was a challenge due to the current housing market in Vancouver. During the process, I questioned my expectations for a home. I also noticed when viewing each space; I would create a vision of how I could see myself and my things in the space.

Discussed on page 43.

[packing]



Moving in the Fall of 2017 lead to the reflections in *Packing*. I moved from a residency, that is a standard cookie-cutter studio space with each room identical. This act made me realize that my things are what made a space my own. Seeing my things in boxes produced an immediate feeling of guilt around the amount of stuff I owned. Upon opening the boxes in my new place, the sentimental value attached to the objects resurfaced. It was a conflict of emotions between guilt and sentiment.

Discussed on page 43.

```
mycelium_v4_with_array
9 ArrayList newcells;
10 PImage img;
11 float food[];
12 float myceliumThreshold = 0.3;
13
14 String[] filename_array = {"rus
15 int img_count = 0;
```

[processing + coding]

As an elective, I wanted to explore parallels between the digital and the natural networks by creating a visualization of mycelium through coding using Processing. However unexpectedly, it became an exploration of what language and coding could be. Building on the original intent and how we use the language in home décor/design magazine when describing nature, I took the descriptive adjectives used and created a visual representation of mycelium growing into these words. In reflection, there were layers of understanding, which included; coding of man-made artifacts, shared resources, and social networks, visual representation vs. reality, and intuitive and logic in language.

Discussed on page 64-65.

[in vs. on]



I built growing environments out of PVC tubing that would allow the mushroom to thrive. This challenged my wording of growing mushrooms *on* rather than *in*. Growing *in* would provide a solution to the mycelium medium from drying out. However, I realized the point was not to grow the mushroom in the objects to be utilized by humans as a material but to grow the mushroom on the objects to share the structures — making them equal.

Discussed on page 41.

[value]



Questions around value began to surface while reading through the home décor/design magazines. These magazines have features that focus on the dollar value of the product. No focus is placed on the quality value or the manufacturing value or the personal value of the product. This had me question how do these features influence our perception of value? How do we change the focus of value from the dollar? And if we felt closer to nature would we become more aware of our consumerist habits?

Discussed on page 43.

[zine]



Utilizing the magazines from *Lack of Nature — Audit*, I attempt to create zines that focused on the contrast between the staged spaces shown in the magazine and our actual reality. The intention was to expose how these magazines create unrealistic expectations. However, the issue I ran into in the initial stages of the project was that I couldn't find any images to contrast with — the opposite side of the spectrum, the unstaged.

Discussed on page 51.



[definition cards]

Using a dictionary, I defining the keywords that I pulled from class, readings, and studio. Taking these definitions, I matched them with visual images from my practice and everyday.



[cutting]

In order to inject the home décor/design magazines with nature, I began to cut away layers. Using an xacto knife, I started by carefully following the outline of the object of desire on the front cover of the magazine. The cutting process was one that took time and detail, which each layer the cutting became more passive with the previous layers acting as a template to cut the page.

Discussed on page 43.



[layers]

A continuation of cutting, the magazines were photographed as each layer was peeled away revealing the layer below. A stop motion video was made in collaboration with *Framing Nature*. The video flips through each layer cut from the magazine with random interjection of images from *Framing Nature*.

Discussed on page 51.



[framing nature]

Once these magazines were cut to the last page, they became a frame which could be used to isolate content behind. I used them to literally inject nature into the magazines, to fill the missing content. The burrowed home décor/design magazines were used to frame the natural environment. A stop motion video was made in collaboration with *Layers*. The video flips through each layer cut from the magazine with random interjection of images from *Framing Nature*.

Discussed on page 28.



[mushroom chair]

An ongoing project, *Mushroom chair* is a functional chair, designed and constructed. The chair was then left outside to weather, mould, and rot. The end intention is to grow mushrooms on it.

[reading environments]



A series of short videos that take literature content out of context. Playing with contrast and making strange, *Reading Environments* has people reading gossip magazines (*People*, *OK Canada*) in the natural environment and nature literature (*Walden*, *the Sacred Balance*) in the urban environment.

Discussed on page 59.