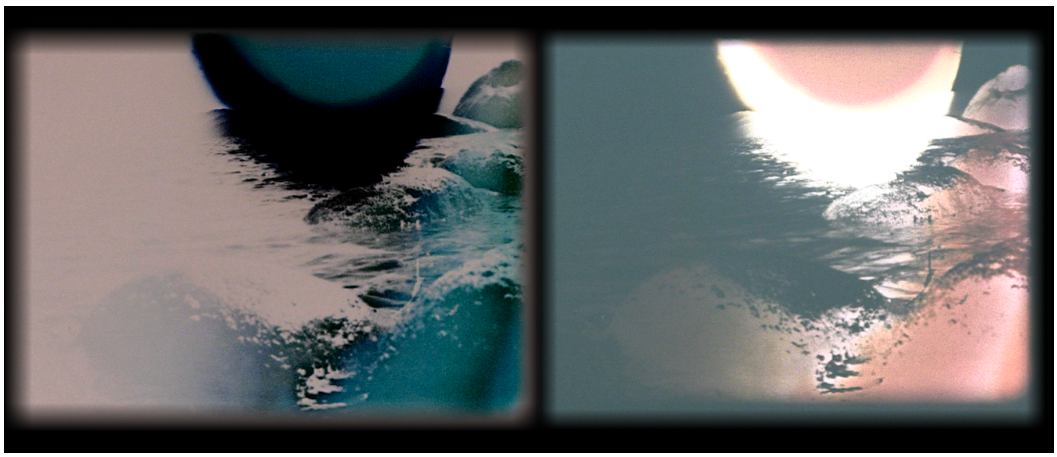
OCEANIC ALCHEMY:
Collaborations and Surrenderings in Film Eco-Processing

by
ANA VALINE



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ABSTRACT

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My filmmaking practice has been centered around ocean plant film development and the 'oceanic feeling'. My contemplations have taken the form of experiments in eco-processing as both the method and subject of my work. This opens for me the following questions: how does the act of inviting and collaborating in the shoreline, and then surrendering to the outcomes, manifest physically, spiritually, and psychologically in the filmmaking process? How do these invited variables transform the observer and the celluloid? These questions are important for me as an artist who is re-situating myself in my practice. I'm relearning how to be a filmmaker; as a restorative art form and as a way to understand, and contribute to, the world in which I create. I'm opening the camera and myself to possibilities of re-imprinting, unlearning and responding in new ways. In this slowing down to see and listen more deeply, is there potential for creative re-integration through immersion in place and material practice? How can we consider acts of reciprocity in our creative work with natural elements? When I consider the shoreline and its inhabitants as teachers and partners in my making, what does that do to the hierarchy of filmmaking outside of the film industry? Through material engagement, I'm exploring forms of renewal and restoration in collaboration with the sea, discovering ways of making films with the ocean using seaweed and seawater. The shoreline begins to function as a space of potentiality and transformation. Perhaps it is in response to big picture, urgent topics that I'm opening a tiny lens on more intimate collaborators. Maybe there are connections to the macro through the micro. I'm wondering how we will be changed if we acknowledge this Earth as the knower and ourselves as discoverable. How will surrendering to the timeless patience of the sea change my ways of making?

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As I listen, un-learn, and explore the spaces of these timeless territories, I am in awe. I am an uninvited guest here and acknowledge these lands were taken without consent and the atrocities that followed can never be repaired. The intention of my filming on and with these lands, plants and waters is to attempt a new understanding of relationship by engaging with the ocean and shoreline life from a position of enquiry, humility, and respect for place and those who carry deep knowledge of their ancestral homes. It is a small step and the start of an unravelling, an undoing and a re-imprinting.

I have listed filming locations by their colonial names as place-holders while I learn more about deeper histories. As my understanding changes, and with permission, the ways in which I will be able to speak of place will change.

DEDICATION

For my mother, who continues to teach me what it is to move in the world with thoughtfulness, grace, kindness and courage… and the fiercest seafarer I know.

INTRODUCTION

There is a way that nature speaks, that land speaks. Most of the time we are simply not patient enough, quiet enough, to pay attention to the story.

- Linda Hogan

Since August 2020 my filmmaking practice has been centered around experimentations in ocean plant film development and contemplations with the 'oceanic feeling'. The oceanic feeling is one of feeling 'a part of' the microcosm and vastness of our world, and beyond.[1]

My explorations have taken the form of experiments in film eco-processing, as both the method and subject of my work. Eco-processing is a method of developing celluloid with non-commercial materials, often plant matter. It is categorized as experimental, and in the case of working with plant ingredients, is also unpredictable. It is this unpredictability in the film outcomes that is leading me to consider these works as collaborations with nature, and a form of alchemy. Most of my research is done in the field with the camera and by gathering ingredients, while the kitchen and basement play the roles of 'the lab' for brewing, mixing and processing. Copious notes and photos are taken to track variables and recipes. Yielding to these (thus far) uncontrollable variables brings both magic and disappointment. This process opens for me the following questions: how does the act of inviting and collaborating, and then surrendering, manifest physically, spiritually, and psychologically in the process? How do these invited variables change the observer, and the celluloid? These questions are important for me as a filmmaker who is re-situating myself in my practice. I'm learning how to be with filmmaking in a new way; both as a restorative art form and as a way to understand, and contribute to, the world in which I create from a new perspective.

Having worked in the commercial film industry where hierarchical and militarized structures and long hours can lead to disembodied output, I'm now opening the camera and myself to

[1] More on this in the chapter "SHORELINES"

possibilities of re-imprinting, unlearning and responding in new ways: of reprogramming to hear the life that speaks more softly. In this slowing down to listen is there potential for creative re-integration through immersion in place and material practice? When I consider the shoreline and its inhabitants as teachers and partners in my making, how does that change my learned approach to a filmmaking hierarchy, and how can I reconsider my assumed position? Through material engagement, I'm exploring forms of renewal and restoration in collaboration with the sea, discovering ways of making films with the ocean using seaweed and seawater. The shoreline begins to function as a space of potentiality and transformation, and I'm slowing down to listen.

The shoreline, that space encompassing water and land both in changing rhythms, reflects my feeling of being of two worlds and none. I am in the in-between space of how I was before and my understanding after this. By 'after this' I mean after a degree and the pandemic and examining culture and creation through a magnifying glass. Perhaps it is in response to these big picture, urgent topics that I'm opening a tiny lens on more intimate collaborators.

When we open ourselves to other lives on the planet, not just human life but those classified as animals, plants, and minerals, traditional Western structures of epistemology are thrown into question. I'm wondering how we will be changed if we acknowledge this Earth as the knower and ourselves as discoverable. How will surrendering to the timeless patience of the sea change my ways of making?

A NOTE ON STRUCTURE

> *…the oceanic feeling is [a] state… expressed more exactly in poetic and musical ways than in rational and conceptual forms.*
>
> - Caroline Rooney

In this document you will see sections formatted in *American Typewriter*. These are excerpts from field notes, experimentation notes, and personal notes on how I was responding to discoveries in matter, place, and time. These notes are separated and centered to respect their differences from those of critical engagement. Through this structure I'm noting that visceral responses are rarely cerebrally led, but are more of an embodied kind of understanding. Chapters are structured around a roll of film at a specific location, and how making that film reflected or conjured another artist or methodology.

PROLOGUE: The Before Times

Industry was the first way I began working in film. I joined the Director's Guild of Canada as a production assistant in 1998 and spent the first part of a year standing in parking lots and changing garbage cans. Eventually I earned my way to being the on-set PA where I could watch what was happening and ask questions during quieter times. The sets were strictly hierarchical, run with military precision, frequent eruptions of yelling, and power struggles. The hours were long, averaging fifteen per day, and the pace was demanding. I worked my way up to 3rd Assistant Director and then into the production office. This was my film school. In 2004 I took what I learned and went off to make my first short film.

By 2016 I had written and directed a fair amount of my own projects including two narrative features. I was also working as a set dresser as my bread-and-butter job. The hours were flexible enough to accommodate my own occasional projects and I thought it would be good to stay near the action.

In August of 2018 pain in my left knee and ankle led me to the doctor and that was the end of my set dressing work. Carrying furniture 10 km a day takes its toll. I had torn tendons and now my body couldn't do the work anymore. The industry, though well-paying, has cost me a bad thumb and a shredded leg. I had to retrain so decided I could shift lanes and be an editor, and having cut a lot of my own projects, I knew I liked the creativity and this was an opportunity to re-situate myself in my film union job. School was to be a time of relearning how to read, write, and walk while healing from the surgeries and become a contributing member of society again. I stepped into a low-residency master's degree at Emily Carr University. I had no idea that I would stumble over joy.

Making things has always brought me comfort. I like getting 'supplies' so I have things on hand when an idea rolls in. There's a store on Main street that is full of donated and discarded scraps of craft materials. This is where I found my first bits of film footage: in a barrel in the corner. The

16mm films had been cut into two-or-three-foot sections and most pieces had nothing to do with the others. It was literally found footage. My friend asked me what I was going to do with three bags of film strips and I told her I might make something at school. I hadn't even been accepted at that point but I knew I liked the look and feel of the transparent ribbons of colour. I also knew it was rarely used in the industry any more.[2] Digital accommodates increases in output and saves time so it supports the breakneck speed at which the film industry operates now. When I got into school I brought my three bags of film. I spent most days slowly looking at the mini images through the loupe over the light box.

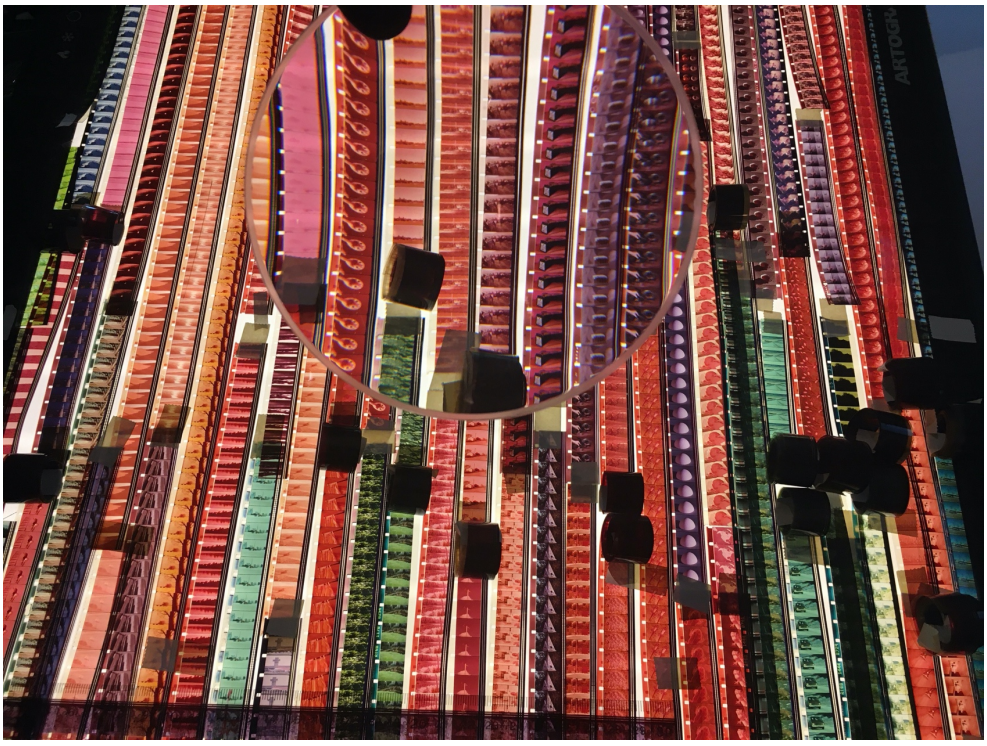


Figure 2. Ana Valine, *16mm Found Film Ribbons*, 2019. Digital photograph.

This unproductivity bothered me. I was spending a lot of time looking and not making and I had been trained to always be in some kind of film productivity. I had grown to equate creating with stress and I found not producing to be stressful now as well. My instructor, Elizabeth MacKenzie,

[2] "Although Kodak continues to produce motion picture film stock, it now supplies a limited number of products to a dwindling market" (Knowles, *Experimental* 138)

urged me to, as Donna Haraway counsels, “stay with the trouble”, slow down and “be with the material”. She encouraged me to consider getting to know the material as precious time in the process; that it was okay to simply sit with it and enjoy the texture. There is an experimental film ‘summer camp’ called the Film Farm and their manifesto includes the insight that “It may take the whole week of the workshop for you to shake away the habit of planning, what has become the guiding light of the profit-driven film world” (Knowles, *Experimental* 146). Although I wasn’t at the Film Farm it took me much more than a week to disengage and change course. For my term critique I spliced about 500 feet together and constructed a projection installation where I could superimpose layers 16mm film by pulling them through the projector manually. I made a small steel projection screen and discovered I could project in full daylight on the textured surface.

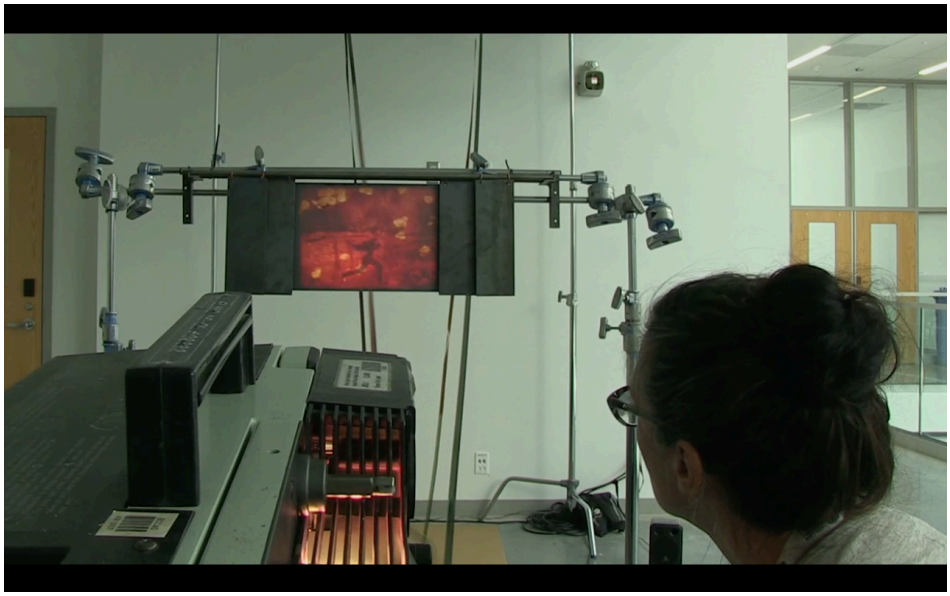


Figure 3. Ana Valine, *Road Movie #8 Installation*, 2019. Installation photo

> *It was the chugging of the projector and the ribbons of colour in my hand that was the gateway experiment to my infatuation with film. Love takes time but I liked where this was going.*

Over the next two terms I moved into the full-residency cohort and was placed with Professor Lindsay McIntyre as her teaching assistant in Analogue Practices. Her open approach to creating

“foreground[ed] the exploratory nature of process rather than following a pre-defined path… where accidents, discoveries and unexpected chemical reactions direct the filmmaker into new creative avenues” (Knowles, *Experimental* 73). Lindsay showed us many other film altering techniques and how to film with a 16mm camera and process the footage using traditional chemicals. I was making movies now, creating my own black and white ribbons of film. This pleasure of “experimental cinema [was] defined by its emphasis on alternative models of production, favouring individual, hands on approaches to the large-scale industrial processes of commercial cinema” (Knowles, *Experimental* 71). It was a welcome change and the darkroom was now my classroom. This imposed patience with the film made space for an intimate relationship with the images. They were twice-made now, once through the camera and now in this developing process.

My plan was to incorporate my hand-made films into my editing projects and I was now ready to transition into the editing software. Then the world stopped. It was March 2020. COVID-19 came to Canada and doors were closing everywhere. We were in lockdown and the future was uncertain. I wasn’t sure where or how I fit anymore.

SHORELINES

The word ecology *is derived from the Greek oikos, the word for home.*
- Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

Conquerors come, conquerors go, the ocean remains, mother only to her children… she adopts anyone who loves her.
- Epeli Hau'ofa, *Our Sea of Islands*

One of my first early memories is finding a baby whale tooth on the rocky beach of Pico, the island we lived on when I was small. I had a distinct feeling of kinship with the baby whale. I felt the enormity of the sea and how big those whales are, and the endless expanse of dark reflective water. That was my first fully immersive experience of the sea and things that lived within and around the shore. That was my first moment of awe. I still have the tooth.

In 1927 Romain Rolland[3] wrote a letter to his friend Sigmund Freud about his own experiences with awe. He called this 'oceanic feeling' "a sensation of "eternity," a feeling of something limitless, unbounded" (Freud/Riviere 8), "an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole" (Freud/Strachey 54). Is it possible I could have experienced this at such a young age? In light of the ego/id separation (Freud) one could argue that these feelings and sensations are more present and available to young people, before they are culturally conditioned to be "marked off distinctly from everything else" (Freud/Strachey 54). According to Rolland, this feeling is "shared by many others… he suppose[es] millions more" (Freud, JR trans 8). He does "not see mystical experience as culturally or racially specific. For him, mysticism, wherever found, was basically the same thing: an experience of being" (Rooney 25). If this was the feeling I had, perhaps location became synonymous with the feeling of 'being'. It's possible that rocky beach became my link with reverence and peace.

[3] Born in 1866, Romain Rolland was a French novelist, dramatist, art historian and mystic. He won a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1915 "as a tribute to the lofty idealism of his literary production and to the sympathy and love of truth with which he has described different types of human beings" (nobelprize.org).

In this time of uncertainty, it makes sense that I would find my way back to the shoreline. My feet know the way. This is not a time for books. This is a time for a body to confirm life. So, I went to the water, where I often go when I can't figure things out. The immensity can hold my troubles. I sat with the ocean as it reached up to touch the land, sliding up the slope of the shore, turning the space of land into sea. I watched the water recede, and I saw that the land was smooth after the water's washing. The water came up to change the land again, and again to recede and the land was land again. I saw these things in conversation: the water and the land where they existed back and forth, where they could be both together and then stillness. It was a place to take a breath.

The shore is a space of liminality, a place of patience where things come to sit and possibly leave different than they came. Liminal spaces hold potential for transformation and as I listened to the waves seep into the shore there was peace again. I wanted to film this motion of meeting, of holding two matters in one space. Of ocean's divulgences on time. It "traced out…the crossing to the other beginning" (Heidegger qtd. in Peters viii) and here in the wet sand was the gateway.

> *The thin region where the sea meets the land is unlike either land or sea. It is betwixt and between, a threshold from one state to another… a place of dramatic change and remarkable abundance – abundance of life and also of possibility… long stretches of liminal space.*
>
> - Josie Islen, *The Curios World of Seaweed*

One/SB

Figure 4. Ana Valine, *First Film at SB*, 2020. Digital photograph

Spanish Banks, Vancouver BC
August 12, 2020
4:40pm
20 degrees, sunny, slight breeze
Stock: 3378E b/w hi con
ASA/ISO: 12
LX Meter: ?
Fstop: 5.6, FPS: 64 x 4 cranks
Fstop: 8 FPS: 24 x 3 cranks
Subject: waves on rocks

Water and Woods

Having a hard time lately with the concept of time. More connected with space and place.

The sounds of branches rustling and water lapping on rocks. The touch of air on skin in the breeze. Distant people, barking dogs.

The sound of slowness, a suspended, anxious, imposed relaxation. Folks with suddenly a lot of time on their hands, mulling on their minds. Walking is just something to do but doesn't cover the lost looks. I, too, feel a little lost, adrift. A sense of waiting.

Because of the pandemic, I needed to find a new way to create, to go out on my own, to find a way to be in collaboration with more eternal and available materials. Even if I could physically have gone back to the film industry for a job, it had shut down. Access to school and the darkroom were denied. Film director Bruce MacDonald has stated, "punk rock is using what you've got"[4] multi-media artist Carole Itter practices "using things that already exist"[5], and, experimental filmmaker Dagie Brundert[6] claims her independence and the "love to tinker on my own immediately when an idea strikes me… I don't want to be dependent and I don't want to wait" (Noctua). I needed to work with what was at hand and I knew the sea was there, as always. I went 'punk rock'. Outside in the open is the safest way to create now. So outside I go where the air is clear, to re-discover the abundance of possibility.

Indigenous author and plant ecologist Robin Wall Kimmerer asks, "How, in our modern world, can we find our way to understand the earth as a gift again, to make our relations with the world sacred again?" (*Braiding* 31). This time of COVID-19 solitude has brought with it existentialist questions and opportunities for re-evaluation. This is stirring a need in me for profound responses. My fear was that if I couldn't create I would lose my way. I was faltering and needed a touchstone, I needed a way to sort out the implausibility of this current global crisis, or at least a way to find peace within it.

I went back to the shore and brought my movie camera. The camera is a 1950s 16mm Bolex. It requires the loading and threading of a 100' reel of analogue film. It doesn't record sound or hold a battery so it has to be hand cranked every 720 frames – that's every 30 seconds at 'natural' speed (24 frames per second) or every 10 seconds filming 64 frames per second (slow motion) like I was. When I'm filming with a Bolex its collaboration is physically apparent. It's not light and it's not silent. As film scholar Kim Knowles observes in her first forays with the camera, "unlike digital cameras and smartphones, it is heavy, noisy and initially quite awkward to work with. Its

[4] Director's Guild of Canada Masterclass Series
[5] During an Artist talk for Allison Hrabluik's Studio Class at Emily Carr Univeristy of Art + Design
[6] see Chapter Two/CC

mechanical knobs, levers, and various adjustments take some getting used to and it demands a significant amount of bodily investment" (*Experimental* 152). As well as being the go-to cameras for early independent and new-wave filmmakers, they were used extensively by journalists, explorers, and documentarians. They are sturdy and dependable and more connected to the manual, material process of movie-making than newer digital cameras.

In his book *Devotional Cinema*, Nathaniel Dorsky re-examines the act of filming as one of relating, instead of 'shooting' or 'capturing'. His observation that "[t]he camera must give itself completely and wholly to its subject, yet it cannot give itself away to its subject" (49) resonated with the way I was approaching the sea. Although I'm tripping on the subject/subjected relationship between what is seen in the frame and who is seeing, it's the idea of surrendering to what is in frame that rings true for me. Filmmaker Amy Greenfield says it more elegantly in published notes on her work: "[W]hen I'm behind the camera it's as if I have no thought or body. It seems like I don't exist, as if I'm giving myself entirely to what's coming through the camera lens" (Haller 117). Echoing Greenfield, I'm seeing in a new way, one that is not about subjugating what is in the frame (by this I mean making the image my 'subject'), but surrendering to something bigger than myself.

In the spirit of re-focusing, film theorist Scott MacDonald observes that

> the 'retraining of perception' elicits ecological consciousness through focused contemplation – the small acts of looking, listening and noticing espoused by many nature writers… offer an antidote to our media-saturated environment… allowing new experiences and new embodied understandings to emerge. (Knowles, *Experimental* 74)

Indeed, new understandings were emerging for me. The world in a lens reveals many more subtleties than meet the human eye. Looking through the camera with this openness becomes a gesture of invitation, of allowing the sea to come forward with its own shape and tone, into the frame, and imprint itself willingly on the celluloid. This is a new way of filming for me, this 'un-directing'. I'm wondering what will emerge if I film as if seeing for the first time, as if quiet information was coming from the sea. Author and activist Adam Krause observes that "We see

ourselves acting upon the world. There is subject and object. Action upon. Separation. We do things to things. But this view obscures the active role of the non-human. The world also acts. And the boundary between that active world is porous and fluid" (qtd. In Knowles, *Experimental* 128). The sea is not a passive object for anyone. I want to respect it, to represent it in its most natural form, to create a way of filming where I'm intervening in the least possible way. I would like the camera and developing process to act as 'quotation marks' for the sea, as tools in its self-portrait, to simply let the sea speak for itself, to be open with these "material entanglements," as Knowles describes these interactions (*Experimental* 40).

Maybe in this way of making I can support a fraction of the oceanic feeling through the film's transparency. "the question of vision, and the challenge to normative ways of seeing the world is the first step in a movement towards social transformation" (Knowles, *Experimental* 27). Kimmerer challenges us to consider how we engage with our world, how we can consider acts of reciprocity in our creative work. "What does the earth ask of us? Attention… deep listening… art is a way of paying attention… attention leads us into relationship" (*Nocturne*). This new approach could be a respectful way to be in place and time and a way of deep seeing that seems compatible with deep listening. In this way of filming I am possibly able to adopt more of a translator role between the celluloid and the sea, making space for naturally occurring characteristics to take shape.

> *The waves come forward and I open the shutter, like a meeting, a discovery. I don't know if the water is discovering me and the camera – maybe, when it moves apart in the contact – but as the waves come closer I am with the water differently. My time slows and my breath slows and everything else falls away, like the cliché.*
>
> *There is an immersion in the elements with which I'm creating, laying down low into the water. I get wet and muddy but have to be down there, in it, where water meets land, to be with the ingredients that bring to life the movement in the frame. In opening the shutter there is a split second of imprint. It happens over and over again with every notch of the spring winding down. The winding backwards distorts time. The open camera and the ocean coming forth to imprint itself on the celluloid, and beyond that, my eye and mind.*

EMERGENT PHENOMENA

Life's order is characterized by emergent phenomena… the spontaneous development of self-organized order among ensembles that can neither be predicted nor explained by examining component parts in isolation. Spontaneity and self-organization mean that no external agent is sculpting the organism: it sculpts itself.

- Peter T. Macklem

I've had a strong positive response to Dorsky's *Devotional Cinema* book. The response has no doubt been influenced by this time of Covid-19 and another summer of fires.

> We might try to escape or distract ourselves. But the more we are able to relax and accept the absolute presence of our situation and then begin to recognize its formal qualities, the greater the chance we have to transmute it. With humility we can perform the act of alchemy and transform what might feel like a leaden claustrophobia into an expression of openness and clarity. (Dorsky 19-20)

'Transmutation' was a word that came to me last year and recently I learned it was a term used in the practice of alchemy. According to the Oxford online dictionary, alchemy is "the medieval forerunner of chemistry, based on the supposed transformation of matter." I'm considering eco-processing as a form of alchemy, using the ocean's own ingredients to transmute celluloid into its own image. In alchemy, one of the goals is to turn base metal into gold. With film, the goal is to transform silver halide into black silver metal evocative of images.

At the sea, four five-gallon buckets, a dolly and a towel are the items I bring for gathering. I fill three buckets with sea water and one bucket with seaweed and some forest greens from the shoreline. The ocean is vast and mighty and generous. I hope my filmmaking reflects it well.

I take the heavy buckets home and fill up the largest pots I have with seawater to heat. In the meantime, I empty a box of baking soda onto a cookie sheet and put it in the oven at 400 degrees. Cooking baking soda for an hour turns it into washing soda, which I need for the developer. I also grind unflavoured vitamin C tablets in a mortar for the developing brew.

As the largest pot on the stove heats up, I dump in several boxes of sea salt. I'm turning the seawater into a naturally-derived version of fixative – a necessary element in the relative permanence of images on celluloid. The seawater fixative's naturally occurring salinity has to be heavily fortified. This leaves extra salt crystals floating on the surface in magically scientific, salty snowflake patterns.

Figure 5. Ana Valine, *SB ingredients and salt fix*, 2020. Digital photographs

I put the other pot of hot sea water into the chopped seaweed and greens and let it stew for a couple of hours[7]. Once it cools to 37 degrees, I strain it and add the washing soda and vitamin C. The PH of the final mix is 12, which is in the range of a chemical developer so I'm ready for the next step: carry the buckets of sea brew developer, sea rinse, and sea fix into the basement. I block off all the light leaks and take the film out of the sealed box, plunge it in, and hope my calculations for timing are correct. The basement now smells like low tide in the rain.

Rinse in plain sea water for one minute to soften the emulsion.
Gently agitate in developer for 20 minutes.
Rinse again in sea water for 5 minutes to stop the developer.
Put in light tight bucket of salt water fix.
Wait three days.

[7] Seaweed contains phenols, the active ingredient that triggers transformation of silver in the emulsion.

As Knowles recounts of her first foray into the darkroom,

> there is no aspiration for perfect images. The unspooled film is gathered spaghetti-like, submerged by hand and agitated for several minutes. It splish-splashes around in the tub, the surfaces and edges of the celluloid crunching against each other. It's a distinct and unforgettable sound – a symphony of artisanal film production that will translate into physical traces of the process. Lifting the dripping bundle, holding it high to release the liquid, then plunging it once more into the wash feels like a baptism. The metaphors are endless, and there is certainly time to give imaginative life to them in this obscure space of waiting. (*Experimental* 154)

My film has to sit in the dark in the salt fix for three days because it's an organic process. If I was using a chemical fix it would be minutes. It works.

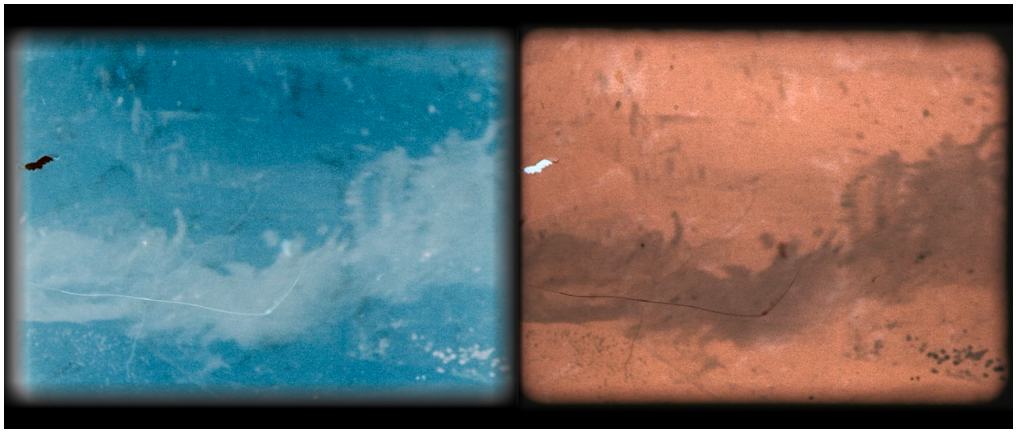


Figure 6. Ana Valine, *SB1*, 2020. 16mm Film Still (R) and inversion (L).

On the right is a single (actual size: 16mm wide) celluloid frame image of what I saw when I took the film strip out of the bucket. I rinsed the salt off it and hung it over the tub to drip dry. These eco-process steps result in a negative roll of film. I played the negative through an Elmo projector onto a silver-flecked screen, and re-filmed from the screen to an HD digital camera and audio mics. The HD negative footage (right) was imported into Premiere Pro editing software and inverted into a positive image (right).

These single-frame images carry the marks of the entire process, “my body, the body of the camera and the body of the film strip, marked and scratched. Multiple materialities overlap and intertwine” (Knowles, *Experimental* 157). Embedded in the celluloid are flakes of salt crystals. These films seem to be ever-evolving, absorbing scratches and signs of their journey, all showing up in the light of the projector. In my practice alchemy occurs in the meeting of plant and celluloid, when matter meets matter. Harvard professor and cultural critic and theorist, Giuliana Bruno, claims, “Materiality is not a question of materials but, fundamentally, of activating material relations” (qtd. in Knowles, *Experimental* 43). Seaweed contains iron and I’m guessing the amber colour in the negative image is a result of the seaweed and seawater properties reacting with the silver gelatin emulsion.

The result of this natural seaweed tint was a surprising gift from the ocean. The unmeasured natural chemistry of the eco-developer brought more to the image than I had anticipated. In his *Process Cinema* chapter “Echoes of the Earth: Handmade Film Ecologies”, Gregory Zinman brings our attention to chance creative partnerships. Uncontrolled collaborations with non-human contributors was the impetus of John Cage’s *4’33”* (1952), a musical performance piece that seems, on the surface, silent. In fact, it was Cage’s openness to chance, ‘accident’, and coincidence that produced the ever-shifting soundtrack of *4’33”*. Zinman notes “*4’33”* may be chiefly concerned with how humans listen, but what if we shifted our focus to think about how non-human and inorganic entities work with humanity to produce and perform art” (109). This roll of film included very present evidence of the ocean’s participation.

In this practice, the ocean holds its own agency in the making of its likeness. What we see in the frame is what made the image: the water and seaweed within the camera’s frame were gathered as developing ingredients to process the latent image. “For alchemy to take place in a film, the form must include the expression of its own materiality, and this materiality must be in union with its subject matter… The instinct to express the union of material and subject occurs at the beginning of known human expression” (Dorsky 25). This first experience was complete, not just materially, but in a spiritual way as well. It felt respectful and full of potential. This was a result

of my wonderings on the oceanic, of feeling connected with the material, “a psychic working through of a particular issue or a concentrated focus on a specific detail or form” (Knowles, *Experimental* 158). I was as transformed as the strip of film. “This whole new world of artisanal practice open[ed] up, where chemistry and botany come together in a creative journey of discovery” (Knowles, *Experimental* 113). This discovery happened because I couldn’t get into the school or the darkroom to use the usual chemicals. The lockdown liberated me.

Two/CC

Figure 7. Ana Valine, *Filmmaker at CC,* 2020. Digital photograph. Photo credit: Stephen Quinn

Caulfield Cove, West Vancouver BC
August 16, 2020
12:10pm
25 degrees
Stock: 3378E b/w hi con
ASA/ISO: 12
LX Meter: 360?
Subject: log bobbing in water and shore rocks
Fstop: 5.6, 64fps (x4) / Fstop 5.6, 24fps (5) / Fstop: 8, 24fps (6)

This kidnapped cove.

There are overwhelming condo developments crawling up the slopes of the beyond.

I knew the spot I was looking for was on the west side of the peninsula, up into the curve, and by a jut in the land near a big rock. This place was important because many lives ago I brought my roommate's daughter here to go swimming. We had a picnic and launched off that rock right into the dark water. When I came up for air, a seal was looking straight into my face. I could have reached out and touched her.

She looked so curious.

In these territories of the northern west coast I am becoming more acquainted with the land and living beings. I'm questioning the epistemology of the human as the 'knower' and the studied as the 'knowable'. When I am with the ocean it's clear to me who knows more. Every visit, I come away with the realization that my previous knowledge is being pulled out with the undercurrent, tumbled in the waves, and washed back onto the land different than how it left me. The sea is practicing alchemy on me too.

My first exploration with eco-processing was in a one-day Echo Park North Film Centre workshop guided by Lisa Marr. I met Lisa at a cyanotype workshop hosted by Alex McKenzie and I heard about that workshop from an acquaintance, Nisha Platzer. These under-the-radar creative get togethers came into my life through word of mouth. That workshop with Lisa where we developed with weeds in the park came back with a flash and I remembered how moved I was by the process and final films. Lisa sent us home with photocopies of hand-written concoctions[8]. Many items in our kitchens and gardens have the potential to develop celluloid. "It is, in fact, possible to replace traditional film developers with a combination of… coffee, vitamin C and washing soda (sodium carbonate)" (Knowles, *Experimental* 113). She notes that certain combinations are referred to as

> caffenol… Other household substances can also be used such as wine or beer… The active ingredient[s] in this solution [are] phenol[s], the acidic chemical required to oxidize (turn black) the silver particles in the celluloid that have been exposed to light. Since phenol[s are] also found in varying strengths in many plants, flowers and herbs – from rhododendron to rosemary – the possibilities of ecologically-aware film processing become almost limitless. (Knowles, *Experimental* 113)

That day on the shoreline after the school lockdown, I remembered Dagie Brundert's[9] seaweed recipe on the printout and went home to find the paper. I knew people were doing land plants but I couldn't find anything more on seaweed. I brought my questions to my supervisors. Alla

[8] "Through the dedicated chemical explorations and educational initiatives of Dagie Brundert in Germany, Lisa Marr and Paolo Davanzo of the Echo Park Film Center in Los Angeles, and countless others, the field of eco-processing has progressed to the extent that it is now widely practiced and taught in workshops throughout the world" (Knowles, *Experimental* 113)

[9] Brundert has generously posted most of her experiments on her website yumyumsoups.com.

Gadassik and Lindsay McIntyre are both deeply engaged in the experimental film community and they suggested books, filmmakers, websites, and online film festivals. Although developing with seaweed is not common, there was enough in common with suggested filmmakers that I felt, finally, not alone. These are early steps, and the people I have spoken with have been generous and adventurous, and almost always environmentally concerned.

> The demise of celluloid film as a commercial medium coincid[ing] with both a rising awareness of the finite physicality of the planet[,] and a wave of scholarly discourse calling for a more attuned material sensibility[,] suggests that the time is ripe for a reassessment of materialist film's radical potential and theoretical implications. (Knowles, *Experimental* 25)

There is a mixture of Zen and boldness that seems to be a commonality throughout the eco and experimental community. I liked the approach to creation (try anything) and the openness about how 'success' and 'failure' can be re-thought.

Things were starting to come together. I was having great results and felt like a mad scientist. I was following my nose and plunging into my work of filming and gathering ingredients on the beaches. It was a fully-immersive creative practice that was spontaneous and improvised. I would walk along the beach pulling my dolly loaded with empty buckets until I found the spot that seemed right for the weather, time of day, and angle of light. I gathered what was growing on the shore, usually not knowing the names of seaweed, often not keeping track of what went into the bucket. In an edited book devoted to process-based cinema, editors Scott MacKenzie and Janine Marchessault define this as "a creative tradition in alternative filmmaking that is unscripted, improvisational, participatory and based on the manipulation of the very materiality of the film" (3). I was playing with the possibilities of what would show up on the celluloid. I was embracing the fragility and fragments of those first images. I had a film from the first shore and I was excited to do it again though I was concerned with the 'beginner's luck' outcome. I wanted to know *how* it worked, and *why* I was so drawn to the ephemeral and ragged quality of the images.

There is a kind of 'wabi sabi' look to most eco-processed films.[10] This surrender to imperfection is necessary when making films by hand, and in relationship with live matter.[11] The collaboration depends on shifts in perspective often brought forward by surprises in process. Filmmaker Kerry Laitala notes "as you manipulate those materials and they begin to manipulate you, it becomes a kinesthetic experience" (Laitala). There is risk inherent in this process. The recipes are almost all adjusted and adapted by each maker and sometimes the results are a blank roll or almost imperceptible images. Carl Brown lets the concept of creative loss reform his approach. "I viewed this as a blessing… Losing the footage forced me to reshape my philosophical approach to film. Now, I do not get as attached… My relationship with my film is fleeting. Through this uncertainty, I have gained a new flexibility: chance and change" (87). British filmmaker Tacita Dean embraces chance, spinning it into positivity: "I let myself believe in [coincidences] to the extent that they keep me from despair over my work. When they're happening and it feels like their unseen powers are on your side, you actually have a better working day" (qtd. In Starling). It seems embracing this uncertainty is a conscious move away from imposing predictable outcomes, and flexibility of response echoes the organic nature of creation. There is surfacing here, evidence of letting things happen, of allowing the mysticism of alchemy to have its way with the material. This process: to offer, add, let time do its work, and embrace the imperfect outcomes, is the perfect antidote to the industry film set. Pieces of me that I hadn't noticed missing were coming home again. There was something about trust and resilience emerging.

In the presence of all this trust, the batch of film at Caulfield Cove did not work out. The disappointment of the disappeared image of the sea was worse than the technical 'failure'. I remember the sea so beautifully in the frame. And I remind myself that letting go is part of transformation.

[10] "wabi-sabi is the art of finding beauty in imperfection and profundity in earthiness, of revering authenticity above all… Broadly, wabi-sabi is everything that today's sleek, mass-produced, technology-saturated culture isn't" (Lawrence).

[11] I refer to Jane Bennett's book *Vibrant Matter*, which addresses in depth, the concept of material agency.

Three/SS

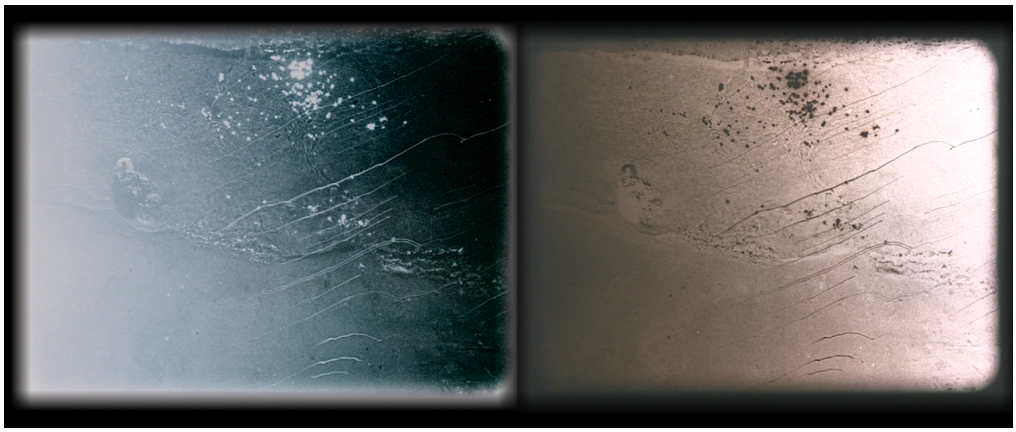


Figure 8. Ana Valine, *SS1,* 2020. 16mm Film Still (R) and inversion (L).

Salish Sea, Wellingdon Beach, Powell River BC
August 22, 2020
4:23pm
20 degrees
Incoming tide
Stock: 3378E b/w hi con (from LIFT, Toronto)
ASA/ISO: 12
LX Meter: 360 + ?
Subject: waves, sailboats, my mother's feet and mine, my mother smiling
Fstop: 5.6/8, 64fps (1 & 2) / Fstop: 8, 64fps (3) / Fstop 8/11, 64fps (4) / Fstop: 8, 64 fps (5) / Fstop: 8, 24fps (6)

My mother grew up on the water. Although she won't fully confess, I think part of the reason she got with my dad is because he was living on his fishing boat when they met.

After we kids finished school they were finally free to go sail the wild blue yonder. It took several years for them to build their boat and the same season it was done, they started their 11-year Central American journey. They lived on that boat for a long time. It's been in the family for more than thirty years. When their small house is overflowing on holidays, the family takes over the house and my parents go down the two blocks to the marina to sleep on their boat. Their sanctuary, their cocoon.

I asked my mother what it was like sailing alone at night on an open sea. She said she was never alone.

Some people say you can't see anything out there in the night ocean. She says they're not looking.

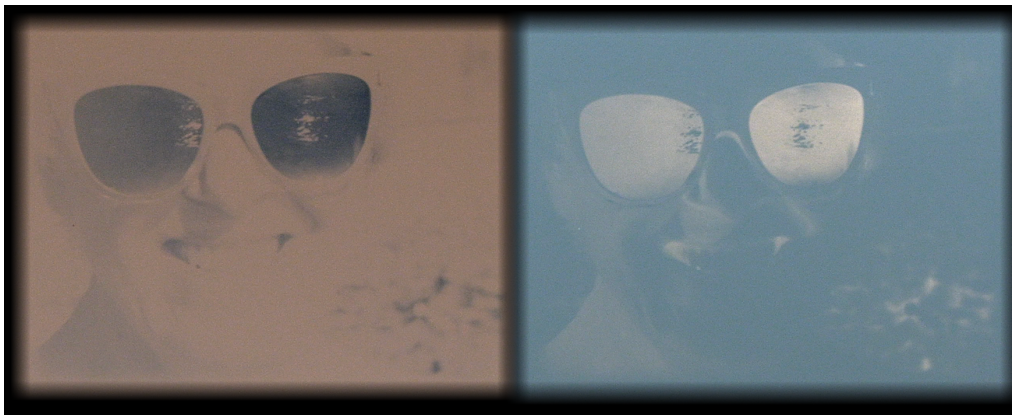


Figure 9. Ana Valine, *SS2: Mom*, 2020. 16mm Film Still (R) and inversion (L).

My mother with the ocean in her eyes. Filmed the day we made Three/SS.

Through deep listening and attention, we can strengthen and repair our relationship with the earth. I first understood this from Robyn Wall Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, and the more I listen, the more I hear it echoed. I am learning through ECUAD Aboriginal Gathering Place Sharing Circles (hosted by Connie Watts and Brenda Crabtree), academic readings, Mimi Gellman's *Braiding Sweetgrass* reading group, and conversations with Lee Maracle, how much deep listening, as an Indigenous practice, guides the receiving of information and relationship[12]. Although I am in the early steps of learning new ways to be with the land, water and other beings through this ocean work, it has already profoundly changed my perspective. Composer and philosopher Pauline Oliveros explains how deep, conscious listening is different from hearing: "Compassion… and understanding comes from listening impartially to the whole space/time continuum of sound – not just what one is presently concerned about. In this way discovery and exploration can take place" (*Deep Listening)*. "[S]uch focus and expansion means that one is connected to the whole of the environment and beyond" (*The Difference Between)*. I am understanding this in a way that reaches into sight as well: what it is to see as opposed to simply looking. It means for some of us, changing our lens. "We do not need to see *better* or more

[12] I have recently been made aware of the book *Hungry Listening* by Stó:lō writer Dylan Robinson and his work with sound and music.

clearly, but *differently* and with a deeper physical awareness" (Knowles, *Experimental* 41-42). For me this is slowing down to appreciate or notice that which is around me in the world. In my filming practice this is reflected in how I'm seeing through the camera from a position of inviting. This is deeper listening for me and what I'm hearing is subtle and more humanely paced. I asked Mimi Gellman, an Indigenous artist and professor at ECU, how I could think about reciprocity in my filmmaking. She suggested that maybe the attention of the filmmaking process itself, as well as gratitude, might be enough, that maybe the film was the gift. If this is true it keeps me clear about slowing down to hear the sea speak.

I keep in mind the history of these shores, the little I know so far, and my own history of how I got here. I do my best to honour the live collaborative partners and gather with respect. I've learned some things about approach through readings, teachings, and sharing circles. It takes time though. As with any being, it takes time to really know another. Creative research has changed for me because I'm becoming aware of other forms of information sharing. Time is the most valuable ingredient in these films. With time comes understanding.

There are ways of deep seeing in all art forms. There are paintings with so many layers of time they seem to go deep into the canvas and sculpted high, through paint, protruding out into the room. Frank Auerbach made an impression on me when I first saw a monograph of his work in 2004. His layers of scraping and repainting were built up to look like sculptures on canvas. I got to see two of his paintings in person at the Vancouver Art Gallery two summers ago. I remember thinking the word 'vigor'. In a 2013 interview, Auerbach

> joked that he would no longer be able to lift one of these canvases—as a result of countless sessions reworking each piece. This unrelenting approach reflects his belief that a subject must be properly understood before its "raw truth" can be reached. Such an understanding is technical, but also emotional, grinding down all superficial relations to discover a fleeting essence. Becoming familiar with a subject "leads you to its unfamiliarity". (du Toit)

This is a deep investment of time. The time is evidenced in the material layers and weight of the canvas. For his portraiture work, Auerbach asks his sitters to come to his studio once a week for two hours. Often these people are seen for years, sometimes decades. Catherine Lampert has

been sitting for Auerbach since 1978 and notes, “By doing it repeatedly he has changed the parameters of the portrait… He thinks you can never exhaust a subject, you can see differences… Just as people themselves aren’t fixed, there is movement of time and experience” (Galton). With time, Auerbach is rewarded with the revealing of his subjects. He waits to know their inner worlds and paints, scrapes, and repaints in an attempt to represent what he comes to understand of each person. In these portraits of Lampert, we are given the opportunity to see her how the artist has come to know her through time, conversation, friendship, and a commitment to the long journey of understanding another being.

Figure 10. Frank Auerbach, *Catherine Lampert Seated,* 1990, oil on canvas, 24 1/8 x 22 1/8 in.
Figure 11. Frank Auerbach, *Head of Catherine Lampert,* 2004, oil on board, 17 ¾ x 16 in.
Figure 12. Frank Auerbach, *Portrait of Catherine Lampert,* oil on board, 28 1/8 x 24 1/8 in.

Auerbach’s quest, his desire to truly know, his patience in looking to really see, his process of ‘sitting with’, has challenged my own assumption of what I think is enough. My days at the beach seem short and I have since begun to film the same shore, to study its changes and moods. Auerbach makes works that “offer the viewer an experience scarcely available in contemporary art: immersion… [in] an age dominated by momentary distraction” (du Toit). His multiple studies, witnessing the changes and dimensions of a being, is a way of pausing in our contemporary world. His view slows us down and perhaps defies the inevitability of our own mortality. Maybe in these deeply layered portraits he is immortalizing his subjects and taking us back through time.

His additive and subtractive method of painting, scraping, and re-layering has similarities with editing film and projection installations. Although most people consider editing a linear form, I think of editing as sculpting: removing frames, adding clips and sequences, over and over, repeating until just the right movement and relation between images is found. I often work deep into the night. That's when the world goes to sleep and I can finally have the extended silence I need to hear the rhythms. Auerbach's "story is underwritten by patience, erudition and endless repetition. He has painted the same handful of sitters and landscapes in a precise cycle spiralling back to the beginning of his career; only his style fluctuates, gradually, like an ocean" (Galton). This rhythmic working is also reflected in my own repetition of rewinding and finding the sea in the right representational frame of the camera several times in a visit.

The quest for understanding resonates with me and I'm discovering how weather, seasons, and health of the seaweed are reflected in the ecological hand processing. Each shore offers its own colour in moving images, its own pattern of waves meeting the land, and its own ambient sound. It is in this 'getting to know', the patience to really see and listen, holding space for layers of a being to open up and reveal… These are the qualities of his practice that appeal to me, trusting that there is always more to understand and new ways to be present.

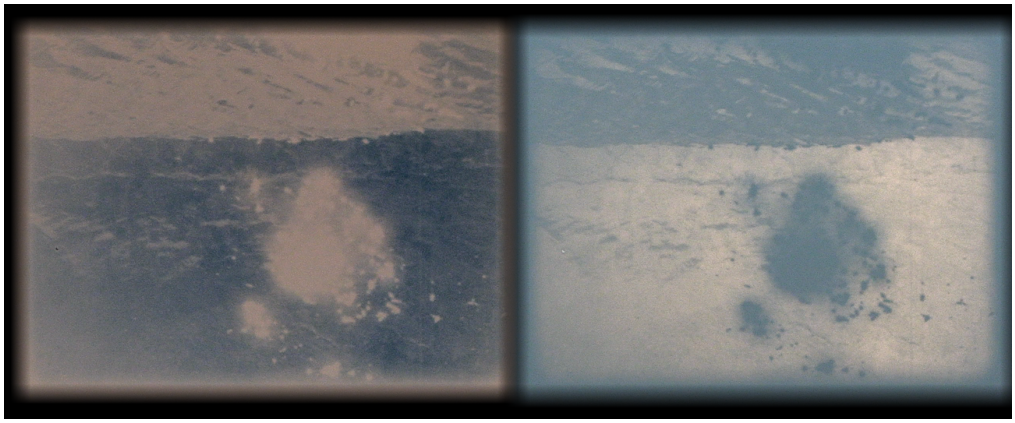


Figure 13. Ana Valine, *SS3*, 2020. 16mm Film Still (R) and inversion (L).

Four/RR

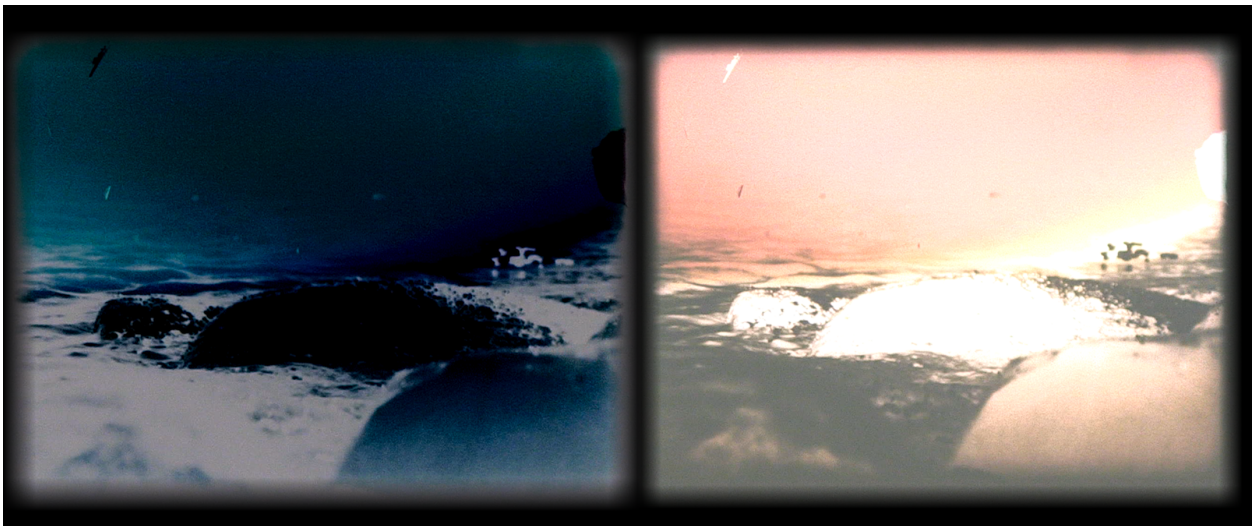


Figure 14. Ana Valine, *RR1,* 2020. 16mm Film Still (R) and inversion (L).

Salish Sea, Black Point Beach at Ramsay Road, Malaspina Strait, Powell River BC
August 25, 2020
midday
19 degrees, soft breeze, sun, quiet ripples over rocks
Water completely clear and relatively warm
Stock: 3378E b/w hi con
ASA/ISO: 12
LX Meter: 360/640
Subject: gentle water lapping over rocks
Fstop: 5.6, 64fps (1-3) / Fstop: 8, 64fps (4) / Fstop 5.6 /8, 64fps (5) / Fstop: 8, 64 fps (6 or 7)
rolled out at 64fps ooops

The beach is a two minute walk from the cabin.

Around the corner and down the path.

I can see it from the yard. Assess its mood. Someday I'll be here more frequently, when I can be away from the city more, when I don't have to engage in city work. When I can put a darkroom in the old rock studio.

For now, I carry the buckets down the slope and stairs to the rocky beach. It reminds me of Oregon though I was just small when we lived there. An environmental memory.

Today the ocean is gentle and clear. Someone is kite-surfing out in the offing. The rocks of the beach are large and smooth and easy to walk on if I plan ahead the next two steps.

Clear water means no bloom at this beach so the seaweed is scarce. There are a few scant patches on some of the larger rocks so I pick a tiny bit and leave most.[13]

Up on the rocks of the beach though, between, where the sand is underneath, roots of hardy plants find a place. The variety is wide and the stalks are sturdy. One variety has lacey leaves and tiny purple flowers, another beach grass is thin but so tough I can't pull it from the ground. I manage a couple of blades and respect the rest.

The resulting brew smells like hay.

Figure 15. Maya Deren, *At Land*, 1944. 16mm black and white Film Stills.

I discovered Maya Deren's 1944 short black and white film *At Land* on YouTube a couple of years ago. Not knowing who she was, but affected by the film, I began research on her other work and was impressed with the boldness and depth of her art. Her articulation of the process of seeing through the camera and editing her images is insightful and practical, though the results are surreal and sometimes unsettling.

At Land begins with a woman lying in the surf at the edge of the sea. It looks as though she's drowned, her undulating body being pushed and pulled by the waves, washed and rolled in the sand. As we will discover, Deren's character has come from the sea and spends the rest of the film trying to make sense of the strangeness of land humans.

Deren ascribes high value to artists as beings who bring new ways of understanding into social consciousness. She writes, "As in science, the process of creative art is twofold: the experience of reality by the artist one side, and [her] manipulation of that experience into an art reality on

[13] I have since learned about 'honourable harvest' through Kimmerer and McIntyre: Never take the first one you see, take only what you need, take only that which is given.

the other. In [her] person she is an instrument of discovery" (*Anagram* 26). The artist filmed and assembled to disorient and re-engage our perception, to be open to dream worlds and surrealism. Photographer Mark Alice Durant notes that all of Deren's films "share an aspect of trance, of the narrative of the unconscious to transcend the isolation of the individual. She believed that we might move our bodies, open our eyes and our souls in such a way that we might expand beyond the limit of our skins" (Durant). Deren used her camera to bridge worlds and consciousness. She entwined her body with natural elements, other humans, and the sea to dissolve the barriers of self-containment. With her films she presents our unconscious desires and connections to each other through moving images.

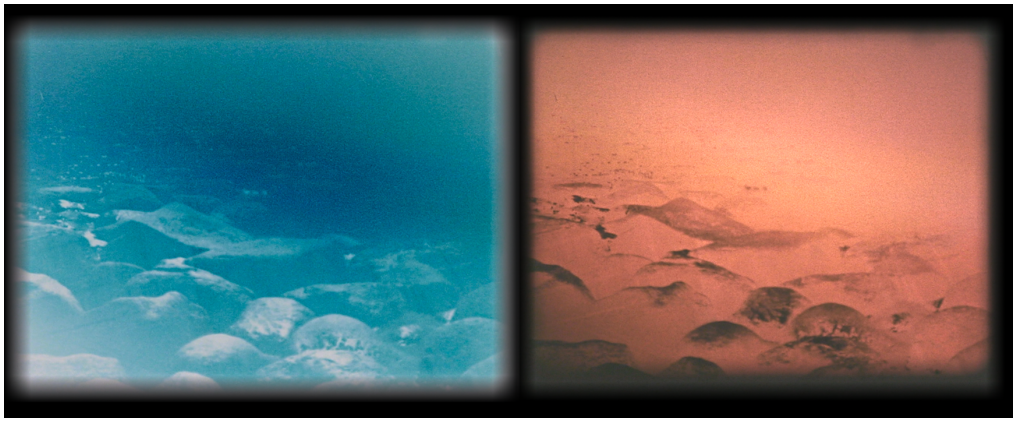


Figure 16. Ana Valine, *RR2*, 2020. 16mm Film Still (R) and inversion (L).

For most cultures the sea holds epic powers and myths. We are related to it not just physically, but there is also a draw to surrender to its depths. Astrida Neimanis is quoted in Rita Wong's book *Undercurrent*: "We embody the hydrological cycle, but this is not a cycle of mere addition and subtraction. Rather, it is a cycle of continuous becoming and transformation" (Wong 63).

Figure 17 (left). Amy Greenfield, *Element (1973).* Film Still.
Figure 18 (right). Amy Greenfield, *Tides* (1982). Film Still.

On the left Greenfield struggles to rise up from the muddy earth in her formative film *Element* (1973). She uses her body with no words, leaving us to grapple with our own responses to find meaning. “All these struggles in her films – the defiance, the transmutation of the body into a visible form of energy, and the intoxicating moments of liberation – are a summoning of a resolute belief to counter the veiled forces that shape us in our world. Action is not just character. It is the ultimate expression of life” (Haller 98). The film’s elements are few but provocative. Greenfield’s physical commitment in the struggle is primordial and potentially dangerous. The investment asked of the viewer is to stay present, and in the filmmaker’s evolution, she brings the viewer through transformation with her. In all of Greenfield’s work she asks for your attention to transition, enacting the theoretical, leaving space for us to ponder.

The frame on the right is from her film *Tides* (1982). As *Element* is expressed through struggle, *Tides* is expressed in surrender. Greenfield allows herself to be moved by the waves and tide, washed and rolled on the shore. Borrowing from Deren's *At Land,* some sections of the film play in reverse giving the impression of the sea releasing her body to the land as if she too has come from the waves.

Tides starts with a quote from Isadora Duncan's 1903 manifesto *Dance of the Future* “The movement of the waves, of winds, of the earth is ever in the same lasting harmony. We do not

stand on the beach and inquire of the ocean what was its movement in the past and what will be its movement in the future. We realize that the movement peculiar to its own nature is eternal to its own nature." As Sto:lo writer and thinker Lee Maracle succinctly puts it, "*We do not own the water, the water owns itself*" (Maracle 37).The ocean is a force that pulls us to her shore. In *Tides,* Greenfield brings us with her again. As much as *Element* carries potential danger, *Tides* offers a sensation of safety and surrender, a sense of oneness with the ocean, immersion and submersion with another living entity.

My own process also includes physical immersion with the ocean, allowing the risk, surrendering to chance. I reach farther than is comfortable, I go out into dynamic weather, and stretch between rocks. This is physical creation, it is engagement with matter and the work is labour intensive[14]. It is another dimension of the embodied surrender to the process. The oceanic pull is strong and I feel very alive, re-charged and strong when I walk up the shore with full buckets of marine liquid.

I am in the middle of my life if all goes well. This pivot into formal education has turned into an unlearning and unravelling, a re-imprinting and reconnecting and turning to nature for questions and signs of change, both hers and mine. There is a focus in my explorations with the shoreline. It seems a common activator in female artists. "Greenfield and her dancer protagonists are driven figures, alone but reaching out beyond the physical. In so many of her films the protagonists are consciously aware, searching" (Haller 11). Growth can be uncomfortable like when a teenager's bones grow so fast they ache. I'm grateful for the ache. Expanding understanding is humbling and full of blunders.

[14] Feminism and women's labour are ever-present in my work. These topics drew me deeper into questions about materiality and working with what's available. I'm indebted to the women who have forged a path in experimental and eco-processing filmmaking, and although I engage in this conversation through other women's artistic work, it is not a priority for me to highlight Feminism as a subject at this time. In this paper, my way of talking about it is through material process and re-engagement through senses.

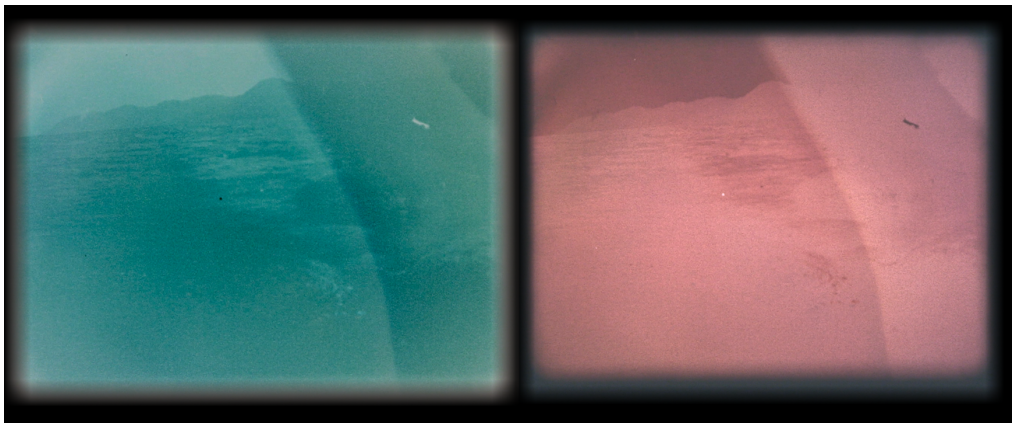


Figure 19. Ana Valine, *RR4*, 2020. 16mm Film Still (R) and inversion (L).

This roll of film, from Black Point Beach, stuck to itself in places so the developer didn't reach most of the emulsion. The result is almost entirely hidden, but sometimes there are brilliant flashes of raspberry and gold revealed as a curtain of semi-changed pink pulls itself back and forth across the bright rocky image. It's like a gem tucked inside matte earth, peeking through a tiny spot. It could be a rising body washed up on a long shoreline.

Greenfield's application for *Tides* funding included the description: "the dancer will seem to "suffer a sea change/Into something rich and strange"" (Haller 97). She did not get those funds and this roll isn't technically successful, but something deeper and 'rich and strange' is happening. This sea is changing me.

Five/NB

Figure 20. Ana Valine, *New Brighton,* 2020. Digital photograph.

New Brighton Beach, East Vancouver, BC
September 14, 2020
midday
16 degrees, cloudy with fire smoke
Water not clear, wearing boots
Stock: 3378E b/w hi con
ASA/ISO: 12
LX Meter: H80
Subject: small, long waves over barnacle rocks
Fstop: 2/2.8, 64fps (1-3) / Fstop: 2, 64fps (4) / Fstop 2.8/4, 24fps (5 – 6) roll out on #6

Firesmoke so thick I can't see the North Shore.

Industrial beach. Stinky in a way that is more than marine life. Rocks on beach covered in brown dead seaweed. The new growth is sparse.

Two lone seagulls. A purple starfish.

The thick, humming atmosphere of industry: steam vents, tug boats, waiting barges, and faraway trains.

And then there's a dove. She's finding some smalls to eat on this toxic shore.

As I approach new beaches, I am faced with the reality that some shores appear healthier than others. At this shore I was overcome first by the smell. It wasn't the clarifying, saline scent of the other seas. This shore had a smell of struggle. When I looked around to understand this more it made sense. There were tanker loading docks, coal transfer stations, chemical storage cylinders and other industrial activities all around. Though there was a sign alluding to a beach clean-up movement, the area had a film of something over the rocks and greens. Whatever was happening was affecting the health of the water and shoreline.

I'm drawn again to my original word of inquiry: transmutation. How do we as humans and other beings on the planet transform our cells to adapt? What stories are these transmutations telling? In her book, *The Curious World of Seaweed,* Josie Iselin tells us that "marine algae can be the indicator for radiation in our waters after poisoning catastrophes… Seaweed can be a beacon" (3). Although the ocean is a mighty force, a self-cleaning giant liquid organ, we appear to be polluting faster than it can wash itself. "If someone had said to my ancestors that you could destroy the waters, they would likely have laughed – it turns out that this is in the realm of the possible" (Maracle 35). When I approach the shoreline as a place of potentiality and transformation what does it mean to witness this kind of disintegration?

Collaboration with the ocean began with dreams of some kind of eternal truth, a chance at reconciliation with self and shore. A slowing down to listen and appreciate. Knowles quotes Timothy Morton[15] in his approach to thinking *through* and *with,* rather than *about* ecology:

> *The ecological thought* is the thinking of interconnectedness. The ecological thought is a thought about ecology but it's also a thinking that is ecological. […] The ecological thought doesn't just occur 'in the mind.' It's a practice and a process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are connected with other beings – animal, vegetable, or mineral. (*Experimental* 40)

[15] Timothy Morton has been called "the philosopher prophet of the Anthropocene" by Alex Blasdel. (theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/15/timothy-morton-anthropocene-philosopher)

What I see with the camera this time is more difficult to witness. I have to be careful to not romanticize my renewed relationship with the ocean. We both are flawed. I hold myself back, sad and guiltily repulsed by this shore's dis-ease. She struggles here and I know it's not her doing. This is her bruised place. In this moment I distrust humans and have to remind myself that many are doing their best to reverse the damage. "The vision of 'Man' as the sole agent of environmental destruction glosses over key cultural distinctions, social inequalities and political agendas, assuming equal responsibility across a seemingly homogenous 'Planet Earth'" (Knowles, *Experimental* 40). Some of us are more guilty than others. I leave with the full buckets wondering how to translate this grief.

> [F]ilm becomes a narrative of newness and reveals things for what they are rather than as surrogates for some predetermined concept… If we do relinquish control, we suddenly see a hidden world, one that has existed all along right in front of us. In a flash, the uncanny presence of this poetic and vibrant world, ripe with mystery, stands before us. Everything is expressing itself as what it is. Everything is alive and talking to us. (Dorsky 40)

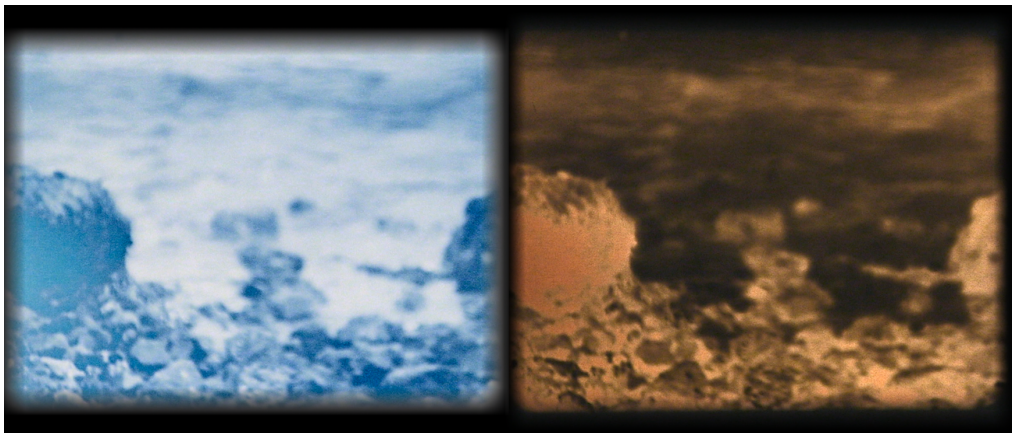


Figure 21. Ana Valine, *NB1*, 2020. 16mm Film Still (R) and inversion (L).

From this polluted shore came vibrant film. I have mixed reactions to this confusing result. My assumption was there would be no image because the seaweed would be compromised. It might have been, but whatever other properties or toxins the seaweed and water were carrying reacted

strongly with the emulsion. There was an inherent energy in this brew. “We can understand the [filmmaking] process as an attempt to make ‘sense of the physical world by other means, giving voice to the environment and allowing it to speak through the medium of film” (Knowles, *Experimental* 49). The sea spoke, but not in the way I expected. What kind of chemicals, human made or natural, would create such a bright result? Dorsky claims film has the capacity to reveal what we can’t see, “it can achieve a transcendental balance. This balance point unveils the transparency of our earthly experience” (28). If this is true, can film act as an interpreter? As I get more familiar with eco-processing will I be able to read the ‘language’ of the sea through the images it produces? David Gatten made a series of ocean-collaboration films where he submerged crab traps full of unexposed film in the Atlantic Ocean. The ocean beings and accidental human contributions reacted strongly with the silver bromide in the emulsion.

> The final films appear abstract but are in fact documentary: visual and aural inscriptions of the ocean… These labile films, bursting with colour and static, understand themselves as having entered into a series of relations and, in turn, can be understood as a form of communication between the ocean, its organic and inorganic components, and humanity. (Zinman 111-112)

His film series is titled *What the Water* Said. The ocean spoke to his celluloid too. The oceanic and human creatures’ activities were imprinted in the film, and through projection, the traces, or documents, are available to us to understand their underwater story.

Moving forward with experiments in eco-processing means being engaged with existing materials offered in each place. Not every space is ‘pure’ and not all ingredients gathered will be fully ‘natural’ if they have been saturated in compromised environments. We are living in “a time when anthropogenic changes to the environment and climate can no longer be ignored and colonial epistemologies remain in need of undoing” (Balsom 10). If I’m making space for the ocean to come forward I have to remain open to all possibilities of learning and ways of expanding expression.

Putting one’s hands on each frame of a film is intimate. I am working with the interaction of matter to bring an image to the surface of the substrate. In this collaboration a relationship is

formed between the filmmaker and the material resulting in “a certain visceral quality in the moving image. This quality is derived largely from… direct bodily contact… produc[ing] a film that vibrates with an energy caused by the uniqueness of each frame, which can suggest body energies at a molecular level” (MacKenzie & Marchessault 70). Our own bodily rhythms and perceptions, and those of film’s processes and projections explain why we respond so viscerally to cinema.

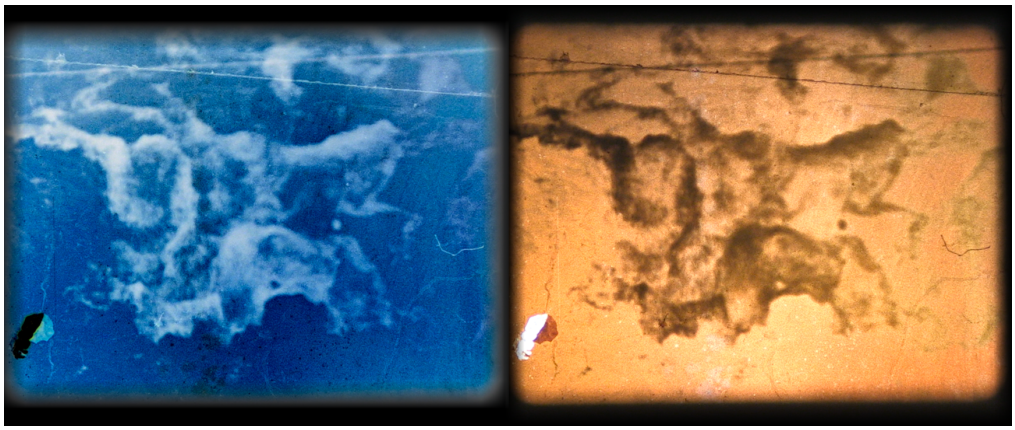


Figure 22. Ana Valine, *NB2*, 2020. 16mm Film Still (R) and inversion (L).

Handmade film often results in images of suggestion, leaving space for mystery, respecting the audience’s desire to fill in gaps with their personal associations and inquiries. “Viewing a film has tremendous mystical implications; it can be, at its best, a way of approaching and manifesting the ineffable” (Dorsky 28). We are, more than ever, “in search of reflections on what it means to belong to the whole of a world in our time of ecological, humanitarian, and political emergency. The dispossession of the ego and decentering of the human found in oceanic feeling” (Balsom 9). I read the shore at this location as an indication of our disconnection. If we are aware of being part of a whole, how can we ignore these signs of illness? And importantly, to move forward, how can we ‘listen’ to these shores to gauge our recovery?

Six/AMB

23. Ana Valine, *AMB moths,* 2020. Digital photograph

Ambleside Beach, West Vancouver, BC
September 18, 2020
3:40 pm
19 degrees, humidity 83%, hazy smoky sky
Low tide, wind 3 km/h
Stock: 3378E b/w hi con
ASA/ISO: 12
LX Meter: H40
Subject: quiet, lapping waves
Fstop: 5.6, 64fps (1 & 2) / Fstop: 4, 64fps (3 & 4) / Fstop: 8, 64fps (5) / Fstop: 8, 24 fps (6)

So quiet here. Soothing. I'm here for Carlotta.

Rocky beach with lots of seaweed.

Good to be back here – from the early days with her, and walking the dogs. I miss her. A complete bubble from the rest of the city. Eerily peaceful. Bougie stores behind the shore.

The lonely low blare of a shipping barge.

Thousands of dead moths washing up in the water, sticking to the rocks. I thought they were flower petals.

The summer has been filled with labour. Much of it has been the labour of love. The labour of helping my friend Carlotta die, the labour of helping my partner move a block closer, the labour of setting up work spaces that will be pandemic-proof so I can continue my labour through another wave, if it happens. I am witnessing this strange change not so much in a literal way, but as a way of perceiving that which sits next to me; the discomfort of unknowing. Liminality can be a feeling of displacement, disorientation, unravelling and undoing. It can have the feeling of hanging, suspended, held by a thread. We wait with our fragility, with our not knowing.

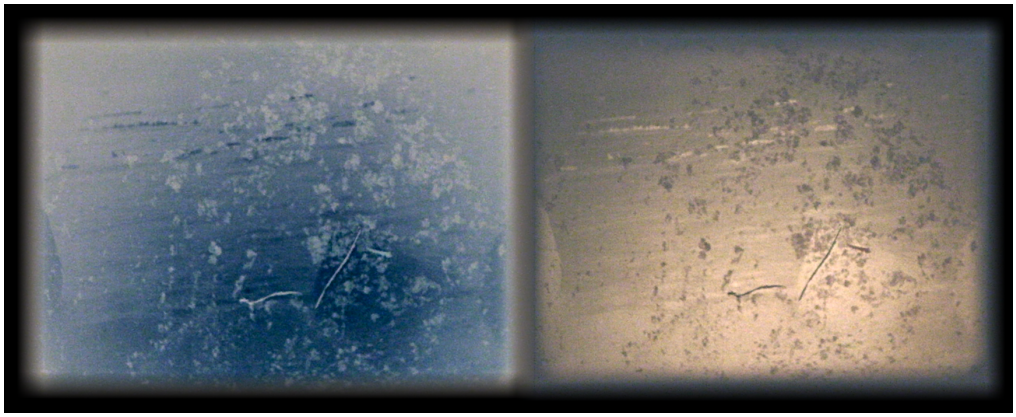


Figure 24. Ana Valine, *AMB1 (traces of salt)*, 2020. 16mm Film Still (R) and inversion (L).

We are in shock, negotiating our bodies through a virus, smoke-filled skies with a red sun, and clouds of moths. There is so much of life and death up close and hovering. Some of us make art in grief. Stan Brakhage created several films contemplating the cycles of life and death, pieces of moth hanging suspended between layers of celluloid. These moths exist in two places; in the celluloid and in the image projected on the screen. How do they exist in the in between? What are the threads that hold them in this world and the other? I imagine Brakhage, his grown man fingers fumbling with fragile, tiny wings.

Film, as a body of material, goes through the projector 24 frames per second. There are 24 hours in a day and we don't know how many we will breathe through. "Our time began when we were born, and will end when we die. We have done nothing to earn it, so we cannot pretend that it

is ours" (Raqs). We are here and gone in a flash. The dark lines between frames divide the light. "Unlike any medium before it, film promised to capture traces of the works in time, registering moments and movements that resided outside of any human intentionality of control through the nonhuman automatism of the camera. Something of the world itself would be rendered back, preserved yet transfigured" (Balsom 17). Liminality can be the states between awake and asleep, between life and death, coming into the world and leaving the world. The labour of dying is no less than the labour of birth, and somehow, somewhere, perhaps the passages intertwine.

Creative works often intertwine, sometimes by chance, and often with others before and after. It is a kind of artistic language. "[In] the score for *4'33"*, John Cage writes "Tacet" to indicate silence. Tacet, Latin for "it is silent," has the same root as [the filmmaker Dean's] name: Tacita, "the silent one." Dean's work is full of silences that, like Cage's music, are seething with noise. And even her silent films are accompanied by the whir of the projector, spinning like an accelerated clock" (Gioni 13). Time is forefront in Cage's piece with each of the three movements, and present and audible in Dean's projectors. "Cage's silent piece, like much of his work, invites chance and the unknown into play, and it is this that perhaps attracts Tacita most" (Starling). In *Merce Cunningham performs STILLNESS* (2007), Dean's conception of *4'33"*, she films Cage's life partner Cunningham listening without movement (except in the inaudible music transitions, where he shifts positions). He is listening to his deceased love's 'silent' composition. It is a study in grief, waiting, and holding time. There are several homages to Cage's most famous piece including a short film by artist Simon Starling and an imposing horizontal steel slab by modernist sculptor Richard Serra titled *Silence (for John Cage)* (2015). These works of reverence are an acknowledgement of having a place in a bigger picture, of being part of a whole, altered by time and touched by the one before.

Figure 25. Tacita Dean, *Merce Cunningham performs STILLNESS ... (six performances, six films),* 2008. 6 x 16 mm colour films, optical sound, approx. 5 minutes each. Partial view of the installation at DIA: Beacon, 2008. Courtesy of the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York / Paris. Photo credit: Ken Goebel

Filmmaker Jennifer West has used the shoreline as a place of material transformation, employing the ragged and grinding occupants of the beach to transmute and decay her celluloid. She is a contemporary filmmaker based in California. Hers is a bodily engagement, fully physical with experimentation and unorthodox developing ingredients who "employs various unique processes to produce alchemical transformations in her film based practice" (Vilmagold). She describes her practice as "radical materiality - where I corrode, tint, etch, and alter physical analog film strips with materials and actions from the world: cooking film in eggs, soaking it in communal urine, submerging it in the Great Salt Lake, exposing it to xrays, etc. Radical Materiality allows chance and uncontrolled processes from the world to become part of the work" (Notebook).

West's installations are epic. They usually involve the material presence of the physical 35mm filmstrips installed in way that creates layers of transparent walls, often with the engagement of the viewer's body acting as a form of mobile, temporary screen or volunteer light source. Other

times she installs unprocessed film in public places and invites the viewer to participate in the making of the image, usually through some kind of physical contact with the celluloid strip that leaves an impression to be seen in a later projection. These forms of installation enhance the physicality of her work and invite the viewer into a sense of her labour and embodied creative process.

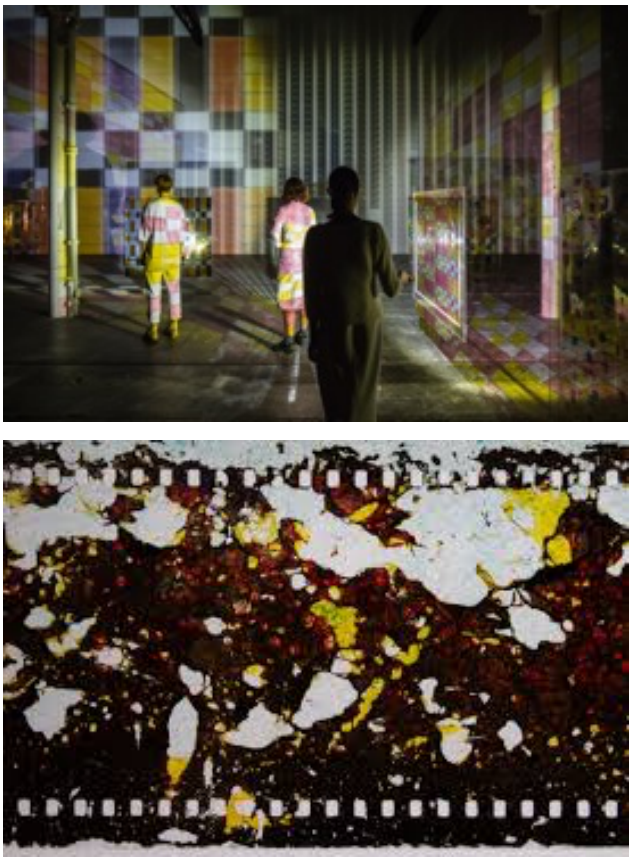


Figure 26. Jennifer West, *Flashlight Filmstrip Projections*, 2016, Plexiglas panel frames, 35 and 70mm filmstrips, dyes, inkjet prints, flashlights, Tramway, Glasgow, Scotland, Commissioned by Tramway, original commission the PICA TBA Fest, Portland, OR 2014

Figure 27. Jennifer West, *Salt Crystals Spiral Jetty Dead Sea Five Year Film (70mm film negative floated in the Dead Sea and given a healing clay bath in extreme heat in 2008 - stuffed in a suitcase, placed in studio buckets, covered in clay and salt for five years - dragged along the salt encrusted rocks of the Spiral Jetty and thrown in the pink waters in 2013 in below 10 degree weather - Dead Sea floating and mud baths by Mark Titchner, Karen Russo and Jwest - Spiral Jetty dragging and rolling by Aaron Moulton, Ignacio Uriarte and Jwest - DIY telecine frame by frame of salt covered film by Chris Hanke)*, 2013, 54 seconds, 70mm film negative transferred to high-definition, Commissioned by the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art

Five of West's films have been made in partnership with the sea and ingredients along the shoreline such as salt, rocks, mud, and sand. The frame above *(figure 25)* shows a still from a film she dragged along Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* and then left in a bucket of sea mud for five years. In another homage, Serra, who was a friend of Smithson's and helped work on the spiral, echoes *Jetty*'s shape in the massive landscape and water installation work *7* (2011), a towering steel sculpture in Doha, reached by a spiral walkway.

There are creative spirals and waves of recognition between artists, from West's and Serra's works stepping off Smithson's; Serra's homage to Cage, to Dean's homage to Cage, in collaboration with his lifetime partner, Cunningham. In many of these works, there has been an embracing of chance and the unplanned in the making, perhaps leaving room for signs of the original artists to emerge.

These days, and with the influence of experimenters that have come before, I am less focused on controlling outcomes and more interested in the collaborative process of material experimentation, surrender and embracing the surprises. These processes include periods of hanging, suspended in time, immersed in fluids; times of deep transmutation between steps in development, emerging eventually into transformed matter. There are liminal times in this making, the submerged days when I don't know if the film will come to life or recede into darkness. This batch of film with Ambleside ocean was developed with thousands of moth wings that were floating in the water, collected with the seaweed.

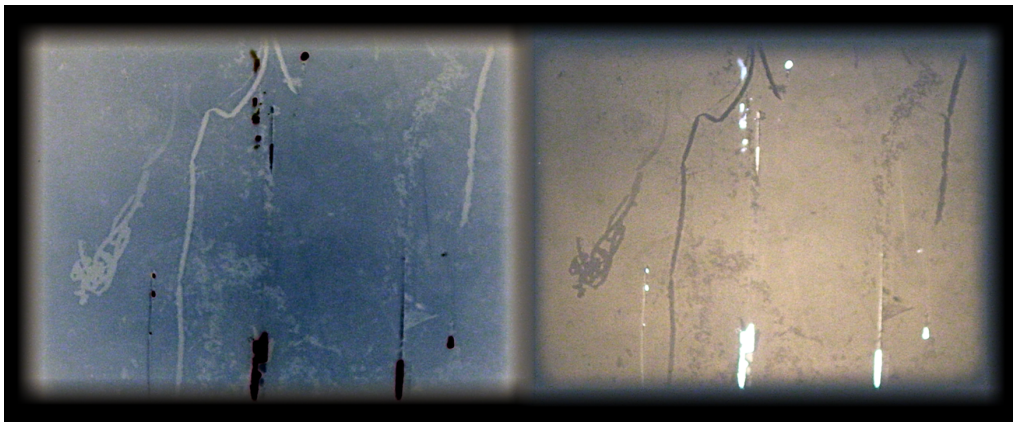


Figure 28. Ana Valine, *AMB1 (traces of moth)*, 2020. 16mm Film Still (R) and inversion (L).

I was with Carlotta for ten days while she was suspended between this world and the next, while she held both life and death in her. In death do we return to the sea like Deren and Greenfield? Many films use the shoreline as transition to the next: it is a common movie motif. The last frames of *The 400 Blows* linger. The boy runs toward the sea to escape those chasing him. He turns toward the camera, feet in damp sand, to face us before his conclusive final steps. The film leaves us hanging, suspended with him in life between this frame and the next. This is how we remember him. This is how we remember the moths and the silent music of John Cage.

Seven/SB2

Figure 29. Ana Valine, *SB/2: Live Ocean @KingTide,* 2020. Digital photograph.

Spanish Banks, Vancouver, BC
November 24, 2020
10:48 am
17 degrees
King Tides
Stock: 3378E b/w hi con
ASA/ISO: 12
LX Meter: 160
Fstop: should be .o7 but lens only goes to 1.8, 64fps (1 - 4) / Fstop: 1.8, 24fps (5 & 6)
Underexposed so will have to develop longer
Brought colour stock as well for experimentation
Stock: Kodak Colour Negative 7219 w #85 filter
ASA/ISO: 320
LX Meter: 320
Fstop: 2.8/4, 64fps (1 - 4) / Fstop: : 2.8/4, 24fps (5 & 6) film left on feed reel because I overloaded.

King Tides: exceptionally high tides because of the pull of the moon.

Almost missed the seaweed because I was late getting to the shore. The tide is coming in fast.

The waves are lush and loud and don't care about my lateness. They are vigorous and self-possessed.

Waves churning up silt and living things, washing them up into my bucket. The water is somewhat cloudy with greens. Seaweed is plump and jade green, slightly yellow-brown.

Although I followed the same recipe, temperatures, and timing, the film stock I've been using all summer didn't develop well this time. Either I've underdeveloped it or ruined the fix by peeking to see if there was an image. Or the phenols in the seaweed have changed due to less sun and colder temperatures. Perhaps the sea water for the fix has changed as well. More research is required. Whatever the reason, I did manage to get a slight image from the colour negative stock. I was thrilled. This is apparently very difficult to do so maybe it was beginner's luck. The image was faint when I brought it out of the basement fix so I needed some advice. I had to save one or both of these rolls for the upcoming installation because I didn't have time to do another four-day process.

One of my supervisors, Lindsay McIntyre, put me in touch with Dawn George, an eco-developer adventurer who lives in Nova Scotia. She said, as a last resort, that I could try lifting more out of the image with an eco-bleach made from hydrogen peroxide and vinegar. "It gives off a fume," she warned, "so do it outside with gloves." I had no luck with the black and white stock but after a few hours of test strips was able to find the exact timing (2 minutes and 22 seconds) for the colour stock to bubble a response. It's a rich amber and its direct digital inversion is cobalt blue.

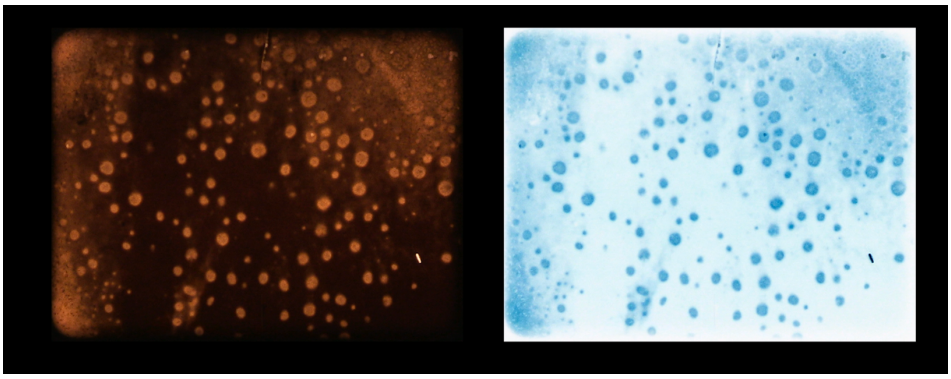


Figure 30. Ana Valine, *SB2:1 (CN Bubbles)*, 2020. 16mm Film Still (L) and inversion (R).

Recent online research has led me to two more women from Kent, UK, who also develop with seaweed, Kim Conway and Melanie King. They both work with still images but their recipes and

philosophies are similar to my moving image approach. Conway is focused on “creat[ing] safer alternative darkroom solutions” (Conway) and King practices respect and what sounds like ‘sustainable harvesting’: “As with all foraging, it is suggested that you adhere to the forager’s code, being careful with the environment when collecting seaweed. Make sure that you correctly identify the seaweed that you plan to use, and that you do not take more than you need” (King). I will reach out to them as I continue my research. Perhaps they’re kindred spirits existing in a similar realm, over a continent and across an ocean.

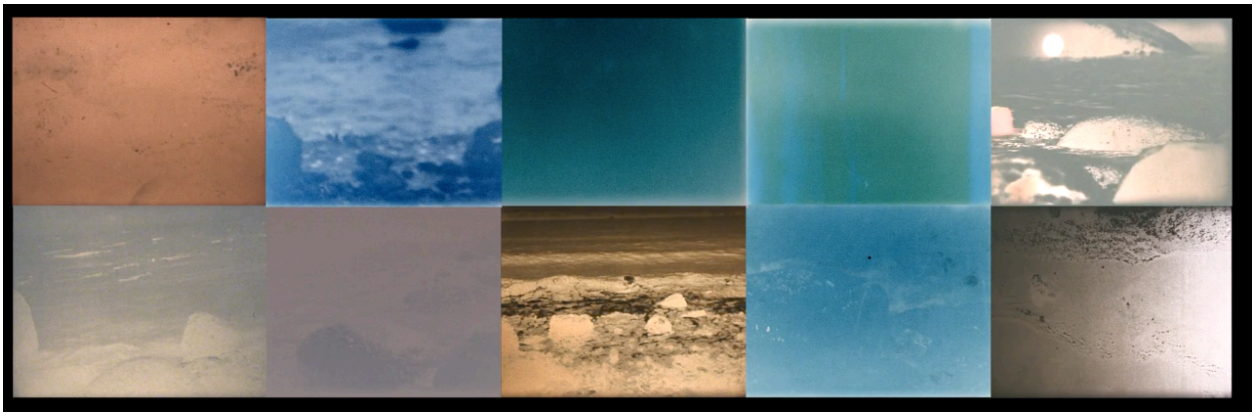
In her essay *What is the Oceanic?* Caroline Rooney makes a crucial connection between the oceanic and creativity. “The oceanic feeling is about an affect state of being that is the most *conscious*, fully aware, fully alert or awake one possible (as opposed to an unconscious or conceptual state), and this state is expressed more exactly in poetic and musical ways than in rational and conceptual forms” (27). This explains why my focus changed so radically when the pandemic hit. I went to the ocean because I was lost. I went with questions, not preconceptions. When I listened, what I heard was the water and the land talking back and forth.

When we consider the oceanic feeling and ourselves ‘a part of’ instead of ‘apart from’ it is a shift in understanding how we are in the world. These radical shifts can be disorienting and refreshing. In my explorations of projection, I have only been able to convey a small fraction of the experience of being with the ocean.

How, why, and to what extent my creative interventions result in an immersive experience for the viewer has yet to be determined. Am I, or will I ever, be able to convey the feeling of ‘oneness’ that the ocean gives us? Is my interference/interpretation contributing in any way to something that is already whole? When I asked this in a previous draft, my professor Jamie Hilder responded, “There seems like a pretty easy answer to this, and it's "no." That's an impossible bar to set for yourself. No work besides the ocean can do that. It's like trying to invent God.” True, and yet as artists we strive to share our stories of how we experience awe and the feeling of being ‘a part of’. We continue to practice our craft so maybe, someday, it will transcend and become art that expands our experience of being, and that of the viewer. In that process I explore work in the

space of possibility. As in life, that space contains both joy and grief, ‘success’ and ‘failure’. And I keep returning to the shore to learn more. As Deren insightfully wrote in *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*, “The relationship of thought and art on the one hand and discovery and invention on the other, is not a settled marriage, grown steady with agreement and adjustment. It is more like a passionate flirtation, full of defiance, reluctance, anticipation and neglect” (18). The collaboration with nature through scientifically influenced methods is unpredictable at best and, as with Auerbach’s approach in getting to know a being, requires patience and repetition with slight adjustments at each sitting. It is with this motif of repeating studies that I reflect on my oceanic installations.

OCEANS 1 - PLACE



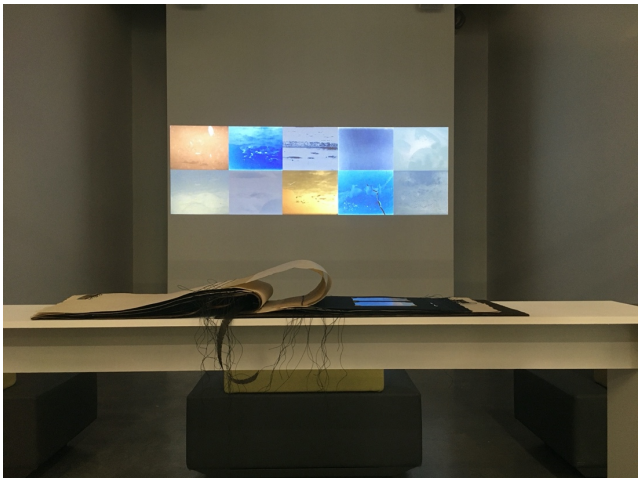


Figure 31. Ana Valine, *Oceans 1: 5 Shorelines*, 2020. Digital film still.
Figure 32. Ana Valine, *Oceans 1: 5 Shorelines with An Unfinished Book,* 2020. Digital photograph.
Figure 33. Ana Valine, *An Unfinished Book on the Shore*, 2020. Digital photograph.

Oceans 1 is a multi-image, single channel video installation with accompanying eco-processing recipe book. The video is a nine-minute loop. The book is hand-made, hand-sewn, and contains hand drawn maps of the filming locations (ink made with shore forest ingredients), on-site journal pages, process photos, field notes, and eco-recipes.

The frames in the video are made from five beaches: Spanish Banks, Wellingdon Beach, Black Point Beach, New Brighton Beach, Ambleside. I filmed one 100' black and white roll at each beach and developed it as a negative image in the seaweed and seawater seen within the frame.

Normally this stock produces high contrast black and white images with no tones of colour or subtle greys. On this neutral canvas, with this eco-developing process, each negative image bloomed with its own warm tint as a result of the properties in the seaweed at its unique location. The negative image was digitized and inverted into a positive. Each roll was then slowed down. The sound is a result of filming the 16mm reel moving through the projector. The mechanical projector sounds and scratches on the film sound strip were digitized, slowed and layered. "the digital translation of the analogue image draws out the ethereal quality of the indexical trace" (Knowles, *Experimental* 117). In their natural state waves and projected analogue images often move too fast to appreciate the beauty of a drop suspended in midair or how a wave meets a rock. In slow motion we can also see traces of the maker's hand and dried crystals of salt flakes. The digital transfer works as a kind of microscope of time, a slowing down to commune in a suspended way.

Although I appreciated the experiment with film time, I missed the tactility of the film strip and the action of it going through the projector. For such a material practice, this installation lacked material presence. The handmade book on process filled that gap somewhat, and was informative and tactile. The sound of the projector was present in the room via the digitized, re-worked sound design, but the constant comfort of its mechanical chugging was missing. I did

notice that viewers were willing to share a lot of their time with this piece. The comments were often related to soothing, unwinding, and the desire to have it present in their day to day environments. It seems like a good de-stresser and touchstone with nature in a mediated way.

Two of the challenges presented were: 1) Without the book, would there be a way to convey the process in making with seaweed? Without being didactic, how could one elegantly incorporate this information into the installation? 2) What were the choices around the multi-image projection? Was this the best way to show these ocean films in terms of projection representing content? In this question the word ‘re-present’ hangs in the air. With these considerations, I move into the next installation with the idea of immersion, and breaking away from the traditional projection frame.

OCEANS 3 – SPACE

Figure 34. Ana Valine, *Oceans 3, Installation Still 1*, 2020. Digital photograph.

Oceans 3 is a multi-matter, multi-media installation in an empty classroom. “Whilst photochemical film projection has disappeared from most commercial screening spaces, it has re-emerged in new contexts and in reinvented configurations, from gallery rooms to radical DIY spaces and from contemplative installation to sensorially immersive performance” (Knowles, *Experimental* 215). Many of the university spaces are empty these terms since most learning is online.

This immersive installation is a gathering of four short-throw digital projectors, a 16mm Elmo analogue projector, the built-in projector affixed to the ceiling, and the screen on my laptop. Seven projections all together. The analogue reel is the original print of the colour negative reel discussed in Chapter Seven/SB2 and is strung high, through reels attached to the ceiling grid so it formed its own type of Mobius loop. Three of the projectors show slow motion inversions of the analogue film. These projectors are canted, playing with a type of parallax so the images are diagonal slashes of water growing and rushing past the viewer. One of the images becomes a pyramid/diamond shape against the windows as a result of where the projection edges intersect with the walls. The in-house projector shows the slow motion 4:3 aspect ratio of the inverted footage, pausing a fraction of a second on each frame, showing the bubbled and marred surface of the emulsion. The laptop echoes this image. The final projection is the original group of frames, *Oceans 1*, projected at an angle within one of the wider blue swaths, and slightly under the analogue frame. Audio is a sound design composed from recordings of the analogue projector, scratches on the celluloid sound strip, the pot of salt water fix bubbling on the stove, and the waves at the filming location.

Pulled across the ceiling grid are panels of white muslin fabric which act as another projection surface. Dangling from the grid are three unravelling clusters of knotted film rolls, rolls that didn't develop with discernable image, 'failures' one might call them. With the flickering projections lighting them, they look like seaweed: organic-looking shadows on the dim walls.

The interplay between digital light flickering in intersecting prism angles across the walls and ceiling, the precarity of the breakable film strip dangling from the overhead reels chugging through the sprockets of the projector, the live ingredients on the table, and the peekaboo window corner result in a living, fully immersive interaction of the elements of filmmaking. Within each technology's character, the differing elements of the sea are highlighted, allowing the viewer to absorb the many layers of process and material. Analogue and digital's interplay equal more than the sum of their parts: "there is often a non-hierarchical fusion of elements that

involves both chemical manipulations and digital transformations" (Knowles, *Self-Skilling* 82). It is a conversation between the media that are a part of its making.

35. Ana Valine, *Oceans 3, Installation Still 2*, 2020. Digital photograph.
36. Ana Valine, *Oceans 3, Installation Still 3*, 2020. Digital photograph.

Other than the ambient light coming through the corner window, the room is lit only by the projections and a series of light boxes placed on a table in the middle of the room. On the lightboxes and surrounding table surface are natural science ingredients for eco-processing. The table is a museum-like 'archival' display of seaweed, salt, a roll of film in salt fix, Bolex camera and other filmmaking supplies. It is an alchemist's table that reveals the inner makings of the projected images.

During my thesis defence, my external reviewer, Kelly Egan, generously pointed out that there are three places in the film process where one can change time: the camera through frame rate, the editing stage, and projection choices. When I think retrospectively about *Oceans 3*, time was all over the place in that room in an expansive way. Egan noted the "friction of combining time." This was an early and sprawling experiment in combining elements of matter and time possibilities.

As Egan pointed out, the darkroom element of the installation gave her a sense of being at an archaeological discovery. Essentially, the developing materials were rendered useless because of the light in the room. It seemed as if the filmmaker had walked away from the table mid-making. This installation worked well in many ways. Indeed, the intention was to bring the viewer into the process of making, a step in the work that is essential yet difficult to convey. The other intention of the installation was to share the endless ways one can present the mediums of film and video. As Knowles describes,

> The term 'expanded cinema' is employed… not in relation to the live performance of experimental film works, as it has come to be understood, but in its original formulation by Gene Youngblood, as 'an explosion of the frame outward towards immersive, interactive, and interconnected forms of culture'. For Youngblood, expanded cinema relates to expanded forms of consciousness that exist at the intersection between different media. (Knowles, *Experimental* 187)

Oceans 3's central object was a 16mm projector with a 100' loop of film suspended between two reels hung high on the lighting frame, with the excess 60' spilling in its self-formed figure-eight ribbon on the floor in front of the projector: analogue footage moving through the projector and being pulled up to the ceiling to fall back into itself again. The precariousness of this moving image object placed in the middle of the room linked the developing table with the digital projection on the far side of the room. Process and time are represented through visual variation and the sound of making. In this piece, analogue is queen. Analogue represents origin and alchemy, or the transformation of matter. Dean describes analogue as:

> proportion and likeness, and is, according to one explanation, a representation of an object that resembles the original; not a transcription or a translation but an equivalent in parallel form: continuously variable, measurable and material. Everything we can quantify physically is analogue… the imprint of light on emulsion, the alchemy of circumstance and chemistry. (Visher)

Egan describes the darkroom as an altar, a place where the High Priestess practices. This makes sense when considering Dean's above reverence for celluloid. In her response to my eco-practice and the elements foregrounded in my work, Egan poses an important point for me to contemplate in my installations: In considering the "alchemy of darkroom space into the alchemy

of presentation, perhaps the filmstrip is the piece of art." Indeed, the filmstrip blossoms into its own in the darkroom, *if* it decides to come forth in the developing elements. It is the essential and pivotal piece in these works. Dean observes, "The film you thought you'd shot is never the film you see developed. The gap between the film's exposure and its first viewing seems to invite new thoughts and chance occurrences" (Starling). Maybe this is the time-space that Egan refers to when she speaks of darkroom time being its own cycle in the making. I'm starting to think of it as 'blind time' or 'chance time'. The minutes where I close my eyes in the dark and hope my calculations provide an inviting environment for alchemy to occur.

The filmstrip as a piece of art is an intriguing concept, and maybe one that subconsciously I understood as I moved into my next installment, although there were other challenges to consider. The exhibition gallery had only one room for media projection and someone else was using it. Unless I wanted to install in an isolated classroom again, three floors up, I had to find a way to share my film in an open white gallery hallway with skylights. There was one thing I knew, and that was I wanted the film to loop again. I wasn't done with time, but I had to work in light.

OCEANS 4 – TIME

Figure 37. Ana Valine, *Oceans 4:1*, Installation view, 2021. Photo credit: Michael Love

Oceans 4, on the surface, seems simpler than the previous installations. The work is less cluttered and there are, overall, fewer elements. It is more streamlined. The way to it was not smooth. I had intended to make another room full of material elements but when I discovered the only way to do this was to install on the 4th floor, disconnected from the rest of my cohort for our thesis installation, I decided to find a corner on the gallery floor and try to make it dark.

The day I came to campus to do projection tests in the remaining spaces, I parked and walked into Ian, the metal shop tech. The solution was clear and immediate. I would project on steel like I had in my first term when I discovered it would work with a projected image in ambient light. Possibilities opened up and it was only a matter of deciding where, so I chose an open wall space with no interruptions, between to pillars. I thought the concrete columns would frame the steel nicely.

I have a history with this metal. In my late twenties I worked on the pipeline as a welder's apprentice and I grew fond of its confidence. Steel is not easily manipulated. One has to work

hard to transform its matter, to get it hot enough to melt with itself or other matter. I respect its convictions. Other than extreme heat, the only thing that can change it is water, given enough time.

Serra's first memories were of water and steel. ""I could look out of my bedroom window and see ships go by," For [his] fifth birthday, his father took him to the Marinship yards as a treat… and watched a launch with a cheering throng as the boat slid into the sea" (Solomon). This early memory was formative for Serra and his relationship with steel and transformation. I wonder if my first ocean memory at the Pico shoreline has informed my creative direction in the same way. Perhaps those long, cold days on the pipeline with the thin red stream of melted steel left another indelible print.

The film will be projected on a steel surface comprised of three 4' x 8' sheets that will be affixed to the wall vertically, side by side, resting on the floor so the projected image will start at ground level. This will provide an 8' x 12' screen.

Figure 38. Ana Valine, *Oceans 4:2*, Installation view, 2021. Digital photograph

Serra, who designs oversize steel sculptures, and is lauded as "the best-known living sculptor in America, might seem out of step with our increasingly virtual world. In an age when visual

satisfactions scroll by on Instagram in seconds, he revels in the physical — enshrining abstract forms as maximalist feats of mass and scale" (Solomon). His work is, admittedly, impressive. His ability to maneuver and manipulate the heavy character of steel into sensual curves that hover precariously on the verge of gravity's pull is the work of an engineer who knows the intimate qualities of this mass. He has seen steel transform in his many early years working in the industry and even earlier, back to that launch day, when he saw the ship change "from an enormous obdurate weight to a buoyant structure, free, afloat and adrift" (Solomon). He has seen the material held up, its heaviness made light by its relationship with water *when form is applied*, the mass of steel floating on the surface, transmuted with the same element that has the potential to render it to dust. His impression was caused by steel in water. I wonder what water in steel will bring. Even as an image, as beams of light.

Steel has been chosen for its ability to interact with the projector's light beam and translate an image, no matter what ambient light conditions are present. I discovered this in my first term when I made the small steel screen so the material experiment has come full circle, out of necessity.

The choice of projecting on steel at this scale in this location was bold. I was taking up space. Not something I would have felt confident about doing two years ago, yet something I was committed to figuring out now. At this point I was working on instinct. "The selection of material determines the aesthetic possibilities and limitations. When working with steel, one accepts the technological materialism either directly in terms of assembly or construction, or indirectly as allusion" (Serra 31). I was putting the pieces together in ways that went beyond how the projection beam cooperated with the raw surface of the metal.

Steel serves a metaphorical return as well: seaweed has a high iron (and other mineral) content. The films made of seaweed will be projected on a surface that contains similar material matter as the images. Like returns to like.

Figure 39. Ana Valine, *Oceans 4:3*, Installation view, 2021. Digital photograph

Beyond the surface and mineral content of film and screen, I was working with time. There are 24 frames in a second. There are 24 hours in a day. “We can never measure how long and distant or how short and pressing 24 hours is; but, just the same, we call it “24 hours.” The leaving and coming of the directions and traces (of time) are clear, so people do not doubt it. They do not doubt it but that does not mean that they know it” (Raqs). There are two projections: a 1’ x 1 ½’ frame of analogue moving through the 16mm Elmo and loop, and digital slow-motion loop through the ceiling-mounted projector that covers the full 8’ x 12’ area. Where the images intersect and are superimposed, there is interaction in the waves. The two loops will likely never repeat their relationship because of the differing durations and frame rates. It is unpredictable, all chance. The more we sit with the moving images, the more the images give us something new. No two waves are ever the same. Maybe in this work I’m able to bring the shore closer to the viewer.

Another element of chance and time exists in the reel of film. The uncontrolled developing process is visually apparent as the filmstrip rolls through the projector loop. Spots of underdeveloped bright pink and orange are visible as they pass along the spools and past the light, flash on screen and slowly fade into more muted tones of mauve and blue. This iteration is up for two weeks and I’m uncertain how many more projections it will retain an image. I’ll

probably need to replace a few segments as they fade. The salt water fix has not been proven to be permanent so there is an element of entropy and time in the disappearance of the image.

The general reception of this installation was positive although most people wanted more intimacy and an enclosed darker space to sit with it longer. There was glare on one panel no matter where one stood: it changed when we changed position. It was also sometimes difficult to interpret the large digital projections because I hadn't factored in the dispersion of pixels as the image was stretched to fit the full screen. My initial projections were of smaller, focused frames, dense with light. Either I need a brighter projector or a darker space. I have an instinct to experiment with both potentials.

Oceans 4 is moving image and sculptural work. This is a discovery that has emerged through the degree. For the most part, I've been working through the lens of exploration and not having a goal-specific outcome for the projects. Dean clears the air with "it is incredibly important that not everything has to be a knowing decision" (Obrist 86) and although Serra's work appears controlled, he supports this with a similar approach. "The structures are the result of experimentation and invention. In every search there is always a degree of unforeseeability… the part of the work which surprises me invariably leads to new works. Call it a glimpse…" (Serra 167). I have come away from *Oceans 4* and this degree with more than a glimpse of what could come next. The possibilities of sharing these oceanic filmstrips are endless and I have no presumptions. As Serra notes,

> If I define a work and sum it up within the boundary of a definition, given my intentions, that seems to be a limitation on me and an imposition on other people of how to think about the work… I think the significance of the work is in its effort, not in its intentions. And that effort is a state of mind, an activity, an interaction with the world. (Serra 4)

I let my imagination roam and it goes beyond the shoreline, into the deep part. I look back at the shore and watch how the waves meet the land. It's different from here. "To leave *terra firma* and delve into the liquid flux of oceanic feeling is to undertake a radical reorientation of perspective" (Balsom 10). The shoreline is long and winding and full of potential transformations.

CONCLUSION

…it becomes clear to me that I had been missing that sense of wonder about film – that sense of playing as an important role in a magical process.
- Cara Morton[16]

40. Ana Valine, *SS3*, 2020. 16mm Film Still (and inversion). / 47

Approaching filmmaking from a place of not knowing, of finding comfort in discovery, led me to the shoreline to make a film with the ocean. From that day I have learned that being open to uncontrolled collaborations can be incredibly rewarding. Though unpredictable, when the elements come together, it is transforming both personally and creatively. The practice requires repetition, patience, and faith that something will eventually occur. In addition to finessing the craft, staying open to chance is the most important part. That is the art part.

Learning to slow down and see, not just look; and listen, not just hear; is the biggest gift of this formal education. The repeated practice of sitting with someone, or an other than human one, brings rewards that build into a relationship with time.

[16] Ms. Morton expresses this "artistic freedom" in an article after her visit to the Film Farm in 1994. The article is titled "Films, Fairy dust and other fucking cool shit (or "How I Found Myself on the Independent Imaging Retreat") (qtd. In Knowles, *Experimental* 144).

The green ray is an optical phenomenon that isn't seen by all. "Sailors see them more than the rest of us, and they have come to signify, for some, a harbinger of great change or fortune in their lives" (Dean *Green*). My mother has seen it several times but she has sat with the horizon for innumerable sunsets. Like Auerbach's sessions, her relationship with the sea and horizon has been one of daily re-understanding. Dean shares her experience of the elusive flash.

> "[A]ctually waiting for green rays is something I do quite often. It's a very strange thing because you are dealing with your eyes as well. If you keep them open you get too much dazzle so you have to blink and then you have to open them just and the point of the sun slipping beneath the horizon… In [*The Green Flash*], I've got one that's almost not there and I think that's best actually" (Obrist 39).

Celluloid holds witness to that which is not retainable by the human eye. To see the green ray is also a practice in patience, seeing, and faith in chance encounters. Greenfield, West, Deren, Auerbach, Cage, Dean and Serra were and are artists who deeply explore 'being' through their work. They bring their embodied selves to their explorations and enquiries with transcendent results. Maybe the deep layers of Auerbach's repetitive strokes allow space for us to meditate with him on his open subjects. Greenfield's surrender to the force of the sea, and Dean and Cage's embracing of uncontrolled collaborations, are practices of faith. West's play with materiality dances with chance. Serra's sculptures hold elements of worship; Deren's films are full of otherworldly ritual and trance.

> [T]he ritualistic form is not the expression of the individual nature of the artist; it is the result of the application of his [*sic*] individual talent to the moral problems which have been the concern of man's relationship with deity, and the evidence of that privileged communication… creating an imaginative, often mythological experience which… has no reference to any specific time or place, and is forever called for all time and place… He becomes part of a dynamic whole which, like all such creative relationships, in turn, endow its parts with a measure of its larger meaning. (Deren, *Cinematography* 20)

Engaging in filmmaking with more-than-human collaborators has opened me to a feeling of deep connection and being 'a part of' the life force around me. Through this unpredictable way of creating I've had "a radical reorientation of perspective" (Balsom 10) and have discovered making

films can be a liberating act of reunion with live matter. Even Cage doesn't take full credit for his approach. He remained open to learning and listening. His friend Morton Feldman helped him understand "to be unafraid or to be full of that love which comes from a sense of at-oneness with whatever"" (Zinman 110). To be open to that "at-oneness with whatever" is a part of the oceanic feeling. My practice has become one of surrendering to possibility. This has been liberating and full of unexpected gifts of understanding beyond my own experience. In a time of social distancing, I feel more at one and at peace than any other time. If I can carry this experience to others through the work, it becomes a sustainable practice in all ways.

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