Residue:

Dialogues in Seasonal Time

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ABSTRACT

My practice is built around a series of gestures toward the land where I live and careful observation of the responses that follow. The work is site-specific in a rural location on treaty 8 territory – specifically, Beaver, Cree, Métis and Dene territory. Each gesture begins as a kind of mimetic echo of phenomena that I observe. I try to embody moments on the land as a way of learning from these moments and acknowledging their significance. These gestures sometimes take the form of simple sculptures made with materials found in the forest, different forms of writing on and with the land, as well as lens-based work that includes my shadow as both haunter and hauntee. My influences include artist Peter von Tiesenhausen, author Nan Shepherd, Blackfoot researcher and educator Leroy Little Bear, and most importantly, the many entities that I encounter in this part of the world. The responses that come from the land and other entities are the most significant aspect of my work, and I am presenting only the residue of these encounters through my documentation and sculptures. I am devoted to exploring various experiences of time and how they overlap, as well as how this relates to political, historical and ecological concerns. All the while I am trying to understand what it means to make work and live in a state of flux.

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INTRODUCTION - There is No Focal Point – Seeds for Clouds

I saw an episode of *The Nature of Things* (2019) where they talked about how coniferous forests have the ability to generate clouds in hot weather. The trees intelligently coordinate the emission of turpenes that eventually attract moisture and manifest as clouds as they rise into the sky in large groups of molecules. I like to think about this process as both indicative of my interest in ecological systems as well as the ideal model for how ideas are generated in my practice. There is an entire ecosystem of relationships that are working together to create this phenomenon – a cloud that, from a human perspective, seems to appear out of nothingness. The ecosystem includes growth, decay, interspecies communication, nourishment, as well as light and darkness. Every part of the system plays a part in every other part. My practice is a combination of lens-based engagements and documentation of site-specific sculptural work as well as written interactions with the environment. Long periods of time are a key ingredient in the work I do, details culminate over time, coming together like the formation of a cloud. Even when ideas lose their original purpose and relevance, I believe they are decomposing to feed other things at play—I embrace these digressions and transformations as a way to relinquish control. And then, like the clouds, as ideas take shape they offer generative shade on the web of elements that helped to create them.

Positionality

Early in my adult life the French philosopher and phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard helped me to cultivate a generous way of looking at everyday details as invitations to use your imagination to enrich your experiences. He wrote, “everything I look at looks at me” as a way of identifying the potential for imaginative engagement with all forms of matter (185). His

writing continually emphasizes that small moments speak perfectly to their larger context. In the years since I encountered Bachelard, and especially after moving to a rural location, I have had a growing sense that a strict diet of western philosophy is fatally out of balance. My practice has evolved to be largely made up of spending time walking and paying attention to the systems, beings, and differing experiences of time around me. In the same way that people fail to understand the coniferous generation of clouds, Bachelard is too human focused to let the “mysteries of matter” take credit for the phenomena that he loves to contemplate. “For things as souls, the mystery is inside. A reverie of intimacy—of an intimacy which is always human—opens up for the person who enters into the mysteries of matter.” (72). His perspective is rooted in the idea that the world is always at our disposal for our own edification, and that the human experience is private and more important than those of the other entities that surround us.

Fig. 1: The boreal forest on Treaty 8 territory.

My own background and path to being on the land where I live inform my practice as well as the limitations in the outcomes of my work. When I was little, I was always aware that my family was from somewhere else. Even now, saying Northern Ireland evokes a dark shadow. There was evidence in our kitchen, like HP sauce; nobody else I knew had that. Nobody could tell that we were different by how we looked. People said my parents had an accent, but I couldn't hear it. There was something unseeable behind us that determined everything in front of us.

I grew up with the notion that my parents were from somewhere where violence was coordinated, and had the false impression that violence was incidental and shapeless in Canada. We were too caught up living in one story to realize we were joining in on trampling another one. The narrative of escape was allowed to be bigger than the narrative of collective oppression. We enjoyed the privilege of being guests, unaware of what had been going on before we arrived. Now I know that violence is/was coordinated here too, on a monstrous scale. Every stage of the history of Canada exploited Indigenous people and the land. The violence was hiding in plain sight, in the pervasive and agreed upon racism in the white communities that we were a part of. That should have been more easily spotted, never mind the apparatus of residential schools and violent extractive commodification of the land. We were never confronted or challenged by this violence... another privilege.

I knew the vague outlines of the world that my parents came from... car bombs in busy marketplaces, knee-cappings, executions of dissenters in front of their children. I remember hearing about families that didn't "belong" in hardline Protestant or Catholic neighbourhoods being forcefully evicted by mobs. Or sometimes fire-bombed out of their homes. I see the echoes of these firebombs in the landscape here. I see the details of a shadow and have to

decipher what is casting that shadow. And I begin to wonder if I am a shadow and what is casting me. I also wonder how to be here. Maybe this land is like one of those homes in Northern Ireland, invaded by a mob... we didn't break down the door, but find ourselves inside the house among the aftermath—seeking necessary shelter from death threats across the ocean.

I grew up in prairie, poplar landscapes, then the city, and now on the edge of the poplars again - living and working as an un-invited visitor in Treaty 8 territory – Beaver, Cree, Dene, and Métis land. My partner and I live on a quarter-section of land that is regenerating after being cleared 20 years ago. Our home is solar powered and we heat entirely with wood in the winter time. Our lifestyle necessitates an awareness of what is happening with the seasons as well as how our consumption directly affects the ecosystem around us. I am caught up in the ongoing dialogue in the land, without knowing what is being said. How do people decide that they are home? Why does it matter to call it a home, why not a haunt? Why not learn to be more like a ghost, fluid in your relationship with place, space, and time, as well as the memory of other times—attached but unattached. Like anthropologist Anna Tsing says, "Freedom emerges from open-ended cultural interplay, full of potential conflict and misunderstanding. I think it exists only in relation to ghosts. Freedom is the negotiation of ghosts on a haunted landscape; it does not exorcise the haunting but works to survive and negotiate it with flair." (76) There is no innocence in the present tense, so I have to find ways to navigate, constantly re-calibrate. "Haunting...is the relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society's assurances of innocence and reconciliation." (Tuck & Ree, 642) Even as I try to embody a better way of being with the land and the people whose home territory I live on, I am also benefitting immensely from the colonial context.

Even as this colonial system saved my parents from certain death, it is important not to confuse comfort and safety with freedom. The systems on the land are in a constant state of flux. My ambition is to find ways to embody a state of flux and resist permanence.

Professor Jeff Corntassel of the Cherokee Nation shared an idea with me: “According to Blackfoot Elder Leroy Little Bear, it’s not as critical how we as individuals recognize the land; what is of utmost importance is “how does the land recognize you?” [1] I do my best to acknowledge the land and I think that I am acknowledged back, but it is as someone that the land does not know. My ancestors were elsewhere, casting a shadow from a place that I cannot see, and I am that shadow, struggling to understand what the land here is trying to say to me, because I also do not know its language. As a result, it is difficult for me to understand how I am being recognized. This helps me understand the strangeness of my presence here. My mother talks about how she misses the wind in Northern Ireland, it has taken me a long time to understand the significance of her expressing the difference in the wind. Her sentiment conveys remorse for one of many lost relationships.

It is helpful to use Little Bear’s quote as a way of understanding the difference between western and Indigenous ways of knowing. Approaching the land as a group of equal and equally connected entities helps me to understand that I am witnessing and experiencing self-determined beings and systems, rather than a group of life forms that occupy a lower place in a human-centred hierarchy or seasons that are arbitrarily affecting the environment. This

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1I heard Corntassel share this quote a few years ago and I had remembered it only as “...does the land acknowledge you back.” The difference helps me see how I was at first arrested by the notion that the land could acknowledge me back. Now I understand that the “how” of the acknowledgement helps me to see how a settler person is acknowledged differently than someone whose ancestors had a relationship with this specific place.

difference in understanding the land around me is a difference that I am always going to be navigating as a settler person on Indigenous land.

In *Borderlands*, Chicana cultural, feminist, queer theorist Gloria Anzaldúa talks about the psychic restlessness they are plagued by as one who contains dual or multiple cultures. In my own way I know this restlessness but have spent much of my life misunderstanding what it is really all about—it is about the breakage in both my own heritage as well as erasure of the human relationships with the land where I live. Anzaldúa also tells about this simple shadow play, how reactions are limited by and dependent on what they are reacting against. We are always on the opposite side of a river to that which we oppose: “At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once.” (100) My context is quite different than Anzaldúa’s but the model feels relevant. The differences between background and foreground, object and shadow, haunted and hauntee are of concern to me, and as I identify with both extremes, I need to find a way to be the outlaying coordinates as well as everything in between—find a way to exist in the invisible space of the shadow. Be a shadow that is also made of light. (Anzaldúa 100-101)

Casting Shadows

Writer and poet Nan Shepherd wrote about the plants in the Cairngorms of Scotland. She talked about holding up a sheet of paper behind the plants to see the sharpness of their lines in a cast shadow (Fig. 1): “See how the shadow stands out like an etching, distinct and black, a miracle of exact detail.” (41) Shepherd’s explanation of this exercise in shadow play stands out to me as a good starting place for my own work. She spent much of her time

walking the Cairngorms, journaling and observing—generally in a state of being present and aware of what was going on in the systems around her. This is an artistic practice rooted in love for the land, in the way that love functions in a long-term relationship—a long and ever-deepening appreciation of the subtle details of another being. I have the sense that Shepherd could see no end to the mysteries and dialogue with the land. She walked an open-ended path, also keeping herself open to everything around her.

Fig. 2: Photograph of me holding up paper to see the outlines of the shadows created by dead grass in the winter.

In many ways Shepherd helped me to understand the practice of walking and being present on the land as an embodied practice. Her shadow play is a toe-dipping into material interaction and subtle interference with the entities on the land. She showed me how you can perceive spaces in between borderlines. One border is the object and the other is the visible shadow and there is a three dimensional shadow in between. It is the absence of light that helps us find the definition. We see the sharpened line of the object and know it better. The borderlines tell us about what is contained in the unseen. The shadow play works as a template for my material approach.

After my partner and I cut up a large spruce tree that fell in a windstorm I looked for ways to mimic the tree and overlap its life with mine. After we cut and loaded the logs I stood where the trunk had been, the morning sun casting my shadow across the space where the tree had been. I swayed back and forth with a camera around my neck to document the interaction. It was a moment for me to think about the transfer of energy from one form to another, to stand in recognition of what I had taken. I could see my presence as spectre as well as participant in the direct engagement with this entity. I could also see the space between myself and my shadow in the ghost space of where the tree had been. It is an effort to see myself, and also make myself available for change as part of the process. This specific tree generated several projects and experiments that all stemmed from this embodied mimicry (which I will touch on throughout this paper).

Fig. 3: Video still from *Shadow Reverse Shadow*, 2021.

Fig 4: Video stills from *Ghost Water*, 2021.

Fig 5: Video stills from *Ghost Water*, 2021.

Guiding Lights:

These questions materialized as I responded to the theorists and projects detailed in this paper:

How do I understand the land around me and how does it understand me?

Why is art the correct way to engage with the land?

What does it look like to create work where I am not the only agent in the process?

How do I resist the notions of permanence in my artwork?

How do I partner with and witness the land where I live and retain a willingness to engage without understanding the process?

Residue (Discussion of Work)

An idea is like smoke: you can contain it with fabric or a tent. It will be there for a while but gradually disperse. Then you have the smell for a while. That might be the essence of the smoke, or something that helps you imagine the essence by comparison. The smell is evocative of what smoke is like and how it behaves. The smokey smell is documentation of smoke as a presence, a residue that lingers after the presence. I'm engaged with residue, and how residue (or documentation) is a digression from presence, a haunting. For many of my projects I use photographs, video, or writing to communicate a site-specific work on the land where I live. The idea of residue is important because I feel that neither the documentation nor the physical work is the most interesting part of the pieces. Nor do I consider the "real" work to be media or sculptural at its core. The real essence of the work is

in the mostly invisible interaction that takes place after I make a work and when it is documented. The responses from the more-than-human world are like the space between the shadow and its caster. As a result, my exhibited work is like the residue of this uncontainable more-than-human presence.

Initially my practice focused on interactions with people in my community and how people experience and perceive time in the place where they live. This interest in time and community took the shape of video recordings of people silently counting to 60 with their eyes closed and then repeating the exercise verbally. I recorded these exercises on video as a way of building a map of perceived time.

Gradually I began to understand that seasonal time is a more significant interest because of the way it brings accumulated time into the present tense. I started to trace out the rings of sections of trees that I gathered while cutting firewood. The process of trying to follow the undulating lines of the tree growth rings was instructive about how trees experience and embody time. I realized how they are perfect “logs” of the time that they have lived through. They record the atmospheric conditions as well as the other entities in their proximity. Though I could only roughly follow the record that the trees kept, the result of the effort illustrates my method of mimicry. I am not pursuing a perfect rendering of the entity that I am responding to, but rather the process of trying (and often failing) to accurately trace the surface of a growth ring is what is most essential. Each carved step is an ongoing effort that will never achieve perfection but remain somewhere in between misunderstanding and understanding. It also represents my crude but patient efforts to find a way into the relationships around me.






Fig. 6: Video stills from *Counting*, 2020.

Fig. 7: Details from *Zero is the First Number,* 2021. Spruce log. Series of three.

After the image that I took of my shadow on the cut tree stump, my partner and I gathered the discarded branches from the tree and I placed them on the snow that covered the surface of a small marsh. This was a way for me to take the process of harvesting into myself and express it outwardly while displacing my presence through the footsteps. It is a form of gratitude as well as an acknowledgement of my consumption of the tree. There is transience and inevitable melt and decay in the future of the piece. Following the first stages of spring melt, as the branches blended into the marsh, the trunk of a previously fallen tree (that I did not know was there) emerged from under the snow in roughly the same place that I had made my footprints:

Fig. 8: *The Branch Path,* 2021. Spruce branches and snow.

The emergence of this tree displaced my authorship. There is forcefulness to the emergence of the tree through seasonal time that completely overwhelms the initial gesture without completely erasing it. The reason that this emergence, functioning as both over and underwriting is satisfying is the way that it demonstrates my complete lack of control and possession over the more-than-human world around me. The land is taking the gesture and transforming it to a happening that possesses much greater certainty than the initial effort. In turn, I developed a hunger for more of these interactions, to offer gestures that mimic processes around me and wait for a response. *The Branch Path*, appropriately, showed me the previously unseen trailhead toward dialogue with the land that unfolds at a seasonal pace. This dialogue might be what Powatomi writer, theorist and scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer is referring to when they write about a grammar of animacy. They describe this grammar as a way of seeing everything as an active and living entity that contributes to the web of life that make up the land. Wall Kimmerer muses about what we might gain from seeing the entities around us with this lens: “Imagine the access we would have to different perspectives, the things we might see through other eyes, the wisdom that surrounds us. We don’t have to figure out everything by ourselves: there are intelligences other than our own, teachers all around us” (58). For me the unfolding of this installation became a teacher without my realizing that I was going to be taught.

Fig. 9: *The Branch Path,* 2021. Spruce branches and snow.

Pathos Bowls

Donna Haraway's analysis of Andy Goldsworthy's work sets out a useful framework for me to aspire to as well as to use for identifying some of the moving parts in my practice: "Mortality and change are never out of consciousness. Process and dissolution—and agencies both human and non-human, as well as animate and inanimate—arc his partners and materials, not just his themes" (25). What I like about this passage is the way that it encompasses over-arching themes but also places them into a comprehensible relationship with space and time. The idea of "partnering" with what might be thought of as materials,

takes on increased significance when you can also identify sentience and agency in the materials.

I noticed the way that squirrels sort out spruce cones on broken tree stumps. In response, I started to carve bowls into tree stumps that were left after I harvested standing dead trees for firewood. Initially it felt like a dead-end experiment where I could not clearly understand what I was engaging with or what it might mean, other than creating a tidier space for the squirrels to work (which might be enough!). I carved a few bowls with chisels, spending time in the woods, thinking about the trees that I had taken that stood there. I felt the way the stumps would move slightly in response to the force of the carving motions. I knelt beside them to work and I could sense the roots under my feet and legs also responding to my work.

I filled a few of them with water to see if they would hold moisture, watching them slowly empty out. They would take a day or more to completely empty. Then the heat dome of 2021 descended and the temperature rose to record highs and stayed there for weeks. You could smell the trees cooking in the heat. The water in the bowls felt different all of a sudden. I used some beeswax and raw flax oil to make a paste to lightly line the bowls. I poured water into them and they held it for a little longer than before. I put up trail cameras to see who, if any, creatures might be around.

Since then, there is an ongoing parade of animals that come to this group of bowls. Everything from elk to squirrels to woodpeckers. This is a small gesture. I call it a “pathetic” gesture. I like this term because it relates the clumsiness and inadequacy of my gesture to offer water to a forest full of animals in a climate crisis. But the root meaning of pathetic from the Greek origin Pathos, is to be sensitive and deep feeling. I think that this gesture encompasses pathetic in both the original and contemporary sense of the word. Perhaps

what impresses me most about this site is the immediate awareness of what is only a teacup's worth of water used by a wide variety of creatures. This project is a gesture of affection and interest toward the land, creatures, and elements.

Fig. 10-11: *Pathos Bowls*, 2021 – Ongoing. Spruce, Beeswax, Flax oil, and water.

Fig. 12: Trail camera documentation of *Pathos Bowls*, 2021 – Ongoing. Spruce, Beeswax, Flax oil, and water.

Fig. 13: Multi-panel trail camera documentation of *Pathos Bowls*, 2021 – Ongoing. Spruce, Beeswax, Flax oil, and water.

Desperation

A project unfolded over the course of the winter season in 2021-2022 that became another act of overwriting, or maybe editing is more accurate. For several months I had the phrase “quiet desperation,” in my mind as something that I might work with. This phrase was made famous in Thoreau’s *Walden*, where he writes: “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation” (8). I was holding off on engaging with it because I was uncomfortable with bringing Thoreau into my work. Something about the air with which he is talked about has always smelled stale to me. It feels like *Walden* is taken as the last word on engagement with the natural world. But I could not shake the phrase; maybe it felt like it was too close to my mental state in pandemic isolation and maybe I liked the significance of writing it on the ground as it relates to the climate crisis. I sent a drone up a few dozen metres into the air and recorded myself walking out the phrase with footprints in the early winter snow. I liked the way the footage looked but felt unsatisfied with using this phrase. So I tucked it away and felt like it had just been something that I needed to get off of my mind.

I went for a walk in this field four months later after the snow had almost entirely melted in open areas. I had actually forgotten about the experiment altogether when I came across some of the letters. Initially I thought I was seeing an interesting pattern of animal tracks and then realized what it was. Tracking my past self for that brief instant left me with the impression that this was not my work.

Fig. 14: Video Still from *Desperation,* 2021-22. Video & Photographs.

The way that the snow melted, the word “quiet” was no longer visible. Only the frozen footprints from “Desperation” were still visible. This was exciting to me for several reasons, but mainly I felt as though the land and elements edited the writing and sent it back. And the editing process necessarily took place at the pace of seasonal time/change. The word quiet was dispensed with, and suddenly the writing was free of the cultural entanglement that had initially bothered me. Weather, condensation, time and a fortuitous decision to take a walk in this place again all worked together. A day or two after I photographed the letters it snowed again and they were gone.

Fig. 15: Details from *Desperation*, 2021-22.

Video & Photographs.

Fig. 16: *Desperation*, 2021-22. Video & Photographs.

This discovery shows my own actions back to me as a kind of ongoing haunting. There is also a strong sense that the phrase I put out as a clumsy offering was repurposed and then given back to more appropriately reflect the state of the environment while removing much of the sense of human ownership.

The field where *Desperation* was written is a cattle pasture that was overly grazed due to the heat wave the previous summer. The frozen footsteps take on a more profound function of distress signalling (like S.O.S.) that is less tied to me and works more broadly. The revelatory process of *Desperation* is in touch with the way *The Branch Path* from the previous winter/spring worked. In both cases the more-than-human world is responding. There is a process of learning happening in each case for me, and this sense of learning is heightened by the corrective tone of *Desperation*.

Context

Around the same time that I was working on the initial stages of my bowls project, I met multi-disciplinary artist Jason de Haan. He was working in Demmitt, Alberta on a hummingbird feeder sculpture. When I visited the site, I saw a very plain metal frame and struggled to understand what the significance of the shape was in relation to hummingbirds, but I was interested in the idea because he is making structures that are designed to interact with animals.

Fig. 17: Jason de Haan, *Structure for Observing Atypical Flight*, 2020 - Ongoing. Steel, found bottles, copper, paint. 6 m x 6 m x 4.25 m (variable). Permission pending.

After I saw de Haan give an artist talk via zoom for our Low Res cohort in the summer of 2021, I understood more of what was happening. He explained how the concept started in

an abandoned coal mining town in BC called Corbin, where hummingbirds pass through on their migratory route. The pyramid in Corbin copies the inverted shape of the now abandoned open pit mine there. The idea is to have at least three of these pyramids on the hummingbirds' migratory route, with one in Mexico, as well as one near where I live in northern Alberta. Each site is chosen in part because there will be a person there who ensures the feeders remain stocked and cared for—this last detail I will circle back to later.

These pieces were exciting because of the location specific interactions that de Haan was trying to achieve as well as the consideration of the local and wider context. I also found it instructive to be in proximity to the project as it was being worked on. Though we didn't really talk about the feeder sculpture when we met, the interaction gave me a sense of what he is like and how he is with other people, helping me understand the spirit of the work. If I had only seen the gallery representation of the piece I would not have the same sense of the person behind the concept. It also makes a project like this more immediate and relatable to have informal contact with the art and the artist. It is informative to see one of these feeders as a nondescript pile of metal and then to see a finished one in gallery images – this gives me the privilege of seeing the work as both refined and unrefined. The everyday-ness of the metal is retained in how I see the work in the gallery which also helps me to understand how I engage with materials. The interaction with de Haan and his sculpture remind me that a subtle set of adjustments or documentations can shift something from everyday into something that exudes a little bit of magic or poetry.

I had a conversation with de Haan about my bowl project and he (as well as some others) suggested that I should not show too much of the animals or too many images. I found it hard to think about leaving out some of the more striking images that came from the trail cameras. In an interview with my former mentor and film scholar George Toles, he

described to me the importance of not giving too much information as a way of giving the audience something to do. This approach rang true from a narrative perspective, but it was in a feedback session with my instructor Lauren Marsden during spring term 2022, that they raised the concern that seeing complete images of the physical animals might feel ethically uncomfortable because of the unnatural visual access that we have to the creatures. There is a voyeurism that becomes a type of ownership and maybe soul-stealing that occurs when we see creatures that do not offer consent to being photographed or the term captured is maybe more accurate. These ideas and concerns shifted my approach to show the images in a way that allows the creatures to retain a sense of mystery through more abstract photographic representation. Though I am still using images that come from a non-consensual way of capturing, I feel that this approach comes closer to creating greater figurative distance between the viewer and the viewed. I want to create something beyond documentary images, so that the images have their own aesthetic aura. I use the term “aura” in the way that Walter Benjamin describes it in relation to distance:

> We define the aura ... as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch. This image makes it easy to comprehend the social bases of the contemporary decay of the aura. It rests on two circumstances, both of which are related to the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life. Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. (Benjamin, 5)

Benjamin’s understanding of the human (western) desire to overcome “the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction,” helps me to understand and untangle my own relationship to the images that I captured at this site. There is a great deal of joy in seeing the creatures in their totality. But, especially when considering an exhibition, it becomes important

to be on one's guard against reproducing the images of these creatures and falling into the trap of doing this as a way of conquering them and ultimately owning them in the service of a feeling of satisfaction.

Fig. 18: *Pathos Bowls*, 2021-Ongoing. Spruce, Beeswax, Flax oil, and water.

The way that time is playing out in my work has been influenced by my neighbour and friend, multi-media artist Peter von Tiesenhausen. His *Lifeline* (1990-ongoing) is an example of engagement with the deep time of seasonal living as well as demonstrating transient settler presence. Beginning in 1990, von Tiesenhausen began adding a section of picket fence for each year that he lived in Demmitt, Alberta. He does not maintain the fence, allowing the

structure to deteriorate. According to Lucy Lippard, this project is, “an unashamedly colonial imposition, the fence is also a classic cultural marker of successful racination. The older segments are worn and weathered, while the newest ones are brightly white, reflecting the artist’s life and all the lives that surround it” (84). The yearly addition to *Lifeline* is an example of lived time on the land that incorporates decay into the essence of the piece. One of the aspects of *Lifeline* that I relate to the most is the older sections of the fence where trees from the bordering forest have fallen onto and broken pieces of the structure. The decay of the forest is reclaiming the space in the same way that new growth is simultaneously weaving its way into the structure.

Von Tiesenhausen often talks with me about being a part of the community and the highs and lows of seeing good people come and go. I feel that his affection for and devotion to the long term “project” of community building is one of the underlying concerns of *Lifeline*. For me, this imbues his yearly act of fence-building with not only his relationship to the land but also the community, and maybe his relationship with himself. In a similar way, my Bowls project is to me the beginning of a longer commitment to a project. Like Peter’s yearly pilgrimage to add to his fence, as well as the way de Haan’s hummingbird feeders are installed where they can be maintained indefinitely, I feel that ongoing commitment to these bowls has become an essential part of the project.

Making a commitment to the *Bowls* is also how I understand myself in the web of relationships that sustain me in this place. It takes on the significance of a ceremony of recognition, intentional awareness of the innumerable entities moving around and with me, sharing water like a form of communion through pilgrimages to the site. This creates a small and, as mentioned before, pathetic place of interface. The ongoing gesture also enters the sphere of seasonal time and deeper time, keeping the door open for further revelations. The

regular contact with the bowls is a way of keeping the initial lessons and surprises from the project close to me. I hope to experience the decay of the site and the eventual regrowth that will follow.

Fig. 19: Peter von Tiesenhausen, *Lifeline,* 1990-Ongoing. courtesy of the artist.

In thinking through the exhibition process in relation to these and other works from the last two years of my practice I have been working to show these moments and still retain the feeling that there is no focal point. This aims to mimic the experience of being in the woods and like Nan Shepherd wrote about in *The Living Mountain*, to try to get away from the privilege of the central viewer and the “framing” of the natural world for human consumption. I want to find ways to exhibit work that mimics the relational considerations inherent in both the projects as well as the experience of trying to live relationally with the land. Artist Olafur

Eliasson's *The glacier melt series* is an instructive group of works in relation to my practice because it is a way of exhibiting work that occurs over a long timeframe and is usually shown in a way that spreads the focus and avoids prioritizing a single vantage point.

Initially, the thing that I related to with Eliasson's photo series was the practical approach to presenting before and after images. I have a similar desire to document processes that show the passage of time in a concise and evocative way. While I enjoy writing about my process and the observations that I make along the way, I feel like I should avoid explaining too much.

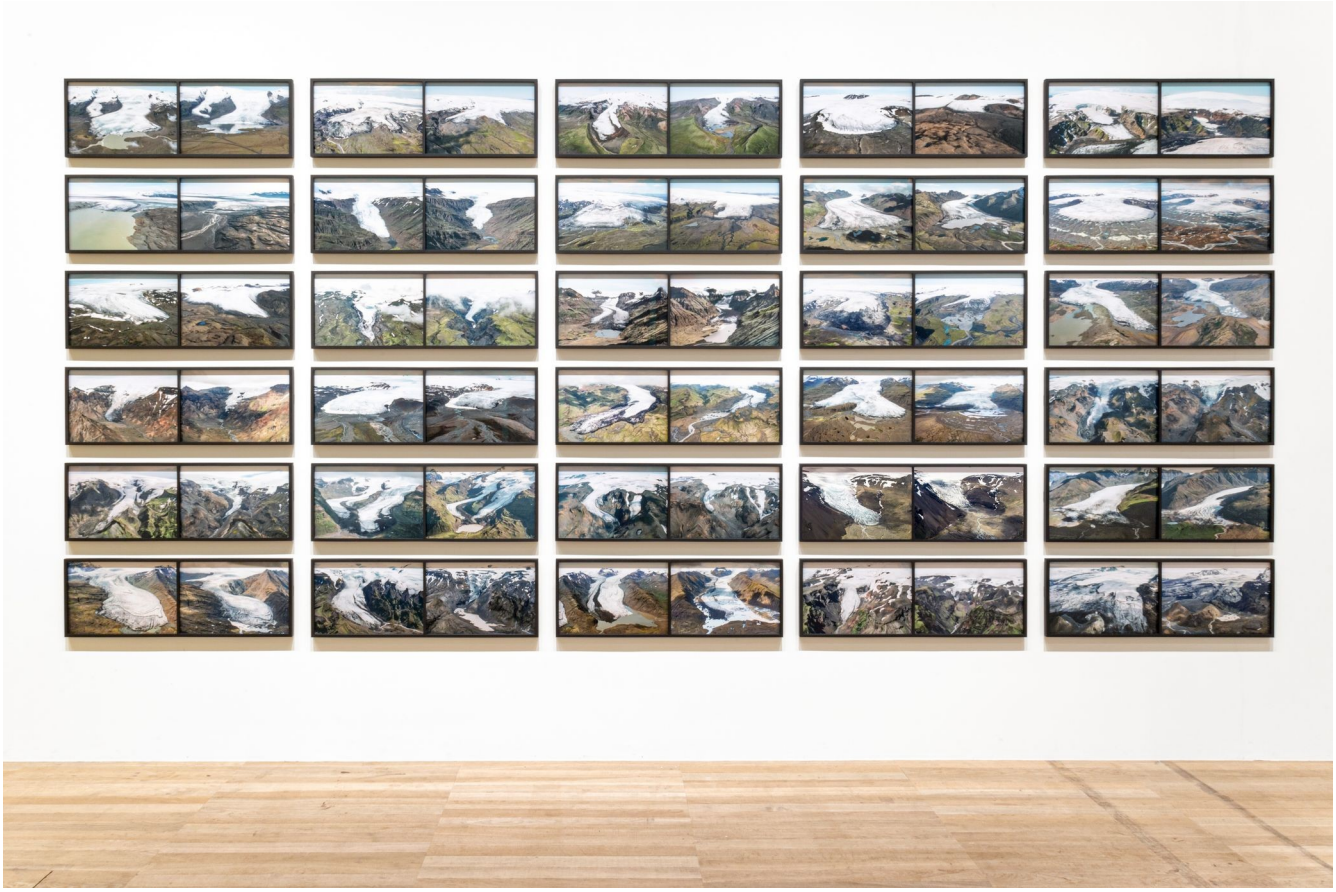

Fig. 20: Olafur Eliasson, *The glacier melt series*, 1999-2019. 30 C-prints.Installation View: Tate Modern, London. Photo: Michael Waldrep/Studio Olafur Eliasson. Courtesy of the artist; neugerriemscheider, Berlin; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles. © 2019 Olafur Eliasson

Eliasson captured images of glacial retreat 20 years apart, photographing from roughly the same vantage point and then framing the images next to one another in a joined double frame. I appreciate the way that the photographs do all of the talking apart from the minimal information about time frames that are communicated through the title. Looking at the way that Eliasson installed the images in different settings is instructive not only in the way that time can be considered in a micro and macro way but also in the image arrangement so that the visual presentation is balanced with many vantage points. There is the suggestion of progression in the sequencing and grid arrangements but they are shown as a single piece.

Fig. 21: Olafur Eliasson, *The glacier melt series*, 1999-2019. 30 C-prints, each 31 x 91 x 2.4 cm. Installation view and detail: Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. Photo: Erika Ede. Courtesy of the artist; neugerriemscheider, Berlin; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles. © 2019 Olafur Eliasson

Eliasson is sharply pointing at climate change with the expressed goal of raising awareness through the presentation of the photographs. Though I deeply appreciate this work, and share the sense of urgency and the need to include the climate crisis in any work that considers land and time, considering this work shows me differences in my sensibilities. For example, my *Bowls* project and any of my work involving melting snow takes climate change as a given in the process of the piece. But I feel that it is important to keep the focus on the web of relationships as they persist in the context of climate change. The emphasis on the need for people to understand that their world is a never-ending web of relationships through time, space and inter-matter/inter-species communication is ultimately what I feel is

needed to build empathy for the more-than-human world. Donna Haraway's assertion that "western-indebted people can no longer figure themselves as individuals and societies of individuals in human-only histories" is a useful way of thinking about how we see often perceive the climate crisis and how we need to shift our thinking to take the next steps toward addressing it. With this in mind, I emphasize relationship building in addition to stopping what we are doing wrong. Like forest ecologist Suzanne Simard's points out through her research into networks under the forest floor: "nothing should be lost. Everything has a purpose, and everything is in need of care" (303). I see my work as adding to the assertions that we need to stop our devastating processes and replace them with relational living.

Conclusion

I think of "becoming" as the same thing as decomposing, but maybe "over-writing" is a better way to encompass both processes. Philosopher and cultural critic Steven Shaviro's analysis of speculative realism philosopher Alfred North Whitehead's ideas are a useful way of framing my ambition. Shaviro states, "The world...is composed of processes, not things...How an actual entity becomes constitutes what the actual entity is...its being is constituted by its becoming" (2). Becoming, transforming, over-writing: these are essential for me to imagine myself and my work in relation to the place that I live. Even as the metaphorical cloud is forming it is also dissolving.

It is difficult to pretend that we are not always a central part of everything that we make and do, even as I try to conceive of a way around the use of a focal point. I am searching for the relationships in a myriad of ecologies, across different times and instants, as well as across different dimensions and realities. I see my practice as work that also looks back at me as well as the viewer. Each time a gesture is made, there is a response. In some cases the response is an altering or editing of my initial effort. It is presumptuous of me to suppose that I

can properly understand how the land is acknowledging these works because I do not have the depth of relationship to know. I will go so far as to say that it seems to be happening, and that there is a kind of corrective tone to the responses. There is also a sense that seasonal time is required, as well as patient attention, in order to truly engage. I am pursuing a way of looking and being that prioritizes relational thinking and a way to foreground existence as part of a web of entities rather than believing that we are all the central figure of reality. I also believe that the path forward necessitates the need to find ways to exist and thrive in paradox and flux.

Final Reflection

I realize that I have a lack of contentment with the way that I have been shown the natural world that I am just now beginning to untangle, and this is perhaps what is behind my desire to make these gestures to the land. My internal reviewer Jamie Hilder helped me to see that I embrace scientific explanations of phenomena but shy away from fully spiritual readings of the same phenomena even as I try to make room for this way of thinking. The ongoing challenge for me is to grapple with what I actually believe and what I believe is happening in these dialogues. I see this grappling connected to an intuitive practice, where I try to let my intuition guide my actions and pay attention when things do not feel quite right. My intuition is often telling me something is out of balance long before I acknowledge it. The process of opening up the work and writing to more people exposed my tendency to frame myself as working in isolation. Even though I wanted to distance myself from Thoreau's approach I found myself sliding into it. While there were moments of profound solitary discovery, my practice is at its most engaging when considered as a social pursuit – the work becoming the residue of dialogue between more than one entity rather than just self

reflection. I also want to open up the presentation of my practice to include conversations and insights from other people that inform my choices and, in many cases, guide my actions – this is also a way of giving up authorial control.

The arrangement of my thesis installation was meant to draw attention to the space between different moments and have the pieces build off of one another to create an atmosphere that echoed the place that they came from. I included shadows as part of the physical sculptures to keep the objects in touch with the theme of shadows as well as a way of alluding to the extra-dimensional qualities of the work. This extra dimension took on greater significance when showing the work so far from where it is from. I have often had people say that my work is very slow and quiet. After installing the work I have a stronger sense of what this characterization means. Though I used a large space for the install, I can see how the consideration of space/time in the gallery is essential to inviting a viewer to find the pace of the work. I am pleased to come through this process with the feeling that my practice is beginning to unfold and that I am leaving with challenging questions to grapple with. These things tell me that my practice is alive and shifting rather than taking the shape of a concluding chapter among my creative pursuits.

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