Chthulucenic Living [and dying and composting]: Pursuing Ongoingness through Animality and Biophilia

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Chthulucene Living [and dying and composting]: Pursuing Ongoingness through Animality and Biophilia

Abstract

This studio-based dissertation project emerges from my engagement with the concepts of animality, biophilia, and the Chthulucene. These concepts form central research topics amongst a host of supporting subthemes, contributing to a framework that weaves together connections between human and nonhuman relationality and environmental remediation. I interrogate and problematize human-centric perspectives and hegemonic forces that encourage distance from animality and arguably enable environmental degradation. My work thus challenges ongoing legacies of colonialism that promote oppression and destruction. The written component of this project is part of an interdisciplinary thesis that includes artworks presented at Western University’s McIntosh Gallery from July 4 to July 30, 2022, in an exhibition entitled NODES: Animality and Kinship. The overarching themes of animality, biophilia, and the Chthulucene are mirrored in the writing and in the artworks, which were shown in a three-gallery presentation deploying video, drawing, sculpture, and installation. Together, the writing and the body of art proceed from my positionality within our complex geological times where, I argue, the need to recognize animality and multispecies relationality is of primary urgency in advocating for the preservation of connections amongst human and nonhuman species. As a whole, this dissertation project considers how animality, both as a subject and a framework, can work towards mending socio-cultural relationships and support environmental remediation. The written project is composed of three chapters and a conclusion, followed by a dossier documenting the exhibition and an appendix of related works and projects I created during my doctoral studies.

Keywords:
Animality, Biophilia, Chthulucene, Human and Nonhuman Species, Reworlding, Ongoingness, Interconnectivity, Contemporary Art, Visual Art, Decentering, Dismantling, Multispecies Alliances, Relationality, Decolonization, Care, Remediation, Kinship, Intraspeciation
Summary for Lay Audience

This dissertation looks to three main areas of focus with the aim of decentering dominant Western beliefs regarding the human position in the more-than-human world and relationships between human and nonhuman species. These areas of focus, which are interlinked, are: 1. *Animality*—a contemporary and open perspective on human existence and human-animal relationships; 2. *Biophilia*—which, according to Edward O. Wilson’s conception of the term, addresses innate interconnectivity between species and promotes care for nonhuman species, including the vegetal/botanical; and 3. The *Chthulucene*—a contemporary perspective on our current epoch, with respect to the conceptualization of Donna Haraway. The core of this dissertation includes propositions regarding remediation and ongoingness when it comes to multispecies alliances and recuperative measures for the environment. While undertaking this research, I created artistic works that correspond to the themes addressed in each chapter of this thesis; a dossier documenting these works of art and an appendix with related artwork and projects follow.
Acknowledgements

I would first like to acknowledge the place where I carried out my doctoral studies and the peoples and history of the traditional territory on which Western University stands, including McIntosh Gallery, where I had the privilege of exhibiting my artwork. I acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek (Ah-nish-in-a-bek), Haudenosaunee (Ho-den-no-show-nee), Lūnaapéewak (Len-ahpay-wuk), and Chonnonton (Chun-ongk-ton) Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. With this, I respect the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have with this land, as they are the original caretakers.

The above reflects Western University’s land acknowledgement, which is meant to reveal and correct miseducation as well as to renew respectful relationships with Indigenous communities. I also wish to personally express my gratitude to the Indigenous people of this land where I conducted my studies. This extends to where I currently sit—I am fortunate to be writing these acknowledgements nuzzled between my sleeping dog companions on my couch in Tkaronto, Ontario, the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. Also, I’d like to express my gratitude for the land where I grew up, for I could not have carried out this research without experiencing life in such a way—Nipissing First Nation, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg peoples and the lands protected by the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850.

I’m grateful for the many individuals who supported me throughout my studies. First and foremost, my parents Chris and Carol who have provided unceasing support and encouragement. They are always checking in to express their pride and remind me that the academic work I do and the art I create are important. I’m fortunate that both my parents are people who fundamentally care for others, human and nonhuman, and for the environment. This sense of care has been instilled in me as a driving force that ultimately shapes my outlook on life. Thank you also to my sister Chantalle who is always a source of inspiration and for her encouragement and support.
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I’m so grateful for my supervisor, Patrick Mahon. I would like to thank him for his insight and guidance as well as for his tireless work, patience, and unwavering support. His generosity not only helped me throughout my studies, but also provided me with opportunities to advance in my professional field. Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Kirsty Robertson and Soheila K. Esfahani, for their incredible support and invaluable feedback, for challenging me through critical questioning, for presenting alternative perspectives, and for their support of my artistic practice and research.

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Though the title page of this thesis indicates me as the sole author, many helped build this thesis, human and nonhuman. I’m thankful for the more-than-human world, which continues to help realize my own animality. And to those who are mentioned throughout the text and footnotes, I’m honoured to have your names and research written in this thesis so readers can acknowledge the pillars of this work. Additionally, citing the work of Indigenous, Black, POC, women, LGBTQAI+, Two-Spirited thinkers is a small step in the refusal to reproduce colonial actions.

To the people I’ve named and to those I haven’t, I’m neverendingly appreciative of you.
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Prolegomenon

This dissertation, which is part of the requirements of the PhD in Art and Visual Culture (Studio stream) at Western University, focuses on my artistic research and production, with the intention to provide an integrated framework for engaging with the knowledge and creative outputs of my work. Aligning text and visual materials together, this dissertation consists of a written thesis and a body of artwork developed during my studies. Both are meant to play a synergistic role in representing my doctoral research, which cannot be articulated purely in written form, requiring creative art production to express and respond to the themes addressed in the thesis.

As a whole, this dissertation seeks to problematize human-centric perspectives and hegemonic forces, specifically Western beliefs that encourage distance between the concept of animality and the position of the human, beliefs that arguably enable environmental degradation and planetary destruction, as well. Through the creation of artworks, which were displayed in a culminating exhibition at McIntosh Gallery at Western University near the end of my studies, and through this written thesis, based on literature, scientific facts, my observations of works by other artists, and personal experiences and memories, I look for possibilities that might contribute to the mending of socio-cultural relationships, the building of multispecies alliances, and the supporting of environmental remediation.

The thesis dossier and the exhibited artwork together function expressively as doctoral research to recognize the complexity of current geological times, which parallels the need to recognize animality and multispecies relationality. The written thesis is divided into three chapters which address various fields of research pertaining to a broad exploration of human and nonhuman relations. In Chapter One, I present a historical and artistic overview of animality, along with the concept's use and misuse, and I situate my own position on the topic. Chapter Two explores qualities of connectivity between the human and the nonhuman through the concept of biophilia, with support from scientific research and artworks and projects, alongside illuminating the need for environmental remediation. Chapter Three expands on my artistic methodology, including the neologism I coined: Intraspeciation. Here, I also discuss where I situate my research with regard to geological time, more specifically, citing the Chthulucene as
an alternative perspective to the Anthropocene—often recognized as our current geological era/epoch. Proceeding the chapters and conclusion is a dossier of images and descriptions. The purpose of the dossier is to highlight the development and presentation of my exhibition *NODES: Animality and Kinship* and to show thorough documentation of the works in the exhibition. Following the dossier is a supplementary appendix that lists and elaborates on related creative projects that I undertook during the approximately four-and-a-half years of doctoral studies. This is meant to indicate the correlations and crossovers between my doctoral research and external projects.
Introduction

The premise of this studio-based dissertation project revolves around the notion of animality. The research on concepts of animality in this thesis is historically informed and uses a more-than-human perspective in addressing connective qualities between species. This perspective intends to problematize a spectrum of human-centric, socio-cultural, and scientific frameworks. The writing in this thesis is invested in revealing such frameworks as hegemonic forces that have enabled rampant environmental degradation, promoted destructive relationships between humans and between humans and nonhumans, and established distance between humans and their personal experiences of animality. This research is informed by literature pertaining to animal studies, by ideas found in artworks that expand upon these discussions, and by my own personal experiences.

In this thesis, I consider three main areas of focus, all of which are interlinked. Each topic includes propositions regarding remediation and ongoingness when it comes to multispecies alliances and recuperative measures for the environment. These areas of focus are the following: 1. Animality—a contemporary and open perspective on human existence and human-animal relationships; 2. Biophilia—a concept that Edward O. Wilson expanded upon to address innate interconnectivity between species and to promote care for nonhuman species, including the vegetal/botanical; and 3. The Chthulucene—a contemporary perspective on our current epoch conceptualized by Donna Haraway which addresses rewording the Anthropocene with human and nonhuman participation. In addition, I introduce the term intraspeciation—a neologism to express a holistic approach to animality, which guides my artistic practice. Drawing from these areas of focus, my research explores ways of stimulating and encouraging new types of actions for mutual agency between and amongst human and nonhuman species.

It is important to note that, while I use these topics within my research to critique and to form my positionality, all three topics (animality, biophilia and the Chthulucene) have ties to colonial history. Animality has been used as a term to subjugate Indigenous and Black people, and people of colour, women, as well as those with lower economic status. Biologist Edward O. Wilson and his conception of the Biophilia Hypothesis has Darwinian influences—Charles Darwin has made significantly racist statements within his research. Lastly, The Chthulucene, while not constructed in such a way to have direct relation to this influence, takes similar form of “Cthulhu”—a fictional character in H.P. Lovecraft’s novel “The Call of Cthulhu” and this author is known for constructing racist metaphors in his writing. Haraway also explores colonial histories of folklore and Christian mythologies. These are just a few examples to state that the complexities of colonial history is not ignored in this thesis. My intention is to remain informed, critiquing subjects while remixing their core principles for more inclusive and (re)generative propositions.
Silvia Battista suggests that reconsidering the privileged human position in the world aspires to stop viewing humanity as “detached from its creations, from the cosmos and the environment…[and view it] rather as entangled in a web of relations in which humans are not the only agentive actor.”2 While a framework that reconsiders the positionality of the human would necessitate a vast study, I limit my analysis to a series of exemplary and supportive moments and topics that illuminate the kinship3 between species, and that problematizes previous as well as current human-centric, Western-centric perspectives. My aim is to unpack human-animal constructs in order to illuminate historical understandings of animality and biophilia in our current epoch, while at the same time relating my own artistic approach to animality and interconnectivity. In seeking to dismantle hegemonic power structures, I put forward animality as a holistic term that explores ideas and propositions for restructuring and ameliorating relationships between human animals, nonhuman animals, and the environment. This brings me to ask questions such as, In what ways do we seek to alter and/or escape the designation of being human? What does this do for life perspectives and relationships between species? With these questions in mind, my research considers the ways in which animality, both as a subject and framework, might be utilized to refocus perspectives when it comes to mending socio-cultural relationships and supporting environmental remediation.

Since the 19th century, predominant scientific findings have distinguished comparisons between human and nonhuman through differences. People with power continue to use the term animal to oppress nonhuman species, and to directly and inferentially subjugate and oppress people of colour, Indigenous people, women, and those of lesser economic status. Being careful

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3 Kinship has proven to be a complex term, and here, I want to celebrate its many applications, its various meanings to various cultures, and to also acknowledge its possible overuse and metaphorization in academia. This term has been pinned more lately, used especially by white writers/thinkers who often misuse the term or metaphorize it, contributing to a harmful idea of “oneness.” I use kinship, not in a way to force supposed obligatory relationships or to impede existing ones, but to emphasize the inherent connective qualities human animals have to the more-than-human world. This is especially emphasized at the level of the microscopic where we physically share biological similarities. This is not meant to undermine the agency of the individual or impose a “we should all get along” attitude, and I acknowledge that in many aspects, kinship is earned. Rather, I address the term to encourage thinking around the reframing of animality and to open perspectives to question the exclusive outlook on human liveliness (this is what I mean by decentering the human)—to consider more frequent moments of connection to the more-than-human world.
not to reproduce colonialist practices, I seek ways of removing the emphasis on the human—particularly as a counterpoint to negative ideologies advanced by hegemonic forces—to instead assert that we are animal. In so doing, I intend to maintain a critical awareness of a breadth of socio-historical and cultural perspectives, and to investigate ways of decolonizing. Here, I want to acknowledge that much of the current literature within fields engaging at the intersection of art and environmental preservation requires a forthright indebtedness and recognition of Indigenous knowledge and its full credibility in academia and culture. Sabastian De Line states,

Part of the work of decoloniality within the humanities and sciences is ceasing to rely upon Western philosophy and scientific knowledges as the basis of continual knowledge production within academia. Rather than attempting to replace, repair or refute Cartesian decapitations of intellect and body, or by relegating Indigenous scholarship to footnotes, settler feminist scholarship needs to begin to actively promote Indigenous scholarship if it is to decolonize itself from its own regimes.4

While the scope of my project and my own cultural and academic background do not qualify me to undertake what I would think of as a fully decolonized project, my approach intends to demonstrate radical inclusivity as a commitment to moving intentionally in the direction of decolonization and intersectional ecofeminism. In this thesis, I aim to be thoughtful, respectful, and engaged regarding traditions and cultures outside of my own, as well as attempt to appropriately integrate the breadth of my own experiences and knowledge.

This investigation into animality alongside biophilia and environmental awareness through understandings of the Chthulucene are topics that are and have been consistently present in my research and artistic practice. As misconceptions and wrongdoings continue to disrupt and encroach on the remnants of our biosphere and the species that continue to co-exist within it, I revive the importance of the more-than-human in my practice. This thesis encourages the expansion of moral considerations beyond solely human ones for the betterment and fortification of multispecies relations and relationality, which will ultimately, I believe, make our existence as humans more productive in maintaining and improving the treatment of our irreplaceable earth and all of its inhabitants.

“Be prepared to cast off agency, structure, psyche, time, and space along with every other philosophical and anthropological category, no matter how deeply rooted in common sense they may appear to be.”

CHAPTER ONE: Following Animality Towards Kinship

For a long time, it has been difficult for animals not to be stupid [bêtes], or even very stupid. Of course, there have always been generous thinkers, amateur enthusiasts, and those who are stigmatized as unrepentant anthropomorphists.

- Vinciane Despret, *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions?*

To begin this first chapter, I take a historical and notional approach to explore the term *animality*. To define the term within the scope of my research, I refer to histories of colonialism, segregation, and dehumanization. In the process, I analyze moments in history and literature where the term has been used and misused, and I look to reframe animality to reclaim it as a positionality during our current epoch that is in extreme need of inclusivity, belongingness, and ongoingness. Specifically, I raise the possibility of reclaiming animality as a positionality within our relations to one another, human and nonhuman. Once I build the historical structure and sculpt my trajectory, I investigate modes of creating through contemporary art—including my own work as part of this research-creation project—to, both, explore ways in which animality has been visually articulated, and understand animality using different approaches to thinking and creating. Lastly, I speculate on theories and stories of interconnectivity and nonhumanism to challenge preconceived notions regarding animality, and to decenter semblances of anthropocentrism. The structure of this chapter, along with the ones that follow, is free flowing in thought, in that ideas and topics follow one another unconstrained by any sequential or topical organizational parameter; this approach is meant to conceptualize the way my research is interrelatable, and to mimic the organic and constructive manner in which I have gained knowledge.

Defining Animality – An Introduction; Scope; and Moments

In the literature pertaining to animal studies, specifically Western theories of animality, it is clear that nonhuman animals have been regularly discussed in the past as well as in the present as being wild, part of nature, and separate from—as well as located below—humans on a

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This conception of the term animality is often informed by whiteness and used by people with power. The hegemonic structures present in historical literature tend to situate animals beneath humans, as well as establishing hierarchies of peoples, serving to colonize and oppress mainly those who are Indigenous, African, and of Asian decent. As Mel Y. Chen writes: Animality is applied derogatorily towards “laborers in a capitalist economy, women within patriarchal structures, medicalized and de-subjectified disabled persons, persons of color subjected to racist psychologies, and persons exposed to the effects, or aftereffects, of economies put into effect during colonization.”

Since the 19th century, scientific findings have distinguished comparisons between humans and nonhumans through differences, and the term animal continues to be used derogatorily to oppress nonhuman species, as well as to subjugate people of colour and those of lesser economic status. This brings an opportunity for me to acknowledge my own subject position. I am a white settler and hold privilege as a cis-woman. It is my intention to avoid reproducing colonialist practices when I remove emphasis on the human. Instead, I assert that we are animal, and I wonder if, collectively, we can reclaim animality as a term of identification, to stand for a positionality of remediation and progress. I also want to acknowledge that environmental issues and politics involving settler-colonization cannot be resolved exclusively through progressive academic scholarship (despite this being necessary and ongoing work), and I also acknowledge the massive amount of work that needs to be done outside of institutions and especially within them to diversify, “de-white-tify,” and defund. As such, I argue that issues of whiteness and injustice and other destructive forms of power and hierarchies are vital topics in a

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2 I believe this is a good spot to note that there are clear limitations to my research, as the scope of animality is vast and applicable to many themes, topics, and concerns. From an array of correlations such as animal activism, religious implications, the Animal other, and more, there are areas I leave untouched here for the sake of focusing on a comprehensible position on animality that decenters the Human. My position counters conventional views of animality that have ongoingly exploited superiority and blindness to our connections to each other (human and nonhuman) and our rootedness in animality. As well, nature as an idea/notion and space has proven to be complex. Therefore, in the context of my research, I refer to the idea of nature as a human ideology of the natural biosphere, despite its alterations, destruction, and “grooming” caused by human activity. I acknowledge that this also complicates what is so-called natural. I also refer to the term nature as where human and nonhuman economies reside.


4 I use the term positionality throughout this thesis notionally in stating that personal values, views, and experience in time and space influence how one understands the world. Positionality also represents a critical understanding that my background and current position in the world plays a part in the production of academic knowledge.
conversation involving animality and our relations to each other and to nature, the biosphere, and the environment.

To proceed with a historical overview of the term animality, I believe it is important to give context by exploring more standard definitions. The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines animality as a noun that represents, “1. The animal world, and 2. The nature or behaviour of animals.” This provides a clear and rather straightforward definition of the term, and I believe its purposeful broadness—referring to an entire world or to an ambiguous nature—is helpful in defining relatedness between human and nonhuman worlds. The Oxford English Dictionary defines animality as a noun that represents,

1. The state or fact of being animal; animal nature or life; vital power. Now rare.; 2. The qualities and characteristics of an animal as opposed to distinctively human qualities; (in humans) physical, instinctive behaviour or character. Contrasted with humanity; and 3. Animals collectively; the animal kingdom. Obsolete.

I’d like to revisit the second point of the Oxford Dictionary’s definition, which describes animality as physical, instinctive behaviour. There are moments in historical literature that exemplify this point. However, they lack the part of the definition that sets the qualities of animals in direct contrast to human qualities. Rather, the animality is in fact applied to the human animal throughout, such as in the following biblical reference from 1616: “By living soul, here is meant, the naturall estate of life in this world, where men doe eat and drink, procreate children &c; which in the world to come, shalbe otherwise, when this animalitie, or souly state, shalbe changed into spiritualtie.” Another biblical reference from 1653 reads: “Every man…hath these two Principles in him…Divinity and Animality, Spirit and Flesh.” Let’s jump ahead to 2005 to quote Martin Heidegger: “It is thus animality which characterizes man as living being…It is…humanity that characterizes man as both a living and rational being.”

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7 Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “Animality.”
8 Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “Animality.”
9 Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “Animality.”
humans are animals, in this quote, Heidegger nevertheless emphasizes the animal quality of being a living human. In a general sense, animality in its vagueness was historically applicable to life as human and nonhuman, and it wasn’t until its eventual redefining by people in power who misconstrued the term that it came to reference negative connotations and insult. My definition of animality encompasses a need for social change and an acknowledgement of our verifiable human condition for the purpose of decentering the accumulative destructive behaviours we’ve come to adapt; my definition of animality reimages current times via reclaiming the term.

Developing my own understanding of and reclamation of the term animality requires looking to theorists who displace a human/animal binary in their discussions. One such theorist, mentioned above, is Mel Y. Chen, whose work on animacy has resonance with my own developing definitions of animality. Chen in Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Matter, and Queer Affect reconsiders conditions of animacies and working ontologies of hierarchical bodies, meaning some bodies have been deemed more important than others. Chen draws out an interpretation of the term animacy with the support of queer and BIPOC theory, critical studies, and disability theory in correlation with recent debate around sexuality, race, environment, and affect. They state that, “animacies interrogates how the fragile division between animate and inanimate—that is, beyond human and animal—is relentlessly produced and policed and maps important political consequences of that distinction.” Chen uses animacy in a general literary sense to refer to the sentience of nouns and associated grammatical effects. They also interpret the term more widely, exploring what happens when people and nonhuman animals enter the calculus of animacy, and alongside, they use the term as a central construct in the replacement of life or liveliness.

Chen’s use of animacy leaves room for interpretation, whether in their idea of how the term activates language, or in their references to

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10 Chen, Animacies, 2.
11 Chen, 3.
12 Chen, 3.
hierarchical living. I see an interrelatedness between my use of animality and Chen’s use of animacy, in that both address the complexity of living within a hierarchical structure. However, whereas animacy alone is somewhat unclear and expansive in its meaning, the inquiry and resignification I seek within animality, to me, confirms a bodily presentness and awareness of animality as a personal identifier of being animal.

In interrogating semantics, Chen states, “the anima, animus, animal, and animate are, I argue, not vagaries or templatic zones of undifferentiated matter, but in fact work as complexly racialized and indeed humanized notions.”13 Furthermore, “if language normally and habitually distinguishes human and inhuman, live and dead, but then in certain circumstances wholly fails to do so, what might this tell us about the porosity of biopolitical logics themselves?”14 Chen is talking about the failure of definitive definitions to distinguish terms. The tension between definitions of such terms and their actual activation has caused the tangling of perception and meaning, contributing to a larger framework of anthropocentricity that arguably works alongside a cultural hierarchy that categorizes privilege—some human animals above others, and all human animals above nonhuman animals/species.

Continuing with semantics, I see animacy as a blanket term, and animality lies snug as a bug within in. Animality has a clear activation under the broader idea of animacy in that animality means possessing direct animal qualities, and (in the way that I use it to inform my practice from the perspective of a human) it speaks to being alive and dying as a not-completely-organic animal alongside other animals and organisms.15 Animacy allows for terms such as animality to come alive with agency. In this section, I emphasize my affirmed avoidance of egocentrism when I use the term animality, as I see animality as a position of co-existence alongside other modes of livelihood for other critters. In this vein, I consider animality:

13 Chen, 7.
14 Chen, 7.
15 As a side note, I often think about what organic really means as humans are no longer organic in the way I thought we were. To give example, scientists are finding microplastic pollution in the blood of 80% of people who are tested, which certainly extends to nonhuman species being affected by such pollution and products as well. Damian Carrington, “Microplastics Found in Human Blood for First Time,” The Guardian, March 24, 2022. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/mar/24/microplastics-found-in-human-blood-for-first-time.
not [as] a matter of the creatures that we “know” to be nonhuman (for instance, the accepted logics of pets or agricultural livestock and our stewardship of them), so much as a flexible rubric that collides with and undoes any rigid understanding of animacy. This is a paradoxical space about which we both claim to know much and yet very little, that resists unbinding from its humanist formulation and from its strange admixture between science and racist imperialism.\textsuperscript{16}

Both animacy and animality contextualize the politically dominant hierarchy of species, which is a system greatly affected and shaped by colonial order, capitalism, and Christian cosmologies.\textsuperscript{17} More specifically, animality, with associations to race and hierarchy, has the potential to reframe positionality:

It is commonly understood that animality “sticks” indelibly to specific races. However, thinking these images within the rubric of what I am calling animacy theory, we can see how that animality can shift, attaching itself to different kinds of groups. That the domain of the animal is treated as a zone of deferral means that animality subtends a great deal below the white human man at the top, who in spite of his own superior position, can be dragged down by his own queer association. Paying attention to the relationality among the figures allows us to see the complex queer intimacies involved.\textsuperscript{18}

In my project of reclaiming animality with relationality and complexity, the term \textit{queer}, as quoted above, sits under the blanket of animacy and can help define the positionality of animality in my research.

Within the confinements of academic writing, queer as a term is understood as “probing beyond the bounds of normativity, taking on the load of rejection, resistance, negativity, indiscretion, quirkiness, and marginalization.”\textsuperscript{19} Not only does queer theory explore areas outside of the supposed normal but it also finds normativity hiding in places we erroneously think of as nonnormal, which claims heteronormativity as false and oppressive. As complementary to the rejection of heteronormativity, Chen proposes:

an optic—or, rather, a sensibility—that seeks to make consistently available the animalities that live together with race and with queerness, the animalities that we might say have crawled into the woodwork and await recognitions, and, concurrently, the

\textsuperscript{16} Chen, \textit{Animacies}, 105.
\textsuperscript{17} Chen, 30.
\textsuperscript{18} Chen, 115.
\textsuperscript{19} Chen, 68.
racialized animalities already here. What, for instance, of the queerness of some human racialized animalities? What of the animality residing in human racialized queerness? Putting the term queer into the context of animality reframes the normativity of suppressing our interconnectedness and challenges supposedly “proper” ways of being human, in this instance, within Western belief systems. This is undeniably a privileged position of reclamation; I open this discussion as a proposition to redefine animality, and in so doing, I suggest the possibility of using the term progressively and referentially as a position and concept without insult. Animality as insult artificially shifts nonhuman animals on the scale of the hierarchy of species, which weighs sentience in a way that puts human animals at the top, “this presumed superiority of humans is itself duratively supported and legitimated by ‘modern’ states in a transnational system of (agricultural) capital. Yet to consider the biopolitical ramifications wrought by these separated categories is extremely complex, since ‘humans’ are not all treated one way and ‘animals’ are not uniformly treated another way.” This is why phrases that refer to animal poverty, such as “they treated me like a dog,” lack universality as many pet companions are treated very well and many humans are treated horribly and suffer in conditions of degradation. Likewise, applying insulting and ableist words to disability and reduced brain function, such as vegetable, ignores that there are numerous areas of importance in the consumption of vegetables, and that there is an abundance of multiple uses for vegetables and plants. In this context, it is important to think about animality critically, as the term itself has historically served as a crux for defining human from animal and for simultaneously combining the two.

20 Chen, 104.
21 Chen, 89.
22 Ron Broglio defines animal poverty as a human presumption that nonhuman species have limited faculties and therefore have poverty in the ability to reason, their language, and their use of tools. “Their skills are lessened by measuring them against every standard in which we consider ourselves superior, and by this superiority, we differentiate ourselves from them.” Ron Broglio, Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals and Art (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) xvi.
23 In extension of challenging using the term vegetable derogatorily, The Pelling Lab has recently studied asparagus for its possibility to treat spinal cord injuries by the use of its fibres for reconstructing living tissue. Additionally, the lab conducted an experiment that involved carving an apple into the shape of a human ear, which had human cells growing on it after it was processed. It was later demonstrated that the scaffolds stimulated the formation of blood vessels, allowing it to be alive. Pelling Lab: Augmented Biology, “Andrew on the TED2020 Mainstage: Could We Treat Spinal Cord Injuries with Asparagus?” University of Ottawa, accessed November 29, 2022, https://www.pellinglab.net/?fbclid=PAAbmOaAjj05aAeHeOHHjMb2ieYNKBGIK2ciBbNmYr0Ez0-2e3QXulhAZU.
24 Chen, Animacies, 90.
My aim in addressing a historical scope of animality, and in raising the possibility of readdressing the term, is to ultimately create change. Within this scope of research, it seems the term animality is often avoided because of its tightly packed meanings. I ask with vulnerability, how do we create change if discomfort is what deters us from addressing difficult questions, and in such addressing, can we reclaim the term in a powerful way that challenges the combined normativity and ignorance around the word? In investigating animality in this way, I seek to denormalize how animality has been historically used and misused to oppress and separate, and to address the complexities of many structures of inequality. The need to dehumanize in a form of insult is one of the weakest points in a globally shared insecurity about being human. This weakness and the contradictory use of the term animality allows me to wiggle within the chaos to reach for ongoingness and progress. Given language’s ability to be manipulated, animality has the potential to shift for animal futurities.

Catherine Parry speculates on the categorical division between animal and people and addresses moments of fluidity between these two predetermined categories by exploring examples such as a fictional narrative from Indra Sinha’s 2017 novel Animal’s People. This novel is a story of industrial tragedy, westernization, and identity, amongst other themes. Parry analyzes Sinha’s story through the animalization of the main character, a nineteen-year old orphan named Animal, who suffers from a severely deformed spine that forces him to walk on all fours. This boy is addressed zoomorphically by the application of animalistic attributes as a part of his condition, hence his given name; “His outrageously disfigured body functions as the symbol of an exploited body politic, as an interrogation of racist discourses which depend upon the inferiority implied by the term ‘animal’, and a dismantling of the notion that there are stable conceptions of humanity and animality with stable relations to material bodies.” Parry suggests that Animal’s failure to meet societal standards and conventions grants him a name that, supposedly, defines him as an improper representation of humanity. She also notes, however, that Animal’s disfigurement is not “a wholly negative transformation; his deformed body both challenges the insistence of cultural figurations and points to ways of reimagining those key

26 Parry, 15.
figures and symbols that impair what could be rich and compassionate relationships among humans, and between humans and other animals.”

Animal’s story illustrates the urgent need to challenge negative connotations associated with being animal, connotations such as being savage, irrational, and having limited intelligence. Contradictorily to those who have condoned such treatment, rationality does not appear to guarantee the human as an advanced species, given the culpability of humans in environmental crisis, economic poverty, racial discrimination, gender-based violence, and as agents of the deleterious effects of capitalism. In this way, the concept of humanity as implicitly correspondent with ideals of rationality is an imagined construct based on historical and cultural ideals. Parry notes:

The basic biological principle of a human is the same as that of any animal; that is, all animals are dynamic living organisms characterised by voluntary movement and a capacity to make complex reactions to stimuli. But this lowest common denominator definition is an insufficient explanation for human experience of self and world. Although humans may on one level know themselves to be nothing more than an, at present, particularly successful animal species among many other more or less successful species, on another level they conceive of themselves as distinctively different to other animals.

As species and as individuals of matter, there are observable, admirable, and measurable ways that animals are physically and cognitively distinct from one another. Nonetheless, the stark division between human and animal that has been historically ingrained often relies on inconclusive, hazy, and perplexing assumptions. The primacy of the division between human and animal over the distinctions between animal species, I argue, has been developed out of a lack of deep and objective analysis, and as a way of promoting hegemonic superiority.

In her article “Writing the Body Wild: Primatological Narrative and Spaces of Animality,” Rebecca Bishop critically explores animality in the context of historical figures in Euro-Western imagery, such as “wild men” exploring “wild spaces.” Bishop argues for the inclusion of primatology autobiographies within such narratives, stating that contemporary

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27 Parry, 16.
28 Parry, 20.
humanities scholarship has increasingly become curious about animal bodies and human origins, and that, as a subject of interdisciplinary investigation, the animal has served as a key site in processing human self-definition. Yet, Bishop notes, “within this body of scholarship scant attention has been paid to the way in which both animals and ‘animality’ itself have figured in historical conceptualisations of the embodied human subject.” This scant regard emphasizes divisional constraints between human and animal, which impose themselves by disrupting thinking around human animality and the corporeality of animal terrain. The process of critically examining humans and nonhumans in the context of animality, on the other hand, emphasizes relatability that speaks beyond constructs of human livelihood. Likewise, “Howling Wolves and Other Beasts Animals and Monstrosity in the Middle Ages” by Luuk Houwen follows a historical lineage and traces how the human/animal divide was established within a westernized framework similar to the framework described by Bishop. Houwen states, “the medieval period inherited the classical hierarchical model of the Great Chain of Being, in which human beings occupy a position below the angels but above animals, plants, and inanimate matter.” As such, some scholars, including myself, argue that the human/animal split, and the corresponding nature/culture divide is a product of Western epistemology. The argument I put forward in redefining animality is, in a way, a reflexive response to the popular belief in westernized methods and opinions that espouse the abovementioned divisions, and the validity those divisions eagerly express.

In 2012, Brock Bastian, Kimberly Costello, Steve Loughnan, and Gordon Hoson compared three studies that examined tendencies to frame human and animal similarities, as well as consequences of moral concern for other humans, through self-other comparisons. The authors found that “comparing animals to humans expands moral concern and reduces speciesism; however, comparing humans to animals does not appear to produce these same effects.” It is

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30 Bishop, 136.
32 Bishop, “Writing the Body Wild,” 136.
observable that we, as a species, are consumed by our humanness and therefore have difficulty finding relatability to nonhuman species, unless it is relatable to our humanness: “In these cases, the subject of comparison (animals) is viewed as having few unique features compared to the referent of comparison (humans). Conversely, when animals are the referent of the human-animal comparison, humans are likely to be viewed as relatively dissimilar to animals. This is because humans are viewed as having many unique features when compared to animals.”34 This seemingly never-ending domineering-type thinking that reeks of egotistical superiority is incredibly damaging for people, cultures, and relationships amongst humans, humans and nonhumans, and the environment, and, I argue, it comes from a place of self-abandonment of animality.

As a way of further explaining the layers of anthropocentrism, Andreas Hejnol in “Ladders, Trees, Complexity, and Other Metaphors in Evolutionary Thinking” uses the metaphor of a ladder to refer to the hierarchical arrangement of organisms, ranging from “simple” to “complex” animals, which remains a common arrangement presented in scientific literature today.35 Hejnol explains, “such metaphors have depicted life as a slow but inexorable march upward—up a stairway of creatures with humans at the top, positioned as the most advanced beings.”36 This stratified understanding of life represents so-called progress as a linear concept and, according to “ladder thinking,” those who are deemed more complex sit on a higher level of competency and therefore agency.37 This brings me to ask, who codifies the level of complexity that pertains to a given species, and how is this complexity determined? The interminable evolutionary processes of any given organism shows a lineage of complex adaptation, and “it is important to emphasize that all animals alive today have had similar time to evolve from the last common ancestor. Evolution is an ongoing process; no group of animals got stuck in their ancestral state.”38 Thus, distinguishing levels of complexity necessarily involves the kind of

34 Bastian, Costello, Loughnan, and Hodson, 422.
36 Hejnol, G87.
37 Hejnol, G87.
38 Hejnol, G97.
narrow thinking that contributes to the hierarchization of species, and displays the limitations of defining complex beings based on biological categories alone.

**Being/Becoming Animal – A Call to Decenter**

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari use the term *becoming* as a metaphysical notion and a state of primal condition, revealing a relationship between the human and animal, whereby becoming means “becoming-animal.”

Widely used in animal studies and interdisciplinary practices, the concept of becoming-animal challenges misconceptions of identity, as becoming produces nothing other than itself: a body that coexists among many others. Using, instead, a nomadic and rhizomatic framework, Deleuze and Guattari propose becoming-animal as a transformation, with movement involving the idea of progression. The concept of becoming-animal is a process of un-humanizing by uncovering the limitations and instabilities within a hierarchical system that places humans at the tip of pre-eminence.

The concept of becoming prompts me to investigate speculative questions such as, “what makes us human?” and “what is it like to be animal?” Deleuze and Guattari suggest that these “very special” moments of becoming-animal traverse human beings, sweeping them away in the process, which does not, metaphorically speaking, affect the animal any less than the human.

Ron Broglio, in contrast, speculates on the preconceived notion that there is a distinct separation between human and animal worlds, and explores what he calls “contact zones” which embrace being a human animal. Deleuze and Guattari explore ways of becoming animal from the common understanding of the position of being a human, suggesting that it may be unnatural to realize oneself as an animal. Therefore, they use the theory to stimulate the interpretation of the world from the view of something/someone new. Instead of suggesting a new form of being, Broglio suggests stepping away from current divides and spotlights the idea that becoming encourages the collapse of cultural cache. He offers new concepts of “thinking about humans and

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40 Deleuze and Guattari, 272.
41 Deleuze and Guattari, 237.
animals outside the hegemony of the privileged interiority of the human subject.”  

42 The privilege Broglio refers to exemplifies human actions that leverage human bodies over other bodies; aspects of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming-animal similarly leverage human bodies in that their concept distances or others animality as a personal disposition.

In The Animal That Therefore I Am, Jacques Derrida tracks the human/animal binary in comparison and contrast to major philosophers and theorists such as Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lacan, and Levinas, revealing how most theorists have relied upon untenable formations of the human as divisionally different from all other species on earth.  

43 In his lecture-turned article, Derrida discusses what it might mean to be—or to follow—an animal. Derrida uses the term “the Animal” as a way of deconstructing the human predisposition to make generalizations about nonhuman species.  

44 The theorist defends our human similarities to nonhuman species by asserting that the only difference between Man and so-called beast is that humans are aware of when they are naked.  

45 This is arguably a humorous display of anthropocentrism regarding nonhuman consciousness in the sense that Derrida is overly confident in his understanding of nonhuman awareness and agency. Derrida’s definition of the term the Animal seems uncontainable, misidentifying an objective meaning; he approaches his own pet companion, a cat, with compassion, but seems to lack the capacity to acknowledge his very own animality. Thus, the cat is a pageant for curiousness, and in some respects, surface-level observation for Derrida.

While Heidegger denies that humans are animals, Derrida denies much difference between the two and foregrounds the ability for humans to be open to ways of being. In contrast to Heidegger, in “The Question of Human Animality in Heidegger,” Chad Engelland acknowledges uniqueness through human animality and suggests that “our peculiarly human openness to being takes up and transfigures the significance of our animal inheritance. The classical distinction between condition and cause explains how this can be, and the concrete

42 Broglio, Surface Encounters, 85.
44 Derrida and Wills, 372.
45 Derrida and Wills, 372.
46 Derrida and Wills, 374.
action of pointing to share the world illustrates how something bodily can enter into the openness to being.” In this light, the theory of animality consists of reframing through open, individual thinking, where looking to nonhuman species for relatability allows for both an understanding of a complex living system and connectedness. We can find our own positionality within animality in meaningful and unique ways.

In line with Derrida’s argument, though more empathetically observant, Thomas Sebeok defines animal as a biological category and a living system that is maintained by a system of negative entropy, and as a nomadic combination of atoms that make a living body. I argue that Sebeok’s definition, which is grounded in biology, prompts the resistance of human exceptionalism by decentering the preconceived notion that human bodies are uniquely constructed; rather, as Sebeok points out, the internal order of things in a human body consists of many nomadic atoms and organisms. Sebeok’s conception of animal, therefore, provides an opportunity to suggest mutual agency and complexity for the human and nonhuman, rather than presumptuously othering nonhuman species. In this context, acknowledging animality as a complex framework of existence can be a progressive route to understanding the way in which various species co-exist. This provides an important shift in how we conventionally view animal poverty and becoming-animal.

Animality and Art

Animality as a conceptual topic in art has historically been represented by imagery of nonhuman animals in various forms. Predominantly since the 20th century, there has been an increased interest in the animal as a subject and artistic topic in, especially, westernized art practices. In contrast to exploring what it means to be animal, I would like to explore the potential of animality as a reflective quality in artistic works in a way that describes being human. In my practice, my intention is to avoid othering and anthropomorphising nonhuman

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species to reclaim animality as a sharable concept amongst human and nonhuman species. In some work, artists display nonhuman species in a way that others them, such as in the work of Damien Hirst—for example, his 1991 work *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, which encapsulates a large shark in formaldehyde for viewers to examine. Artists represent nonhuman species in other ways, such as by performing being animal in metamorphosis, as in the work of Oleg Kulik. Kulik is a performance artist, sculptor, photographer, and curator who is best known for his controversial performances where he assumes the role of a dog, such as in his 1997 performance *I Bite America and America Bites Me* (figure 1).

Working as a parody of Joseph Beuys’ original 1974 performance work *I Like America and America Likes Me* where he secludes himself and a live coyote in an art gallery, Kulik’s performance involved the artist arriving to the gallery space as a dog rather than a man, a role in which he remained for the length of his two-week visit. He lived as a dog in a heavily secured doghouse built inside the gallery space. The performance was in response to the radical religious and societal conservatism Kulik felt in Russia at the time, and in his performance, he was aiming for “a conscious falling out of the human horizon.”  

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Kulik’s display of animalistic movements and actions in the performance work is exemplary of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of becoming-animal. Giovanni Aloi in *Art and Animals* also refers to Kulik’s work as a becoming, and in its purest form, there is “…an elusive participatory movement that may stake out a flight from the contingencies and restrictions of our human condition, in other words, a kind of ‘un-humaning’ of the human in favour of embracing new and unknown trajectories.”\(^{50}\) Although Kulik’s use of animality does not directly confirm a human animality, it allows for a leap of imagination, going beyond the comfortable and rational, suggesting plausibility in different systems of rationality and being.\(^{51}\)

I have found that many projects and works that explore animality in some way do so through performance. But many of these performances show mimicry of nonhuman species. This

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\(^{51}\) Aloi, 59.
brings me to wonder, is it more productive to examine our humanness by removing ourselves from it? Works that show the subject to be so completely unhuman that they are animal, in fact reveals the truest of our form, which is closeness to animality.

Lynda Birke, Mette Bryld and Nina Lykke in “Animal Performances: An Exploration of Intersections Between Feminist Science Studies and Studies of Human/Animal Relationships” stress the importance of intersectional theories in addressing the complexity of the relationship between humans and other animals. The authors use the notion of performativity as an example in an attempt to break down boundaries and activate the notion of animality. Birke, Bryld and Lykke use performativity as a way to challenge the dichotomy between human and culture, and animals and nature. The authors argue that “…animality is a doing or becoming, not an essence; so, performativity allows us to think about the complexity of human/animal interrelating as a kind of choreography, a co-creation of behaviour.”52 Animality as a becoming-of performance can be seen in the form of animalization, seen in the work of artistic duo Krõõt Juurak and Alex Bailey, for example, who have been taking house calls since 2014 to perform for pet companions. During these performances, Juurak and Bailey humorously walk on all fours, making animalistic movements and sounds, attempting to catch the attention of the pets. Their assumptions regarding the pets’ taste in entertainment strives to reverse the role from entertaining the companions, to see the world from the viewpoint of pets.53 Nonhuman animals are constantly within our gaze and fascination and this sort of exploration into pet reversal, or in a sense, stealing of the spotlight, consists of self-interest in that it assumes that nonhuman animals are interested in our odd human performances. While I agree that animality is legible through aspects of performativity, I believe our actions and thoughts derive from being animals intrinsically, and therefore reflect an essence of animality.

Diana Thater is an American artist-curator whose films, videos, and installations explore tensions between the wild and tame, natural environments and technologically mediated reality within precarious relationships between culture and nature. She often portrays animals and

natural phenomena as subject matter in her immersive and ambient works to encourage new ways of viewing the world. Comparing natural and manmade ecosystems, Thater draws on issues of conservation and considers themes such as anti-captivity and looks to the possibility of improving relationships between human and nonhuman species. Thater actively engages with situations that threaten the natural environment and is interested in exploring the complexity of spaces that involve human and animal cultures. In an Art21 video interview produced by Véronique Bernard and Ian Forster, and interviewed by Deborah Dickson, Thater asserts that she “would like for humans to recognize that they belong to a complicated and complex ecosystem that includes all kinds of other beings.” \(^{54}\) In incorporating nonhuman species in often highly human-centric spaces such as galleries, she projects nonhuman species and landscapes so that viewers can incorporate themselves within those settings, such as within a pod of swimming dolphins.

In a tribute to her earlier work, Theater created the work *Delphine* in 1999 (figure 2) with the intention of giving viewers an opportunity to feel their full selves in the presence of other selves. \(^{55}\) *Delphine* is a colourful installation where LED lights and video footage of dolphins from various angles activate the space, simulating the animals’ underwater environment.

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\(^{55}\) Bernard and Forster, “Diana Thater.”
The work has a curious tension with dimensionality as the dolphins and their motion are transformed and flattened in a slightly distorted projection on the wall. Related to the action of filming animals, interestingly, Thater once said that, at times, when she is in the presence of animals while filming them, she feels scared. This comment has me pondering, as I could readily assume that her interest in animal welfare puts her in an ideal position for realizing herself as animal. In the context of Parry’s argument regarding the dissociation of animality, I wonder if Thater’s fearfulness in the presence of animals distances herself from her own animality, or is it a realization of the abilities of other animals amongst her own animality? The act of filming animals, seen in such works such as Delphine, shows a curiousness from Thater, and to me, shows a peculiarity in her own animality amongst other forms of animality.

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56 Bernard and Forster.
Maria Walsh in an *Art Monthly* article points to Thater’s earlier interest in “the ‘animal other’ that (the writings) of Jacques Derrida and Giogio Agemben hold for artists, as well as the current art institutional rage for sustainability in relation to global warming and its related, but less marketable cousin, species extinction.” The “animal other,” particularly Derrida’s conception of it (which is perhaps over-discussed in art and animal politics), can arguably be seen as a way to deflect deeper engagement with animality and to solidify a binary that separates human from animal, which I believe, is unintentionally done in this particular work of Thater’s.

Reminiscent of Thater’s curiosities regarding captivity, and in keeping with the complicated activation of animality through performance, is the work of Simone Forti. Her 1968 work *Sleepwalkers/Zoo Mantras* (figure 3), was reperformed for its 50th anniversary for the exhibition *The Animal Mirror* as part of the International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP) in Brooklyn, NY, in 2010.


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Leading up to its first viewing in 1968, Forti visited Giardino Zoologico di Roma, a zoo in Rome to interact and observe nonhuman animal behaviour and movements. Forti takes a sincere approach to dance, and foregrounds her movements in the potential for the body to become labouring material—“Animate one moment, inanimate the next, Forti highlights how bodies take on movements and manners that occupy an indeterminate space, between subject and object, human and animal.”58 In her performance, Forti uses movement to transform from human to animal, using what she observed at her visits to the zoo. Forti’s intention for the work was to explore animality and humanity as a systematic continuum and to study “non-normative” bodies.59 She later admitted that her exploration was a form of passively identifying with nonhuman animals through anthropomorphizing. Fostering radical relations and investigating a common knowledge between human and nonhuman species are complicated. In addition, Forti’s use of animality positions the Animal as the subject; “The resultant ‘animal’ as a category flattens any difference, establishing human as somehow separate from animal. While Forti likens her movements to states of mysticism and enchantment, in a way, these systems-of-spectacle—language, the zoo—contour the body, govern the kinesthetic commons, and deny any predisposition to animality in the human.”60 Despite the problematic methods underlying this work, Forti’s display of animality traces an impulse to free herself from the bounds of her human body as she embodies sympathy and vulnerability with her eventual naked body.

To expand on efforts to dismantle a hegemonic hierarchy of species, philosopher Ron Broglio often uses a metaphysical and metaphorical approach in his writing to bypass biological determinism, looking beyond the human/animal divide. Broglio challenges philosophical concepts of animal studies by examining what it is to be animal, and by exploring animal phenomenology and the expressions of various interspecies. Broglio presents the idea that humans and nonhumans live on the same earth, but inhabit surfaces (and below) in dissimilar ways, both physically and metaphorically. He believes humans and nonhumans occupy different “worlds” or umwelten, meaning all species have different perspectives or perceptions of the

59 Ikechukwu Casimir Onyewuenyi.
60 Ikechukwu Casimir Onyewuenyi.
world that they live on and within, even if they occupy the same space. This idea is a possible challenge to Forti’s attempts at capturing the essence of a particular nonhuman animal. In his book *Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals and Art*, Broglio examines artworks by contemporary artists who explore human and animal relationships and argues that investigating animality as an artistic topic provides a “disorientation of the human, a loss of selfhood, and a rending of flesh…that reveals the nonhuman that is intimately woven within the human.” In his investigation, Broglio opens the opportunity to consider other modes of being, and he challenges the self-knowledge that occurs at the inside, or within the privileged interiority that we encompass as humans, by exposing it and opening it up for reinterpretation.

Artist Carolee Schneemann also investigates body movement and human and animal relationships in her work, in particular in her 1964 performance-based work *Meat Joy* (figure 4). This work arguably displays animality. Schneemann began her career as a painter, but quickly became eager to explore performance art as a way of asserting the female body against its use by male artists. *Meat Joy* is one of Schneemann’s most iconic works, consisting of eight barely-dressed performers who crawl and roll about exploring, touching, and playing with raw fish, raw poultry, sausages, wet paint, plastic, ropes, paper, and one another. According to Schneemann, using the human body as material allowed her to expose and confront a range of social and cultural taboos and repressive conventions. As well, this work plays out Broglio’s challenge to conventional ideas of inside versus outside by rendering animal fleshiness that is intimately within the human.

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61 Broglio, *Surface Encounter*, xix.
62 Broglio, 26.
63 Broglio, 27.
Schneemann’s, along with the other performers’, interactions with nonhuman meat not only comment on the mass consumption of nonhuman animals and animal by-products, but also speak of a relatable materiality of the flesh and meat of human and nonhuman bodies. In the process of touching meat, the performers move and manipulate their bodies “until humanness becomes flattened onto the same plane as meat and animal bodies in an ‘erotic rite.’ In contrast to abstraction, leveling the human makes humanness another surface working alongside meat as flesh cut open.” 65 In its rawness, I see this performance as displaying animality such that human animals show themselves openly, the good and bad, with togetherness and greed, amongst other textures and forms of flesh and matter through “a performance of human animality on a plane of immanence.” 66 The interaction of various bodies, dead and alive, puts emphasis on these vessels made of matter, and with this intermingling, animality is rediscovered.

65 Broglio, Surface Encounters, 26.
66 Broglio, 26.
Schneemann’s bodily performance interacting with raw meat alongside, and against her own flesh arguably enters the realm of abject art in that it transgresses our sense of cleanliness, and it explores the propriety of the body and bodily functions. I see animality within this concept in the rawness of bodily form and in the censorship of animal (human especially) bodies that have been abjected by a patriarchal social order. Something similar happens in the work of Kiki Smith who is an artist best known for her use of female and animal imagery and bold experimental sculptures, in which she often explores fairy tales, folklore, religious iconography, and feminism. Smith also humbly addresses this bleakness of animality in her 1992 work, *Tale* (figure 5).

![Figure 5. Kiki Smith, Tale, Wax, pigment, papier-mâché, beeswax, 160 x 23 x 23 inches, 1992. Collection of Jeffrey Deitch.](image)

*Tale* depicts a naked body crouching on all fours while defecating a long line of excrement. Embedded with metaphorical meaning, the excrement can be interpreted as a very blunt realization of animality—something impossible to ignore. The shame and humiliation that the sculpture elicits represent our ongoing conditioning to repress our fundamental being, as
human animals. And that animality is certainly visible in the sculpture as the figure assumes an
animalistic position. In a National Public Radio (NPR) interview with Kiki Smith and Laura
Sydell, Smith discusses *Tale* and explains that “the *Tale* piece was about kind of shame and
humiliation about something—like that you’re dragging this sort of internal personal garbage
around with you all the time. And also the shame and humiliation of not being able to hide it,
that it is so apparent in one’s own being.”67 Smith represents this internal baggage with a bodily
function that is considered socially unacceptable to openly discuss, let alone witness someone
doing. In sharing the shame, the exposure of animality here is visible for the audience to witness,
decentering humanness and lessening the suppression of the reality pertaining to our being.

**Interconnectivity and Becoming With**

Modern humanism affirms the responsibility of humans to lead lives directed at personal
fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity. This situates nonhuman species as less
important “others,” and within Western civilization, this puts emphasis on the good of Man,
creating disadvantages for anyone who does not fall in this category that is represented by
privileged, and as Max Liboiron puts it, “pale, male, and stale gatekeepers.”68 Not only is this
conception detrimental to life on the planet, it is clearly inimical to protecting the environment.
As Nils Bubandt and Anna Tsing state, humanist qualities of industriousness “allowed European
and American elites to imagine that their improvement projects would fully master nature,
leaving no loose ends.”69

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67 Laura Sydell and Madeleine Brand, “Artist Kiki Smith: A Profile,” NPR (October 9, 2006),
69 Nils Bubandt and Anna Tsing, “Feral Dynamics of Post-Industrial Ruin: An Introduction,” *Journal of
In advocating for what she calls nonhumanism, Haraway challenges notions of the ordinary by bringing forth ideas like becoming worldly, alter-globalisation, and becoming with. To Haraway, to become with is to become with many:

I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm.”

In comparison to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming-animal, Haraway takes a more empathetic approach to the notion of becoming. In her approach to becoming as well as in her approach to human and nonhuman relations, Haraway uses intimacy as a tool, exploring closeness and providing detailed knowledge as a way of surpassing human-animal binaries. She argues for a letting go of the human-animal distinction. Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming-animal, which seems promising in theory, but runs the risk of overgeneralization as the theorists mundanely refer to the animal as a subject of curiosity, dismissing the possibility of seeing species on a similar plane. This is not to say that Deleuze and Guattari’s theories completely solidify the hierarchy I look to dismantle—both theorists have offered major contributions to themes of looking beyond supposed humanly restrictions. So, referring to the chapter “Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible” in A Thousand Plateaus by Deleuze and Guattari, Haraway acknowledges the authors’ attempt to look beyond human-animal binaries, but argues that expressing the animal as a spectacle in fact strengthens the notion of the Great Divide—the division here being, “Others to Man.”

Raymond Pierotti argues that one major irony of denying the relatedness between human and nonhuman animals is that it disregards the whole of biological research: the “use of animal models is based on the presumption that the physiological processes of nonhumans, especially our fellow mammals, are so similar to those of humans that it is possible to readily extrapolate

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70 Haraway, When Species Meet, 92.
71 Besides her terms of becoming worldly and becoming with, in When Species Meet, Haraway states that alter-globalisation is a term invented by “European activists to stress that their approaches to militarized neoliberal models of world building are not about antiglobalization but about nurturing a more just and peaceful other-globalization” (3).
72 Haraway, When Species Meet, 34.
73 Haraway, 9.
from the responses of rats, mice, rabbits, dogs, cats, and pigs to those of humans.”74 We perform differently as individualized species; however, our genetic makeup is animalistic. Birke, Bryld, and Lykke suggest that when bringing nonhuman animals into theoretical discussion, openness is required to reconfigure our complex interrelations. A more physical and less notional example of interconnectedness can be seen in Vinciane Despret’s novel *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions?* which draws on various peculiar animal stories that, in all, question hierarchical structures of animal agency. In one story, Despret expands on primatologist Janice Carter’s time living with female chimpanzees that she was rehabilitating in their habitat and describes an experience of interconnectedness that Carter had when she was interacting with chimpanzees: Carter’s menstrual cycle had been completely thrown off.75 Despret notes that many uterus-bearing primatologists have remarked that during their fieldwork, the biological rhythm of their monthly bleeding changes in very perceptible ways. When Carter’s cycle returned, “…it had an unexpected rhythm: during the years of fieldwork that followed, her cycle attuned itself to those of the female chimpanzees and became a thirty-five-day cycle.”76 The significance of this story is threefold. Firstly, this story shows that animality has physical weight and animal bodies are individually complex, while at the same time there are many attributes and moments where we share similarities. Secondly, it exemplifies the malleability of the human body, and that our animal functions have the ability to adapt and sync. Lastly, it suggests that the specificity of the experience of connectivity and animality allows for the direct dismantling of a hierarchy that separates human from animal. As Despret puts it:

> it is the possibility of becoming not exactly the other through metamorphosis but *with the other*, not in the sense of feeling what the other is thinking or of feeling for the other like a burdensome empathizer but rather of receiving and creating the possibility to inscribe oneself in a relation of exchange and proximity that has nothing to do with identification.77

How can we thoughtfully address anthropocentric rhetoric and decenter the human without neglecting/minimizing human politics, such as capitalism, racism, sexism, and ableism?

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76 Despret, 15.
77 Despret, 17.
To me, one way among many would be to encourage self-reflection about how anthropocentrism affects personal perceptions of animality, with the aim of then being able to continuously find commonality. Louise Westling provides an example of commonality by stating “human beings, like all other living things, are immersed in this flesh of the world, ‘a spatial and temporal pulp where the individuals are formed by differentiation.’ Within this flesh, species and individual organisms manifest not only formal resemblances, but also constituting substances—namely, atoms, molecules, and microorganisms—that embody or mirror biological macrocosms.”

Along these lines, another example of commonality is the fleshiness of being, which, even at the level of the microscopic, confesses that we are consumed and connected through a life cycle that becomes with—we are farmed by trees with oxygen for us to only return to the earth as compost and soil. The process of decentering preconceived notions to become with many involves continuous and active unlearning/learning.

Using intimacy as a tool for communication between species, Haraway’s take on becoming moves away from the animal as an othered spectacle, and rather than proposing that we have the ability to become animal, she suggests that we already are animals, and by this fact, we may become with other species instead; this includes together as human animals along with nonhuman species. Lynda Birke, Mette Bryld, and Nina Lykke acknowledge that animality has long been intertwined with concepts of gender, race, and sexuality, and that animality “has long served as a foil to reflect what we consider to be human uniqueness; we often refer, for instance, to ‘humans and animals’ as though they are quite separate from us and quite homogenous,” a separation that has been reinforced by disciplinary segregation. The authors argue that “sociology has traditionally studied humans and excluded other animals, while non-humans and their behaviour fall within the remit of biology. What is increasingly clear, however, is that animality itself (or, the specificity of any particular kind of animal) is just as complexly constructed as gender or humanness and so does not readily fall into disciplinary divides.”

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80 Birke, Bryld and Lykke, 168.
81 Birke, Bryld and Lykke, 168.
perspectives across disciplines, and it is through acknowledgement of this complexity that interconnectivity can happen and therefore challenge preconceived humanist hierarchies and divides.

_A Body Within a Body Within a Body_

Having explored different approaches and theories of animality in text, I now turn to my own studio work to interlink the exploration of animality in art creation. The results of my studio-based research were shown in a culminating exhibition titled _NODES | Animality and Kinship_, which consisted of three major works of art. Each work corresponds with a chapter in this thesis; therefore, I discuss one work per chapter, explaining its relevance to the topics I address. In this chapter, I would like to discuss my three-channel video installation called _A Body Within a Body Within a Body_, 2021-2022 (figures 6, 7, and 8). Its relevance to animality is in its emphasis on ongoingness, kinship, and interconnectivity with and upon our earth—_Terra_.

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Figure 6. Ashley Snook, *A Body Within a Body Within a Body*, Score by Kierscey Rand and voice narration by Michelle Wilson, 3-channel video installation with scent (pine, cypress, eucalyptus), 7:41:19, 2021–2022.
Click the image above to access the video

Figure 7. Ashley Snook, *A Body Within a Body Within a Body*, Score by Kierscey Rand and voice narration by Michelle Wilson, 3-channel video installation with scent (pine, cypress, eucalyptus), 7:41:19, 2021–2022.
In the dark space of the east gallery at McIntosh Gallery in London, Ontario, the videos were projected on separate walls adjacent to each other, while subtle scents of pine, eucalyptus, and cypress lingered in the air to immerse the audience within the space. These scents helped visitors metaphorically consume nature by intaking the smell of natural oils—a sort of intake of animality. Two of the videos consist of stop-motion footage of wax skull sculptures slowly melting, revealing found objects within as they transform. One of these videos displays a skull of a bear (figure 2) and the other, a human skull (figure 3). Both videos play with the idea of movement and malleability pertaining to bodies, perceptions and conditions as animals, and the ability to be transformed. While melting, the skulls take on different forms: at some points, the human skull takes on a more nonhuman, animalistic shape and vice versa for the bear skull. In these two videos, at times the skulls fade in and out, slowly becoming visible from a black screen, showing ghostly reminders of our similarity in impermanence. The third video, projected in between the videos of the melting skulls, consists of broken clips of me travelling in a large

Figure 8. Ashley Snook, *A Body Within a Body Within a Body*, Score by Kierscey Rand and voice narration by Michelle Wilson, 3-channel video installation with scent (pine, cypress, eucalyptus), 7:41:19, 2021–2022.
sand pit while observed and followed by a drone. The drone eventually flies higher and higher into the sky to emphasize the humbling of my humanness to a miniscule dot on the screen. The text, which is also narrated in the video by artist Michelle Wilson, reads as follows:

The present is thick
I’m sure Terra misses you and the way it was intended
I see in the murk
Existence requires ongoingness—ongoing, onwards
And the partials are rhizomatic, connecting and intertwining in each other’s way of being
Myopic thoughts are exhausting, think thinking empty-handed
We live complexly and entangled
I find myself here, there
This body, within a body, and of another
I breathe alongside, within intersectional nodes
And it matters what stories are told and the concepts to conceptualize
The stuff of the living, (in-betweenness), The stuff of the dead
There is relentless diversity of matter mattering
I can come back, in a way, with multispecies alliances
Isn’t it profound? And muddled
A body within a body
Within within a bodied body
Fish, potatoes, blueberries, and bugs, me and you return to slugs

The poetic text paired with the videos collectively correlate to expressions of selfhood—that being of my own animality. Between the cuts of my adventure into the sandpit are various moments and landscapes filmed in my hometown, a small rural town in Northern Ontario. These scenes are personal moments of me exploring what grounds my animality: interactions with cows, seeing hair float in my bathwater, exploring forests, performances with soil, the various textures of my skin, observing chickens, my pet companion pups, and running in sand and snow, amongst other exploratory moments such as examining the bacteria and cultures that live within human bodies in a biology lab at St. Joseph’s Hospital in London. The trio of videos decenter humanness by exploring concepts of interconnectivity amongst species via the acknowledgment that everything, everyone is made of matter. By doing so, the videos collectively reposition the human experience closer to animality.
CHAPTER TWO: Biophilia and Means of Care

I wanted to do right here, even if I had little idea of what “right” meant. To love a place is not enough. We must find ways to heal it.


_Eco_ : 'e(k)on/ — from the Greek, oikos. Home.

- Annie Sprinkle & Beth Stephens, *Assuming the Ecossexual Position: Earth as Lover*²

Chapter Two of this thesis works as a link and as a kinship between Chapters One and Three, bridging information from Chapter One to set theprecedence for Chapter Three by filling the lacuna between animality and our current geological epoch. Here, I talk about my upbringing and connectedness to nature, the biophilia hypothesis, eco-anxiety, olfactory art, ecofeminism, various forms of climate injustice, and environmental remediation. Through topics, in this chapter I explore inputs of importance regarding decolonization. Throughout, I reference artists and artworks that both relate to the concepts above and that serve as examples of resistance to hegemonic systems and frameworks.

I Grew Up With Blue Spruces and Cows

As I mention in Chapter One, I was raised in a small rural town in Northern Ontario; Bonfield is a township with a population of about 2200 with very little light pollution, and consists of things like dirt roads, wildlife, barn cats, a trailer-based liquor store just steps away from the church, boat launches, a very random and misplaced racetrack, and a construction sandpit. Neighbours are friendly, often stopping by to say hello, no phone call necessary. As a community trait, people trade goods like eggs, meat, vegetables, fruits, and preserves, which makes up for the lack of a grocery store in town. There are various farms, a fresh lake, and ample areas for hunting and fishing. My parents raised me to appreciate, respect, and work with nature.

My father is a hunter and an avid fisherman who would kiss a butterfly if he could. My mother is a hardworking seamstress who can turn anything into something else for the sake of sustainability, and if she could, she would work in the garden endlessly. My siblings are much older than me, so as a child I spent a lot of time hanging out with my pet companions—cats, dogs, birds, and fish. I befriended the chickens in the chicken coup to the extent that our emotional connection led me to protest their end of life. I spent most of my time after school and on weekends outdoors, curious about all the things around me. My parents’ home has a four-acre perimeter, and I would often walk around discovering interesting plants, insects, berries, spores, and fungi. My favourite things to do were to find the biggest raspberries and redcurrants to eat on my adventures and to smoosh puffballs so they would burst and make little brown clouds of spore dust. Now and then I would find animal tracks and even skulls. I would follow those tracks into the forest with my dogs and cats following along. Sometimes I would find a stray cow or two on an adventure of their own.

These youthful experiences shaped my connectedness to nature and how I relate to the world and to those around me. It shaped and rendered my utmost respect for the Land and nonhuman species, as well as Indigenous knowledge and traditions that are imperative to Land relations. Here I emphasize my gratitude for land that was and is not my own—land stolen by my ancestors. Now, living in the city with its liveliness and multiple magnitudes of sensory overload, I find myself with a limited window of tolerance for city life. My battery eventually runs low to a point where I need to retreat to nature to intake fresher air, to experience less noise and commotion, and to take in those precious in-between moments of calm, stillness, and simplicity—things that are sometimes hard to come by where I currently reside. The transition between worldviews—going from being a sheltered country girl to an adult adjusting to city life—was, in a way, a wakeup call to the many realities that surround me. Vividly came the reality of environmental change, pollution, and social injustices in Canada, and globally.
Be Eco-Responsible and Decolonize

I find myself at times in a state of personal uncertainty when I attempt to articulate my subjective position within the framework of decolonization; I am in a constant state of learning how to do so and unlearning what has already been ingrained in me. My project stems from an intention to undermine colonial systems and hegemonic frameworks that separate human from animal—and human from natural economies—in a way to decenter popular beliefs regarding human superiority which have always been emphasized through whiteness.

In their book *Pollution Is Colonialism*, Max Liboiron builds a framework for understanding how scientific research methods either support or fight against colonialism. Focusing on plastic pollution, Liboiron models an anticolonial scientific practice aligned with Indigenous (Métis) knowledge that expands on concepts of land, ethics, and relations, to illuminate the idea that pollution is an enactment of colonialism. They state, “today, packaging is the single largest category of plastic production, accounting for nearly 40 percent of plastic production in Europe and 33 percent in Canada”; plastic production as one of the largest contributions to overall pollution is just one example that illustrates leading factors in colonialism and colonial relations to Land. Pollution is typically generated through systems of exploitation and extraction, which uphold the systemic oppression of Indigenous life ways. Liboiron points out that colonialism is often misunderstood as a monolithic structure rooted in historically bad actions. Liboiron argues, however, that colonialism is in fact embedded in land relations even when intentions are good. The call for recycling, for example, “still assumes access to Indigenous Land for recycling centres and their pollution.” This phenomenon also extends to the ways in which water is treated and mistreated as a natural resource that is sold and bottled as a vital resource, while it is simultaneously polluted by selfish deeds. Liboiron’s exploration into plastic pollution reveals pollution in settler colonial states and the disposing of it as an extension of colonization through the continuation of land grabbing and using Indigenous Land as sinks for pollution.

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4 Liboiron, 6.
Tśēmā Igharas is an interdisciplinary artist and a member of the Tahltan Nation, who was also in my cohort during my Master’s program. Her artistic work often portrays her own body in changing landscapes that are continuously impacted by corporate resource extraction. Through strategies of Indigenous resistance to neo-colonization, her practice critically engages with the value of land and natural resources, assessed through Western calculations of wealth (social, economic, environmental, and power ownership). In her work, she explores how these assessments impact cultural lifeways and landscapes in Canada. The praxis of Igharas’ work, as she explains in her artist statement, is sparked by “embodied knowledge and everyday acts of decolonization as ways to understand the imaginary Canadian ‘true North’ and industrial reverberations felt by those who live downstream.” Igharas’ 2021 installation work Tailings Pool (figure 9), for example, consists of a satirical DIY-like kidney-shaped pool. With its intentionally highly saturated colour, the image has viewers questioning its content: is this a shimmering turquoise pool or toxic festering cesspool?


6 Tśēmā Igharas.
Tailings Pool questions the insatiable consumption of natural resources and explores the vital importance of water. The work has a participatory aspect; Igharas invites viewers to a pool party to activate the exploration of discomfort within topics of colonialism and environmental destruction. In this work, Igharas encourages viewers to think about the power dynamics that surround water and to consider the ways in which water connects us all through its own systems, as well as through associated industrial reverberations. It is eye-opening to realize that the very substance that keeps us alive and makes up an average of sixty percent of our bodies (which is an example of shared animality) is the same substance that is so often tainted with toxins through misuse and abuse. Water is one of the foremost and bluntly obvious resources that gets taken advantage of by those in power; it is a resource that clearly activates colonialism, and it is one of the most connective instruments to all life sources.

Liboiron notes that the many types of colonialism (settler, extractive internal, external, and neoimperialist) have some things in common. Colonialism as a whole is a way to describe relationships characterized by conquest and genocide that grant colonialists and settlers ongoing state access to land and resources that contradictorily provide the material and spiritual sustenance of Indigenous societies on the one hand, and the foundation of colonial state-formation, settlement, and capitalist development on the other. Colonialism is more than the intent, identities, heritages, and values of settlers and their ancestors. It’s about genocide and access.

Given the many iterations of colonialism, processes of decolonization require specificity. Specificity prevents any misunderstandings that the opposite of colonialism could be any one thing, such as, for example, environmentalism. As well, specificity prevents the metaphorization of the term, which is often done by a set of evasive, self-serving, settler-based motives as stated by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang in “Decolonization is not a metaphor.” Using specificity with decolonization also prevents colonialism from being conflated with other forms of extraction, such as capitalism. This extends to environmental racism, such as the practice of strategically

8 Liboiron, Pollution is Colonialism, 9.
10 Liboiron, Pollution is Colonialism, 13.
placing hazardous facilities in minority and low-income areas.\textsuperscript{11} But even environmentalism itself can blindly support colonialism. Environmentalism advertises itself as being committed to concerns and actions that are aimed at protecting the environment, but often reproduces colonial actions and strategies—an important argument put forth by Liboiron when elaborating on destructive ventures that are hidden under seemingly positive motives.

We must make explicit the injustices that still remain, even within seemingly progressive movements such as environmentalism. Referring to collaborators Tuck and Yang’s interpretation of decolonization, Liboiron explains that decolonization means “repatriating land to sovereign Native tribes and nations, abolition of slavery in its contemporary forms, and the dismantling of the imperial metropole.”\textsuperscript{12} To Tuck and Yang, decolonization is very much about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life, and in a settler colonial context, it simultaneously recognizes “how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, \textit{all} of the land, and not just symbolically.”\textsuperscript{13} Processes of decolonization can also mean and include many things since there are many forms of colonization. While there are many historical, political, theoretical, and practical definitions of colonialism, a key feature is an uneven power relation between individuals who are indigenous to the land and those who are settlers—this speaks directly to the ongoing Indigenous genocide in Canada. When addressing decolonial strategies, it is important to recognize different worldviews and forms of obligations in order to work together with humility and relationality. Not only that, but when it comes to the escalating environmental crisis, the need for settler harm reduction—models that attempt to reduce the harm or risk of specific practices—is acute.\textsuperscript{14}

During my studies, I had the privilege of joining the multi-year artistic research project \textit{GardenShip and State} as a research assistant and participant. The project started in 2019 and is still ongoing. \textit{GardenShip and State} was initiated by artists Jeff Thomas and Patrick Mahon and included contributors who used art to address the impacts of colonialism and environmental

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\textsuperscript{12} Liboiron, \textit{Pollution is Colonialism}, 26.
\textsuperscript{13} Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” 7.
\textsuperscript{14} Tuck and Yang, 21.
\end{flushleft}
issues such as climate change and global warming. Artist-contributors created works reflecting on themes of decolonial critique, which came together in an exhibition at Museum London. For this project, I created a video installation entitled the honey is sweet (figures 10 and 11), which focuses on challenging the term “invasive species.” With this particular work in mind, I view my engagements with this project and my discussion of this artwork in this chapter as complementary to the studio-based component of my doctoral project. While not central to its theoretical focus on animality, the honey is sweet is an artwork that addresses processes of decolonization.

Figure 10. Ashley Snook, the honey is sweet, bronze, acrylic, wax, wood, urethane resin, spray paint, phragmites australis, video (14:16:23), and sound, 5 x 13 feet, 2020–2021. GardenShip and State, Museum London, October 7, 2021 – January 23, 2022. Photo by Toni Hafkenscheid.
the honey is sweet is a video installation that explores the colonial history and growth patterns of one of the foremost invasive plant species in Canada: Phragmites australis, a species native to Eurasia. Also known as common reed and elephant grass, the presence of invasive phragmites poses an ongoing threat to biodiversity in Canada and reflects the pervasive impact of colonial expansion and industrial processes on southwestern Ontario’s native vegetation and endangered species. The title of this work is essentially another way to say, “ignorance is bliss,” and it points to the reason why invasive phragmites ended up in Canada: overindulgence in commodity transportation. Bashkir honey is one of the most expensive honeys in the world, and it too comes from Eurasia, or more specifically from Russia. Its colour can be seen cast over the installation, as well as in the pesticide that is used to control the phragmites population. the honey is sweet traces my journey through overgrown Ontario wetlands on the Truxor machine—a phragmites-control vehicle that cuts and removes biomass. In tracing the colonial history of P. australis’ arrival in Canada and investigating current treatment methods, the honey is sweet invites viewers to question environmental decision-making in favour of more inclusive and informative strategies for controlling “invasive” species. Using a mock-documentary style of
providing information on the colonial history of phragmites, the text that accompanies the video in subtitle-form is as follows:

The European subspecies of Common Reed, *Phragmites australis*, is one of the foremost invasive plant threats to native biodiversity in Canada. Major impacts of invasive phragmites include displacing and replacing native vegetation and eliminating habitats of endangered species. The first Canadian record of invasive phragmites is from Annapolis Royal in Nova Scotia in the early 1900s. They would have arrived by ship from their native home in Eurasia. By 1950 the distribution of invasive phragmites was deemed widespread. By this time, distribution patterns of invasive phragmites were recognizable from four locations, three of which were high traffic seaports. Phragmites spread through wind, water, and human and animal disturbance. Between 1991 and 2010 there were substantial increases in distribution, especially along highways, which connected phragmites regions in St. Lawrence and southwestern parts of Ontario. Root systems of invasive phragmites can reach a depth of 2 metres and can extend onto gravel shoulders where they are broken up and transported by construction equipment. Increasing numbers of roads and traffic will continue to contribute to the increasing rate of spreading. Invasive phragmites were likely introduced to Ontario in discarded ballast water from cargo ships and imported goods brought to Canada from various parts of the world. The species is also known as “elephant grass” and is believed to have been introduced with straw on trains carrying elephants and other circus animals in the early 1900s. Colonial ventures and development projects facilitated the introduction and spread of invasive phragmites. The infiltration of invasive species is not meaningfully and purposefully acknowledged in dominant discourse as a colonial process that continues to this day. Current control methods include herbicide treatment, cutting and removing biomass, and prescribed burning, all of which are required to be done over the course of many growing seasons to effectively suppress its growth. Dominant discourse on environmental hazards has traditionally been Eurocentric and based in Western scientific models and ways of knowing. As a result of westernized environmental governance, other methods of management have been left out of hegemonic environmental discourse, such as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). We must consider ways environmental decision-making processes can be decolonized for more informative and inclusive strategies. The honey is sweet.

Nonhuman species, including plants, have been categorized under terms like invasive. In deeming a species invasive, it completely disregards the very reasons for their existence—reasons that exist outside of those that solely benefit human life. In assuming the power to
control species, “humans become ‘subjects’ who then proceed to work on the ‘objects’ of the world (animals, earth, water).” Exposing such categorization as having a colonialist motive is an anticolonial strategy that emphasizes the ongoing need for decolonization. Exposing such categorization is also a way to avoid the metaphorization of decolonization, which Tuck and Yang stress is necessary for the term to remain productive in its usage. In addressing my felt connectedness to nature, it is important to note the complexities that surround injustices, hardships, and uneven power dynamics. This includes acknowledging complexities when addressing topics that, while they may be well intentioned, unfortunately have many moments of causing harm, such as environmentalism and ecofeminism. It is easy to remain ignorant within the sublime and awe of nature; if you don’t pay attention to it, the ugly truths bury themselves further in the manicured foliage.

Intersectional Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a form of activism directed at reclaiming the female body, which was and is regularly repressed. Correspondingly, just as the female body is repressed, so too is the agency of nature and nonhuman species. Greta Claire Gaard shows ecofeminism to be a theory that has adopted various fields of feminist activity, such as the peace movements, labour movements, women’s healthcare, and environmental and animal liberation movements. For Gaard, ecofeminism represents the idea that the “ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature.” Be that as it may, at first, ecofeminism was not necessarily inclusive nor accepting of all women’s bodies despite the movement’s focus and efforts, and has therefore grappled with complex challenges. With this said, I argue that intersectional environmentalism can offer ideas to ecofeminism to help it arrive at an intersectional ecofeminism. Specifically, I want to use ecofeminism to acknowledge that systems of oppression are interlinked: climate change denial is encouraged by colonists; racist

15 Tuck and Yang, 20.
17 Gaard, 1.
attitudes and systems of social oppression restrict access to vital natural resources; a lack of care and compassion for the environment is mirrored in a lack of care and compassion for the bodies of Black, Indigenous, POC, women, LGBTQAI+, and Two-Spirit people. I want to address ecofeminism critically, whilst retaining its key arguments that remain within the scope of this project. In addressing the topic in such a way, my aim is to encourage a more inclusive feminism.

In understanding ecofeminism to be an ethical system that recognizes kinship between species, Gaard states that the “interconnected self makes moral decisions on the basis of an ethic of responsibilities or care…What is certain is that failure to recognize connections can lead to violence, and a disconnected sense of self is most assuredly at the root of the current ecological crisis.” 18 An interconnected sense of self requires the implementation of inclusivity on a global scale and an analysis of the oppression of all species. 19 The ways in which women—notably Black and Indigenous women—and nature have been conceptualized in Western intellectual traditions devalues and oppresses people, nature, and nonhuman species while simultaneously elevating value associated with white men, reason, and the advancement of a problematic conception of humankind.

In questioning the oppression of women, people of colour, Indigenous, and nonhuman animals, Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen review the ways in which human activities have affected more-than-human worlds. They address various ways that “sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, and ableism are informed by and support speciesism and how analyzing the ways these forces intersect can produce less violent, more just practices.” 20 In critically engaging with ecofeminism, they uncover factors that undergird oppression such as climate change and its effects on certain communities, revealing how human relationships with the earth and other animals have been distorted. Anna Bedford, Sam Mickey and Douglas A. Vakoch’s “Afterword: Ecofeminism through Literary Activism” clarifies the need for healing such distorted relationships by arguing that “an ethic of care in our interactions with each other and the world

18 Gaard, 2.
19 Gaard, 3.
around us is necessary to counter the relationships of subjugation, domination, and exploitation that are integral to patriarchal and colonial forces in contemporary society.” Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva explain that climate change and species extinction is mostly caused by human activities, which are leaving very large and troubling ecological footprints, and therefore to make a difference it is essential to shift how we see our role in the problem. They state that, “if we continue to understand our role as rooted in the old paradigm of capitalist patriarchy—based on mechanistic world-view, an industrial, capital-centred competitive economy, and a culture of dominance, violence, war and ecological and human irresponsibility—we will witness the rapid unfolding of increasing climate catastrophe, species extinction, economic collapse, and human injustice inequality.” In addressing this serious potential and arguably already-present catastrophe, Mies and Shiva suggest—with thoughtfulness and consideration—shifting points in viewing our human selves “as members of the Earth family, with responsibility to care for other species and life on Earth in all its diversity, from the tiniest microbe to the largest mammal.” The responsibility to care for the earth and one another (human/nonhuman) lies at the heart of animality, and in doing this care work, we promote mutual agency and conservationism.

Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens creatively interpret intersectional ecofeminism with their concept and term *ecosexual.* To Sprinkle and Stephens, being an ecosexual can mean anything from being a lover of nature to being vegan, or someone who refuses to wear leather clothes. They define their interpretation of ecosexual as follows:

Eco from ancient Greek *oikos*; sexual from Latin, *sexualis*. 1. A person who finds nature romantic, sensual, erotic, or sexy, which can include humans or not. 2. A new sexual identity (self-identified). 3. A person who takes the Earth as their lover. 4. A term used in dating advertisements. 5. An environmental activist strategy. 6. A grassroots movement. 7. A person who has a more expanded concept of what sex and orgasm are beyond mainstream definitions. 8. A person who imagines sex as an ecology that extends beyond the physical body. 9. Other definitions as yet to be determined.

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23 Mies and Shiva, xix.
24 Mies and Shiva, xxi.
26 Sprinkle and Stephens, 2.
In defining ecosexuality, Sprinkle and Stephens are conscious of the negative perceptions of New Age environmentalism as a mostly white, middle-class endeavor, something I extendedly and openly acknowledge when it comes to the concepts I address in this project. For them, ecosexuality is “punk-rock, queer, drag, pinup grrrl version of environmental activism.” In acknowledging the problematic aspects of ecofeminism, the duo agree on and adopt one thing that ecofeminists use—anthropomorphism in the construction of Earth as Mother as a means to understand the earth as someone who shouldn’t be harmed. They argue that ecosexuals, on the other hand, anthropomorphize the earth to examine and attempt to heal the human-nature binary that is embedded in Western epistemology, a binary that strives to erase connections to nature by putting humans above all else. To Sprinkle and Stephens, ecosexuals see the body as “expanding beyond its own skin, in forms such as biome clouds, the unique clouds of bacteria and microbes that surround the bodies of all organic beings, animals, and plants. Ecosex is a paradigm shift: we don’t have sex with just another person, but instead we have sex with their water, minerals, bacteria, biomes, and even stardust!” Embracing humanness in the form of acknowledging bodies as matter and as interconnected with one another—human and nonhuman—allows for the repudiation of trust in hegemonic systems that oppress people and cause the earth destruction. This acknowledgement of interconnectedness also lives in subcategories of environmentalism, such as biophilia. However, much like the results of narrow readings of ecofeminism, it is contextually important to be aware that, if used incorrectly, such topics could be used to contribute to the kinds of actions and understandings that perpetuate colonialism and underpin inequalities.

Biophilia and Caring for Terra

The biophilia hypothesis as defined by Edward O. Wilson is the innate tendency for humans to seek connections with nature, nonhuman species, and other living organisms. The term biophilia was first contextualized by psychoanalyst Erich Fromm in the 1970s to elucidate

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27 Sprinkle and Stephens, 2.
28 Sprinkle and Stephens, 2.
29 Sprinkle and Stephens, 16.
30 Sprinkle and Stephens, 19.
31 Sprinkle and Stephens, 19.
human fondness for life and growth. While Wilson’s conception of biophilia is important to the scope of my research-creation project, it nonetheless has some limitations, which I address here and in my practice. Wilson states: “The phylogenetic continuity of life with humanity seems an adequate reason by itself to tolerate the continued existence of apes and other organisms. This does not diminish humanity—it raises the status of nonhuman creatures. We should at least hesitate before treating them as disposable matter.” In arguing primarily as a biologist, Wilson’s argument seems to proceed with humanist attributes. He approaches nonhuman creatures like they are scientific spectacles or a cabinet of curiosities, suggesting that we, as sophisticated humans, ought to merely hesitate before treating nonhuman species as disposable, or to merely tolerate their existence. As Catherine Parry suggests, “the rationalist ideology which underpins Western definitions of humanity involves a form of anthropocentrism which justifies the colonisation of non-human nature.” Wilson’s biophilia hypothesis begins to appreciate human connections to nature and nonhuman species. The concept, however, is reductive in focus, tunnel-visioning interests solely in life and the living, and limiting compassion and relatability involving the kinship of lifecycles: birth, growth, death, and decay. In addition, Wilson states, “to the degree that we come to understand other organisms, we will place greater value on them, and ourselves.” While this thought is well intentioned, Wilson’s use of the words “them” and “ourselves” emphasizes the very boundary that I look to de-normalize, one that Donna J. Haraway calls the “Great Divide,” which “separates the ontology of human-animal encounters. To be human, should be on the opposite side of this divide.”

Contrasting biophilia is the concept of biophobia, or the fear of living things. An increase in biophobia could have negative implications for biodiversity conservation because it may result in the loss of direct interaction between humans and nature, and a lack of motivation to protect nonhuman species and habitats. Biophobia proceeds from possible triggers such as an

33 Wilson, 130.
35 Wilson, Biophilia, 2.
36 Donna Jeanne Haraway, When Species Meet (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 11.
37 Haraway, 11.
evolutionary trait to fear and avoid large carnivores and venomous animals,\textsuperscript{39} or a traumatic experience, or learned behaviour from family developing in a distaste or disinterest in nature and nonhuman species. In a 2010 study, John P. Simaika and Michael J. Samways propose that “biophilia and biophobia are the aspects of global prototaxis and that both are found not only in animals, but also in plants, fungi, protocists, and bacteria.”\textsuperscript{40} While the authors believe biophilia can be found in creatures and plants, they argue that it isn’t necessarily innate, as we as a species have never been forced to evolve personal connection to the environment. Despite this, they agree that biophilia does, nevertheless, contribute to improvements in human well-being, and that being surrounded in a natural landscape of our liking can reduce stress and increase productivity, happiness, and longevity.\textsuperscript{41}

Liboiron notes that Western science has long been “identified as a practice that assumes mastery over Nature,” and that it “reproduces the doctrine of discovery, revels in exploration and appropriation of Indigenous Land, and is invested in a rigorous self-portraiture in which valid scientific knowledge is created only by proper European subjects. It is also pretty sexist.”\textsuperscript{42} The idea that it is a learned behaviour to love nature creates distance and raises implications of mastery as if we have the choice to acknowledge nature’s agency or not. Returning to the benefits of biophilia, Simaika and Samways argue that biophilia is “specific in that it calls for a common ethic of the conservation of nature, beyond our immediate needs. It is broad enough to allow people of all cultures to share in its meaning, and it relates to the common need not only to survive, but also to live.\textsuperscript{43} It seems as though the authors are unwittingly arguing against themselves because for biophilia to relate to survival, an intrinsic connection is required. Embracing biophilia for its beneficial qualities, the concept has been introduced as a prescriptive solution to health concerns (I expand on this later in this chapter). The idea that simply being in nature has healing properties emphasizes, arguably against Simaika and Samways, that biophilia

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\textsuperscript{40} Simaika and Samways note that there has been a preference to use the term prototaxis over biophilia—meaning the genetic tendency for an organism or cell to react in a definitive manner to another organism or cell. Simaika and Samways, 904.
\textsuperscript{41} Simaika and Samways, 904.
\textsuperscript{42} Liboiron, Pollution is Colonialism, 20–21.
\textsuperscript{43} Simaika and Samways, “Biophilia as a Universal Ethic for Conserving Biodiversity,” 905.
\end{flushleft}
is intrinsic and beneficial and the more you feed it, the more it grows, including in the multispecies relationships that have potential to flourish.

While Wilson encourages a stiffer dose of biological realism,\textsuperscript{44} he also provides a sense of playfulness in his writing when he describes his experiences in nature. I consider the awe and wonder that emanates from his writing to be an example of the ethos that encourages contemporary writers and artists to address kinship between human and nonhuman species, and by extension, whether intentionally or not, promote animality. I activate this sense of magic in my artwork as a way to engage the viewer in the seemingly estranged qualities of the nature that surrounds us. In doing so, I hope to elicit responses similar to one that Wilson describes what he talks about being in nature: “The effect was strangely calming. Breathing and heartbeat diminished, concentration intensified. It seemed to me that something extraordinary in the forest was very close to where I stood, moving to the surface and discovery.”\textsuperscript{45} To me, the extraordinary aspect that he can’t put a finger on is his animality. Through experience in nature, the effect he describes suggests a movement towards animality as an immanent process of re-emerging or transforming into something new.

Christi Belcourt is a Métis artist best known for her acrylic paintings which often depict floral patterns inspired by Métis and First Nations historical beadwork. In her practice, she often explores concepts of identity, culture, and place, alongside divisions within communities. Her work is vibrant and meticulous, shows attention to detail, and pays homage to nonhuman agency, as seen in works such as Our Lives are in the Land (figure 12) created in 2014.

\textsuperscript{44} Biological realism is referred by Wilson as an epistemic attitude that acknowledges human as animal and human connections to nature. Wilson, Biophilia, 131.

\textsuperscript{45} Wilson, 7.
From Belcourt’s website, the description of this work reads as follows: “The plants are teachers. They are connected to each other, and all other spiritual beings through the sacredness of life. When I remember who I am—a human being connected to all of life—I remember also that I am loved by the spirit world and our ancestors. And when I remember this, I remember to respect even the smallest of things.” The expressiveness in Belcourt’s work, with which she explores Traditional Knowledge, draws attention to an appreciative connectedness to nature. This appreciation is observable in the way she speaks about her work: “I have nothing to say about my art. I will leave that to others. Everything that drives me, and drives my art and the mishmash of everything I do in my life is my love for the earth and my awe of it all.” As a Métis artist

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with deep rootedness in Traditional Knowledge, she speaks wholly through a visual language that celebrates the beauty of the natural world with a sense of respect and appreciation for reciprocity—“the great power and mystery surrounds us every minute of every day. Everything—the plants, insects, winds, stars, rocks, animals, us—is a giant web of pure spirit. Nothing is separate from anything else.”

In my exploration of Belcourt’s work and her usage of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) ways of knowing, I use a sense of biophilic appreciation to think about her approach without appropriating it. My approach to biophilia involves care for multispecies relationships and a responsibility to emphasize these connective qualities, all the while respecting Indigenous knowledge. In approaching biophilia this way, I seek to decentralize Western scientific beliefs that promote disconnection and superiority.

In their article “Beyond Knowing Nature: Contact, Emotion, Compassion, Meaning, and Beauty are Pathways to Nature Connection,” Ryan Lumber, Miles Richardson, and David Sheffield investigate how pro-environmental behaviour can encourage feelings of connection to nature and how certain courses of action can promote human wellbeing. They argue that biophilia functions as a “biological driver for the desire to connect with nature, for the benefits to wellbeing that nature provides.” In support of biophilia as a biological driver, Clemens G. Arvay in The Biophilia Effect: A Scientific and Spiritual Exploration of the Healing Bond Between Humans and Nature states, “Individual rewilding means appreciating, respecting, and accepting other beings for who and what they are, no matter if they are humans or not. It means rejoicing in the personal connections we need so badly.”

Personal rewilding through the exploration of biophilia not only rejoins animality with the human, but it also emphasizes the appreciation for nature and care for its future. The biophilia effect “isn’t important only because of the enormous effect nature has on our psyches and bodies. It also calls us to something important in terms [of] the future of our planet: our very existence depends on our paying close attention to all of nature and her intricate tapestry of diverse and magnificent landscapes.”

Lastly, as supportive corroboration, Stephen R. Kellert in Kinship to Mastery: Biophilia in

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48 Belcourt, “Artist Statement.”
51 Arvay, xi.
*Human Evolution and Development* argues that “we evolved in the company of other creatures and in a matrix of conditions making this varied existence possible. And we continue to rely—physically, emotionally, intellectually—on the quality and richness of our affiliations with natural diversity.”\(^{52}\) Our long course of human evolution has always relied on multispecies relationships, and our human biophilic inclinations form the basis for healthy human maturation which thrives on mutual appreciation and care.

In her *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, María Puig de la Bellacasa discusses care in the capacity of disentangling human and nonhuman relations, which involves decentering human agencies. Bellacasa emphasizes that “care is too important to give it up to the reductions of hegemonic ethics. Thinking in the world involves acknowledging our own involvements in perpetuating dominant values rather than retreating to the sheltered position of an enlightened outsider who knows better.”\(^{53}\) To care in this sense is to work within and for relationality; this is a requirement that then affects how we care. Using care as a speculative ethics grounds the idea that caring is ontological rather than moral or epistemological. This specific vision of caring “presupposes heterogeneity as the ontological ground on which everything humans relate with exists: myriad doings—everything we do—and of ontological entities that compose a world—selves, bodies, environment. It speaks of care as a manifold range of doings needed to create, hold together, and sustain life and continue its diverseness.”\(^{54}\) Care is therefore organically connected to the continuation of life for more-than-human entanglements and isn’t forced as a moral order or obligation. Since it isn’t based purely on empirical evidence, the biophilia hypothesis is a concept that, while imperfect, created a sliver of openness to relationality within Western science. This allowed for care and alternative viewpoints to come forward.

Zachari Logan is a Canadian artist who works mainly in drawing, ceramics, and installation. In his practice, and in particular in his 2013 drawing *Swarm No. 1* (figure 13), Logan

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\(^{54}\) Bellacasa, 69–70.
explores intersections between masculinity, identity, memory, and place, often using his own body as a site of exploration as he re-wilds as a queer embodiment of nature.\textsuperscript{55}
branches, and bodies depicted in various states of transformation. Logan states, “What we do to the land we do to our bodies. We affect the landscape; the landscape affects us. We are interlinked.” His depictions of weeds and decaying flowers amongst human bodies are representative of the inevitable passage of time, revealing new life and growth.

Natalie Jeremijenko is an artist and engineer with a background that includes studies in neuroscience, biochemistry, and physics. Jeremijenko’s work explores the intersection of technology, society, and the environment, and it looks to improve conditions leading to climate change. Her approach to her practice can be considered biophilic as she expresses her appreciation for the biosphere and the species that co-exist within it. Co-created with architect David Benjamin, Amphibious Architecture encourages a “data-driven dialogue” between fish, humans, and their shared environment through a text message feature where participants correspond with fish by receiving real-time data about the water quality in response. Despite being surrounded by rivers, New York residents have little interaction with water and most are unaware of the ecosystems that live below. This ecologically-minded experiment was intended to encourage human and nonhuman interaction, acting as a biophilic inquiry to build upon a dynamic and communicative environment.

Jeremijenko looks beyond gallery walls and often conducts interventions that engage with social and environmental concerns. In the Environmental Health Clinic, Jeremijenko created an establishment where individuals can go with health concerns for the planet. Rather than leaving their appointment with pharmaceuticals, however, they leave with advice and instructions on how to preserve the environment. Jeremijenko’s intervention encourages personal and community actions to problematize global market capitalism and consumerism and exposes their effects on the environment.

57 “Zachari Logan Talks about His Exhibition, Remembrance,” Peabody Essex Museum YouTube channel, August 11, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=C_c8f91Nl0w&feature=emb_logo&fbclid=PAAyYYMlj6cTqMWBrV6Xp38rz8YAq2RtugCMF0lumGVStnEanODSHZDuMM.
On a related note, time in nature is now prescribed by doctors as a tool for wellbeing. Since Covid-19—with its lockdowns and mass amount of death, alongside various global catastrophes and protests—it has become more important to talk about mental health, and one of the main therapies for symptoms of depression and anxiety has been to get outside and get in touch with nature. Physicians can now prescribe access to national parks, national historic sites, or national marine conservation areas through a nature prescription program. This prescription programs, however, shares a tension with arguments put forth by Liboiron, Tuck and Yang, because national parks in Canada are crown land, and hence Indigenous land—“claiming land for the Commons and asserting consensus as the rule of the Commons, erases existing, prior, and future Native land rights, decolonial leadership, and forms of self-government.” At what point is walking in nature an imposition? Additionally, there is an interesting tension between the concept of nature as healing and eco-anxiety, which is defined by the American Psychology Association (APA) as “the chronic fear of environmental cataclysm that comes from observing the seemingly irrevocable impact of climate change and the associated concern for one’s future and that of next generations.” With this said, both the prescriptive measure and eco-anxiety amplify the benefits of a biophilic perspective—which can look different for everyone—because both involve the importance of care for the environment and the importance of preserving things that make us intrinsically happy. The actual manifestation of decolonization is of utmost importance and climate depression is real; it is psychologically devastating to face climate and ecological catastrophe daily, while watching those in power not only fail to act but actively make things worse.

Forms of ecotherapy extend beyond visiting national parks and can be introduced in everyday actions such as opening your window and facing the sun, putting your bare feet on grass, and listening for birds and other forms of life when on your commute. I also believe

60 Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” 28.
62 Howard Clinebell first coined the term ecotherapy as a way to define ecological spirituality and improvements that can come from engaging with nature. He defines ecotherapy as “a holistic relationship with nature [which] encompasses both nature’s ability to nurture us, through our contact with natural places and spaces, and our ability to reciprocate this healing connection through our ability to nurture nature.” Martin Jordan and Joe Hinds, Ecotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1.
Ecotherapy can be mimicked in the most contemporary sense: by getting house plants,\textsuperscript{63} by investing in a good Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) lamp, by introducing into your home colours that can be found in nature like a shaggy moss-coloured area rug, and by using aromatherapy with essential oil diffusers.\textsuperscript{64} Biophilic actions such as these can help us maintain our animality in domesticated spaces in a world that doesn’t always allow for it.

**Exploring Olfaction**

Laura U. Marks explores the ways in which intercultural cinema can provide embodied experiences, and she offers a theory of “haptic visuality”\textsuperscript{65} which functions as sensory stimulants that trigger physical memories of smell, touch, and taste, suggesting that visual stimuli can trigger physical memories of other senses. For Marks, this is a way creative outlets can engage viewers’ bodily and individual experiences of culture and memory.\textsuperscript{66} I am interested in possible intersections between olfactory stimuli (via haptic visuality) and biophilia, and how these concepts can possibly intertwine. On a personal level, these concepts meet each other in my biophilic curiosities in nonhuman species and in my enjoyment of nature and the scents that follow. Relatedly, I am interested in what such interactions do for our health and memory associations. For example, nostalgic associations caused by scent can elicit “sense memories”\textsuperscript{67} as Caro Verbeek and Cretian Van Campen note. Sense memories are said to be “involuntary, elicit emotional, aesthetic experiences,”\textsuperscript{68} and are also “creative constructions of the past.”\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{63} Although incorporating plants in domestic spaces have many benefits, it should be noted that the concept of house plants stems from a long history of colonialism and Victorian obsession, cultivating plants as collectables and as a containable nature. For more, see Elaine Ayers, “Strange Beauty: Botanical Collecting, Preservation, and Display in The Nineteenth Century Tropics” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2019), 1–199.

\textsuperscript{64} Jo L. Wheeler Robins notes that in France, medical students are required to study aromatherapy and it is frequently prescribed by physicians. The subjective nature of aromatherapy is taken as soft evidence that aromatherapy can treat certain ailments and promote mood improvement. Examples of therapeutic scents include lavender, jasmine, geranium, and clary sage. Jo L. Wheeler Robins, “The Science and Art of Aromatherapy,” *Journal of Holistic Nursing* 17, no. 1 (1999): 6–7.


\textsuperscript{66} Marks, 132.


\textsuperscript{68} Verbeek and Van Campen, 135.

\textsuperscript{69} Verbeek and Van Campen, 135.
Applying this to my own life, the construction of my life path surrounded by nature elicits fond memories that involve many smells.

In 2019 I worked with my principal advisor Patrick Mahon on an independent study exploring scent associations from a biophilic perspective. Titled “Exploring Meditative Qualities of Olfaction Through Biophilia” (figure 14), the study investigates the correlation between human experience, memory, and olfaction, and is inspired by the under-explored territory of olfactory art. The study’s goal was to uncover the affective qualities of olfaction that pertain to emotional reactions to natural scents. As an artistic response to biophilia, I conducted an experiment involving four different blends of essential oils which included oils such as rose, bergamot, patchouli, lavender, jasmine, chamomile, orange, balsam fir, peppermint, carrot seed, geranium, and more. The individual blends were placed on wool and then in four individual bottles for people to smell from. After smelling each bottle, participants were asked to fill out a short questionnaire asking them how certain scents made them feel and what associations came up for them when smelling a selected blend. The end results were printed in a book as a type of memoir where people shared their intimate memories. Some were inquisitive, some were very personal, and some were funny and disconnected:
SCENT # 2

1. Does this scent resonate with you (a memory, a place, or perhaps a connection)?
   
   NO 1 2 3 4 5
   DEF. YES

Describe (optional):

A forest, hiking

2. Please circle the most relevant response to the scent:
   It's pleasant  I'm indifferent  It's unpleasant

3. Do you associate a colour with this scent?
   YES: ☐  YELLLOW  NO: ☐
   Colour: ☐

4. Do you associate a mood with this scent?
   YES: ☐  Serenity  NO: ☐

5. Optional Comment(s):

   Lindsay said she got goosebumps after I read her my description while she smelled it.

SCENT # 3

1. Does this scent resonate with you (a memory, a place, or perhaps a connection)?
   
   NO 1 2 3 4 5
   DEF. YES

Describe (optional):

My mom often put eucalyptus in her bathwater.

2. Please circle the most relevant response to the scent:
   It's pleasant  I'm indifferent  It's unpleasant

3. Do you associate a colour with this scent?
   YES: ☐  green  NO: ☐
   Colour: ☐

4. Do you associate a mood with this scent?
   YES: ☐  N/a  NO: ☐

5. Optional Comment(s):
Figure 14. Scent Questionnaire Samples, “Exploring Meditative Qualities of Olfaction Through Biophilia,” Independent Study, Western University, 2019.
Judging from the disjointed and varied results, it is clear that smell is a subjective and intuitive language that cannot be readily contextualized in words and is better understood through experience. Likewise, so is the concept of embodying animality. As a form of somatic expression, this reflexivity stands as a fundamental basis of olfactory art and provides an alternate perspective for experiencing art. Hsuan L. Hsu expresses that “we can voluntarily shut our eyes or ears, life’s dependence on breath makes it impossible to shut out smells for more than the span of a breath.”70 In inhaling and consuming aromatic art, the viewer to some extent involuntarily internalizes the art. As a form of socio-cultural engagement, this means the very life force of the plants in my work intermingles with the viewer’s very own being. Meanwhile viewers may be thinking of their own scent memories, creating a means of embracing multispecies relations, and in this case, relations within our animal bodies.

Edward O. Wilson acknowledges animality through the appreciation of nonhuman species and via an embodied interest in other living organisms, which he exemplifies by referring to a naturalist exploring aromatic qualities in nature. Wilson narrates the naturalist’s experience in nature, stating that, “from time to time [the naturalist] translates his running impressions of the smell of soil and vegetation into rational thought: the ancient olfactory brain speaks to the modern cortex.”71 This shows a connection between scents in nature and personal thought—emphasizing that such scents can be strong triggers for memory associations. As I mention above, scent as an artistic medium is a fairly new concept. It has seldomly been investigated as an artistic material and minimally regarded in art history and criticism. As Jim Drobnick explains, scent art is not always accepted as a “legitimate vehicle for artistic expression.”72 I incorporate scent into my artistic practice as a way to give viewers a heightened involvement in the work, and to trigger a viewer’s most animalistic sense (the sense of smell), all to encourage biophilia. One of the complicated aspects of using scent in an artistic project is that for the most part, scent is not codified with specific associations/interpretations and is therefore largely experienced subjectively. With this in mind, using scent in my studio-based project—such as by implementing scents extracted from aromatic plants, flowers, beeswax, and decaying leaves—

71 Wilson, *Biophilia*, 103.
allows me to reflect on various perspectives for a more intersectional understanding of biophilia. It also removes some of the control over how my work is perceived, which I enjoy.

Using somatic expression in works of art can work as an alternative and experiential means of engaging larger issues, such as climate change and air pollution, as exemplified in Peter de Cupere’s 2015 work, *Smoke Cloud* (figure 15).


To encounter this work, visitors are encouraged to climb a ladder and insert their head in a cloud that is filled with the scent of air pollution. This is a cheeky way to suggest that our heads are stuck in the clouds and that we are guilty of ignoring the evidence of environmentally destructive behaviour.
Also using scent in their work is Wolfgang Laib, an artist whose materials and working processes include repetition, collecting, and using natural substances such as rice, pollen, beeswax, and milk. Created in 1988, Laib’s *The Passageway* (figure 16) is an installation consisting of numerous beeswax chambers which give off an aromatic ambience and conjure experiences of trust and comfort.

![Figure 16. Wolfgang Laib, *The Passageway*, beeswax and wood construction with two electric light bulbs, MoMA, 1988.](https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81801)

The aromatic qualities of beeswax in this work provide a meditative moment to thoughtfully respond to the way we utilize and interact with nonhuman species, and they invoke the possible comfort this may offer (amongst other responses). The beeswax in this work references to the importance of multispecies relations and personal associations with biophilia to the processes of discovery or rediscovery. Commenting on Laib’s work, Silvia Battista suggests that the practice
of “ecological configuration that his creative method conveys not only destabilizes the idea of the artist as the only agent of his artistic products, but also recognizes a performative quality to the material itself.”

Laib’s works are constructed in a manner meant to enhance awareness of a transcendental serenity and a closeness to nature.

**Recuperative Play for Ecological Grief**

This brings me to discuss the second artistic component of my doctoral research, which was also part of the *NODES: Animality and Kinship* exhibition. *Recuperative Play for Ecological Grief* (figure 17) is an experiential installation piece consisting of soft sculptures, a bed of artificial turf, and a canopy of sheer fabric and chamomile all under soft orange lighting. *Recuperative Play for Ecological Grief* is intended to provide viewers a space for decompression, contemplation, possible comfort, and a moment to pause and/or play.

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For this work, viewers are invited to remove their shoes and to walk amongst the turf to pick up and examine the soft sculptures. There are also soft sculptures placed on plinths in case the artificial turf isn’t an option for the viewer. Considering the ongoing environmental crisis, the connection between mental health and connectedness to nature plays an increasingly important role in my research and day-to-day life. As an installation that mimics a constructed nature, the tactility of the soft sculptures welcome play, and the turf encourages participants to reflect on a biophilic positionality and the benefits of nature. Biophilia and play are introduced at an aromatic level in this work as there are plenty of smells to reflect on in the space. I infuse the batting with lavender in many of the soft sculptures with the aim of providing comfort and possible memory associations. Subtle scents of chamomile grown in my mother’s greenhouse can be smelled from above, where a canopy provides a bed for the dried herb, gently floating above the viewer. These scents act for me as a personal reflection of comfort, as they were ones that surrounded me in my childhood. While my aim for including biophilic scents and soft
sculptures is to encourage thoughts of nature and care, the installation carries an interesting tension because it also combines smells of glue from the canopy and smells of plastic and rubber from the turf. This to me represents a humbling of humanness, reminding us that we’re not perfect and that we often make silly and destructive mistakes (intentionally or not). The soft sculptures are organic in shape, many of which are silhouettes based on footage I took in my hometown of moving animals. The sculptures are abstracted in such a way that, while the viewer may think they know what they’re looking at, they might question it anyway. It was important to me that viewers hold on to objects long enough to feel connected in some way, potentially bringing them closer to their own animality and biophilic connections.

Growing up in a small rural township, along with the teachings of my parents, created a foundation for the way I conduct my participation in the more-than-human world. Taking a critical and biophilic approach to topics such as ecofeminism, eco-anxiety, connectedness to and care for nature, recuperative measures, and environmentalism also requires conversations around topics such as pollution, racism, resource extraction, whiteness, land grabbing, privilege, harm reduction, and accountability. Decolonization, especially in pedagogical discourse, needs to be addressed clearly, specifically, and in a way that promotes action. Tuck and Yang make clear what decolonization is not—“Decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity.”74 Furthermore, decolonization requires adopting an unsettling perspective—one that acknowledges harmful passivity. Progress requires genuine care, and that too can be uncomfortable, but necessary.

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74 Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” 37.
CHAPTER THREE: Tentacular Thinking and Creating in the Chthulucene

The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places. In urgent times, many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe, of stopping something from happening that looms in the future, of clearing away the present and the past in order to make futures for coming generations. Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or Edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.

- Donna J. Haraway, Staying with the Trouble

This final chapter acts as the skeletal foundation of my research methodology, in which I address predominant theories that shape my research-creation project and processes. Here, I discuss my personal and specific approach to making and thinking, which then leads to methodological speculation. This chapter largely focuses on a discussion of my research positionality within what Donna Haraway calls the Chthulucene—a term I define and explore with reference to other “cenes” and relatable artists. Following on the previous chapters, my writing—along with the topics I address—is free-flowing: while there are distinct topics, the subject matter leads towards a rhizomatic framework in a way that denies linearity, much like learning itself. The aim of this chapter is to explore ways of change and to open propositions for other worlds to exist.

Speculating on The Poetics of Method and Intraspeciation

As my research-creation project evolved, I further developed a term that I began to explore during my MFA, which poetically expresses the way I think about my practice as an artist and scholar. I developed the term intraspeciation to conceptualize a holistic approach to animality, and my work proposes a theory of intraspeciation through embodied and experiential components. As a notional approach, intraspeciation is significantly influenced by my upbringing in a rural town in Northern Ontario, the traditional territory of Nipissing First Nation, where I was surrounded by forests, agriculture, pet companions, and undomesticated nonhuman

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animals. Intraspeciation activates the term animality by proposing that individuals can identify with a deeply internalized animality, and by encouraging keen interest in other living organisms because of their inherent relatability. I use intraspeciation as a way of defining my process, positioning my work in proximity to evolutionary theories of phylogenetic exploration by blurring taxonomic divides.

As a branch of biology, phylogeny explores the diversification of species and focuses on uniqueness. In my practice, I acknowledge uniqueness and complexity but I use tactics to blur distinctions to focus more on interconnectivity than on uniqueness as a way of repudiating hierarchical structures. From an evolutionary standpoint, I see intraspeciation as similar to phylogeny in the sense that both recognize biodiversity. Intraspeciation differs from phylogeny, however, in that intraspeciation is a poetic and playful tactic that reimagines animality more as an intermingling of species than as a way of establishing systematic categories of different species that ultimately separate human from animal. The intermingling I associate with intraspeciation makes up a human body—and it is implicit to the body of the human—like many nonhuman species that co-exist. It is a means of decentering the assumption of the superior human, with its inevitable problems.

While my research into animality and my exploration of intraspeciation are influenced by the realm of science, investigating this terrain provides the opportunity to expose the limitations of science and the way it can “other” species or solidify the human/animal divide. And by association, artistic approaches to such topics can fill the gaps in areas not normally touched by scientific frameworks. Ron Broglio investigates social and scientific misconceptions that have resulted in animal poverty and the othering of nonhuman species. Within this framework, Broglio states that “the supposed poverty of the (animal) surface provides an opportunity for thinking differently. If philosophy is to think the unthought of thought, it will be at such limits,

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2 As a child, at times I struggled with the fact that I lived in a rural area. I felt as though I was too far from the city where my friends were, and where there were more supposedly entertaining things to do. Foremost, I recognize my position as a white settler and the privilege it holds growing up on land that was stolen from Nipissing First Nation. The privilege that I also acknowledge here is of growing up by fresh lakes, clean air (in comparison to more urbanized areas) and plentiful freshly harvested foods. I also evaluate this privilege in comparison to where I live now, in an urban environment where I often long to escape to “nature” for personal recharging.
horizons, and surfaces where we meet the Other.” My doctoral research and studio investigations are dedicated to finding ways in which we meet each other—human and nonhuman—with compassionate vulnerability, accepting previous divides and suspending them through notions like intraspeciation, which for me provides opportunities to think differently.

In his article “Becoming-Animal in the Literary Field,” Brian Massumi suggests that “an increased attunement to differing livelinesses, as they amplify each other’s relational potential for sensing and acting, can lead to the composition of an altered form of life.” Intraspeciation is a term that can be used in the action/activation of this alteration; it involves a process of personal discovery or realization of animality within day-to-day living, thinking, and making as such, for that moment or there-on-out. Whether it is established briefly by an ephemeral experience or an epiphany, or perhaps a newly recognized motive, to be intraspeciated involves a shift in perspective regarding human privilege, and proposes a reimagining of a humanity that is no longer detached from animality.

I wonder if this framework can help us move beyond anthropocentric thinking to conceptualize and embrace the interconnectivity and relatability that exists amongst species. What would this do for our social structures and worldly dynamics? This also leads me to ask questions such as: How does readdressing animality through the process of intraspeciation increase an appreciation of kinship between species and a moral consideration of nonhuman species? How does the incorporation of concepts put forth by the biophilia hypothesis (human innate curiosity in other living organisms) in immersive, contemporary artworks encourage appreciation, identification, and kinship amongst humans and nonhuman others?

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Making Knots and Nodes: Critically Theorizing Posthumanism and Actor-Network Theory

Critically approaching posthumanism in the context of my research holds key propositions that assist in formulating my theory centralized in animality. Whereas posthumanism conventionally focuses on the human and its relationship to technological advancements, a critical approach asks what posthumanizing does for nonhuman species and promotes the “undoing” of the human altogether. Lars Schmeink suggests that “the idea of the ‘human’ is under attack by liquid modern realities, losing its categorical integrity through corporate manipulation and environmental influences.”5 Using posthumanism as a lens, Schmeink argues that “the human is reduced by hypercapitalism to become inhuman, non-human animals are introduced to showcase categorical liminality—if not outright transgression—and to reveal the interrelatedness of species, and finally the ‘posthuman’ is staged as an alternative category better equipped to prosper in the post-catastrophic environment, having to negotiate its position in regard to the still-existent ‘human.’”6 Through critically evaluating posthumanism, in the undoing of the human who has been shaped by modern realities, alternative perspectives become clearer and help reveal the interrelatedness of species. This better equips us for catastrophic environmental conditions and, hopefully, better equips us to make better choices when it comes to preserving the environment and caring for each other, human and nonhuman.

Considering the human within Western social, political, and scientific history, Rosi Braidotti states that “we assert our attachment to the species as if it were a matter of fact, a given. So much so that we construct a fundamental notion of Rights around the Human.”7 In suggesting posthumanism as an attempt to decenter “man”—the historical measure of all things—Braidotti states that “there is widespread concern about the loss of relevance and mastery suffered by the dominant vision of the human subject and by the field of scholarship centred on it, namely the Humanities.”8 While traditionally the Humanities structures posthumanism under conditions of change, centralized for the betterment of humankind, my approach in critically analyzing

6 Schmeink, 75.
8 Braidotti, 2.
posthumanism suggests that a construction such as intraspeciation may provide a way of restructuring animality and therefore relationality.

Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd uses an Indigenous perspective to enliven thinking about the posthuman, noting that in Euro-Western humanities, “posthumanism and the ontological turn have all been queried and challenged as Eurocentric. These critiques re-center the locus of thought, offering a reconfiguration of understandings of human-environmental relations towards praxis that acknowledges the central importance of land, bodies, movement, race, colonialism and sexuality.” Similarly, both posthumanism and the Anthropocene (a term coined for our current geological epoch) have been criticized for undermining and ignoring key issues of environmental ruination and for following a Western-centric and hegemonic outlook on relationality which promotes human dominance, pollution, and speciesism. Kathryn Yusoff alludes, “To be included in the ‘we’ of the Anthropocene is to be silenced by a claim to universalism that fails to notice its subjugations, taking part in a planetary condition in which no part was accorded in terms of subjectivity.” Criticisms of the Anthropocene also conjure implications of how nonhuman species are treated by humans. Thus, critically approaching posthumanism can be utilized as a way to challenge Anthropocenic strategies.

In correlation with arguments advanced by my approach to posthumanism, I want to cross-reference several thematics found in actor-network theory. I see this critical perspective on posthumanism and arguments put forth in actor-network theory as aligned, as both challenge human exceptionalism. Theorized by Bruno Latour in Reassembling the Social, actor-network theory (ANT) argues that everything exists within interactive relationships that are inside or outside networks; this includes human and nonhuman species, technology, and non-living or inanimate objects. Latour uses what he calls infra-language when he describes these networks, which is essentially meaningless outside its allowance for the displacement of terms and their various meanings. For example, when Latour discusses relationships, he often invokes words

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10 Kathryn Yusoff, A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 12.
such as *group, grouping,* and *actor,* which are empty words that lack specific context: “[Such a word] could be applied to a planet as well as to an individual; to Microsoft as well as to my family; to plants as well as to baboons. This is exactly why I have chosen it.”\textsuperscript{12}

Specifically, Latour writes that “an ‘actor’ in the hyphenated expression actor-network is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming around it.”\textsuperscript{13} In using the word *actor,* it is never clear who and what is acting within a network, for the actor is never alone. What Latour calls actants—which can be literally anything provided that it is deemed the source of action as opposed to the actor which is considered any entity that does things—are equally important, and each have a function; therefore, it is necessary to look at every part of an overall system to understand its dynamic. Networks in ANT include actors in given situations and how they relate with one another within the network, and connections are created when actants relate to one another and influence each other. Using such language to describe how ANT functions enables the creating of paths that diverge from systems of oppression, for example, given the functionality and purpose of all actors and actants. Thus, we can observe how personal ways of being and seeing, with no established starting point or social aggregates, can become a means of enhanced mobility.

While I mainly intend to use terms that are precise in their meaning, I find the broad terms within ANT useful in the dismantling of hegemonies and other barriers. It encourages deconstructing social hierarchies for same-plane existence: “ANT is not interested only in freeing human actors from the prison of the social but in offering natural objects an occasion to escape the narrow cell given to matters of fact by the first empiricism.”\textsuperscript{14} After having done extensive work on concepts of assemblages—as modalities of groupings of agencies and paradigm shifts that see space and agency as results of humans and nonhumans forming precarious wholes—Latour explains that it is necessary for him to scrutinize more thoroughly what exactly is assembled in an assemblage and under the concept of a society, which is a central topic of discussion in sociology. Indeed, sociology is the “science of living together.”\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} Latour, 29.
\textsuperscript{13} Latour, 46.
\textsuperscript{14} Latour, 114.
\textsuperscript{15} Latour, 2.
Similar to questions put forth by posthumanism, ANT looks at what a society is, what its dimensions are, what it consists of, and what social factors are at play and how they can be altered. Perhaps confusingly, ANT also holds that society and the social do not exist a priori. These concepts are to be retraced by creating connections; “thus, every choice of a departure point will lead to the drawing of a completely different animal, fully incommensurable with the others.”16 Here, Latour outlines an approach in which there is nothing specific to the social order and no residual features other domains cannot account for.17 Alongside this thought, the notion of society is replaced by “many connecting elements circulating inside tiny conduits.”18 In this sense, the concept and meaning of the social is shrinking and therefore provides room for other social domains in the more-than-human world, understood as movements of re-association and/or reassembling.19 A critically engaged posthumanism is much like an ANT departure point, in that it deems animality incommensurable amongst all actors and provides objective judgement.

Counteracting beliefs propounded by humanism, Latour explains that nonhumans are actors and not “hapless bearers of symbolic projection.”20 He states that any study “that gives non-humans a type of agency that is more open than the traditional natural causality—but more efficient than the symbolic one”—is considered to be within the ANT corpus.21 I see ANT in this way: as foundational support for the scope of my research that challenges human exceptionalism. It is particularly important that it allows multispecies alliances and “self-structure,” which is the idea that the social is left in the hands of the actors and not constituted by the analyst or observer.22 This concept is especially fitting alongside the social aspects of the Chthulucene, an alternative perspective on our current epoch where agency exists for human and nonhuman actors in finding alliances in the process of reworlding. Like critically engaging in posthumanism, ANT requires an undoing of previous conceptions of agency and the growth of relationality, as “ANT claims that it is possible to trace more sturdy relations and discover more

16 Latour, 36.
17 Latour, 4.
18 Latour, 5.
19 Latour, 7.
20 Latour, 10.
21 Latour, 10.
22 Latour, 23.
revealing patterns by finding a way to register the links between unstable and shifting frames of reference rather than by trying to keep one frame stable.” To Latour, we can build upon the social if we refrain from interfering with tension and controversies that then unfold relativism. To me, this is what Donna Haraway means when she raises the idea of staying with the trouble—by staying with the tension of hegemonic systems, for example, to dismantle it in order for relativism to unfold. Within the overlapping ideas of Latour and Haraway, it is clear that action involving change is “to be felt as a node or knot that comprises many sets of agencies that are waiting to be untangled and rendered vivid once again.” Latour states this as the simplest thing in the world: “We are all bound by social interactions; we all live in a society; and we are all cultural animals.” To live in a time of desperate need for recuperative measures, cooperation is imperative; funnily enough, that cooperation must be of the most disruptive kind of all.

Chthulucene Living [and dying and composting]

In considering systematic phenomena, Haraway wonders how altering perspectives with reference to the human experience in a given epoch might surpass the boundaries of identity, and how discerning kinship in the concept of animality might ultimately create changes in kind. Haraway refers to “multispecies” when articulating instances of actions, responsibilities, and relations. By discounting a singular-visioned and humanist perspective, Haraway suggests that in order to produce change, there must be actions from a multitude of participants, human and nonhuman. She states that “multispecies flourishing requires a robust nonanthropomorphic sensibility that is accountable to irreducible differences.” In this vein, accepting animality within our own human embodiment is a prerequisite to embracing multispecies relations. In addressing the complexity of such relations through concepts of ecofeminism, Haraway proposes rewiring modes of thought: “we need to make kin symbiotically, sympoetically.”

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23 Latour, 24.
24 Haraway, Staying with the Trouble, 1.
25 Latour, Reassembling the Social, 44.
26 Latour, 159.
27 Haraway, Staying with the Trouble, 99.
28 Donna Haraway, When Species Meet (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 90.
29 Haraway, Staying with the Trouble, 102.
In light of Haraway’s ideas, my choice to position my research within the current age she theorizes as the Chthulucene is one of the central tenets of my methodology. Haraway ponders, “perhaps the outrage meriting a name like Anthropocene is about the destruction of places and times of refuge for people and other critters,” and the “Anthropocene is more of a boundary than an epoch.”30 The Chthulucene, in contrast, is a concept of an alternative epoch that, rather than focusing on ecological destruction caused by humans, situates our current epoch with respect to both human and nonhuman activity. The Chthulucene addresses living and dying together on an irreparable earth, with the proposition of composting and reworlding the Anthropocene. Systematically different from the Anthropocene, Haraway defines the Chthulucene as the “dynamic ongoing sym-chthonic forces and powers of which people are a part, within which ongoingness is at stake.”31 Only with “intense commitment and collaborative work and play with other terrans, [can a] flourishing [amongst] rich multispecies assemblages that include people…be possible.”32 As I mentioned previously, Haraway emphasizes that the Chthulucene makes it necessary that we “stay with the trouble,” which requires “making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles.”33

In my thinking, I believe the term compost is a wonderful representation regarding current efforts in reworlding. I see it as a realistic yet optimistic concept to be used in acknowledging the destruction that has been done on and to Terra, yet it is also one that provides a point of departure from which to move forward in productive ways that cannot be facilitated by mainstream outlets that promote fear mongering and defeat. On one hand, this work brings us back to Terra in more ways than one, grounding us critters in a way that informs us that we, one day, will be components of the ground, part of that which grounds. And on the other hand, it also provides propositions for using present circumstances as material and turning it towards something else—to repurpose in service of new worlds, new perspectives, and possible futures.

Wrought by Biofilm Productions is a film made using time-lapse photography created in 2022 that addresses ways in which we as humans categorize the world around us. It looks to the

30 Haraway, 102, 100.
31 Haraway, 160.
32 Haraway, 101.
33 Haraway, 4.
hidden world of decay to challenge misconceptions about the processes of rot and decomposition. Biofilm Productions is made up of time-lapse videographer Joel Penner, whose work is featured in National Geographic’s *One Strange Rock*, and writer/podcaster Anna Sigrithur, who is known on Nordic Food Lab Radio and Oxford Food Symposium’s *Ox Tales* podcast. The film is divided into sections that educate the viewer on processes of decay, and the section I would like to focus on is entitled *Compost*. This section offers an immersive experience of viewing striking imagery of time-lapse footage of decaying fruits, vegetables, plants, and animals (figure 18).

![Figure 18. Anna Sigrithur and Joel Penner, *Wrought*, Biofilm Productions, 2022. https://www.wroughtfilm.ca.](image)

There is an accompanying text that poetically contributes to the footage. I have included the text below to show the connections between concepts of compost and our animality, connections which can guide us to remerge into the Chthulucene. I suggest that when reading the text, do so as loosely as possible, allowing for metaphorical moments and a fluidity among the concepts I address in this thesis to come through; a transgressing of binaries previously discussed:

> While fermentation leavens and spoilage threatens compost reincarnates forming biological static between the frequencies of animal and vegetable ready to be tuned into new life. Wriggling creatures form disassembly lines for humanity’s leftovers. Worms
traffic nutrients on slippery, writhing freeways. They follow bacteria’s passage into the interior of a fruit where crisp flesh melts into flux. A seasonal tempo emerges composting and composing. Fallen leaves are stripped down to reveal secret skeletons and their vivid rainbow pigments fade into the black richness of the forest floor. But compost soils more than just fruits and foliage it claims creatures with blood creatures with senses creatures with mothers and they too the swarming multitudes will invade devour and rip apart. In the compost heap I am fine with such violent disarray. But come my time to dissolve I am far less brave. Habituated to this one body anything else suggests oblivion. But the compost heap dreams of another option to be wrought that is, transformed. But is this transformation a caress or is it violence? Metamorphosis or ruin? The answer depends on where within rot’s vast network we stand. At times rot is a feast! A multispecies melee of gorging digesting and excreting. Devoured by beetles rotting flesh wriggles to life once more in a putrid eucharist of feather scale and bone. Rot even offers a place for moments of rest and togetherness. In a world obsessed with growth we overlook these tender possibilities of decay. That soft and loving surface that will catch us when we fall disassemble us and let us return together in new and vibrant flesh. But for now, this flesh is perishable. With each breath, we make a choice what do we preserve? And what do we leave to rot? Some things are hard to swallow but when digested allow for infinite becoming. As it is, we only have a taste. And once swallowed we too are not dead. We are wrought.  

There are many actors working within and alongside the process of compost. There is complexity in individual agency and functionality, which shares contrasting space with similarities amongst the human and nonhuman. The Chthulucene acts as compost, reworlding what’s been left to us for sharable moments and infinite becomings.

After taking a moment to think about compost, I would like to continue discussing concepts within, and in support of, the Chthulucene. Heather Swanson, Anna Tsing, Nils Bubandt, and Elaine Gan speak about animal suffering in the Anthropocene and why within the Chthulucene, it is imperative to embrace connections. They state that “this suffering is a matter not just of empathy but also of material interdependence. We are mixed up with other species; we cannot live without them. Without intestinal bacteria, we cannot digest our food. Without endosymbiotic dinoflagellates, coral polyps lose their vitality.”  

With the idea that humans are materially interdependent with nonhuman animals as my frame of reference, I reject the hegemonic notion that there is a contemporary loss of affinity between the human and

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nonhuman. Rather, I propose that we readdress a position of animality in order to stress, for critical purposes, that we cannot survive as a human species—especially within the Chthulucene—without the assurance of the agencies of nonhuman species.

The term Anthropocene represents a geologic epoch in which a level of livability is determined by humans; “the winds of the Anthropocene carry ghosts—the vestiges and signs of past ways of life still charged in the present.” Although its starting point is proposed to have begun less than a century ago with the nuclear Trinity Test in 1945, the Anthropocene tells a story that took millions of years to conceive. It is a story that involves ruination and corporate greed, is apocalyptic in nature, and is and must be critically questioned by those who see differently. To see differently is to adopt a separate perspective from other ages and “cenes” that have influenced destructive behaviours, especially behaviours enacted in the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene focuses on the causation of catastrophe from a standpoint of human exceptionalism as in, look what we’ve conquered but passively take accountability for. Deborah Bird Rose in “Shimmer When All You Love Is Being Trashed” states that “to act as if the world beyond humans is composed of ‘things’ for human use is a catastrophic assault on the diversity, complexity, abundance, and beauty of life.” This is a legacy of a Western apparatus which asserts human superiority and competence above all. Upon reflection, Rose notes,

Man is the only animal systemically to torture members of its own species, as well as members of countless other species, and to engage in seemingly endless and often wildly indiscriminate killing. Precisely because human cruelty tends to drop out of our conversations, I want to insist that we linger with it. It is terrible stuff to have to stay with it for too long, but those who suffer, whether human or more-than-human, don’t have a choice. They have to stay with it, because they are experiencing it. At the very least, we who have not yet been drawn into the vortex of violence are called to recognize it, name it, and resist it; we are called to bear witness and to offer care.

In addressing this one-sided superiority, we are able to continue to expose the desperate need for sanative strategies that simultaneously highlight who we are as a species, what we are capable of,
and also mutuality. We as a species possess plasticity, which carries the capacity to join fellowships with others.39

Today there are “cenes” proposed in abundance, and because of this, it is truly up to the individual earth-bounder which one they choose to live in and fight for or against. The live art duo Pony Express, led by Ian Sinclair and Loren Kronemyer, highlights various epochs in their immersive artwork camouflaged as a symposium, entitled Epoch Wars (Figure 19). The artwork poses the question, “How should we name the geological era we will all die in?” and challenges the naming of the Anthropocene in exploring other means of taking responsibility for our planet’s current state.

Epoch Wars addresses various (recognized and potentially recognizable) epochs such as the Capitalocene, Chthulucene, Plantationocene, Symbiocene, Gynecene, Manthropocene, and many more, asking various participants such as international and local artists, scientists, and visionaries to imagine alternative worlds to the Anthropocene. The duo sees these counternarratives as built within the concept of a speculative symposium—featuring keynotes and “deep-play panel talks”—in order to radicalize their audience into epoch warriors.40

Haraway expresses ways of thinking in the Chthulucene as tentacular, as in having many tentacles. Tentacular thinking breaks binaries through bodily practices and networks that are

39 Rose.
composed of trajectories, patternings, and lines and the tentacular tangles to make kin. Haraway expands on this by arguing that “bounded individualism in its many flavors in science, politics, and philosophy has finally become unavailable to think with, truly no longer thinkable, technically or any other way.” Laura Prouvost is a multi-media artist who predominantly creates installation works that encourage viewers’ engagements with fictional spaces, which often also encourages tentacular thinking. Prouvost’s work is preoccupied with the power of suggestion, as many pieces are open to multiple interpretations with tangling storylines and encourage participation through presentness. In 2019, Prouvost represented France at the Venice Biennale with her 2019 multi-media work Deep See Blue Surrounding You (Figure 20). This video installation consists of various scenes of adventures that a group of people embark upon, travelling within various landscapes and spaces. Around the video are sculptural found objects that parallel the video. This work provides viewers with tentacular vision, whereby Prouvost makes animalistic references to the octopus as a way of suggesting no singular ending to her exploratory, subterranean world.

41 Haraway, Staying with the Trouble, 5.
Deep See Blue Surrounding You is a cavernous and immersive installation where Prouvost plays with the physicality of space, with fleeting video moments corresponding to art objects explored for their agency. In an interview for Ocula magazine, Prouvost shares that she is often interested in the translation of moments which prove to be quite sensorial—such as when grass touches your face—and she prefers exploring alternative vocabularies in order to share those moments.42 Discussing Deep See Blue Surrounding You as part of the Venice Biennale, Prouvost says that the video component of the multi-media work is projected within a loop and therefore the same story always starts again, much like the tentacle of the octopus that feels and feels, all over again; the animal is assumed in the film to lack memory, constantly touching objects and things for the first time.43 The viewers in this scenario can approach Prouvost’s work

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in the same way, taking what they choose, in accordance with their own story.\textsuperscript{44} Both tangible and imaginary, \textit{Deep See Blue Surrounding You} can be compared to certain thematics of the Chthulucene, namely the reimagining of relationality, animality, and the intermingling of shared realities, as the artwork offers the chance to challenge representations of many kinds. In the film, through the continuity of experiences interacting with objects, especially those related to nonhuman species such as seaweed, plants, birds, and an octopus, the humans in the video appear to be embracing an adventurous animality and kinship as an alternative vocabulary towards relationality.

Sebastian De Line is a queer, trans artist and scholar of Haudenosaunee-Métis-Cantonese descent who considers the Chthulucene as an epoch that requires a rethinking of relationality and of how both human and nonhuman species co-exist. De Line draws from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors to recognize the multiplicity of forms of kinships and what sorts of implications such multiplicity has on marginalized assemblages.\textsuperscript{45} De Line explores the concept of animate matter as a new materialist approach and as contribution to Indigenous philosophy and science, which is also a concept that is in constant flux and attached to animality.\textsuperscript{46} Here, De Line uses the notion of animality within the concept of \textit{tranimacy}, which asks how “materialities could be imagined in a Chthulucenian epoch and what are the implications of conceptualizing the becoming of tranimals while thinking through animacy.”\textsuperscript{47}

To help her readers visualize her concept of the Chthulucene, Haraway uses playful string configurations from children’s games to explain intra-actions of thinking, patterning, and making. Haraway primarily uses two games: one is the non-Indigenous \textit{cat’s cradle}, and the other is an Indigenous string game called \textit{na’atl’o’}. But De Line questions if Haraway’s proposal of living together can be adequately expressed through game play, as “games have rules and limitations.”\textsuperscript{48} Haraway proposes that within the Chthulucene, “the partners do not precede the knotting; species of all kinds are consequent upon worldly subject—and object—shaping

\textsuperscript{44} Maertens, Picon, and Huard.
\textsuperscript{46} De Line, 84.
\textsuperscript{47} De Line, 85.
\textsuperscript{48} De Line, 86.
entanglements." De Line notes that this metaphor is both limiting and adrift: "The openness of interpreting a metaphor gives it leeway to become multiple in meaning, yet its mercurial nature does not always account for the structures of systems it may encounter nor alternative ways of becoming and mattering." De Line explains that in the game of na’atl’o’, relationality occurs through the process of speaking and listening, not as an exchange of passing string to one another. Collectively, this allows for the possibility of diffraction, which can encourage flow and relatability. In questioning how to be in relation through the concept of tranimacy, De Line notes, “I have not come close to exhausting a list of identity intersections and their possible assemblages. The possibilities are contingent and in constant flux. What needs to be kept in mind are the singular and collective positionalities that are personally embodied.” Tranimacy, as a way to describe relationships between nonhuman and human animals, trans embodiment and agency, is a concept that could very well live in the Chthulucene. It is a concept that does not deny the inescapable truth of death; like the Chthulucene and compost, “it does not excuse us from our relationship to the death or evacuation of animacy in other bodies.” Tranimacy is also described as always occurring and passing through bodies; it exemplifies the way animality can be embraced uniquely, despite its sympoietic nature.

**Research Methodology and Artistic Contribution**

The specific methodology of my practice is inherent to the particular knowledge and experience produced by it. I adopt contemporary practices of reflexivity: a sort of bidirectional approach (within the scope of my practice) to what influences me to enact my thinking and feeling and thus to produce my work. I am largely moved by knowledge I gain through everyday moments (simple and complex), worldly occurrences and circumstances (both expected and not), and the displays and interactions of various animalities that happen coincidingly, in which connections can be made. *What is Our Role?: Artists in Academia and the Post-Knowledge*

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50 De Line, 86.
51 De Line, 86.
52 De Line, 88.
53 De Line, 89.
54 De Line, 101.
Economy edited by Jaclyn Meloche is a collection that puts forward four personal perspectives from four academics on the concept of research-creation and art-based practices within academia, in particular, at the doctoral level. The perspectives are expressed by individuals who are all invested in the production of new understandings of art-based research and the knowledge produced by making art, especially within and in proximity to academic institutions.

In the introduction, Meloche, a writer invested in knowledge conceived by art and the everyday, uses the term enlightenment to refer to an “intervention into the present situation that draws on the resources of the past for inspiration and guidance.” As reflexive contributions, artistic interventions—such as physical artwork—can open new interpretations that have the effect of reviving the past or retaining its significance. They can also create new thinking, which in turn contributes to the heritage that future generations can reference. The belief that creative practices can create new types of knowledge activates a shift in institutional discourses that limit understandings of artistic practices and productions in (and around) academia.

The need to understand the role of the artist in academia suggests the assumption that art must embody knowledge, which is unsurprising. Meloche proposes that artists in academia can “deconstruct and reconstruct the role of the artist in relation to the notion that what they contribute, and how they do so, informs the changing ways of ‘enlightenment’ within academia.” As I address my methodology and conceptions of methodology more generally here, I think it is also important to address the challenges that come with attempting to amalgamate a professional art practice and the role of the artist within the academy. There are established structures and methods within academic institutions that can risk limiting the work of the artist. Rules and regulations may not apply to all practices, resulting in a sort of grey area in which artists cannot distinguish their approach.

55 Jaclyn Meloche, What is Our Role?: Artists in Academia and the Post-Knowledge Economy (Toronto: YYZ Artists’ Outlet, 2018), 16.
56 Meloche, 16.
57 Meloche, 20.
58 Meloche, 25.
It can be said that the formation of an artistic methodology in the university is a perpetual work-in-progress, as approaches to practices are often highly individualized and therefore so are their necessary methodologies and processes. One of four perspectives in What is Our Role? that I would like to elaborate on with reference to my own thinking is that of Dave Kemp, who graduated from the Art and Visual Culture PhD program at Western University in 2014. Much like my own thinking around my practice and methodology, Kemp approaches art in academia by addressing the importance of two kinds of knowledge: one, knowledge gained by creating art, which can’t always be vocally articulated and is more experiential; and two, knowledge gained that can be articulated by language. Both live in harmony and tension with each other. In his essay “Generating Knowledge: The Things We Know but Cannot Explain,” Kemp explores the shareability of the knowledge obtained as an artist and the possible friction and challenges that come with a studio-based PhD program. Kemp states that one of the difficulties of translating art-based practices in academia is “the impossibility of quantifying artistic knowledge and measuring its ‘results.’ Artistic knowledge cannot be transferred through explicit, linguistic means, but instead is uniquely produced within by the individual through their own personal engagement and embodied experience.”

To expand on these ideas (and where I find a relationship with my own thinking), Kemp refers to polymath Michael Polanyi’s theory of tacit and explicit knowledge as a way of making clear the kind of knowledges that get implemented in the production of art-making and the possible intellectual outcomes that can be obtained. Tacit knowledge is personal knowledge that cannot be verbally articulated. It lives in tension with explicit knowledge, which is linguistic knowledge that is formal and codified. Both aspects of knowledge live in cohesion within my practice-based research, and they ultimately work as a whole to articulate my arguments and artistic expressions.

I incorporate elements of installation, drawing, and sculpture within my practice, and the principles informing my specific methodology revolve around my lived experiences and theorization/interpretations of animality. This set of linked processes operate through the activation of intraspeciation as I describe earlier in this chapter. My artistic work intertwines

60 Kemp, 31.
with themes addressed in this thesis—such as animality and intraspeciation—through strategies of narration, storytelling, and through the invocation of and references to scientific facts. My methodology involves inquiry using subjective and objective thought and can at times be about one or the other and sometimes “both/and.” Ultimately, my methodology aims to examine what might be termed both “obviousness” and “unfamiliarity,” thus informing the reconstruction of previously considered temporally-bounded perspectives through the imaginative physicality operating in my artworks. I use both subjective and objective approaches to seek outcomes that involve the direct consumption of visual knowledge and the opportunity for personal exploration of the work.

Tacit knowledge is not exclusive to art practices; it is the knowledge used to navigate the day-to-day. Because of its subjective nature, tacit knowledge is not generally considered credible knowledge, and thus is often ignored. This is indeed problematic “because much of what it is to be human is based on tacit understanding, and most innovation, at its root, stems from some form of tacit or gut-based intuition.”\(^{61}\) It is a knowledge that is emotional, intuitive, and involves sensorial observation, which in turn helps us navigate explicit knowledge. The concept is holistic in its collective understanding, and “now more than ever before, an integrated and comprehensive understanding of the world is needed.”\(^{62}\) Art proposes a way of appreciating tacit understanding and encourages us to embrace composite ways of knowing, because without accepting the combination, we lose meaning.\(^{63}\) For example, the installation *Recuperative Play for Ecological Grief* provides an experience that emphasizes sensorial participation—to feel and observe—which then leaves room for reflective and critical evaluation. I have arrived at my understanding and comprehension of the research I explore in this thesis only by way of combining knowledges. For instance, my process of intraspeciation combines intuition and scientific fact. As well, my artistic responses to explicit means of obtaining knowledge—such as studying decolonial strategies and analyzing scientific case studies—are a form of tacit knowledge; both forms of knowledge work together in my artistic process.

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61 Kemp, 31.  
62 Kemp, 32.  
63 Kemp, 40.
Following from the above, it is important to me to assert that my interest in the Chthulucene also informs the presentation of my artwork and the way I intend it to be viewed. Like the aspirations of Chthulucene-informed thinking and feeling, the experiential quality I emphasize with my work stresses the importance of being present. Experiential and sensorial participation in my project also aligns with Haraway’s notion of being sympoietic. Haraway explains sympoiesis as a system that requires collective productivity and avoids spatial and temporal boundaries.\textsuperscript{64} The methodology that I adopt is fluent, transitional, and in motion; it is not in making of itself, it is always a part—partnered in some way.\textsuperscript{65} The work that I produce has a sense of movement; it has a sense of my own presence as I include personal attributes; and it has a sense of the viewers being present as participants. The third and final component of the studio-based artwork I produced for this project and thesis exhibition is a thirty-foot by four-foot drawing entitled \textit{Chthulucene Dream-Land: States of Reality} (Figure 21). This large-scale drawing addresses themes of the Chthulucene, compost, reworlding, and various concerns regarding understandings of the Anthropocene.

\textsuperscript{64} Haraway, \textit{Staying with the Trouble}, 33.

\textsuperscript{65} Haraway, 33.
For the exhibition NODES | Animality and Kinship, the drawing was fastened on to a large rounded floating wall in order to immerse viewers within the work. The aim was to transform the gallery space to heighten the viewer’s experience of feeling present with respect to the work. As an homage to the video installation A Body Within a Body Within a Body, over forty wax skull sculptures surrounded the gallery space—wax skulls of human, bear, and beaver all sitting on decaying rhubarb leaves harvested from my mother’s garden. Intraspeciation is active in this work, and the work is an example of using intraspeciation as a methodological structure for identifying with our animality, as well as for assisting in understanding nonhuman species in a productive way. The drawing also demonstrates aspects of my methodology as I was involved in a practice of learning and unlearning with reference to day-to-day observations and experiences and worldly contributions and topics living in the Chthulucene.

The drawing consists of the following image segments: a cloud person “overindulging” in a chicken wing, an office worker transitioning into a tree, wax worms consuming and
digesting a plastic phone case, an indestructible micro-animal accompanied by composting
insects, animals turning into compost, and other strange juxtapositions and figurative
arrangements. While working in the studio, I allow for an abundance of references and subject
matter to underline my motivation, which provides direction for a particular work. Motivation
for the imagery seen in the drawing relates to topics such as environmental remediation,
environmental destruction, capitalism, colonialism, consumerism, plasticity, privilege, and
ongoingness. There is an open quality about the physical structure that supports the drawing and
the segments of imagery within the drawing, in an analogical way, are open to interpretation. The
viewer can either enjoy them individually as interpretive stories, or together, as a narrative
whole. The exterior of the drawing’s structure has a reflective mylar that distorts its
surroundings, especially when viewers come close to the work. This allows for an abstracted
visual experience, and perhaps, metaphorically, a distortion of self, suggesting a perspective-
shift. Its purpose is to encourage viewers to imagine themselves differently, shape-shifting
amongst the wax skulls and rhubarb leaves that surround the drawing space—which are
themselves changing and decaying in the temporal process of decomposing and reworlding.

My methodology is self-organizing in that it involves the process of accumulating “the
many,” much like some notions of animality and co-existence. Similarly, the studio portion of
my research-creation project co-exists in productive dialogue alongside the written component.
The works I created for my thesis exhibition are meant to support and intersect with my written
thesis and vice versa. Collectively, the artworks are experimental, sensorial, and embody
opportunities for subjective thought and experience. During the process of creating, I tend to
reflect on a range of experiences and actions as a way of engaging in a continuous process of
learning and unlearning. As I allude to above, the written component and the studio productions
of my research-creation project are separate entities, yet they are meant to complement each
other in ways such that, in the areas where one component may elude, the other fills in, as two
apparent polarities comprise one chronicle of research. The unlearning is much like tacit
knowledge and the learning explicit. The theory and the intended studio work cannot, therefore,
be measured hierarchically. Both processes of thought and expression through the means of tacit
and explicit knowledge are equally important components of research and display, forming a
synergy as a whole.
Conclusion

The importance of recognizing the complexity of current geological times parallels the need to recognize the complexity of multispecies relations. Animality has regularly been viewed as a way of separating human uniqueness from animal life. This misguided distinction misses that animality is a complex construct; all species embrace animality or participate in it differently, and therefore, as a site of great complexity, animality cannot be divided or broadly distinguished according to merely two categories (human and animal). Scott F. Gilbert, Jan Sapp, and Alfred I. Tauber, like Donna Haraway, address how we as humans share our bodies with many other beings: “Symbiosis is becoming a core principle of contemporary biology, and it is replacing an essentialist conception of ‘individuality.’”\(^{66}\) The authors explain that through modern zoological findings, we know that animals (human and nonhuman) are composites of many species that have lived, are living, and are developing and evolving collectively: “The discovery of symbiosis through the animal kingdom is fundamentally transforming the classical conception of an insular individuality into one in which interactive relationships among species blurs the boundaries of the organism and obscures the notion of essential identity.”\(^{67}\) Likewise, Raymond Pierotti notes that “if relatedness is accepted as a given, links to the rest of the living world are clear, and ethical obligations owed to these relatives by human beings is a logical philosophical development.”\(^{68}\) This concept of relatedness between human and nonhuman species acts as a central point, or a node for understanding ways of productively moving forward in geological uncertainty.

I use the concept of a node metaphorically to represent my dissertation project; indeed it appears in my thesis exhibition title. As a term, it has more than one meaning, referring to, both, a central connecting point where pathways intersect, and the swell of a plant stem where leaves emerge. My dissertation project acts as a central connecting point where art, theory, and scientific knowledge meet. At that swell, what emerges are concepts of animality, biophilia, and

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\(^{67}\) Gilbert, Sapp, and Tauber, 326.

the Chthulucene, which collectively work together to address kinship and environmental preservation, and to centre hegemonic and westernized frameworks that attempt to plant harmful “truths.” My fondest memories as a child growing with the trees and animals around me led me in this direction of research, and in a sense, I’ve carried this node in my pocket my whole life.

An Epilogue for Ongoingness

As an epilogue, I relate my research to Natasha Myers’ ideas in her essay “How to Grow Liveable Worlds: Ten (not-so-easy) Steps for Life in the Planthroposcene.” Stitching together excerpts from Myers’ speculative project “Rooting into the Planthroposcene,” the essay guides readers through a step-by-step process for getting out of the Anthropocene by re-emerging into the Planthroposcene. Though their focuses diverge, the Chthulucene and the Planthroposcene have many things in common. That commonality is observable in Myers’ essay; one central point of agreement is that both Haraway and Myers find the Anthropocene problematic for being anthropocentric and a model of human domination. Both the Chthulucene and the Planthroposcene encourage multispecies alliances and stress the importance of care for nonhuman species. Given these commonalities, I use selected steps in Myers’ essay to highlight ongoingness stemming from propositions put forth in the Chthulucene as a way to conclude my research.

Myers reminds readers that they are living under a spell—one that is destroying the planet: “It is time to cast another spell, to call other worlds into being, to conjure other worlds within this world.” She makes clear that at the forefront of the Anthropocene is Man casting this spell; Man who is also agentive in forms of capitalism and colonialism, neither of which is

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69 Myers describes the Planthroposcene as an era that is not timebound and one that stages new scenes and ways of seeing seed/people relations and is grounded in radical solidarity with plants: “The Planthroposcene acknowledges the joint and uncertain futures of plants and peoples and demands we change the terms of encounter so that we can become allies to these green beings.” Natasha Myers, “How to Grow Liveable Worlds: Ten (not-so-easy) Steps for Life in the Planthroposcene,” ABC Religion & Ethics (January 6, 2021), https://www.abc.net.au/religion/natasha-myers-how-to-grow-livable-worlds:-ten-not-so-easy-step/11906548.

70 Myers.
natural or innate to human necessity. Capitalism and colonialism are nonetheless conditions that have produced hundreds of years of violence, human exceptionalism, and white supremacy. All those results have been articulated as physical markers in a temporally-bounded geological era.\(^1\)

Myers instructs that the first step is to understand that “we” doesn’t represent “one,” and that not every earth and sky dweller follow the Anthropocenic form of life nor contribute to its inarguable destructiveness. Myers uses the term “Anthropo-not-seen” to refer to those whose lives and lands are continuously being spent by accelerating wealth-seeking actions via colonial and neocolonial powers. She states, “These are the people who remain targets of dispossession and attempted annihilation even—perhaps especially—today as capitalism gets into high gear in its efforts to ‘go green’ and ‘save the world.’ Don’t believe the hype of sustainability rhetoric. The worlds built by colonialism and capitalism are unliveable for us all.”\(^2\) As I mention previously, not all efforts that promote and paint a picture of environmental remediation and care for nature actively carry out such work, and forces of capitalism and colonialism make this problem much worse.

Given the foregoing, it is important to note that not all subjects are affected by the Anthropocene in the same way and therefore decolonial strategies are vitally significant to the kind of reworlding Myers proposes. Her second step provides instruction on breaking this world (the Anthropocene) to make other worlds possible. This is directly relatable to Chthulucenic thinking and is required if one desires to live in the Chthulucene where instead of adopting Anthropocenic logics like ruin porn and apocalypse,\(^3\) perceptions are geared towards ongoingness, multispecies alliances, and preserving the environment.

Dismantling anthropocentric logics involve decolonization, and the way out of such doom-thinking begins with imagining what makes a liveable world. Animality, biophilia, and Chthulucenic thinking can act as conceptual tools to help realize a better place to live. Myers’ step three offers an affirmative mantra to be repeated: We are not alone. Affirming this phrase

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\(^1\) Myers.  
\(^2\) Myers.  
\(^3\) Myers.
allows space for multispecies alliances to grow in number. The self-realization that we live amongst other agentive beings, human and nonhuman, is necessary for living in the Chthulucene where building connections is imperative to improving conditions on earth. Addressing and accepting animality as a shareable characteristic is a step forward within the Chthulucene. Myers notes that Anthropocenic thinking is obsessed with human independence, limiting collaborative efforts, and certainly affecting any attempts to realize them. This type of independence encourages disassociating from the idea that “there are other forces and powers among us, including those with significantly better skills in the realm of world-making and planetary-scale change. In some cases, these beings have billions of years more experience than us in terraforming liveable worlds.”

The last step that I want to discuss and connect with my research is the sixth step, one that I think is important to end on as a concluding proposal. Step six demands that we must disrupt colonial common sense in order to create viable ongoingness. Myers firmly states that “decolonisation means giving stolen lands back to Indigenous peoples. And decolonisation demands we reckon with and dismantle the overt and covert ways that settler states are structured on white supremacy, slavery, and the erasures of existing Land/body relations through fantasies of Terra Nullius.” We must make strange what has been inherited from those in power whose beliefs have been concretized as valid and the sole truth—beliefs that have invalidated any other way of knowing and navigating the world. For example, “it was the colonisers, of course, who refused to believe local and Indigenous people’s claims that the plants can sing.” This abuse of power has extended to human exceptionalism, which is another form of violence and colonial formation that forcefully expels the liveliness and sentience of the more-than-human world around us. Looking to decolonial strategies, we must not only challenge overt acts of discrimination and hatred, but also look closely at the details of our common sense:

To do this, we would need to upend everything we believed was common sense. Forget everything you thought you knew about the living world, especially what you believe is perceptible, imaginable, reasonable, legible and meaningful. Refuse the disenchantments of a mechanistic science that renders more-than-human worlds in the form of alienable

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74 Myers.
75 Myers.
76 Myers.
bits of life and death ready to be portioned off as property, resource, or commodity. Sideline colonial and capitalist moral economies that dictate what is good, valuable, and true—especially those that naturalise economic growth and extraction as the work that is proper to Man.\textsuperscript{77}

These steps, though listed for the Planthroposcene, are applicable to any world that looks beyond hegemonic systems of oppression and conquer, which the Chthulucene looks to dismantle. The steps I’ve mentioned here are particularly important if we are to live in the Chthulucene, because they are progressive and active in moving forward into ongoing-living, sprouting from a place of discernment regarding healthy relationships amongst all earth dwellers and species, human and nonhuman. The Chthulucene is, importantly, not restricted by temporal limits, but rather it reworlds and composts what has been done during the Anthropocene. These steps when applied to the Chthulucene offer opportunities to thrive through destruction, with animality at the forefront. In order to deconstruct and challenge human privilege and hegemonic systems, we must nurture our kinships and embrace our animality, and forge and maintain a range of means of co-operation and mutual care.

\textsuperscript{77} Myers.
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This dossier provides an expanded overview of the development of artworks in the exhibition \textit{NODES | Animality and Kinship} at McIntosh Gallery (2022). In this section, I reflect further on the processes involved in the studio-based component of this dissertation, as well as findings discovered during the run of the exhibition. \textit{NODES} consists of three installations as a cohesive body of work; however, each art display highlights a major topic of the thesis. The installation \textit{Chthulucene Dream-Land: States of Reality} foregrounds the Chthulucene as an alternative perspective on our current epoch through speculative and imaginative drawing and objects, \textit{Recuperative Play For Ecological Grief} calls attention to the benefits of biophilia, and \textit{A Body Within a Body Within a Body} underscores embodiments of, and connections to animality.

\textbf{Exhibition Statement}

Welcome to the Chthulucene! A place in time that addresses living and dying together on an irreparable earth—a place in time with possibilities, including the possibility of \textit{reworlding}. Here in the Chthulucene the world is a site of uncertainty and change but also a place of opportunity to look, think, and be, differently.

\textit{NODES} is an exhibition that emphasizes \textit{ongoingness} by addressing concepts of animality, kinship, and interconnectivity with, and upon, our earth—Terra. Animality in this project is proposed as a holistic term that explores ideas and propositions for restructuring and ameliorating relationships between humans, and between humans and nonhuman species. In Western theories of animality, nonhuman animals have regularly been considered to have the limiting capacity of being wild, part of nature, and separate from—and ultimately below—the human. Within this conception, the term animality has been used predominantly by white thinkers to inform what defines nonhuman animals, as well as to colonize and oppress peoples. The term animality has also, by contrast, been used to speak of progressive relationships between human and nonhuman species, including with respect to their connection with the environment. This exhibition probes the potential to reframe animality to refocus current perspectives with the goal of mending socio-cultural relationships and supporting environmental remediation.
Collectively, the works in this exhibition invoke transformational spaces as, both, sites of interconnectivity and as contexts in which to be present, and they explore animality in both divergent and convergent ways. Through this, NODES seeks to decenter humanness, allowing space for contemplation, grief, and imagination through sensorial participation in seeing, smelling, touching, and hearing. The spirit of this exhibition, with its deployment of sculpture, drawing, video, and experiential installation, aims to provide an opportunity for us to reconnect to a sense of animality and the surrounding biosphere by promoting kinship between species, and by problematizing current human-centric perspectives. It encourages that through commitment, collaborative efforts, and multispecies alliances, reworlding may become possible.

I acknowledge that the exhibition was produced on the respective traditional territories of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations.

Reflections on Process and Responses to the Exhibition

Developing the studio-based component of this dissertation began with a few different approaches to process. Initially, my methods of creating were guided by a lot of contemplation, brainstorming, and material exploration. In the midst of my research, I noticed that I was consistently drawn towards using heterogeneous elements, such as video, scent, drawing, and highly tactile materials such as wax, turf, sand, as well as other organic matter, to represent the scope of my research. My gravitating towards these elements in my production was based on my intentions to create works that provide moments of participation through the experiential qualities of the artwork.

For the video installation A Body Within a Body Within a Body, I began with an interest in exploring animalistic movements and gesticulations, setting out to film in various areas between Bonfield, Toronto, and London, Ontario. While exploring, I became increasingly fixated on capturing moments that brought me into an awareness of my own animality; most of this happened, coincidentally, in Bonfield—my hometown. I was moved by revisiting childhood memories—to a place and time where I realized my animality. In addition to filming in Bonfield and Toronto, I visited the Lawson Health Research Institute at St. Joseph’s Hospital in London to
speak with scientists and doctoral students in microbiology about the bacteria that share the human body and other bacteria that can potentially make the human body their home. These discussions came about because of my interest in questioning humanness as a way of exploring animality in the context of a shared sense of embodiment. Here, I was able to examine fascinating living bacteria, which I filmed, and which became part of the final cut of the video.

While travelling between Bonfield, Toronto, and London, I was also working on the thirty-foot drawing *Chthulucene Dream-Land: States of Reality*. Over the span of two years working on this drawing, I speculated on the Chthulucene and subject matter that could represent an alternative perspective, thinking that was also influenced by what was happening in the world—lockdown after lockdown, a rapid growth in environmental concerns, and numerous protests all around us. To expand on some of the topics I discuss in Chapter Three of the thesis essay, I share some commentary here on notable imagery and inspiration.

A key image in response to my sense of the need to rebel against capitalism is represented by a white man in a business suit who has caught himself in the Chthulucene where he’s being taken over by a discarded infected tree. Being inspired by the Chthulucene’s emphasis on relationality and multispecies alliances, along with reflections on my visit to the Lawson Health Research Institute, I found I was increasingly becoming interested in insects that help decompose corpses, and in a resilient microscopic animal, the tardigrade. Inspiration also came from attending Dr. Kirsty Robertson’s summer school, Museum for Future Fossils, in 2019, where we learned about nurdles—microplastics that pollute beaches. These inspired the imagery of wax worms—who are known to decompose plastic—in my work shown consuming a plastic phone case. I wanted this drawing to be experienced in order to suggest the possibility of people being consumed by its Chthulucenic happenings. As such, it is large-scale and surrounds the viewer in a semi-circular format. On the floor in front of the drawing display sits a layer of sand: it was borrowed from the sandpit I walked through in Bonfield seen in *A Body Within a Body Within a Body*, to enhance the experiential quality of the work and to metaphorically comment on what makes a body; in a sense, it reminds us that many granules create a mass.
The artworks in *NODES* are interlinked not only by relatable topics, but physically by possessing remnants of each other. It is my intention that my entire dissertation show evidence of interconnectedness in notable ways, much like the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman species I argue for throughout the thesis. My findings in researching topics regarding animality, and the act of creating artwork in response, has shown me that animality is best understood experientially. By creating artworks, I want to provide opportunities for people to find animality within themselves. To do this, I rely on attempting to stimulate the most animalistic components of our beings—our senses such as smell, sight, sound, and touch.

An example of what I am talking about is the installation *Recuperative Play for Ecological Grief*, which encouraged sensory observation by providing soft orange lighting, organic and inorganic smells, a variety of fabric textures through the soft sculptures, and the sensation of artificial turf against your skin and beneath your feet. This particular work stems from my interest in the biophilia hypothesis and its potential for healing. In the making of the work, it became steadily more important to me to take a therapeutic approach. As a person who struggles with mental health and has been progressively struggling with ecoanxiety—which often trails into a fit of existential dread—I speculate as to whether this is something that puts me closer to my animality. Amidst such struggles, one of the only ways I can self-regulate is to spend time in nature, which is contradictory at times because it is most often one of the subjects that worries me.

For *Recuperative Play for Ecological Grief*, I was inspired by my mother’s impeccable sewing skills, and in working with her on the production of the piece, I wanted to keep things soft and comforting. This softness was also a translation of my care for the environment and for nonhuman species. By creating and handling these soft objects, I was able to reflect on why I care and where this care stems from, thus better helping me to develop my thoughts and ideas in this thesis. My art installation is personal; it holds precious memories of living in the country and speaks to my sensitivity around environmental degradation. Much of the fabric too holds memories, as many soft sculptures were constructed with repurposed fabrics and batting—organic and inorganic materials that have had past lives of their own. The act of physically sewing the soft sculptures provided a sense of hope, and it is my own hope that this energy
carried through to the installations final state. Sewing edges acted like mending and helped me imagine what changes could happen living in the Chthulucene. In its final state, the work was installed in a space that was intimate and somewhat private, offering a space for contemplation, grief, or whatever the viewer needs to experience in the space. It reminds me of a very special resting spot in my parents’ backyard where my dad always kept a trail clear in the thick of the trees, which leads to a round sitting area cushioned by lanky moss. As a child and into my teenage years, I would visit this spot to read, play with my pet companions, draw, or just sit in the stillness of the forestry. During the exhibition, when viewers took off their shoes to interact with the installation, it was like they were responding to their inner child—alongside the actual children visitors who excitedly participated in the work, as well.

The way in which the installations in NODES were displayed allowed for viewers to experience the exhibition in whatever order they chose. Though this was my intention, I personally had a preferable way of moving through the exhibition: I see *A Body Within a Body Within a Body* as my first move. Here, I am awakened by my animality and am being prepared for the remaining exhibition, including the intake of smells of pine, cypress, and eucalyptus. I am now prepared to emerge into the Chthulucene as a human animal who shares relationality with many others. Next, I move to *Chthulucene Dream-Land: States of Reality* where I think about the realities of the current state of the world and what it means to transition into the Chthulucene with speculative curiosity, thoughts that are encouraged through viewing the drawings. I walk amongst the skulls and see my distorted reflection in the mylar; this nomadic state of my being puts me closer to my animality. Lastly, I go to rest within *Recuperative Play for Ecological Grief*. In this space, I allow myself to feel, and I grieve what scares me. I am welcomed with softness and comfort as I stay here for a while to recuperate.

**Documentation of the Exhibition**

The following images were taken during the stretch of the NODES | *Animality and Kinship* exhibition at McIntosh Gallery, Western University’s gallery on campus, July 4–30, 2022, with an opening reception on July 7. Photos courtesy of Dickson Bou.
West (Main) Gallery:


For further information on this artwork, see Chapter Three, beginning on page 86.

This installation includes scent and is immersive in nature. Viewers are invited to remove their shoes upon entering the space and to walk amongst the artificial turf to pick up and examine the various soft sculptures. This is a contemplative space where breath awareness, and deep breathing is encouraged.

For further information on this artwork, see Chapter Two, beginning on page 63.
East Gallery:

*A Body Within a Body Within a Body*, Score by Kierscey Rand and voice narration by Michelle Wilson, 3-channel video installation with scent (pine, cypress, eucalyptus), 7:41:19, 2021—2022.

For further information on this artwork, see Chapter One, beginning on page 29.
Appendix

Documentation of Related Works/Projects

This appendix expands on artistic works and projects developed during my PhD studies (2018–2023) alongside, although separate from, the studio component of this dissertation. Artistic history and past projects can be viewed online at: www.ashleysnook.com.

VHD VHD, 2018—2019

VHD VHD began as an assignment in Dr. John Hatch’s course “Painted Skies/Cosmic Sightings” in 2018 where students were asked to either write an essay, create an exhibition proposal, or a mini documentary, amongst other options. Opting to do the exhibition proposal, I developed and proposed the installation work VHD VHD. Excited by the proposal, I set to create the installation, which was firstly exhibited at OCAD University on October 4–5, 2019, alongside Nuit Blanche activities in Toronto.

VHD VHD is an imaginative installation that explores the complexities of our interconnected existences. The concept of the work is inspired by one of the readings in Dr. Hatch’s course, the novel Cosmicomics by Italo Calvino. The title of the installation is named after characters in the novel. Cosmicomics is a collection of short stories that entangle scientific facts with imaginative storytelling. Of particular interest to the concept of VHD VHD is the short story titled “The Distance of the Moon” where explorers seek to discover findings of the moon. Calvino’s writing describing the moon is intricate and magical and is what really influences the many materials and objects that are within the installation space of VHD VHD. While on the moon, the explorers aspire to find moon-milk, which Calvino describes as carrying substances such as “vegetable juices, tadpoles, bitumen, lentils, honey, starch crystals, sturgeon eggs, moulds, pollens, gelatinous matter, worms, resins, pepper, mineral salts, and combustion residue.”

Influenced by the many findings in moon-milk, *VHD VHD* consists of clear, hollow, spherical objects containing organic materials such as plants, crystals, skulls, insects, seeds, feathers, and more. In a dark space, the glass spheres lie on beds of sand, which are highlighted by soft galactical colours of pink, purple, yellow, and blue. The installation also explores sensory elements of sound and smell. Sound recordings of outer space, as documented by NASA, along with undertones of binaural beats play as viewers walk the space. Scent is incorporated by filling the air with essential oils that are believed to promote positive energy with uplifting scents such as lavender, lemon and mint. Inside, the spheres’ findings contain an intimate intertwining of organic materials all wrapped in human hair. In the act of wrapping materials with hair, I contemplate interconnected ephemerality as what is contained in the spheres can be observed for its liveliness and/or representation of death.

*VHD VHD* encapsulates organic material as a way of expressing tendencies of biophilic curiosity while troubling the desire to retain positive energy. Biophilia, a concept used by the recently deceased biologist Edward O. Wilson, suggests that humans are innately drawn to nonhuman species because of seemingly inherent relatability and because we hold a fascination with life. Through its material exploration, *VHD VHD* displays various organic materials to emphasize life relatability, while attempting to normalize death and decay as we endure an ongoing ecological crisis. This immersive installation explores how human and nonhuman species live within, and without, natural systems amongst landscapes and spacescapes. It questions how one can obtain and maintain positive energy in a time of immense destruction. It is known that human proximity to nature has an affective impact on our wellbeing, given that being close to nature can counteract negativity and increase pleasant feelings. However, how can we hold, retain, and perhaps store positive energy on a depleting planet? What possibilities can come from destruction? *VHD VHD* is an installation that emphasizes realities of human and nonhuman lifecycles and provides opportunities to sit with possible discomfort and contemplation by focusing attention on encapsulated materials that possess individual stories of their own. It offers radical acceptance of the challenge of finding inner calmness during a time of ecological destruction and grief.

*VHD VHD* was later shown in the PhD exhibition *suppose they are all put together* at the Artlab Gallery at Western University, January 9 – January 23, 2020. This exhibition brought together
the artwork of PhD students who have shared interests in speculative and experimental exploration—engaging in complexities of interconnected relationships.

*VHD VHD* was also published in the Comparative Media Arts Journal as part of Simon Fraser University’s 11th Issue “Heterotopias (Worlds Within Worlds)” in 2022, which can be visited here.

*VHD VHD* Documentation

Exhibition Advertisement – Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2019:
Exhibition Documentation – *VHD VHD*, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2019:

Click the image above to access the sound component of *VHD VHD*

Exhibition Documentation – *VHD VHD, suppose they are all put together*, Artlab Gallery, Western University, 2020. Photos by the Department of Visual Arts, Western University:
Mentioned in Chapter Two, “Exploring Meditative Qualities of Olfaction Through Biophilia” was an Independent Study supervised by Professor Patrick Mahon from January to April, 2019. Here, I elaborate on its process.

As a precursor, I used the notion of intraspeciation as a guide to investigate natural scents and their possible associations with animality, and their potential to recall memories. Therefore, this independent study investigates human/nonhuman paradigms through the less explored territory of olfaction and the potential for the sense of smell to stimulate biophilic curiosities and memories. Through this exploration, I investigate the ways in which olfaction is used as a therapeutic measure, and how this can be utilized as an artistic medium in addressing human animal ties to kinship in the more-than-human world. A further goal is to investigate affective qualities of olfaction that pertain to behavioural and emotional reactions to organic and natural scents.

As an artistic reaction to the concept of biophilia, I constructed an experiment that implemented smellable deposits of natural scents, along with subjective assessments in the form of questionnaires for participants to fill out. I used various essential oils and refer to them as concentrated life forces of different plant species and potential triggers for animality. By asking questions such as, “How can natural scent associations propose transformative experiences that critically engage in recuperative processes?” this independent study provides knowledge for further exploration into olfactory art and a way to further problematize dominant attitudes that contribute to the destruction of nature.

The scent experiment consisted of a selection of four essential oil blends that I created and named; however, the names were not disclosed to participants—rather, they were numbered for participants to refer to in their questionnaires. The essential oils were applied to raw wool, which absorbed and contained the oils for a long period of time. These pieces of wool were then individually placed inside corked bottles and were on display for visitors to uncork and contemplate the smells.
An associated questionnaire accompanied the bottles and consisted of instructions for participants to choose a scent to complete with various questions:

**SCENT #_____**

1. Does this scent resonate with you (a memory, a place, or perhaps a connection)?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<td>DEF</td>
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Describe (optional):

2. Please circle the most relevant response to the scent:

   It's pleasant    I'm indifferent    It's unpleasant

3. Do you associate a colour with this scent?

   **YES:** [ ]  **NO:** [ ]

   Colour: _______________

4. Do you associate a mood with this scent?

   **YES:** [ ]  **NO:** [ ]

   Mood: _______________

5. Optional Comment(s):
The experiment was set up for two weeks at the John Labatt Visual Arts Centre and for one week at the D.B. Weldon Library, both at Western University. Later, it was displayed as an artwork for the exhibition *A Museum for Future Fossils* at the Artlab Gallery at Western University.

“Exploring Meditative Qualities of Olfaction Through Biophilia” at D.B. Weldon Library:
In its findings, this experiment proved that scent as an artistic activation medium is influentially subjective with regard to mood and memory association. Expanding my research on olfaction to thoughts and opinions of others has enabled me to investigate associations that are not solely my own. In my practice, however, I do consider that essential oils as concentrated life forces provide strong associations with biophilia and animality through moments of reconnecting to nature.

In total, one hundred and four questionnaires were completed. In reviewing the results, I welcomed the idea of using scent into my practice as a way of enticing and exploring animality. I saw the potential for biophilia on an aromatic level to revisit memories and the potential for this to have therapeutic effects, which I can, in turn, utilize in my art practice.
EDUCATION

2023  PhD, Art, and Visual Culture – Studio Stream, Western University, London, ON
2016  Master of Fine Arts, Interdisciplinary Art, Media, and Design, OCAD University, Toronto, ON
2014  Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours), Minor in Psychology, Nipissing University, North Bay, ON
2010  General Arts and Science Certificate, Canadore College, North Bay, ON

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2022  NODES | Animality and Kinship, McIntosh Gallery, London, ON
2019  VHD VHD, OCAD U Graduate Gallery, Toronto, ON
2017  Biophilic Tendencies, Epi&Gus Projects, Shoe Box Gallery, Toronto, ON
2016  Intraspeciation, Allan Gardens Conservatory, Toronto, ON

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2023  Illuminating the Beauty of Science, Curated online exhibition, Suboart Magazine
2023  hyphen (-), Protohyve, Gallery 101, Ottawa, ON
2021  GardenShip and State, Museum London, London, ON
2021  EARTH DAY 2021: Stop Extinction! Restore the Earth, Embassy Cultural House, London, ON
2020  Suppose They Are All Put Together, ArtLab Gallery, London, ON
2019  A Museum For Future Fossils, ArtLab Gallery, London, ON
2018  Launch Point, WK Kennedy Gallery, North Bay, ON
2018  Fernigen C. Thicket, Come Up To My Room, The Gladstone Hotel, Toronto, ON
2017  The Paddle Project, Nipissing Regional Curatorial Collective, North Bay, ON
2017  ECO ART, Gallery 1313, Toronto, ON
2016  GradEx, OCAD U Student Gallery, Toronto, ON
2016  Reconstructing Resilience, Open Space Gallery, Toronto, ON
2015  Envelopment(s), Robert Kananaj Gallery, Toronto, ON
2014  Thresholds, OCAD U Graduate Gallery, Toronto, ON
2014  BFA Graduate Exhibition 2014, Department of Fine and Performing Arts, WK Kennedy Gallery, North Bay, ON
2014  Juried Exhibition, White Water Gallery, North Bay, ON
2014  S.T.A.G. (The Student Temporary Art Gallery) Exhibition, Site Specific, North Bay, ON
2014  Black Water Exhibition, White Water Gallery, North Bay, ON
2013  Juried Exhibition, WK Kennedy Gallery, North Bay, ON
2013  Living Proof, Alex Dufresne Gallery, Callander, ON
2012  Juried Exhibition, WK Kennedy Gallery, North Bay, ON
AWARDS

2020–2023 Doctoral Fellowship, Social Science and Humanities Research Council, Western University
2019–2020 Ontario Graduate Scholarship, Western University
2018 Faculty of Arts and Humanities Dean’s Entrance Scholarship, Western University
2018 Faculty of Arts and Humanities Chair’s Entrance Scholarship, Western University
2015–2016 Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship (SSHRC), OCAD University
2013 Carl Sanders Scholarship, Nipissing University

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2018–2022 Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Visual Arts, Western University
  • Foundations of Visual Arts – Studio Art
2015–2017 Graduate Teaching Assistant, Faculty of Liberal Arts & Sciences and School of Interdisciplinary Studies, OCAD University
  • Global and Material Culture – Beginnings to 1800
  • Global and Material Culture – 1800 to Present

RELATED EXPERIENCE

2022 Graduate Student Assistant, The Centre for Sustainable Curating, Western University
2021 Associate Editor – Studio, TBA: Reworking, Department of Visual Arts, Western University
2020 Events Coordinator, Faculty of Animation, Arts and Design, Sheridan College, Oakville, ON
2020 Presenter, Navigating the Corporeal // Animal Sensations, Symposium, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ
2019–23 Research Assistant and Participant, GardenShip and State, Western University
2019 Guest Speaker, Materials and the Anthropocene, OCAD University
2019 Presenter, EnviroCon, Interdisciplinary Conference, Western University
2018 Panelist, Launch Point, Creative Summit, WKP Kennedy Gallery, North Bay, ON
2017–18 Graduate Studies Coordinator, Office of Graduate Studies, OCAD University
  • Interdisciplinary Master’s in Art, Media & Design (IAMD)
  • Criticism & Curatorial Practice (CCP)
  • Contemporary Art, Design and New Media Art Histories (CADN)
2017 Residency participant, The City in Reverse: Diagramming Intelligent Systems,  
  Murmur Land Studios, Sherbrooke, Nova Scotia, (July 2–8, 2017)
2017 Graduate Studies Coordinator, Special Project, Office of Graduate Studies, OCAD University
2016 Graduate Studies Recruiter, Faculty of Admissions and Recruitment, OCAD University
2016 Alumni Panelist, Graduate Thesis/MRP Panel, Graduate Studies, OCAD University
2015 Featured Artist, Gall Pods, a public sculpture, Evergreen Brickworks, Toronto, ON
2015 Residency participant, Florence, Italy Off-Campus Graduate Studies Program, OCAD University
2015 Student Representative, IAMD Program Committee, OCAD University
2015 Professional Teaching Development Training, OCAD University
2014 Director, Coordinator, and Counselor, Scribbles & Brushstrokes, Summer Art Camp, WKP Kennedy Gallery
2014 Conference Administrator, Affects of Site Conference, North Bay, ON
2009 Gallery Assistant, WKP Kennedy Gallery
2009 Instructor, Abstract Art Workshop, WKP Kennedy Gallery

RELATED ACTIVITIES & PUBLICATIONS

2022 Ashley Snook: NODES | Animality and Kinship, Akimbo
https://akimbo.ca/listings/ashley-snook-nodes-animality-and-kinship/
2022 “McIntosh Gallery features thesis exhibition on animality and kinship” Interview by Mike Lacasse, 106.9 The X Fanshaw, London, ON
https://www.1069thex.com/2022/07/07/110698/
2022 “Issue Eleven: Heterotopias (Worlds Within Worlds), VHD VHD,” CMA Journal, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC
http://www.sfu.ca/cmajournal/issues/issue-eleven--heterotopias--worlds-within-worlds-/Ashley-Snook.html
2021 Earth Day 2021: Stop Extinction! Restore the Earth, Embassy Cultural House
https://www.embassyculturalhouse.ca/ashley-snook.html
2021 GardenShip and State, in partnership with Museum London, London, ON
https://www.gardenship.ca
2020 “Time Out: A Digital Publication,” Greenwood in partnership with the Blackwood Gallery, University of Toronto Mississauga
2018 “Come Up To My Room,” Toronto Life, Fernigen C. Thicket by Ashley Snook
https://torontolife.com/culture/gladstone-hotel-come-up-to-my-room-2018/
2017 Phil Anderson, “Interview with Ashley Snook at Gallery 1313,” Artoronto
http://www.artoronto.ca/?p=36937
2016 “Intraspeciation Within the Ontological Biosphere,” MFA Thesis, Interdisciplinary Master’s in Art, Media, and Design, OCAD University, Toronto, ON
https://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/545/