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BETWEEN ELSEWHERE AND AWAY:
SMALL ACTS OF COHABITATION



Jill Sorensen 2021

BETWEEN ELSEWHERE AND AWAY: SMALL ACTS OF COHABITATION

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of PhD Fine Arts
at Massey University, Wellington New Zealand

Jill Sorensen

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Cover photo: Heirloom locket with the baby tooth of Wolf the cat.

ABSTRACT

This creative research thesis proposes, develops and examines the efficacy of an embodied participatory research methodology to elicit experiential and imaginative encounters within suburban human-nonhuman cohabitation. Grounded in a home and garden in suburban Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland, it engages practical and imaginative strategies to reframe the mundane interactions of suburban life as a site of complex human-nonhuman interrelationship and radical entanglement.

This enquiry is grounded, physically and philosophically, in the experimental research project of transitioning my suburban home into a multi-species domestic hub. From this site of interaction, the following research guidelines coalesce: to consciously suspend my acculturated anthropocentric ways of knowing in my research activities and interactions; to engage with active and responsive care and acknowledge the agency of others, human, animal, vegetal and mineral; to wait attentively for possible modes of human-nonhuman attunement to emerge. These terms of engagement underpin creative research that attends, slowly and with care to multi-entity interactions and agentic interplays, interweaving domestic cohabitation, immersive video installation, participatory dwelling-spaces and dialogic events, and engaging with domestic space, gallery, conference and festival.

This research is in equal measure philosophical, practical, and located within art practice. Consequently, this thesis selectively draws on aspects of philosophical posthumanism (Latour, Haraway), New Materialism (Barad; Bennett), Object-Oriented Ontology (Harman, Morton), Affective Ecology (Greyson) and social aesthetics (Born et al). It proposes modes for working-with things across a spectrum of activities and small gestures (Hannula), from gallery-based installations to interventions within the suburban home and garden. These research strands are brought into conversation with historical and contemporary participatory and experiential art practices (Bishop, Kwon, Weintraub) to bring into focus a multimodal and multi-entity research enquiry located within Aotearoa, New Zealand.

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Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the whenua; Owairaka Maunga within which the research is grounded, and pay my respects to the presiding hapu Ngāti Whātua-o-Ōrākei. Then I would like to thank my multi-entity support team; my husband, Mark, who has undertaken this thesis by proxy. Thank you for abandoning the lawn and allowing the dandelions to flourish in our domestic hub. Thank you for rolling your eyes and saying ‘ok’ to each of my provisional DIY projects (and maybe fixing it properly later). Thanks also for becoming my willing barista and my (less willing) copy editor.

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I would like to give a special thank you to my feline research companions: Manney, my first and most faithful research companion who led me into seeing my significant others; you’re deeply missed. And Wolf; thank you for surviving the thesis and the fast-moving van with at least one of your lives, if not your tail, intact. I attend to you, and you attend to me in the ongoing entanglements and intimacies of cohabitation.

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RESEARCH TIMELINE



2016

GERMAIN, J. JACK & GERTRUDE

The first three chickens. a gift from my sister
Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



PERSIMMON TREE PLANTED
&
COMPOSTING CHICKEN HOUSE BUILT IN BACK
GARDEN

Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



2017

SIGNIFICANT OTHERS Part I
24 Jan- 25 Feb 2017
Participatory installation



SIGNIFICANT OTHERS Part I
Books:
SEVEN DAYS: WORMS,
FAVOURITE FOODS,
FIRST THIRTY DAYS OF EGGS



SIGNIFICANT OTHERS Part I

25 February 2017
Participatory event: Hut building,
Pah Homestead gardens,



WICKING GARDEN

2017

A wicking garden is added to chicken house
Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



RAIN WATER TANKS

2017

Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



SHELTER

15 - 19 Feb 2017

with Chris Berthelsen and Xin Cheng for *TEMP: A Force That Won't Cool Down* at Corban Estate, Auckland



HERITAGE CHICKENS

March 2017

Heritage chicken eggs hatched and raised by Gertrude.

Chickens hatch 26 March 2017

Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



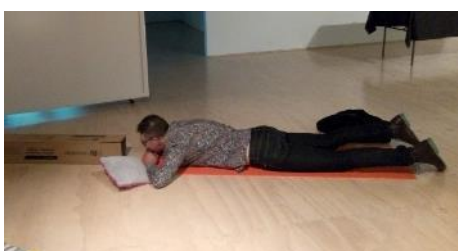
PEARCE GALLERY RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

20 May – 4 June 2017
Whitecliffe College



SIGNIFICANT OTHERS Part II

28 Aug- 26 Nov 2017
Whangarei Art Museum



SIGNIFICANT OTHERS Part II

28 Aug- 26 Nov 2017
Whangarei Art Museum
Participant viewing video of Popcorn the rabbit
in a long box



2018

A LIFE: Compost bin

3 February 2018
Domestic Hub cohabitation
Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



THE BATHOUSE @ SPLORE

23-27 February 2018
An interactive outdoor dwelling space at
SPLORE Music and Arts Festival, Tapakakanga
Reserve

Day 1



THE BATHHOUSE @ SPLORE

23-27 February 2018

An interactive outdoor dwelling space at
SPLORE Music and Arts Festival,

Day 2



GOPRO RIG FOR MOUNTAIN BIKE

June 2018

Post ride

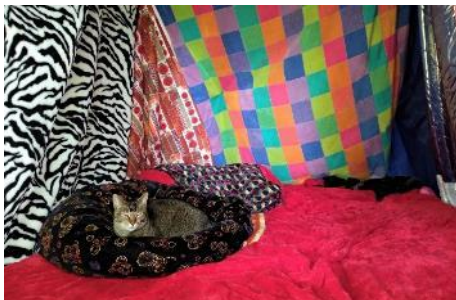
Riverhead forest/ Domestic Hub



*I DON'T KNOW
IF THE WATER KNOWS
HOW SHE WILL MAKE HER WAY
TO THE SEA*

June 2018

Pearce Gallery,
Whitecliffe College



*DOMESTIC HUB CONVERSATION PIT:
SHARING IN AN INTIMATE WORLD: BLANKET
HUT*

14 September 2018

Lounge room dwelling-space
Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



*DOMESTIC HUB CONVERSATION PIT:
THE AGENCY OF THINGS -
PETROLEUM AND WATER*

24 October 2018

Garage dwelling-space
Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



...IF YOU KNEW ME

25-27 October 2018
Curated for DEMO Exhibition Space,
Auckland



*DOMESTIC HUB CONVERSATION PIT:
DWELLING WITH*

26 November 2018
Back garden dwelling-space
Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



BEEHIVES AND BOHEMIAN PEAR TREE

November 2018
Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



I DON'T KNOW...

7-12 December 2018
Immersive video installation
at the artist-run space MAYONEZ,
Auckland



*RM CONVERSATION PIT:
SHARING IN AN INTIMATE WORLD*

27 November 2018
RM Archive Residency
RM Gallery and Project Space
Auckland



*RM CONVERSATION PIT:
THE AGENCY OF THINGS*

4 December 2018
RM Archive Residency
RM Gallery and Project Space
Auckland



STUFFED VINE LEAVES

Harvested from grapevine, eaten with
conversation
Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



*RM CONVERSATION PIT:
BETWEEN ELSEWHERE AND AWAY*

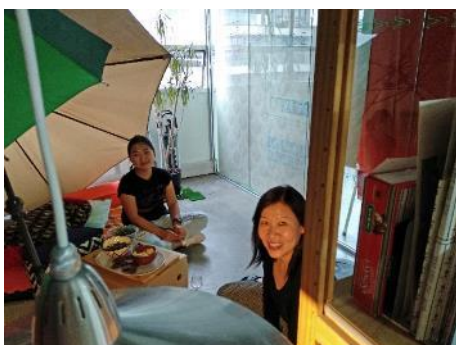
18 December 2018
RM Archive Residency
RM Gallery and Project Space
Auckland



2019

*I DON'T KNOW IF THE WATER KNOWS HOW
SHE WILL MAKE HER WAY TO THE SEA*

13-15 February 2019
Installation and conference paper *Grounding
Story*: ASLEC-ANZ Conference. UNE, NSW
Australia



*RM CONVERSATION PIT Part 2:
Dwelling space*

22-25 February 2019
RM Archive Residency
RM Gallery and Project Space
Auckland



RM CONVERSATION PIT Part 2:
Collaborative wall drawing

22-25 February 2019
RM Archive Residency
RM Gallery and Project Space
Auckland



RM CONVERSATION PIT Part 2:
Wall text (THINGS THAT COME INTO MY HOUSE)

22-25 February 2019
exhibition opening
RM Archive Residency
RM Gallery and Project Space
Auckland



TRAVELS WITH FRIENDS: TJ DEMOS
GoPro eyeline rig

May 2019
Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



TRAVELS WITH FRIENDS: TJ DEMOS
Installation trial in Garden Shed

May 2019
Garden Shed
Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



*DWELLING WITH OAKTREE:
BREATHING WITH*

30 May 2019
Te Auaunga, Oakley Creek



*DWELLING WITH OAKTREE:
OAKLEAF DWELLING-SPACE*

16 June 2019
Garden Shed
Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



*TO DREAM WHILE WAKING (WILDERNESS OF
THINGS)*

3-7 December 2019
Participatory installation
AAANZ conference,
*Ngā Tūtaki -Encounter/s: Agency,
Embodiment, Exchange, Ecologies*



2020

*THANKING THE BIRDS AND THE BEES, THE
VINES AND THE TREES*

7 March 2020
Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland



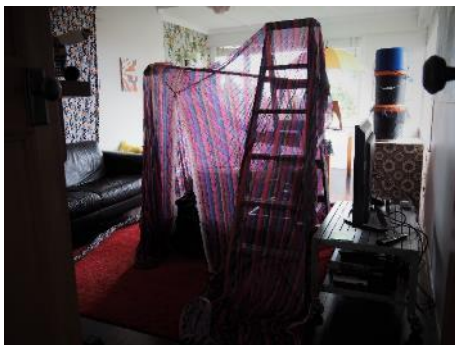
ALTERNATIVE REALITY HUT

22-27 April 2020
Instagram: Day 2



ALTERNATIVE REALITY HUT

22-27 April 2020
Instagram: Day 3



I SEE YOU SEE ME SEE YOU

19 November 2020
PhD examination event,
Domestic Hub,
Owairaka, Auckland



I SEE YOU SEE ME SEE YOU

19 November 2020
PhD examination event,
Domestic Hub,
Owairaka, Auckland



AVOCADO TREE-OAKLEAF DWELLING-SPACE
OAKLEAVES BECOME MULCH FOR AVOCADO
TREES

30 December 2020
Domestic Hub, Owairaka, Auckland

A sequence of short video clips documenting the participatory immersive video installations titled 'Sorensen video documentation.mp4' is held in the Videos Folder alongside this thesis. Further detail is also available on jillsorensen.net

PROLOGUE *THINKING LIKE WATER: A SWAMP MODEL*



FIGURE 1: THE HOWARTH MEMORIAL WETLAND

Unlike the mighty river, the swamp does not flow powerfully to the sea. She is not progressive in her movement, nor decisive in her flow. Her unrestrained waters ebb this way and that, moved by subtle currents imperceptible beneath her still surface, gently stirred by the movement of eels, the flocking of insect larvae and the bony legs of birds. This watery land is fecund with slimy, earthly life; a wet cacophony of birth and decay.

The progressive among my forebears saw such wet fecundity as worthless as it did not offer itself up to the plough. In their minds her indeterminate status between water and land did not lend itself to human habitation. They saw wasteland waiting to be civilised. Waiting to be 'redeemed' through drainage, ploughing and planting and brought to productive dominion as grassland.



FIGURE 2: THE WAIHOU RIVER

Ko Waihou tōku awa. The Waihou is my river, the river my family has lived alongside for four generations. The Waihou river that I have known flows directly to the sea, enclosed by stop banks and floodgates, thick with mud flats and edged with river grass, the last remains of her mighty skirt. (Top photos: The Waihou river in 2020, and beyond it my parental farm)

The Howarth Memorial Wetland, Te Aroha; a small, contained wetland on a site reclaimed from a rubbish dump in the 1940's. It is planted in exotic swamp species provided by the local community, including Willow (*above right*) and buttressed Swamp Cypress (*above left*). Water levels are controlled by a floodgate system, maintaining a consistent water level all year round.

WAIHOU

The land on which I was raised was once part of the Hauraki wetlands, Kahikatea wetland forest that stretched from the Kaimai range on the East to the Hakarimata range on the West, fed by the Waihou River. It is now a dairy farm and the Waihou is contained by stopbanks. The swamp I speak of here is physically and spiritually manifest in the Waihou and her last remnants of wetland; the Howarth Memorial wetland, a man-made swamp populated with exotic species, a metaphorical bastard child of the Western drive dominion and the resistance of water.

Before colonial intervention, the Waihou flowed freely from Te Puna, the Blue Springs at its source, spreading into an expansive Kahikatea forested wetland known as Hauraki. Fed by the freshwater flows of Te Puna and the Piako river and rising and falling with the tidal ingress of the Hauraki Gulf, Hauraki covered the whole of what is now the Hauraki Plains. For the Tangata Whenua, the towering wetland forest teeming with birds and fish was Taonga; Captain Cook and his men saw timber and the potential for productive farmland. In the words of the ecologist Geoff Park, “What was a tapu, food-rich labyrinth of waterways, forest and swamp to the river people was a vacant wilderness to the men in the *Endeavour’s* boats.”¹ Consequently, between 1860 and 1910, the Kahikatea were felled, and the wetlands drained. The 1908 Hauraki Plains Act, in which the government of the day subsidised large scale conversion of wetland into agriculture saw the remaining lower reaches drained and planted in grass. It was this grass that attracted my paternal grandfather to move from his family farm in Taranaki in 1915 and purchase this small parcel of land on the banks of the Waihou.²

THE HOWARTH MEMORIAL WETLAND

The Howarth Memorial Wetland is not a restoration of a section of the Hauraki wetland. Unlike the nearby Toreparu Wetland restoration,³ which is undertaken in partnership with Iwi, and enacted through the understanding that the restoration of the wetland and Mana Whenua are inseparable, the Howarth Memorial Wetland was constructed by Fish and Game New Zealand as a wildlife reserve. Before this, it was a small area of wetland, part of which was used as a rubbish dump. In the mid-1940’s, Fish and Game New Zealand took ownership of the land and excavated a large pond, forming the northern half of the wetlands. Fruiting trees were planted for the birds to provide them with food.⁴ The

¹ Geoff Park, Ngā Uruora: *The Groves of Life. Ecology and History in a New Zealand Landscape*, 49.

² Matthew Hatvany, ‘Environmental Failure, Success and Sustainable Development’.

³ Taura et al., ‘Te Reo o Te Repo: The Voice of the Wetland’, 5.

⁴ Information on the history of this wetland is scant. This account was shared in a private communication with John van Zeist, the administrator of the Howarth Memorial Wetland Facebook Group.
<https://www.facebook.com/HowarthMemorialWetland/>

wetland is separated from the Waihou river by stopbank, and a controlled inflow system controls water levels. The reserve now hosts fifty-one tree species,⁵ only eleven of which are New Zealand natives. It hosts a wide range of native and exotic bird species including Kōtuku, White Heron and Royal Spoonbill.⁶ Walking the trail that circles the wetland, passing through groves of Swamp Cypress, Sawtooth Oak and Black Walnut, it feels more like a North American swamp⁷ than a New Zealand wetland. This impure heritage, while on many levels disturbing, resonates with me as a mirror of my own non-innocent entanglement with the Waihou and her drained lands.⁸

The swamp provides a metaphoric model for a slow-moving, generative methodology. An ambiguous liquid-solid-gas physiology for impure cohabitations, intimate connections, uncomfortable collusions and non-innocent hybrid imaginings. I suggest that such physiology induces subtle forms of knowledge formation and articulation; here, knowledge is not sought out, claimed and named. Instead, it emerges as awareness; multimodal perceptions. It seeks to dissolve extractivist linguistic forms; rather than 'digging deeper' into a subject, 'turning up new ground' or 'mining' a concept or line of inquiry, swamp thinking ferments, coalesces and co-mingles. Its subtle movements favour slow thinking, attentive engagement and responsive participation. Rather than *actively seeking*, this methodology privileges *actively waiting*. In this nutrient-rich confluence, relationships are seeded and nurtured. Moments of attunement bubble up, spontaneous irruptions into the researcher's awareness. Embodied, thought or felt fragments of these encounters sift down and sediment, sometimes articulable, sometimes amorphous and unspeakable.

⁵ 'Howarth Memorial Wetlands Facebook Group'.

⁶ 'Howarth Memorial Wetlands Facebook Group'.

⁷ 'How Wetlands Work', HowStuffWorks, 24 June 2008, <https://science.howstuffworks.com/environmental/green-science/wetland.htm>.

⁸ To reflect this, and to differentiate this sedentary swamp ecosystem from the more dynamic wetland characteristic of Aotearoa, I use the term 'swamp' rather than wetland for my methodological model.

INTRODUCTION

This creative research thesis traces, enacts and critiques an embodied relational research practice through which to elicit experiential and imaginative encounters within suburban human-nonhuman cohabitation in Aotearoa New Zealand. Grounded in a small suburban section in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland, it reflects four years of creative research focused on caring-with, waiting receptively and seeking to attune to the multi-entity others with whom I cohabit. I am a Pākehā woman, and this research participates in the discourse of contemporary, colonised Aotearoa New Zealand. Within this context, it seeks to engage an imaginative shift; from the culturally ingrained perception that suburban life is alienated from its surrounding natural environment, toward a greater awareness of its radical entanglement.

This thesis acknowledges the Tangata Whenua of Aotearoa and gives thanks for the generous sharing of mātauranga Māori. In particular, it would like to acknowledge the insightful *mōhio* of Carl Mika (Tuhourangi and Ngati Wha-naunga) for his compassionate and insightful navigating of Indigenous and Western philosophies. While some elements of this research run parallel to aspects of mātauranga Māori, I want to be clear that this enquiry is located within and seeks to address Pākehā culture as it currently exists within Aotearoa. I acknowledge that as a researcher and a suburban dwelling Pākehā, this thesis leads me into territory where I find myself both complicit with, and troubled by the Western cultural tradition of assuming private ownership of land, and the associated aspiration to a home and garden in the suburbs, be it rented, mortgaged or freehold.

This thesis is in equal measure philosophical, practical, embodied and located within art practice. Consequently, it selectively draws upon aspects of new materialism, ecocriticism, object-oriented ontology, and affective ecology. It also engages both practically and conceptually with DIY across a spectrum of activities, from gallery-based installations to interventions within the suburban home and garden. These research strands are brought into conversation with historical and contemporary participatory and experiential art practices to bring into focus a multimodal and multi-entity research enquiry.

Situated in relation to current new materialist theory that posits horizontal rather than hierarchical relationships for human/nonhuman cohabitation, this creative research thesis engages a methodology that is practical, imaginative and located within suburban life. It proposes that a practice of attending to daily interactions with an attitude of respectful care and unconditional receptivity might facilitate

awareness¹ of new ways of knowing that are embodied, imagined, and grounded within the living network of the biosphere. To address this proposition the thesis poses and seeks to address the following three focused research questions:

Can creative research committed to attending with care, holding a receptive space of unknowing, and attuning to nonhuman agency reimagine and reframe Suburban cohabitation so as to open these relationships for re-negotiation on new terms, understood experientially and viscerally, as well as intellectually?

How might participatory art research acknowledge, involve, and work responsively with multi-entity nonhuman others, and how might the significance of this relationship be experienced by a participating human so as to encourage imaginative possibilities for human-nonhuman relationships?

Can small, located interactions in which nonhuman entities are defamiliarised and re-presented within the physical and conceptual space of an art encounter elicit understanding that is critical, embodied, imagined and conducive to the notion that humans and nonhumans might coexist on a levelled platform of being?

At the outset, it may be useful to clarify two terminology usages. While both are addressed fully in Chapter One, a working definition is called for here. Firstly, within the context of this research ‘nonhuman entity’ refers broadly to all that is not human within the biosphere. In the context of suburban cohabitation, a nonhuman entity might be water falling as rain, or running as wastewater from the dishwasher. Soil, with multitude microbes, is a nonhuman entity, as is a worm, a cat, a grapevine and the food I carry in from the supermarket. In this research, human-made things are also understood as nonhuman entities; the bucket that carries food scraps to the compost, the shirt I wear, the camera I use. Secondly, how this research seeks to navigate the interrelated requirements of speaking from an embodied (human) position and seeking to articulate a post-anthropocentric sensibility. It is essential to be clear that while this research operates contra-anthropocentric² research strategies, it speaks from and to the human. However, rather than locating the human person as the central protagonist, it endeavours to speak from and to the suburban dwelling human as continuous with the natural world or biosphere.

¹ I use the word ‘awareness’ to become cognisant of something that is there over perception – to see or grasp something with the understanding mind.

² Contra anthropocentric and other terminology is elaborated in Chapter One.

A third term requiring clarification is 'participating viewer'. In this thesis the term 'participating viewer' acknowledges the range of engagement responses available to the viewer. It recognises that a viewer may not participate, either through choice or through a physiological, psychological or time constraint. While this research invites and encourages slow, reflective, physiologically affective participation, it also seeks to provide conditions in which participation is playful and curiosity-driven, and which can be accessed through multiple participatory modes. The research presented in this thesis employs two models of participation which need to be considered separately; installations that operate on the traditional gallery drop-in model, which I will refer to as 'experiential installations', and events convened via invitation, which I will refer to as 'participatory events'.

Experiential installations may have an overt participatory component, as in the case of *To Dream While Waking* and *I Don't Know If the Water Knows How She Will Make Her Way to the Sea*, both of which were presented in the context of multi-day art and ecology-related conferences. These works have a range of levels of interaction built into them; a viewer can choose to participate fully, partially or to appreciate the material complexity of the work as traditional installation.³ For the purposes of this research, a decision to look at the work and not to participate is in itself a form of participation. The act of considering and rejecting an object-oriented invitation to participate is in itself an imaginative engagement with a nonhuman entity.

The physical constraints for those with restricted mobility remain more problematic, and while the installations seek to provide accessible options (seating from which to view the work; a wheelchair-accessible umbrella-dwelling space from which the interior of the dwelling space can be viewed, if not entered), it acknowledges that full participation may not be possible for some individuals.

For participatory events such as *Conversation Pit*, an invitation to participate is extended either personally or through supporting institutions or galleries. A negotiation between participant and artist follows, at which point participatory preferences and mobility restrictions can be addressed.⁴

³ These strategies for multiple interactive options are addressed in *To Dream While Waking* in section 3.2.2 and *I Don't Know If the Water Knows How She Will Make Her Way to the Sea*, in section 3.1.

⁴ An excerpt of this communication is included in section 3.2.1.

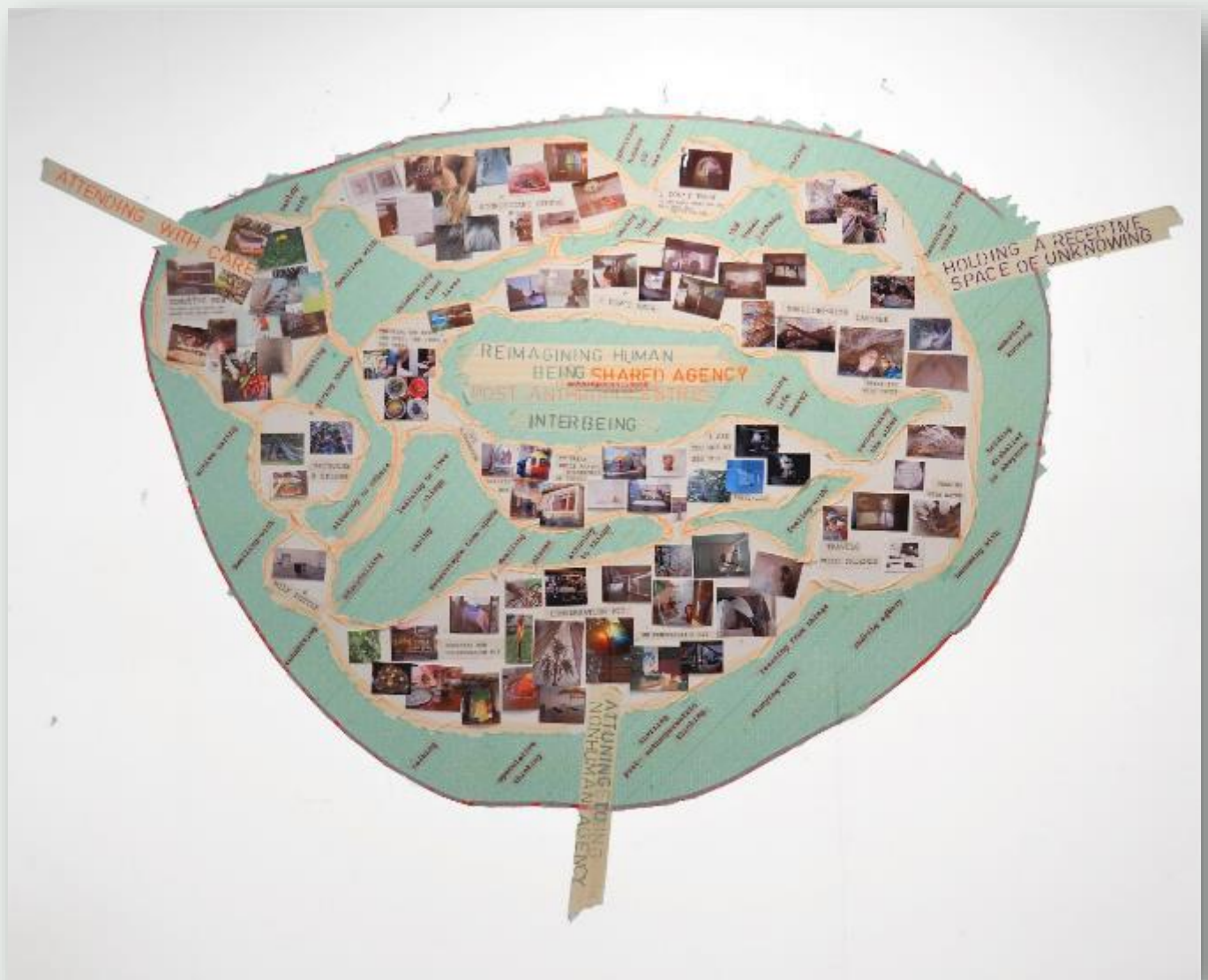


FIGURE 3: THE SWAMP MODEL: RESEARCH DIAGRAM

A swamp is not a clearly demarcated region but rather a gradual transition of water soaking earth, the earth permeating water. Similarly, my research permeates the land that I inhabit, the suburban biological hub where I make my home and the streets, waterways, and trees that surround my dwelling, nested in Tāmaki Makaurau, the city of Auckland.

THE SWAMP MODEL

The swamp research model⁵ arose from the search for a diagrammatic form through which to articulate the non-hierarchical interchange between three commitments: attending with care; attuning to nonhuman agency; and holding a receptive space of unknowing. Tracing trajectories of interplay and influence between research areas expanded into a circular, interconnected research diagram occupying the wall of my research shed. I was led to the swamp analogy through parallel but independent research into my familial associations with the Waihou River. Tracing the river on Google Maps, the Howarth Memorial Wetland⁶ in Te Aroha when viewed from above, reveals striking structural synchronicity.

A swamp is a place of slow-moving circulation, a place where earth, water and air are indiscreet, each moving in and through the other. Similarly, the methodology of this thesis circulates slowly, evolving out of and feeding back into the practical and conceptual activities of creative research. The swamp model provides an imaginative structure for the concurrent circulation of thinking, feeling and attuning. It gives a visual form to a dynamic in which the flow of ideas, theoretical understandings and experimental engagement characteristic of the human researcher commingle with the bodies and activities of the other entities.

The conceptual and physical ground for this enquiry is the '*Domestic Hub*';⁷ a physical and speculative reinvention of my coexistence with home and garden. Instigated at the outset of the thesis, it grounds and recalibrates my relationships of care, a recalibration that now extends into shared suburban space; roads, verges, parks, cycleways, streams, gutters and sky. It offers a research methodology that provides time, space and imaginative freedom within which something might be experienced, that values slowing down and withdrawing to focus on small, unnoticed things and activities. A methodology that seeks out and nurtures modes of attunement and engages sympathetic research forms to bring into view the qualities and characteristics of these modes.

⁵ Chapter Two: Thinking Like a Swamp, addresses the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the Swamp model.

⁶ 'Howarth Memorial Wetlands'.

⁷ It is important to note that '*Domestic Hub*' demarks a specific site of suburban multi-entity cohabitation, a significant differentiation of intention from research addressing the cultural implications of domesticity or housework.

SIGNIFICANT OTHERS (ALPHABETISED)

AVOCADO TREES
BUMBLEBEES
BLANKETS; FOLDED OR SPREAD OUT
BICYCLE; MOUNTAIN AND ROAD
CAMERA
CHICKENS
COFFEE
COMPOST
COW; MEAT OF, MILK OF
GOPRO
HUSBAND
LARGE CAT
PEACH TREE
PHONE
RABBIT
SMALL CAT
SOIL
STEPSON
VEGE GARDEN
WATER; RUNNING FROM THE TAP
WATER; FALLING AS RAIN
WILDFLOWER GARDEN
WORMS

This might take the form of attentive observation with a camera, using the lens to focus on a particular view, aspect or activity of the entity in question. It might be evidenced in the Domestic Hub as a specific, pragmatic approach to daily life. It may be physically manifest through a dwelling-space or a conversation. Or it may take the form of a video projection that attends to a moment of relationship between entities or offers an unexpected perspective on a familiar interaction. Each of these modes provides an opportunity to focus differently on an aspect of life. The commonality across them all is clarity and concentration of focus, filtering out peripheral noise and inviting a participating audience to slow down, look, think and discuss through this lens or filter, which allows habitual expectations to drop away.

The swamp provides a research model that wilfully turns inward and focuses on a slow, attentive engagement with a minute section of the biosphere to draw attention to small, grounded interactions with significant repercussions. The three research commitments provide structure for the confluence of entities, ideas, theories, art discourses and philosophical thought structures. They both trace and direct the flow of activities of caring, thinking, making and waiting, and feelings enacted and exchanged between the human and nonhuman participants in this thesis.

This research seeks to engage the energetic friction generated between multiple research forms and access modes as a discursive dynamic for a creative practice that operates across modes, platforms, and durational engagements. A multimodal discourse that employs thinking as both embodied and critical, in which human-being (the activity of being human), is perceived of and experienced as interwoven within the fabric of our biosphere.

An essential methodological and cognitive strategy within this thesis is to acknowledge that materials, objects, and places have their own agency and material voice. Rather than 'using' materials and tools, it seeks to invite and open out a relationship of collaboration. In practising this unfamiliar methodology (trying, failing, trying again) and seeking to learn how to collaborate with things, a multi-entity research collective has emerged; materials and things whose ongoing participation traces a material dialogic throughout the thesis. This collective operates as a 'material whakapapa' to the broader project. In addition to the significant others listed here, this whakapapa includes:

BANANA BOX
BLUE TAPE
VIDEO PROJECTOR
LENGTHS OF FABRIC
COMPUTER
RED ROPE
CLOTHES PEGS
SEWING MACHINE
WOOD CLAMPS
FAMILY CAMPING TENT
MULTICOLOURED EXTENSION LEADS
CIRCULAR INFLATABLE LOUNGER
WOODEN SUN UMBRELLA FRAME
SMALL WHITE STOOL
MULTICOLOURED UMBRELLA
YELLOW TRIPOD
POTTED TREE
INFLATABLE BEANBAGS
STEPLADDER
MILK BOTTLE
GRAPEVINE/VINE LEAVES/GRAPES/BRANCHES
PERSIMMON TREE/LEAVES
YELLOW HANDLED SPADE
YELLOW STOCKING
VELVET BEANBAGS
OAK TREE (BY TE AUAUNGA, OAKLEY CREEK)
OAK LEAVES (IN THE GARDEN SHED)
HOSES
YELLOW MEASURING TAPE
BLACKBIRD
CRUTCHES

ATTENDING WITH CARE + HOLDING A RECEPTIVE SPACE OF UNKNOWING + ATTUNING TO NONHUMAN AGENCY

ATTENDING WITH CARE

SPENDING TIME WITH, LISTENING, CARING ATTENTIVELY FOR THOSE I DWELL WITH, ANIMAL MINERAL VEGETABLE.

CHOOSING TO VALUE THE DAILY ACTIVITIES OF CARE AS THE SERIOUS WORK OF BEING-WITH.



HOLDING A RECEPTIVE SPACE OF UNKNOWING

MAINTAINING AN ATTITUDE OF UNKNOWING WITHIN RESEARCH AS A STRATEGIC DISRUPTION TO HABITUAL MODES OF APPREHENDING COHABITATION. CONSCIOUSLY STRIVING TO SET ASIDE NORMALISED EXPECTATIONS OF HUMAN AND NONHUMAN BEHAVIOUR TO ALLOW UNKNOWN OR NOVEL AWARENESS TO ARISE

ATTUNING TO NONHUMAN AGENCY

PRACTISING (REPEATEDLY TRYING, STRIVING, LEARNING) METHODS FOR ATTUNING MY HUMAN PERCEPTIVE FACILITIES TO THE AGENCIES AND COMMUNICATIONS OF NONHUMAN OTHERS. DEVELOPING AND APPLYING RESEARCH METHODS THAT SEEK TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND SUPPORT THE AGENCY OF NONHUMAN ENTITIES IN DAILY LIFE AND CREATIVE PRACTICE.

ATTENDING WITH CARE

Care can be discussed in the abstract, but it is enacted in the personal. This research is grounded in a decision of the researcher to take seriously, personally and academically, the interactions of care available within everyday suburban life, starting with my own activities of cohabitation. This instigated the Domestic Hub project, an ongoing investigation of how a practice of *caring engagement with nonhuman others* might guide the transition of a suburban property into a biological hub. Each year the place has become more wild, occupied and alive, and I, the researcher, embedded within the multifaceted community that has emerged. The act of care-full attention has led to an imaginative transition of human identity. From this land where I dwell, the house I occupy, to this community of entities I cohabit with and within, it has enabled a deep seated shift from perceiving myself as an individual who owns some land to understanding myself as a compilation of biological entities in constant interchange with other entities.

Drawing on the scholarship of political theorist Joan Tronto,⁸ this research articulates a position that differentiates ‘actions of care and nurturing self-awareness’ from ‘wellness’ discourse.⁹ Drawing in equal measure on embodied experience, performative enactment and discursive methods, it participates in exchanges of care as an experiential creative research tactic through which to re-articulate and reactivate the mundane interactions endemic in suburban cohabitation. In both mindful cohabitation and convening participatory practice, the research seeks to provide conditions in which care is encountered as an attentive and intimate material and psychological and energetic interaction between entities. It promotes a research form that is discursive *and* embodied, experiential *and* critical; a research model that can move between subjective experience and the mediated critique of that experience.

⁸ Chapter One provides the more comprehensive discussion of care, drawing a parallel between the methodology of this research and the proactive and encompassing definition of care proposed by political theorist Joan Tronto in *Who Cares?: How To Shape a Democratic Politics*.

⁹ Eeva Sointu, ‘The Rise of an Ideal: Tracing Changing Discourses of Wellbeing’, *The Sociological Review* 53, no. 2 (2005): 255–74. Sociologist Dr Eeva Sointu articulates this field, stating that “dominant discourses of wellbeing relate to changes in subjectivity; they manifest a move from subjects as citizens to subjects as consumers. In a consumer society, wellbeing emerges as a normative obligation chosen and sought after by individual agents.”

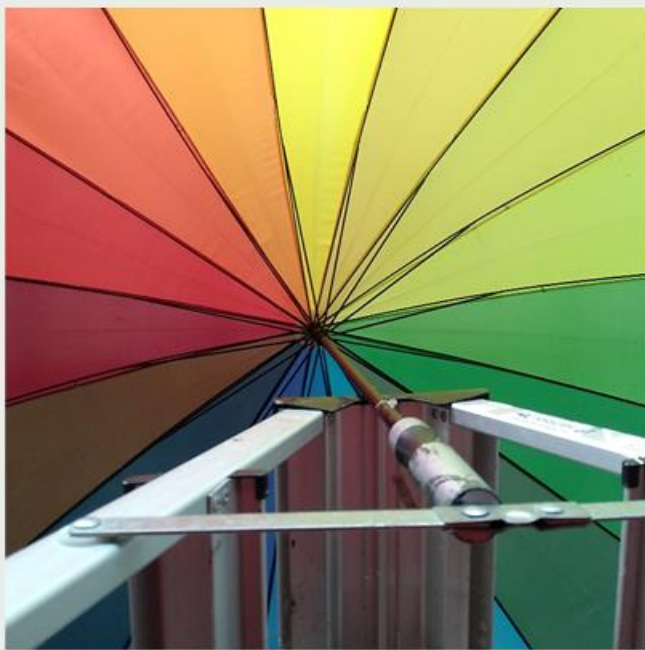


FIGURE 4: SMALL OBSERVATIONS WITH THE CAMERA

HOLDING A RECEPTIVE SPACE OF UNKNOWING

In claiming to operate a methodology that seeks to ‘un-know’, this research flags an intention to re-examine a specific subset of the meanings, assumptions and functions associated with the word *know*. It endeavours to pause the flow of language and let attention pool for a moment on the word and its antonyms in verb form: to know, to not know, to un-know, and to inhabit the act of unknowing.¹⁰ This research follows the lead of physicist/philosopher David Bohm¹¹ and approaches the processes of thinking, knowing and unknowing as an activity. Here unknowing is interpreted as a practical action of holding my assumptions and habitual perceptions in abeyance, of stretching my limbs and mind to hold open a cognitive space in which *something* might emerge.

Within this research, a methodological commitment to holding a space of unknowing is actualised as an activity conducted in lived time and concerned with a specific place. It is an operation of physical, cognitive, intellectual and imaginative holding back from assuming the primacy of human knowledge and agency, to provide a space in which other agencies and ways of communicating might emerge as some form of awareness. It is a commitment to wait on entities and ideas, consciously withholding normative perception through which to unfold and value non-habitual ways of knowing. It seeks to provide conditions in which the perceptive and sense-making modes of seeing, hearing, touching, thinking, tactile feeling, emotional feeling, imagination, dreams and energies felt in the body might be given credence and allowed to emerge as embodied and integrated awareness. It endeavours to provide a situated research space in which the multiple access modes available to the human researcher might be experienced as continuous rather than oppositional.

A parallel research methodology can be observed in the field notes¹² of Maja Kuzmanovic and Nick Gaffney, co-founders of *FoAM*, a geographically dispersed network of transdisciplinary labs researching at the intersection of art, science, nature and everyday life.

Beneath and between it all, the noise of life unfolding. A thick, almost viscous silence.

The rich texture of being present in the world. Within this state of alert yet receptive

¹⁰ The specific usage of un-knowing and unknowing within this thesis is addressed in detail in Chapter One.

¹¹ David Bohm, *On Dialogue* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

¹² Maja Kuzmanovic, and Nik Gaffney, ‘Spectres in Change. Fieldnotes #1’. Here this thinking is elaborated: “Is the mere act of observing an act of caring? How can this noticing, witnessing and recording become a transformative, re-animating force, something beyond representation? A noticing that frames spectral existence with real possibilities and propositions. Abstract data become tactile sensations, beckoning rather than elucidating. Could we think of fieldwork as a careful engagement, an attunement reminiscent of Ampère’s “tâtonnement”, a “feeling around” the landscape?”

presence, abstract data become tactile sensations, beckoning rather than elucidating.

Noticing becomes a re-animating force, an act of caring.¹³

When an artist is working with a studio-based practice, the process of experimentation through testing materials, techniques, subject matters and responding to outcomes is a well-understood methodology. I am applying this experimental strategy to re-evaluating my relationships within daily life. I am drawing on my experience of working with materials in process-driven studio practice¹⁴ and familiarity with unconscious writing and drawing, addressed later in this introduction. Both research enquiries were premised on waiting for something to emerge and make itself comprehensible to my waiting consciousness. Now I turn this research strategy toward the home, property and suburbs with whom I cohabit, and wait hopefully, attentively and with care. This thesis traces and seeks to make comprehensible, the embodied understandings that emerge.

13 Maja Kuzmanovic, and Nik Gaffney, 'Spectres in Change. Fieldnotes #1', FoAM, 21 September 2017, <https://medium.com/@foam/spectres-in-change-fieldnotes-1-b47a213a902c>.

¹⁴ For my MFA (University of Auckland 2002) I built an auto-responsive 'painting machine' and developed a painting medium from industrial adhesives.

ATTUNING TO NONHUMAN AGENCY

In drawing upon the model of the swamp, this research seeks to articulate a fluid research methodology of multi-entity attunement. A swamp-like interchange informed by the seeping of one body into another, a methodology in which agency is not fixed but is understood as a two-way flow between entities. A methodology in which the staccato stroke of the backswimmer¹⁵ passing through the water is equally valid as the paddle-stroke of the human-canoe assemblage passing above.

Here the thesis traces its roots back to political theorist Jane Bennett's 2010 *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*.¹⁶ Bennett's agentic thinking flows through the fluid relationships of attuning to and working-with nonhuman others. Following Bennett's lead, this research seeks to acknowledge and directly engage with the energetic, material and biological activity of nonhuman entities as *agency*; the capacity to act and have effect within an environment. The practice of waiting with receptive unknowing and attending with care applied over a four-year research period has led me to experience communication modes that were previously inaccessible to me. These communication forms are non-verbal, and while translation will always be imperfect, the terms *an activity of attunement* and *experience of embodied awareness* are close-enough approximations. This research seeks to acknowledge the agency of nonhuman others through cultivating an attitude of embodied awareness, attuning the whole of my physical self to the others I encounter. I can best explain this as *a communicative mode in which I configure myself as a sensory being*, rather than a perceiving duo of brain and eyes.¹⁷

¹⁵ The aquatic insect *Corixidae*, also known as water-boatman.

¹⁶ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (UK: Duke University Press, 2010).

¹⁷ I am referring here to my inherited and normalised Western model of perception that privileges human seeing and knowing. This is taken up in Chapter Four: Shared Agency.



FIGURE 5: DOMESTIC HUB - WILDING THE BACK GARDEN: 2016-2019

AN UNBIDDEN PLANT IN THE GARDEN, A BLACKBIRD AT MY DOOR, THE VOICE OF THE TREE
FELT IN MY SPINE, THE PAW OF THE CAT IN MY HAND WHILE DREAMING.

SMALL SCALE

As I have made my own steps of embodied awareness, I have applied these methods to convening small, focused experiential art events. Each event is scaled for personal and relational intimacy; a conversation between four people in a blanket hut; a person holds an egg cup and enquires of its past and its future, or lies alone in a tent and contemplates water as it flows through our home, a drain, a sky. These are strategically small gestures inviting and seeking to facilitate ongoing small steps of embodied awareness for participating individuals. The intimacies of encounter that this small scale affords have significantly contributed to the shape and form of the research.

NAVIGATING MY PERSONAL ENTANGLEMENT WITHIN THE RESEARCH

As this research draws on the interplay between the activities of imagining, waiting with unknowing, attentive care and the experience of everyday life, it may be useful to contextualise this methodology within a personal psychological and physiological background. I am moderately dyslexic, with an associated contra-normative spatial awareness which manifests as a lack of spatial orientation within a given architecture or city structure, but with a strong ability to visualise three-dimensional objects within space and to attenuate this to my own body and a physical space. I have a cognitive function which may be described as attention deficit disorder (ADD). Alternatively, it may also be described as a fluid movement of consciousness and attention through the physical space of my body into the durational space of my experience of time.

These physiological characteristics have been influenced and developed through a period of intense engagement with psychotherapy. Through this practice, I learned that the human brain and sense of self does not differentiate between actual and imagined experience. That it is possible to reimagine a scenario and have the self/ego accept it as valid experience. I also discovered that while I could not think my way out of a problematic situation, I could wait with unknowing and new possibilities would emerge. One example of this process was the emergence of a practice of contra-handed drawing as the primary communicative tool within the psychotherapeutic relationship, which evolved over ten years. This practice emerged spontaneously from inarticulate scribbles, mirroring the automatic drawing experiments of the Surrealists.

From this undirected drawing process, a host of other-than-human entities emerged, including animals, fabulous hybrids, and human-animal chimaeras, filling sketchbooks and populating my imaginative space. These multi-species characters were almost always derived from animals with whom humans cohabit; rabbits, cats, dogs, cows and horses. I became attentive to these animals and the long history we share. Their narrative runs in the shadow of ours, as various food sources, modes of transport, war comrades, pests, companions, and objects of desire. This experience has informed both the subject of my PhD enquiry – domestic multi-species cohabitation – and the methodology of waiting in attentive relationship with nonhuman others. It facilitates cognitive receptivity to the possible emergence of knowledge forms and experiential modes that I do not yet know and cannot access through intellectual enquiry alone.

I am cognisant that this mode of creative research, with its emphasis on unquantifiable and speculative content, brushes against the edges of the critical academic method. To this end, and for specific moments, the methodologies and analytical methods employed by this research venture off the path of so-called objectivity and intellectual distancing and seek to append analytical modes of thought with subjective ways of knowing, including emotion, touch, speculative imagining, and intuition. In bringing the established protocols of human-thought-centred research into play with multimodal research methodologies, this research aligns with the critical stance proposed by the research field of Affective Ecology.¹⁸ An essential correlation is the assertion that critical understanding and the knowledge it generates is not accessed solely through intellect, but also through a nexus of sensual, sensory, and imaginative modes.¹⁹

¹⁸ Alexa Weik von Mossner, *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion and Environmental Narrative*, Cognitive Approaches to Culture Series (Ohio State University Press. Kindle Edition., n.d.). I. 166.

¹⁹ Lauren Greyson, *Vital Reenchantments*., 27. Greyson suggests that acknowledging the affective dimension and cultivating a sense of wonder is not a luxury, but is better understood as a necessity and an academic duty.



FIGURE 6: CONTRA HAND DRAWINGS 2003 -2008

NAVIGATING THE THESIS

The swamp-like nature of this enquiry; multi-layered, comparatively slow and highly attentive, informs the layout of this thesis. To visually navigate the flow and exchange between modes of discourse, sections dedicated to the material and experiential manifestation of the research are interwoven throughout the discussion and analysis. These interludes of documentary photographs, descriptive prose and personal observations flow alongside the academic text as a conceptual harmonic or an interweaving chorus of human and nonhuman voice modes.

Rather than flowing directly from hypothesis to conclusion, this research develops by permeating and seeping between bodies and thought structures. Consequently, some research elements will be addressed in multiple places throughout the document. In these instances, the location of other pertinent discussion is provided as a footnote. The following overview aims to sketch out the flow of the thesis document through the interconnecting pools of research.

Chapter One introduces the tactical approach this research takes to language and defines the central terminology. This chapter outlines the vocabulary the thesis employs and clarifies how it puts these terms to work to negotiate a theoretical and conceptual position. It locates its stance on 'nature' and the 'Anthropocene' and defines a theoretical approach to the ontology of objects and 'things', informed by the philosophical perspectives of Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology²⁰ and Martin Heidegger's tool analysis.²¹ It contextualises and elaborates the three main terms of care, unknowing and agency as introduced previously, and defines its use of the term 'reimagining' by referring to art historian Amanda Boetzkes'²² notion of *ecologicity* and the efficacy of art in reimagining worlds. The final section of the chapter speculates on the need for a less anthropocentric vocabulary and introduces some customised terms that will be used in this thesis.

²⁰ Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, Open Court Kindle Edition (Carus Publishing, 2002).

²¹ Rodger Berkowitz and Philippe Nonet, trans., 'The Origin of the Work of Art, by Martin Heidegger' (2006).

²² Amanda Boetzkes, 'Ecologicity, Vision, And the Neurological System', in *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Ascetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* (Open Humanities Press, 2015).

Chapter Two expands upon the conceptual and contextual framework of the swamp model, aligning it with the research of artist duo Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas.²³ It outlines the historical and theoretical location of the model in relation to philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Felix Guattari's rhizome model²⁴ and the intersectionality theory proposed by critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw.²⁵

It then elaborates the theoretical, philosophical and contemporary art context. Drawing on art historians Thomas McEvelley²⁶ and James Meyer²⁷ it looks back to the energetic disruption that characterised the sixties and identifies a convergence with the current moment of social, political and ecological upheaval. Aligning with the theoretical stance of Georgina Born, Eric Lewis and Will Straw, editors of *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*²⁸ it proposes that nascent practices and philosophies overlooked in the rush toward post-modernity might be reconsidered in the context of contemporary notions of interdisciplinary and interspecies continuity. It positions the thesis within the broader conversation of participatory practice, returning to the foundational practices of Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Robert Filliou, Lygia Clark and Allan Kaprow, drawing on curator/writer Helen Molesworth²⁹, cultural theorist Deborah Frizzell,³⁰ art writer Martin Patrick³¹ and artist/writer Linda Weintraub³², respectively. The possibilities and problematics of this heritage are analysed in conversation with the relational aesthetics of curator/writer Nicolas Bourriaud,³³ and the critical theory of historian/critic Claire Bishop³⁴ and cultural theorist Josephine Berry.³⁵ It then turns to artist-writer Grant H. Kester³⁶

²³ Gediminas and Nomeda Urbonas, 'The Swamp Pavilion'. Accessed 28 June 2020, <https://www.swamp.lt/>.

²⁴ Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, eleventh printing, 2005 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

²⁵ Kimberlé Crenshaw, *The Urgency of Intersectionality*, TEDWomen 2016, https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality.

²⁶ Thomas McEvelley, *The Exile's Return: Toward a Redefinition of Painting for the Post-Modern Era, (Contemporary Artists and Their Critics)* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁷ James Meyer, *The Art of Return: The Sixties and Contemporary Culture* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

²⁸ Georgina Born, Eric Lewis, and Will Straw, eds., *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics* (Duke University Press, 2017).

²⁹ Helen Molesworth, 'House Work and Art Work', *October* 92, no. Spring, 2000 (2000), 71–97.

³⁰ Deborah Frizzell, 'Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art, 1948-1988', *Woman's Art Journal*, accessed 18 October 2020, https://www.academia.edu/23914886/Lygia_Clark_The_Abandonment_of_Art_1948_1988.

³¹ Martin Patrick, *Across the Art/Life Divide: Performance, Subjectivity, and Social Practice in Contemporary Art* (Bristol & Chicago: Intellect, 2017).

³² Linda Weintraub, *To Life! Eco-Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012).

³³ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Pleasance, Simon and Copeland, Mathieu. English translation, 2002 (France: Presses du réel, 1998).

³⁴ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (Verso, 2012).

³⁵ Josephine Berry, *Art and (Bare) Life. A Biopolitical Enquiry* (Sternberg Press, 2019).

³⁶ Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

and art writer Mika Hannula to seek to reassess strategies for embedding the activities of art within everyday human life.

This chapter positions these creative research strategies within contemporary practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, identifying works that operate small lively gestures for reimagining cohabitation. Here it draws on the 2019 exhibitionary project *How to Live Together*, curated by Balamohan Shingade for ST PAUL St Gallery,³⁷ discussing *Art as Medicine; gatherings for women (2019)* by Poata Alvie McKree, and *Invitation to Dialogue (2019-ongoing)* by Christopher Braddock (and dialogue group). It reflects upon Richard Orjis' 2019 project *Cruising the Park: A Queering* and Mark Harvey's 2007 video performance *Weed Wrestle*.

In concluding, the chapter returns to the influence of the long sixties to outline the influence of philosopher Michel Foucault's³⁸ theory of heterotopia and the formation of this research's implementation of heterotopic time-space. The chapter then returns to the swamp analogy to articulate the subversive propositions of low theory and wildness made by gender and queer theorist J. Jack Halberstam.³⁹

³⁷ Balamohan Shingade, ed., *'How to Live Together: Exhibition Guide'* (ST PAUL St Gallery, 2019), <https://stpaulst.aut.ac.nz/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/2019/how-to-live-together>.

³⁸ Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22–27, <https://doi.org/10.2307/464648>.

³⁹ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).



FIGURE 7: CONVERSATION PIT, 2018 & TO DREAM WHILE WAKING (WILDERNESS OF THINGS) 2019

Top: *Domestic Hub Conversation Pit: Sharing in an Intimate World, 2018* and *RM Conversation Pit: The Agency of Things, 2018*

Bottom: *To Dream While Waking (Wilderness of Things), 2019*

Chapter Three interweaves the creative component of the thesis with its philosophical and theoretical concerns. It traces the currents of materials, places, theoretical locations and audiences through a series of dwelling-spaces and dialogic events. Here the Domestic Hub project is elaborated, and two key projects are introduced. *Conversation Pit* is a series of dialogical events in which a constructed dwelling space is inserted into the home or gallery and hosts a conversation on human-nonhuman cohabitation. *To Dream While Waking (Wilderness of Things)* is an object-oriented installation, whereby a dwelling-space and interactive activity is located within an international conference on the arts and environment.

The philosophical and ecological underpinning is articulated through the thinking of philosopher, anthropologist and sociologist Bruno Latour and the recent work of ecofeminist and storyteller Donna Haraway. It engages the new materialisms of feminist theorists Karen Barad⁴⁰ and Rosi Braidotti⁴¹ and returns repeatedly to philosopher Timothy Morton,⁴² whose research area, “the intersection of object-oriented thought and ecological studies” ,⁴³ mirrors this thesis. Threaded through this practical and philosophical research is a strategic engagement with the energetic potential of two distinct but interrelated theoretical enquiries. Cultural studies scholar Lauren Greyson’s⁴⁴ articulation of *affective wonder*, the practical and embodied “experience of and attunement to novel affect”⁴⁵, alongside political theorist Jane Bennett’s work, are both seminal thinking on the agency of matter.

This thinking leads into the DIY *Domestic Hub*, where the theoretical enquiry is brought down to earth as the philosophical propositions of new materialist and eco-critical discourse are applied to the interactions of suburban life. The interactions of art and the suburban garden are taken up in a discussion of Fritz Haeg’s project *Edible Estates* (2005-2013) and *Shopfront* (2011) by Suburban Floral Association.

⁴⁰ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (The University of Michigan: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁴¹ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Polity Press, 2013).

⁴² In particular, this research draws on Morton’s book *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, *Posthumanities* 27 (University of Minnesota Press, 2013) and *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (London. New York: Verso Books, 2017).

⁴³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timothy_Morton

⁴⁴ Lauren Greyson, *Vital Reenchantments: Biophilia, Gaia, Cosmos and the Effectively Ecological*, ePDF (Earth, Milky Way: Punctum Books, 2019).

⁴⁵ Lauren Greyson, *Vital Reenchantments*., 14.

The second part of the chapter returns to the swamp as a reminder of the gritty, unrelenting intimacy of cohabitation. From this low place, it moves into the small political gesture put forward by art writer Mika Hannula in *The Politics of Small Gestures: Chances and Challenges for Contemporary Art*.⁴⁶ For Hannula, the small gesture can be a seemingly insignificant moment or thing that surprises us into thinking differently, a dynamic that when implemented within an art context “allows us to find and generate tools and the courage to find alternatives beside and beyond the instrumentalisation of our life worlds.”⁴⁷ The efficacy of the small political gesture is traced through Eve Mosher’s *HighWaterLine* (2007-ongoing) and *A Bag Full of Snow* (2003) by Peter McCaughey.

For this research, the small gesture leads into an imaginative space for a generative entanglement of art, human life and nonhuman being, articulated in a specific, situated instance of embodied creative research. The final section of the chapter reflects upon small moments of interaction, speculation and waiting together that inform the research practice of convening heterotopic time-space.

⁴⁶ Mika Hannula, *The Politics of Small Gestures: Chances and Challenges for Contemporary Art* (Revolver, 2006).

⁴⁷ Hannula, 5.



FIGURE 8: *DIY ALTERNATIVE REALITY HUT*, 2020

Chapter Four addresses the possibilities and art historical precedents for shared agency in artmaking. It outlines research strategies for engaging the methodological and material agency of tools, materials, objects and machines as participating entities. Here the inclusive notion of participation put forward by this thesis is developed in practical terms, as a mode of working-with, and in theoretical and art historical terms. It aligns the research with affect theory and, picking up another thread of 1960's energy, it returns to the social aesthetics of Born et al and draws on artist/writer Katherine Behar's⁴⁸ contra-anthropocentric re-reading of material process and anti-form as proposed in the conceptual art and writing of Robert Morris (1931-2018).

This chapter traces the flows of materiality and agency through *Conversation Pit* and *To Dream While Waking*, identifying working processes designed to attune to the characteristics and tendencies of what this research proposes to be 'co-authoring things'. It introduces *DIY Alternative Reality Hut*, a response to Covid-19 lockdown in Aotearoa, where the lockdown community were invited to construct their own alternative reality hut and participate in a virtual conversation.

It then turns to the planned final creative component event of the thesis, *I See You See Me See You*. This event returns to the Domestic Hub and the messy ground of breathing, flowering, scratching, digging, eating and sleeping that make up living and dying together. The place from which the energetic exchanges of care, with its associated joys and miscalculations well up through the research. Here this energy bubbles up as a shared encounter located within the entangled relationships of living-with.

The concluding remarks reflect upon my subtle energetic exchanges of attunement with nonhuman entities, noting in particular an accompanying shift in my self-awareness as the human researcher, from intellectual to tacit or embodied knowledge forms. The conclusion overviews the specific characteristics and creative potential of a research methodology in which 'the use of media and materials' is experimentally reframed as an attempt to 'enter into multi-entity agentic collaboration'.

The final section alights upon the specific contribution this multimodal and multi-entity creative research thesis proposes for contemporary participatory practice. It pinpoints strategic developments in which small moments of suburban cohabitation are presented and re-presented, assembled and reassembled with places, people, entities and things in repeated speculative settings. In these settings each configuration seeks out a specific, generative relationship between the audience, location,

⁴⁸ Katherine Behar and Emmy Mikelson, *And Another Thing: Nonanthropocentrism and Art* (Punctum Books, 2016).

material engagement and audience engagement, weaving a network of material and discursive interconnections.



FIGURE 9: RESEARCH TOWARD *I SEE YOU SEE ME SEE YOU*, 2020

CHAPTER ONE: THE NAME FOR IT: WORDS FOR A LESS ANTHROPOCENTRIC VOCABULARY

So much of earth history has been told in the thrall of the fantasy of the first beautiful words and weapons, of the first beautiful weapons as words and vice versa. Tool, weapon, word: that is the word made flesh in the image of the sky god.⁴⁹

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify key research terms along with the parameters within which these words are used. It also introduces a particular approach to language itself. This thesis employs language to draw attention to aspects of human-nonhuman coexistence that it considers to be habitually overlooked and unspoken. It tussles with language as it seeks to articulate thinking, feeling, and practices that run counter to human-centred linguistic forms. Here the scholarship of the quantum physicist and philosopher David Bohm can usefully be brought into play. Working at the intersection of philosophy and quantum physics, Bohm delves into the *activity* of thinking, proposing that “thought is actually a subtle tacit process”,⁵⁰ a nonverbal activity carried out in the body. He asserts that as thinking and its translation into language is a thing that humans do, how it is done can be critiqued and reimaged.⁵¹ Bohm advocates the importance of cultivating an attitude of self-awareness in which assumptions of thought and speech are consciously held in abeyance for critique and reflection.

This research locates its specific enquiry within the broader linguistic framework that Bohm outlines. Bohm contends that “every language form carries a kind of dominant or prevailing worldview, which tends to function in our thinking and in our perception whenever it is used, so that to give a clear expression of a world view contrary to the one implied in the primary structure of a language is usually very difficult.”⁵² He suggests that this bias is deeply embedded and that “one of the major defects of the ordinary mode of using language is just its general implication that it is not restricting the world view in any way at all, and that in any case questions of world view have to do only with ‘one’s own particular philosophy’, rather than with the content and function of our language”.⁵³ The following

⁴⁹ Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, Experimental Futures Series (Durham London: Duke University Press Kindle Edition, 2016). 118.

⁵⁰ Bohm, *On Dialogue*, 16.

⁵¹ Bohm, *On Dialogue*.

⁵² David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 59.

⁵³ David Bohm, *On Dialogue*, 59.

section addresses a range of common but complicated words, introduces some less-common words, and finally, identifies some linguistic gaps and finds words to fill them.

1.1 NATURE WORDS – NATURE AND NATURE

This research adheres to the eco-critical differentiation between a culturally constructed idea of Nature and the thin strip of lively biosphere that encircles our planet. While this difference is now widely acknowledged, the twofold meaning of the word remains problematic. This thesis will follow the lead of theorists Bruno Latour, Timothy Morton, and others, and differentiate via capitalisation; Nature and nature.

In this convention, capital-N Nature refers to the constructed humanist worldview informed by the western philosophical tradition, in which humans are the active protagonists, and Nature provides the passive backdrop and resource for the unfolding of human progress and self-realisation. In this scenario, the Human holds up a lens through which Nature is viewed, interpreted, and narrated. The western individual has several lenses at their behest, science, which has developed as a humanistic disciplinary mode since the Enlightenment, along with pervasive aestheticised constructs articulated from the late eighteenth century such as the 'sublime' and 'wilderness'. In the face of ecological degradation and resource depletion, this world view falters, as nature turns out not to be the passive and plentiful background imagined, but rather an active network of agencies in which humans are one participant of many. Small n nature, also a cognitive construct, seeks to address this dynamic network of materiality and agency, locating human beings as entities arising from and embedded in this network.

1.2 THE ANTHROPOCENE

The term *Anthropocene*⁵⁴ was coined in 2000 by atmospheric chemists Paul J. Crutzen⁵⁵ and Eugene F. Stoermer as a term for what they identified as an epochal transition from the Holocene to a new geological age brought about by human activity. While this is still under review by the International Union of Geological Sciences,⁵⁶ the term has gained traction across other disciplines, reflecting a perceived need for a name for the current moment.

The suitability of the term is hotly contested⁵⁷, as political theorist John Merrick⁵⁸ reminds us in his analysis of Jason W. Moore's term *Capitalocene*: "How we conceptualise the origins of a crisis has everything to do with how we choose to respond to that crisis."⁵⁹

The criticisms of the term Anthropocene are for the most part levelled at '*Anthropos*'. The first criticism, argued by Haraway,⁶⁰ is that Anthropos implicates 'species man', suggesting that all peoples share responsibility for this climatic advent, rather than acknowledging that the larger portion of causality rests with the cultural activities and political systems promulgated by a specific subset of humans. Cultural critic T.J.Demos⁶¹ takes this a step further, declaring that the term occludes the ongoing colonising violence that underpins climate change. Demos argues that for first peoples subjected to colonial invasion, the impact of neoliberal capitalism on natural systems has been energetically opposed for generations. To be named as equally implicated, is to have their voice silenced and cultural knowledge once again ignored.⁶²

A second criticism examined in depth by Demos and political ecologist Jason Moore,⁶³ is that Anthropos, in its generality, leaves unspoken and so unchallenged, the Cartesian division of human enterprise

⁵⁴ 'Global Change News Letter', 41.

⁵⁵ Will Steffen et al., 'The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* (2011).

⁵⁶ Berrien Moore, 'Sustaining Earth's Life Support Systems –The Challenge for the next Decade and Beyond', *Global Change News Letter* 41 (2000).

⁵⁷ *Scientific American*, 'The Term Anthropocene Is Popular and Problematic: Editorial', *Scientific American*. Accessed 18 June 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican1218-10>.

⁵⁸ John Merrick, 'Jason W. Moore: Anthropocene or Capitalocene?', Versobooks.com, 12 January 2015, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2360-jason-w-moore-anthropocene-or-capitalocene>.

⁵⁹ John Merrick.

⁶⁰ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, l. 890.

⁶¹ T.J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Sternberg Press, 2016).

⁶² Ashiya Eastwood, 'T.J. Demos: Against the Anthropocene - Visual Culture and Environment Today'.

⁶³ John Merrick, 'Jason W. Moore'.

versus the forces of Nature and thus covertly acquiesces to the neoliberal capitalising of nature to a dollar value.⁶⁴

A third criticism challenges the validity of positing the current moment as an era at all. Matthew Adams, who researches at the interplay of ecology and psychology, calls out the durational error invoked in the usage of the epoch-word 'cene', suggesting that while human activity is uncontestedly impactful, its duration will be negligible in geological time. Adams claims it may be more usefully imagined as a transition between eras, a geologically brief upheaval rendered less or more catastrophic by human response to impending disaster.⁶⁵ Donna Haraway proposes "the Great Dithering"⁶⁶ as a name for this transitional phase of "ineffective and widespread anxiety about environmental destruction".⁶⁷

This research contends that such an energetic contestation of the word 'Anthropocene' signals a Western crisis of worldview as much as it names a geological epoch. In this discussion, it matters very much where the speaker locates themselves, and for whom they speak. I identify as a Pākehā woman, and this research participates in the discourse of postcolonial Aotearoa New Zealand. This research acknowledges the Tangata Whenua of Aotearoa and gives thanks for the generous sharing of mātauranga Māori, traditional holistic knowledge, with all New Zealanders. While some elements of this research run parallel to aspects of mātauranga Māori I want to be clear that this enquiry is located within and seeks to address the Pākehā cultures of colonial, neoliberal capitalism within Aotearoa. As such, it traces personal, cultural and academic roots back through the European philosophic and theoretical traditions.

Furthermore, this research acknowledges that it is imbricated within an academic framework associated with the Anthropos as the Latin term indicates: *those humans who trace their intellectual and philosophical roots to ancient Greek traditions*. In this reading, I suggest that the Anthropocene emerges as a fracturing of world-construct and a rupture of Western self-identity. This understanding of the Anthropocene aligns with the intentions of this research, and the term appears in this thesis in relation to the 2018 research project *Conversation Pit*. However, since that time, widespread and inconsistent use has occluded the specificity of the word. Rather than using the term Anthropocene, this thesis will employ words that specify the dynamic or activity in question.

⁶⁴ Both concerns can be seen at play in the three-minute film *Welcome to the Anthropocene* on Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's (CSIRO) educational website, Anthropocene. 'The Anthropocene | Short Films'.

⁶⁵ Mathew Adams, <https://phys.org/news/2019-03-opinion-anthropocene-doesnt-species-future.html>

⁶⁶ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, l. 2207. Haraway draws the term from science fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson's novel *2312*

⁶⁷ Haraway, l. 3002.

1.3 THE ONTOLOGY OF OBJECTS AND THINGS

The true chasm in ontology lies not between humans and the world, but between objects and relations. Moreover, this duality holds equally true for all entities in the cosmos, whether natural, artificial, organic, or fully human.⁶⁸

In seeking to examine and reimagine the relationship dynamics of humans and nonhumans within suburban cohabitation, this research engages with aspects of object-oriented ontology (OOO) proposed by the philosopher Graham Harman and extended by Timothy Morton. It also touches upon German philosopher Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) theories of being and thing. This thesis does not attempt an analysis of either Heidegger's tool analysis or Harman's critical reworking of this analysis that underlies object-oriented ontology, rather it seeks to acknowledge a lineage of specific ontological attitudes towards objects and things, which this thesis enacts as practical engagements of living-with.

1.3.2 BEING, OBJECT, TOOL

Central to Heidegger's discussion of being, object and tool is the concept that a thing may be encountered as either *Vorhandenheit*, present at hand; having the quality of presence, or as *Zuhandenheit*, ready to hand, indicating a relationship of engagement or working-with. These two modes of encounter have been extensively theorised in terms of theory and practice; however, Harman offers a divergent and ontologically radical interpretation. In *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, Harman lays out the groundwork for his theories for an object-oriented ontology. Harman proposes that the potency of Heidegger's tool-analysis is unleashed only when understood to apply equally to all things, humans included. Harman contends that when no longer limited to equipment or technical devices, it is a concept that:

holds good for all entities, no matter how useful or useless they might be. Beings themselves are caught up in a continual exchange between presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand. This dual structure belongs to every entity, and is not a statement about the ups and downs of human activity.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, l. 75.

⁶⁹ Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, l. 122.

From this perspective, it is possible to apprehend the agentic potential of things, to consider the possibility that "Beings in themselves are ready-to-hand, not in the derivative sense of 'manipulable', but in the primary sense of 'in action'."⁷⁰ In this situation, a human is inseparable from the ongoing and dispersed energetic entanglement of things. Within this entanglement, Harman extrapolates a second tenet of object-oriented ontology; that "It is the nature of tool-being to recede from every view."⁷¹ Importantly for Harman, this includes inanimate things, claiming that:

Contra Heidegger, withdrawal is not a specific feature of human temporality, but belongs to any relation whatsoever. That tool-beings retreat into a silent background means not only that they are invisible to humans, but that they exceed any of their interactions with other tool-beings.⁷²

For the context of this thesis, it is useful to note that Morton articulates object oriented ontology's object withdrawal and Heidegger's *Zuhanden*, in terms of the innate limitations of any entity's modes of access to fully apprehend or encounter another entity. Morton expands 'object withdrawal', suggesting that "'Withdrawn' doesn't mean empirically shrunken back or moving behind; it means . . . so in your face that you can't see it."⁷³

To illustrate the implications of this *view from within*, Morton elaborates the example of human apprehension of mass extinction. Morton suggests that the first five mass extinctions are visible because they are available as information from geological strata; they can be conceptualised and held in the mind as present-at-hand. However, he claims that the sixth mass extinction, the one we are currently involved in, cannot so easily be held in the mind because it is "what Heidegger would call ready-to-hand, *zuhanden*, and because it is part of our human world, our projects, such as taking a flight."⁷⁴

Following Harman's object-oriented interpretation of Heidegger's tool analysis, this thesis puts into action and critically observes my own engagement as a human researcher encountering my world. While this underlies the whole of the thesis, it is most clearly evident in the Domestic Hub interactions. Here *vorhanden* is interpreted as *presence* at hand; a thing perceived and held in the mind by a

⁷⁰ Graham Harman, l. 404.

⁷¹ Graham Harman, l. 132.

⁷² Graham Harman, l. 139.

⁷³ Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (London. New York: Verso Books, 2017), l. 667.

⁷⁴ Timothy Morton, l. 1258.

human/researcher. Alongside this is the experience of *zuhanden*, things ready to hand, that is, entities encountered and engaged with, within the entanglement of a shared world.

In the chicken house with a chicken and a spade I am undertaking a philosophical, cognitive activity which is also a physical and experiential activity. I am thinking about how I cohabit with the chicken while digging damp humus from the composting chicken house, attending to our interaction; spade, chicken and human, scratching and digging together. I am also observing carefully the transitioning levels of compost and microbial activity that my spade uncovers and will transfer to the soil of the garden. At the same time, I am feeling the warm brush of a feathery face on my skin and inhaling the sharp tang of fresh chicken droppings and the rich, soft smell of microbial activity in the composted soil that the spade uncovers. I wonder at the familiarity and strangeness of the chicken and observe her dinosaur ancestry in her orange eye and the sharp movement of her head. I reflect on the long history of symbiotic cohabitation that marks us. She, as a laying hen, me as a chicken keeper, an egg-eater and urban omnivore. A history uncomfortably rooted in manipulation and entrapment, as I dig, I savour this unfamiliar cocktail of responsibility, solidarity, entanglement, love and brutality.



FIGURE 10: SWAMP DIAGRAM: ATTENDING WITH CARE

1.4 CARE

This research aligns itself with the encompassing definition of care put forward by the political theorist and 2015 recipient of the Brown Democracy Medal, Joan C. Tronto. In her book *Who Cares? How To Shape a Democratic Politics*, Tronto defines care in encompassing terms, as:

a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we may live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.⁷⁵

While Tronto's writing primarily addresses human to human politics, I suggest that her articulation of care can be applied with equal efficacy to the whole of the biosphere and aligns closely with the approach to multi-species care enacted and observed in this research.

For Tronto care is always relational; she adopts the term 'caring with' to articulate the network of attentiveness, responsiveness, competence and acceptance of responsibility that knit together the basis for a society in which "We will trust in one another and in our social and political institutions, and feel solidarity with other citizens, seeing them as partners in our own caregiving and receiving."⁷⁶ This research seeks to explicitly extend caring-with across human and nonhuman borders, seeking to expand the imaginative possibilities and human-nonhuman configurations of caring-with, dwelling-with, and being-with.

The possibility that the notion of caring-with and solidarity might be extended beyond human politics is the central tenet of Morton's 2017 book *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman Others*.⁷⁷ Morton proposes that solidarity with nonhumans, while occluded in current socio-political conditions, is the default mode of the biosphere, or in Morton's words "the symbiotic real".⁷⁸ Morton suggests solidarity may be experienced as:

a thought and a feeling and a physical and political state, seems in its pleasant confusion of feeling-with and being-with, appearing and being, phenomena and thing,

⁷⁵ Joan C. Tronto, *Who Cares? How To Shape a Democratic Politics*, Brown Democracy Medal (Cornell University Press, 2015), 3.

⁷⁶ Tronto, *Who Cares? How To Shape a Democratic Politics*, 14.

⁷⁷ Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*.

⁷⁸ Timothy Morton, l. 70.

active and passive, not simply to gesture to this non-severed⁷⁹ real, but indeed to emerge from it.”⁸⁰

He goes on to posit that this is not something we do, so much as something we acknowledge and attune to, that “allowing for others to exist in some strong sense, joining their ways of accessing things or at least appreciating them, just is solidarity.”⁸¹ This theoretical proposition aligns with my research experience of attentive care, leading to the attunement of my human self with nonhuman entities. Morton’s description of a “deeply pleasant stirring feeling”⁸² accurately describes my experience of becoming suddenly aware of the energetic force of trees, or of kinship with rainwater rushing down the urban gutter toward the sea.

Here I will return to the definition with which this section started and reiterate Tronto’s directive extended to include multi-species care.⁸³ This extended version proposes that a human, either the researcher or another, might participate in a two-way flow of multi-entity care that includes everything we humans do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we may live in it as well as possible. And that caring-with includes acknowledging and supporting the activities that other species and entities do to maintain, continue, and repair their worlds, so that they too may, in their own ways, live as well as possible. And to recognise that this two-way care takes place in a shared world, which includes our human and nonhuman bodies and selves, all of which we, nonhuman and human, seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

1.4.1 A NOTE ON NEOLIBERALISM

While this research aims to engage on a personal and experiential level it acknowledges that the personal and experiential are intertwined with the political, aligning with the definition of neoliberal provided by Tronto in *Who Cares? How To Shape a Democratic Politics*.

the historical association of the free market of capitalism with political freedom, which is usually associated with democracy. In the classical account, if government interferes with the market, it reduces people’s freedom. In the neoliberal model, these concerns have been updated to take into consideration the roles that governments have come

⁷⁹ ‘The Severing’ is Morton’s term for the separation of Humanity and Nature (Morton’s capitalization)

⁸⁰ Timothy Morton, l. 362.

⁸¹ Morton, l. 260.

⁸² Morton, l. 365.

⁸³ Tronto, *Who Cares? How To Shape a Democratic Politics*, 12.

to play in helping citizens care for themselves, and the increasingly global nature of the market. Thus, neoliberals argue against trade restrictions, and they favour the defunding of state-run institutions such as public schools. Neoliberals go further and describe how people must conduct themselves to fit into this new economic order. Neoliberalism affects not just Politics, but politics on a cultural scale.⁸⁴

Political historian Robert W McChesney expands upon the extent of this cultural effect in his introduction to Noam Chomsky's *Profit over People: Neoliberalism and the Global Order*, claiming that:

Instead of citizens, it produces consumers. Instead of communities, it produces shopping malls. The net result is an atomised society of disengaged individuals who feel demoralised and socially powerless. In sum, neoliberalism is the immediate and foremost enemy of genuine participatory democracy, not just in the United States but across the planet.⁸⁵

These two definitions inform the usage of 'neoliberal' in this thesis.

⁸⁴ Tronto, 19.

⁸⁵ Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and the Global Order*, 11.



FIGURE 11: SWAMP DIAGRAM: HOLDING A RECEPTIVE SPACE OF UNKNOWING

1.5 UNKNOWING AND UN-KNOWING

This research proposes a methodological practice of *holding a space of unknowing*, a conceptual and relational space of potentiality within which further ongoing research might unfold. This deliberate and conscious commitment to contra-normative modes of knowing is one of three experimental and experiential rules of engagement that ground my creative research. How this unfolds as a physical, intellectual, and imaginative time-space within which to acknowledge other agencies and value non-habitual ways of knowing is expanded throughout the thesis. This section sets out the personal, theoretical and practical parameters within which this notion is employed.

First, let me be clear that I am not using the word unknowing in accordance with its standard dictionary definition of being *ignorant or unaware*⁸⁶. I am proposing it as a verb to investigate the act of unknowing, in particular the act of unknowing applied toward entities and things. Here it is useful to return briefly to Heidegger's thing-concept outlined previously. Heidegger suggests that in everyday activity there is a habitual conflation of the thing with its specific being, the tool with its human/thing interaction, and the work that arises from this interaction. This research resonates with Heidegger's call to remain conscious to the ingrained "semblance of self-evidence"⁸⁷ of this conflation:

when we venture the attempt to bring to sight and to word the thingness of the thing, the toolness of the tool, and the workness of the work. But to that end only this is needed: while holding far the preconceptions and the overreaching of these ways of thinking, to let the thing rest upon itself, e.g. in its being-a-thing.⁸⁸

This thesis seeks to consciously 'hold far' my own preconceptions and habitual ways of thinking things and to acknowledge that not only do I not know what I do not know, I also do not know what ways of knowing I do not know. I do not know what sensory capacity my human body is capable of but naïve to.⁸⁹ I will hover in my defined research space with receptive unknowing in the hope that embodied and relational ways of knowing may emerge. I will remain alert to the possibility that forms of cognition not always visible or accessible through rational thought-based enquiry may be experienced and articulated. This research approach finds a theoretical precedent in Bohm's articulation of the interconnection of experience and knowledge and Harman's differentiation of cognition and

⁸⁶ 'Definition of Unknowing | Dictionary.com'.

⁸⁷ Rodger Berkowitz and Philippe Nonet, 'The Origin of the Work of Art, by Martin Heidegger', 15.

⁸⁸ Rodger Berkowitz and Philippe Nonet, 15.

⁸⁹ This research rejects the academically disingenuous position of wilful ignorance as a form of institutional critique.

knowledge. Bohm seeks to reconceptualise the human activities of experiencing and knowing, stating that:

it is useful to emphasize that experience and knowledge are one process, rather than to think that our knowledge is about some sort of separate experience. We can refer to this one process as experience-knowledge (the hyphen indicating that these are two inseparable aspects of one whole movement).⁹⁰

Harman addresses cognition and knowledge specific to the ontology of objects, claiming that human knowledge is elicited (or in Harman's OOO terminology *mined*) from encounters with things. He suggests that this drawing-out of knowledge is constituted through a combination of *undermining*; knowledge of what a thing is made of and *overmining*; knowledge of what a thing can do or be used for.⁹¹ Harman suggests that this thought dynamic can be held at bay "by paying attention to the object in its own right, apart from its internal components and outward effects." He suggests that in this way, a person might "recognize the parallel existence of forms of cognition without knowledge that somehow bring objects into focus, despite not reducing them in either of the two mining directions".⁹² Importantly for this thesis, Harman also proposes that an artwork (and this research would suggest art research) resists consolidation as a form of knowledge; it produces surplus affect that cannot be over or under-mined. For Harman, art operates as "a cognitive activity without being a form of knowledge."⁹³ An activity that exceeds knowability, yet "does not exclude the possibility that artists and beholders can also obtain knowledge from artworks as a kind of side-effect."⁹⁴

To elect to engage a methodology of unknowing within an academic thesis that requires a 'contribution of new knowledge' might appear counterintuitive. It flags the intention of this research to take contra-normative, or at least a less academically conventional approach to the sequestering, owning, and distribution of knowledge within creative practice and scholarly inquiry. This is not so much a radical departure as a declaration of allegiance with the multimodal and inclusive research approaches proposed by proponents of performance philosophy, affective ecology and new materialism. It proposes a research position from which to challenge and expand the processes by which knowing is enacted and new knowledge claimed. Throughout the thesis these discursive processes are brought to bear within the intersecting territory of art practice and suburban cohabitation.

⁹⁰ David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, xiii.

⁹¹ Graham Harman, *Art and Objects* (UK: Polity Press, n.d.), 2.

⁹² Harman, 2.

⁹³ Harman, 30.

⁹⁴ Harman, 30.

1.5.1 THE LIMITATIONS OF THE METHOD

A research methodology of unknowing and waiting to recognise nonhuman agency has no recourse to proof. The criticism that what I am perceiving is merely my projection, my desire to see agency projected onto the nonhuman other, can neither be proven nor disproven. However, it may be countered by the observation that the perception that nonhuman others are mute and capable of limited agency is an equally unprovable projection. The fact that it is a projection accepted as common knowledge in no way verifies its validity.

1.5.2 THE LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCHER

This research territory pushes up against the edges of the Western paradigm of world. As a researcher immersed in that world construct, I am perpetually discomforted by the dual suspensions of, on the one hand, holding disbelief at bay, and on the other, scrutinising my susceptibility to suggestion or projection. In this context it is reassuring to refer to other researchers in the field and compare findings.

In the human-plant collaboration *Rooted Hauntology: Attempts at Vegetal Curation* artist/curator Ingrid Vranken spent a year with potted plants, her chosen co-workers, in her studio at *DAS*theatre in Amsterdam:

The time together with my co-workers have made me overly attentive to the plants everywhere around me. Some majestic, others in a pitiful state. I develop the habit of watering dried-out plants wherever I go. I have the impression the plants are screaming at me from all sides. This has made me think how their seeming silence is an invitation to develop attitudes of listening. Listening is not passive, it is an action, engaged and committed. Listening requires patience, even if we don't fully understand right away what we are listening to and what for; it requires a suspension of one's own desires to dominate or push the other towards what they "should be" doing, thinking or saying. Listening is done with the whole body.⁹⁵

The possibility of testing the limitations of belief is brought to the fore in the recent publication *Thus Spoke the Plant: A Remarkable Journey of Groundbreaking Scientific Discoveries and Personal Encounters with Plants*⁹⁶ by Italian Australian biological scientist Monica Gagliano. Gagliano is a highly

⁹⁵ Ingrid Vranken, 'Rooted Hauntology Lab: Attempts at Vegetal Curation', 242.

⁹⁶ Gagliano, *Thus Spoke the Plant* (North Atlantic Books. Audible Edition, 2018).

regarded plant researcher⁹⁷, yet the back story to her research strays well from the established scientific pathway. In *Thus Spoke the Plant*, Gagliano recounts stories of learning to hear the unspoken voice of plants through undertaking an initiation into tree knowledge with a Peruvian plant shaman. Through learning to listen to the plants, Gagliano has been guided through ways in which to undertake scientific research to bring this plant knowledge and plant agency into the language of humans.

Monica Gagliano's research hovers in my psychic space, a heterogeneous element that I do not reject but which requires a reworking of thought space to assimilate. The efficacy of Gagliano's experience is borne out in her scientific research, and her book lends scientific credence to my own research experiences. Nevertheless, the story that Gagliano unfolds bumps up against the edges of my paradigms of world. I observe it bump softly against this psychic wall, a slow-moving pool ball encountering the velveteed side of the pool table and rebounding. I wait, metaphorically with Gagliano, Kuzmanovic and Gaffney, physiologically with some chickens and an Oaktree, gently testing the boundaries of knowing and unknowing, seeking imaginative passage from one to the other.

⁹⁷Gagliano is currently based at the University of Sydney where she is a Research Affiliate at the Sydney Environment Institute and a Senior Research Fellow at the School of Life and Environmental Sciences.

WAITING

WAITING PATIENTLY LIKE THE BLUE HERON: FOR TREES TO GROW, THE SOIL TO BECOME RICH WITH MICROBES. WAITING WITH FEELINGS OF UNEASE AS FAMILIAR BECOMES QUESTIONABLE. AS I WASH A PAINTBRUSH AND THE WATER IS SOILED. AS I BUY SOME SUSHI AND REALISE THAT I AM LEFT WITH A PLASTIC CONTAINER IN MY HAND. AS I PULL A CARROT FROM THE SOIL AND FEEL ITS ROOTS TEAR.

WAITING: LIKE AN INSECT ON WATER, FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT TO OFFER A GUEST THE PLATE OF STUFFED VINE LEAVES, TO SEGUE INTO A NEW AREA OF CONVERSATION. WAITING WITH THE CAMERA FOR THE GATHERING CLOUD TO BREAK INTO A DELUGE OF RAIN.

1.5.4 UN-KNOWING OWNERSHIP

Waiting with unknowing and being attentive to those who surround me has profoundly altered the way I perceive my relationship with other entities. My sense of the possibility and appropriateness of 'ownership' as a general and defining notion has faded. As my perception of nonhumans has changed, this term no longer fits my experience. Ownership as a relationship mode, emerges as clumsy and incongruous. It is not that I am taking an ideological stance on ownership; it is purely that it no longer matches or articulates the relationship I now find myself in. I have become increasingly aware that ownership is valid merely as a social-political arrangement between humans within a shared culture. Take, for example, my house, which I once considered that I co-owned with my (human) partner. I now understand this house as a complex entity existing on a timescale more extensive than my own. Its physical structure of wood, glass and metal predates my habitation and will continue after I move on. It is a community of multiple inhabitants; insects, birds, humans, cats, plants, bacteria, atmospheric gases and fungus, of which I am one. While I have the agency and cultural permission to modify, maintain or destroy this structure, there are many other agencies also at play. Even in the case of demolition, the parts of the house would continue to exist in other places and assume different forms. What my husband and I own together is the right, agreed-upon by the dominant human-centric law of the land, to inhabit this structure erected within this section of land and air, from a certain number of metres beneath the surface of the earth to an agreed-upon height above.

Other entities own the land by other authority. I have had to admit that the claim to ownership made by the Blackbird, scratcher of gardens and pecker of fruit, as the current representative of those hatched and raised here for many generations, is at least as valid as my own.



FIGURE 12: SWAMP DIAGRAM:
ATTUNING TO NONHUMAN AGENCY

1.6 AGENCY

Jane Bennett prefaces her 2010 book, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, by stating her intention to:

think slowly an idea that runs fast through modern heads: the idea of matter as passive stuff, as raw, brute, or inert. This habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings) The quarantines of matter and life encourage us to ignore the vitality of matter and the lively powers of material formations, such as the way omega-3 fatty acids can alter human moods or the way our trash is not "away" in landfills but generating lively streams of chemicals and volatile winds of methane as we speak.⁹⁸

In this brief introduction, Bennett unfolds a body of thought that was until recently, occluded from the mainstream of Western thought-space thoroughly acculturated to a worldview in which humans have agency of thought and action, and the 'natural world' lacks agency and operates mechanistically, or in response to instinctual drives.

This thesis does not purport to provide a comprehensive overview of agency as a field of philosophical enquiry, but rather to locate this creative research enquiry within a subset of key philosophical concerns. Firstly, it touches briefly on the conditions within which nonhumans came to be denied agency. Secondly, it will align this research within a framework of new materialist enquiry that seeks to remediate and reclaim a vital and agentic biosphere.

Here it is worth taking a moment to review some theoretical analysis of the persistence of the world view that Bennett and other new materialist thinkers contest. The Western philosophical tradition traces a line of thinking from the substance dualism of René Descartes (1596-1650) through Locke (1632-1704), Berkeley (1685-1753) and Hume (1711-1776),⁹⁹ setting out a modern philosophy based in human exceptionalism, and the privileging of intellect over matter. In this worldview, the human drama is played out against the background of a mechanical, mute nature. In this scenario, agency is allocated in decreasing increments from the human through the higher animals, reaching a zero point at bacteria and viruses and leaving plants, geological features, gases, minerals and human-made objects inanimate. Within this paradigm, to lack animation is to be devoid of agency.

⁹⁸ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, l. 48.

⁹⁹ Lawrence Cahoon, *The Modern Intellectual Tradition: From Descartes to Derrida*.

Bruno Latour interrogates the foundations of enlightenment thinking in his 1993 book *We Have Never Been Modern*.¹⁰⁰ Latour locates the durability of the division between nature and culture in a paradoxical and self-sustaining dynamic between the thought of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Robert Boyle (1627-1691). To simplify an elaborate treatise, the details of which exceed the scope of this thesis, Latour puts forward the argument that the modern condition, in which nature is aligned with science, and culture is exclusively socio-political, was constructed rather than emergent. Latour contends that "Boyle and Hobbes fought to invent a science, a context, and a demarcation between the two"¹⁰¹ inaugurating a modernist thought structure in which the two domains operate in parallel, unable to intersect.¹⁰² Latour suggests that Boyle and Hobbes inform modernism:

like a pair of Founding Fathers, acting in concert to promote one and the same innovation in political theory: the representation of nonhumans belongs to science, but science is not allowed to appeal to politics; the representation of citizens belongs to politics, but politics is not allowed to have any relation to the nonhumans produced and mobilised by science and technology.¹⁰³

The significance of this philosophical conjecture in the context of this thesis is that it identifies an inbuilt resistance to thinking nonhuman agency: Latour proposes a condition within the modern Western philosophical tradition that renders nonhuman agency unthinkable. It *cannot* be thought because it requires the intersection of two thought-structures that only operate in parallel. If this proposition holds, the consequence of thinking nonhuman agency fundamentally destabilises the cultural and political worldview that supports and promotes the domination of Western civilisation.¹⁰⁴

Timothy Morton, following a speculative realist line of enquiry, reaches an equivalent conclusion, locating the philosophical problem in "the notion that philosophy can only talk within a narrow

¹⁰⁰ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.

¹⁰¹ Latour, l. 383.

¹⁰² Latour suggests that Hobbes and Boyle set out a Constitution of sorts, stating that "As with any Constitution, this one has to be measured by the guarantees it offers. The natural power that Boyle and his many scientific descendants defined in opposition to Hobbes, the power that allows mute objects to speak through the intermediary of loyal and disciplined scientific spokespersons, offers a significant guarantee: it is not men who make Nature; Nature has always existed and has always already been there; we are only discovering its secrets. The political power that Hobbes and his many political descendants define in opposition to Boyle has citizens speak with one voice through the translation and betrayal of a sovereign, who says only what they say. This power offers an equally significant guarantee: human beings, and only human beings, are the ones who construct society and freely determine their own destiny." Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Harvard University Press. Kindle Edition. Latour, l. 671.

¹⁰³ Latour, l. 619.

¹⁰⁴ This thesis also considers perspectives of this crisis of worldview put forward by Haraway, who evokes the term "the great dithering" outlined in in the definitions section of this chapter, And Morton whose notion of 'the charnel ground at the end of the world' is elaborated in relation to the current Covid-19 pandemic in Chapter Four.

bandwidth, restricted to the human–world correlate: meaning is only possible between a human mind and what it thinks, its ‘objects’, flimsy and tenuous as they are.”¹⁰⁵ This philosophical insight is useful insofar as it elucidates the enormity of the stakes that underpin the ecological directive to acknowledge the agentic interconnection of human and nonhuman entities and move away from an anthropocentric hierarchy of being. I suggest that it also serves to remind us that this is a crisis of philosophical imagination. This research contends that the current climate crisis, for example, is not solely a lack of feasible physical options, it is also a lack of imaginative context for a world shaped by these changes.¹⁰⁶

As a researcher, I encounter the implications of this philosophical heritage on a personal and practical level. In the Domestic Hub, I strive to un-know my own ingrained expectation that plants, water and soil are mute possessions. The experiential philosophical learning gathered from the Domestic Hub research is applied in tandem with the intellectual, philosophical position outlined here. In *Conversation Pit* it is addressed directly, as the speculative conversation via the provocation *Sharing in an Intimate World*:

Sharing in an Intimate World acknowledges the impossibility of maintaining an anthropocentric worldview in an era of eco-crisis and invites us to tease out ways to orient ourselves within a biosphere in which we are continuous with the network of entities we previously called nature. This re-imagined world-view has been described as the third-place (Bruno Latour¹⁰⁷) or, in the words of Timothy Morton, “an experience of intimacy and closeness with nonhuman entities”,¹⁰⁸ which may include the bacteria, the biota and entities with whom we cohabit, but also trash; the plastic, chemical and biological waste we have carelessly spread around and are now surrounded by.

¹⁰⁵ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects*, l. 242.

¹⁰⁶ Lauren Greyson, *Vital Reenchantments*, 22.

¹⁰⁷ Faculty of Arts, Aarhus Universitet, *Bruno Latour*, 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*.

1.7 THE PRACTICE OF REIMAGINING

An important touchstone for this research is art historian Amanda Boetzkes' essay 'Ecologicity, Vision, and the Neurological System' published in the anthology *Art in the Anthropocene*.¹⁰⁹ Boetzkes articulates the importance of reimagining coexistence on a fundamental level, advocating conscious retraining of our perceptive faculties so that we might 'see' or genuinely perceive nonhuman others in terms other than the anthropocentric. Boetzkes suggests that art plays a pivotal role in reimagining a visuality able to comprehend an immanent, lively world and calls for the reconsideration of neurology, ecology and visuality to facilitate:

an emergent cognitive process that is enacted and elaborated through art. I called this increased awareness – which is also a honing of optical experience – ecologicity. It emerges in and through the existential net of affordance,¹¹⁰ the coexistent effects of environment and facts of behaviour that constitute perception."¹¹¹

This research suggests that this emergent cognitive process may be fostered within activities of reflective imagination and moments of meditative contemplation.

However, I would argue for two qualifying responses to, and extensions from, Boetzkes' statement. First, it is crucial to this enquiry that the enacting and elaborating is not solely the activity of the artist, but that responses might also be elicited for a participating viewer. Second, art may hone not just optical experience but also tactile and visceral experiences. This research proposes that a mode of engagement in which art is not 'that thing over yonder' that we objectively reflect upon or critically analyse, but also that 'this small thing that I live with' might allow for an embodied form of reimagining; a visceral experience of 'this thing uncomfortably close', sometimes disturbingly intimate, achingly sad, perplexing, and possibly disquieting.

If we accept that art enacts an ontological space for imagining, or at least an agreed-upon location for particular types of thinking and consideration, then it is possible that certain art practices might operate a safe-zone for alter-normative contemplations and systemic re-imaginings. Following Boetzkes, this research aligns with an art practice that operates a level of reimagining that goes beyond raising awareness, protesting lack of action, and even modelling sustainable alternatives within the structures of capital N Nature. Morton puts this succinctly in *Hyperobjects*: "We need art that does not make

¹⁰⁹ Amanda Boetzkes, 'Ecologicity, Vision, and the Neurological System'.

¹¹⁰ Here Boetzkes is referring to cognitive psychologist James J. Gibson's 'theory of affordance'

¹¹¹ Amanda Boetzkes, 'Ecologicity, Vision, and the Neurological System', 272.

people think (we have quite enough environmental art that does that), but rather that walks them through an inner space that is hard to traverse."¹¹²

In taking up the challenge put forward by Boetkes and Morton, this thesis aligns with the research stance of American artist Eve Mosher who states, "I have recognized the vital change needed in my own work. I need now to create space for communities with which I work to process (in rapid time) the grief that we all need to process regarding the climate emergency and be able to move to action."¹¹³ This research attends to the need for new ways of being and communicating, firstly at the low-down level of personal awareness, striving to reimagine my human perceptive faculties and learn to allow nonhuman entities to exist in terms other than anthropocentric. It then seeks to facilitate such reimagining for human others through participatory practice that both embodies and articulates Mosher's agentic assertion that "As artists we can both create visions of a new world as well as create space to allow others to engage in radical re-imagination of how we live on this planet."¹¹⁴

¹¹² Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects*, l. 3235.

¹¹³ Eve S. Mosher, 'Grief and Radical Imagination'.

¹¹⁴ Eve S. Mosher

1.8 WHEN THERE IS NOT A WORD FOR IT

Some things can never be spoken
Some things cannot be pronounced
That word does not exist in any language
It will never be uttered by a human mouth

David Byrne, Talking Heads¹¹⁵

This research endeavours to acknowledge the agency of all entities, whether animal, vegetable, or mineral, and to respectfully acknowledge the difference of their sensory and perceptual modes from my own. To articulate this position, this research proposes an expanded vocabulary of actively contra-anthropocentric terminology. Returning again to Bohm, I offer these words as a speculative thought experiment and reiterate Bohm's proposition that "the mere act of seriously considering such a new mode of language and observing how it works can help draw our attention to the way in which our ordinary language structure puts strong and subtle pressures on us to hold to a fragmentary world view."¹¹⁶ The selective use of customised vocabulary within this research denotes both a conceptual stance and a small step of reimagining within the structure of our language.

1.8.1 A NON-ANTHROPOCENTRIC WORD FOR NON-ANTHROPOCENTRIC

This research identifies a need for a word containing within itself the meaning *contra-anthropocentric*, deliberately and consciously *not* anthropocentric. One term in current usage that aims to redress this linguistic gap is *ecocentric*, a word and a proposed worldview in which ecological systems are granted priority, displacing the centrality of human concerns. Ecocentric was coined in the 1920s by the pioneering environmentalist Aldo Leopold,¹¹⁷ and in the 1980s, became associated with the environmental philosophy movement Deep Ecology.¹¹⁸

For the purposes of this research, the binary flip implicit in this term is problematic as it perpetuates the separation of Human and Nature insinuating that either humans are central, or ecosystems are

¹¹⁵ David Byrne and Talking Heads, 'Give Me Back My Name', from the album Talking Heads, *Little Creatures* 1985

¹¹⁶ David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 60.

¹¹⁷ Aldo Leopold (<https://www.aldoleopold.org/>)

¹¹⁸ Foundation For Deep Ecology, 'The Deep Ecology Platform'.

central. Timothy Morton elaborates this point with the reminder that "we are not in the center of the universe, but we are not in the VIP box beyond the edge, either."¹¹⁹

This research suggests that there is room for terminology that circumnavigates this hierarchical clash and proposes that a new word is required to negotiate the entanglement of cohabitation. In response, this research puts forward the term *Anthropocontinere*, constructed from two Latin roots; *Anthropos* (*human*) + *continere* (*hang together*). *Continere*, pronounced /contin-ēre/, derives from the Latin *con*; being or bringing together . . . indicate[ing] completeness, and *teneo*; to bind, hold, obligate . . . uphold . . . retain knowledge of.¹²⁰ This conjunction invites the Eurocentric tongue to articulate, that is, *to speak of* a state of valuing and upholding human interconnection within a network of being.

Within this research, the terms *Anthropocontinere* and *anthropocontineric* will be employed alongside post-anthropocentric, contra anthropocentric and ecocentric to demark a conceptual space of non-naïve entanglement in which the human being thinks and speaks from alongside and amongst those who are not human.

1.3.1 THING

This thesis suggests that, within a specific context of contemporary Western human-nonhuman cohabitation, the non-specific noun 'thing' provides a linguistic gap-filler, a proxy-term for objects and materials that the Western philosophical tradition excludes from the category of entity, being or person. This approach aligns with Heidegger's proposition in *The Origin of the Work of Art*¹²¹ that both human-made and naturally occurring things are co-positated as 'stuff' and form. Heidegger suggests that sensuous or sense-able material qualities give rise to the "stufflike in the thing",¹²² which is embedded within form, giving rise to the recognisable¹²³ shape of the thing. Significantly for this research, Heidegger goes on to extrapolate that "With the synthesis of stuff and form, a thing-concept is finally found, that fits equally well things of nature and things of use."¹²⁴ In this way, Heidegger might be seen as (re)opening Western thought space to the possibility that things (objects, entities, materials) are not defined by or limited to their provenance in either Nature or Culture. This concept in which a 'thing' is

¹¹⁹ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects*, l. 413.

¹²⁰ 'Continere Word Origin', <https://etymologeek.com/lat/continere>

¹²¹ Rodger Berkowitz and Philippe Nonet, 'The Origin of the Work of Art, by Martin Heidegger'. Cited from Berkowitz and Nonet's 2009 translation of Martin Heidegger's *Die Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (1935-1960).

¹²² Rodger Berkowitz and Philippe Nonet, 11. (Translators note: The standard translation of *īlh* in English is "matter," following the Latin *materia*. But Heidegger uses *Stoff*, rather than *Materie*. Accordingly, we render it as "stuff.")

¹²³ *Recognisable* here refers to the form of a thing that is recognised by a perceiving human.

¹²⁴ Rodger Berkowitz and Philippe Nonet, 'The Origin of the Work of Art, by Martin Heidegger', 11.

understood to exist entangled with but ontologically independent from human activity informs the terms 'thing' and 'nonhuman entity' throughout this thesis.

1.8.2 A NON 'HUMAN', NON 'OTHERING' WORD FOR NONHUMAN OTHERS

To speak from alongside requires naming words that do not, either directly or through association, put the speaking human in a position of centrality or ownership. The default term employed in posthumanist philosophy and object-oriented ontology has been *nonhuman other*. This term served to usher into academic thought-space the notion that nonhuman entities might have some manner of being, agency or even selfhood, independent of and incommensurable to human being.

Recent scholarship evidences a vocabulary evolving to reflect the complexity of the relationship. On the fundamental level of the allocation of being and life value, philosopher Rosi Braidotti proposes the word *zoe*, a term she defines as “the endless vitality of life as continuous becoming.”¹²⁵ For Braidotti, *zoe* articulates a life force that exceeds the traditional Western philosophical notions of ‘life’ and ‘not life’. Braidotti counters what she considers to be a fundamentally anthropocentric ascription of life-value where “the self-reflexive control over life is reserved for the humans, whereas the mere unfolding of biological sequences is for the non-humans. *Zoe* stands in for the mindless vitality of life carrying on independently of and regardless of rational control”.¹²⁶

Within the field of ‘continuous being’ denoted as *zoe*, myriad other words arise. There is a need for earthy words; Haraway's '*critters*', more agentic words; Morton's *nonhuman people*, or David Abram's consciously less condescending term *more than human others*. The struggle to find words is especially problematic when the nonhuman in question is carbon dioxide or a rock. This research suggests that such verbal paucity is a symptom of the anthropocentric structure of Modern English, which has an absence of words for things-in-themselves, but an abundance of words for things in-relation-to human beings.

In searching for a word for nonhuman others that is not implicitly relational or specifically 'othering', three words in current usage emerge: *entities*, *beings* and *things*. These three terms will be used throughout this thesis. While these terms are adequate in many contexts, on occasion, this research

¹²⁵ Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (UK: Polity Press, 2006), 41.

¹²⁶ Rosi Braidotti, 37.

runs up against the need for language to decisively specify a relationship of coexistence and finds the need for unfamiliar language that demands consideration. For these instances, the research proffers a word constructed to amplify contra-anthropocentric intent. Drawing on the Greek root *Allelo*,¹²⁷ meaning 'the other' 'in mutual relation', this research proposes the word *allelobeing*, and its abbreviated form, *allellos*. The word form *allellos* has some level of familiarity in English usage, from the scientific term *alleles*, which is derived from the same root and is used in genetics to refer to multiple coexistent genes relating to a particular function.¹²⁸

1.8.3 THE PRONOUN PROBLEM

A second problematic linguistic gap is the absence of a respectful non-gendered 'being' word to use when referring to 'things'. Proper English dictates no choice but the agency-reducing term 'it'. Possible amendments are to use the euphemistic plural form 'they,' or to adopt gendered language, with the risk of anthropomorphising as human-like, rather than equal but different. Morton articulates this dilemma in the introduction to *Humankind*:

There is no pronoun entirely suitable to describe ecological beings. If I call them "I," then I'm appropriating them to myself or to some pantheistic or Gaia concept that swallows them all without regard to their specificity. If I call them "you", I differentiate them from the kind of being that I am. If I call them "he" or "she", then I'm gendering them according to heteronormative concepts that are untenable on evolutionary terms. If I call them "it", I don't think they are people like me and I'm being blatantly anthropocentric.¹²⁹

As a workaround for this, this research will call upon the word '*gweie*'¹³⁰, a proto-Indo-European root meaning '*to live*'.¹³¹ This unofficial being-word is offered in this text as a pronoun interchangeable with *it, she or he*. For linguistic flow it is adapted to the possessive determiner *gweis* for *its, her or his*.

¹²⁷ Allelo, 'Allelo-, Allel- - Word Information'.

¹²⁸ National Human Genome Research Institute | Allele: <https://www.genome.gov/genetics-glossary/Allele>.

¹²⁹ Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, l. 99.

¹³⁰ The longer form *gweie* is used here to avoid confusion with the recent adoption of the short form of the word 'Gwei', as a unit of the cryptocurrency Ether.

¹³¹ 'gwei- | Origin and Meaning of gwei- by Online Etymology Dictionary'.

A note to the way in which these terms are used in this thesis: the purpose of these custom terms is twofold; to bring a specific accuracy to the intentions of the research and to draw attention to themselves as contra normative language usage. To facilitate the flow of language and thought throughout the document, this thesis has opted strategic application over blanket consistency. The research proposes that Anthrocontineric can be used with no further explanation, however the other two terms will be used selectively, and for the most part in conjunction with the more familiar term alleles/object and gweie/it.

CHAPTER TWO: THINKING LIKE A SWAMP



FIGURE 13: GARDEN SHED/STUDIO WITH SWAMP DIAGRAM, PROJECTION OF THE WAIHOU, GRAPEVINE AND OAK LEAVES

TO THINK LIKE A SWAMP IS TO ATTEND TO A LOW PLACE, GEOGRAPHICALLY AND CONCEPTUALLY, A PLACE OF MULTIDIRECTIONAL HORIZONTAL OOZE, RATHER THAN HEIGHTS SCALED AND DEPTHS SOUNDED.

This thesis draws on the metaphor of a swamp, a place in which the roles of land, water and air are configured differently from the surrounding land, to designate a research area within which to deliberately set aside the usual roles and interactions of everyday suburban life. Here the critical conceptual space of contemporary art discourse is applied to the physical space of suburban home and garden and the experiential time-space of cohabitation. It demarks a research space in which multi-species cohabitation might be addressed as both the subject of embodied reimagining and also as an experiential filter through which to feel out the discrepancy between lived experience and the thought structures and language available with which to articulate it.

It is also a diagrammatic model through which to navigate a complex, living research practice. This will be embedded in the text of the thesis through metaphoric terms such as currents and upwellings. Alongside this, will be metaphorical interludes referring to swamp dynamics such as ‘the watchful one-legged waiting of the blue heron’ as a reminder that the diagram refers to an actual swamp and an actual practice. The acuity and duration of the heron’s waiting is evoked to signal the need for an intense temporal engagement less familiar to the urban-dwelling human. It provides a metaphorical reminder that when I speak of waiting and unknowing, I am speaking of a philosophical, cognitive activity which is also a physical and experiential activity.

This chapter firstly locates the swamp model within the broader territory of theory and art practice. It then locates the swamp-like dynamic of this research within the cultural upheavals of the sixties. It outlines foundational moments in the emergence of participatory practice in the sixties and seventies that continue to inform the research. The contemporary outworkings of the dynamics identified in this section are discussed in terms of small lively gestures emerging from local practice and personal engagement. The final sections of the chapter pause to observe the influence of the sixties filtering through the thesis, referring to Michel Foucault’s thinking on heterotopia that flows through the research strategy of convening heterotopic time-space. It traces a current of contra-normative thinking that resurfaces in J. Jack Halberstam’s articulation of low theory and the anarchistic potential of wildness.

2.1 NEIGHBOURING SWAMPS AND RELATED STRUCTURES

2.1.1 THE RHIZOME MODEL: DELEUZE AND GUATTARI

In privileging horizontal flow over hierarchical order, and interconnection over linear progression, the swamp model proposed in this research acknowledges the legacy of the rhizomatic thinking of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*¹ was published in English in 1987, and I was introduced to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome model in my first-year theory class at art school. This vegetal image of multiplicity and horizontality was influential in the formative years of my undergraduate studies. Along with Michael Foucault's socio-political analysis of the complicit relationships of sovereign power (the sovereign right of the individual) and disciplinary normalisation (discourse consolidating into a 'natural rule' or worldview),² it has fed into the formulation of this research.

The swamp model I am proposing has some strong commonalities and equally strong divergences from the rhizome model. Both seek to break with a linear model of thought which privileges a beginning – middle – end logic, instead favouring a multidirectional middle-out model for thinking and being. My research methodology aligns with Deleuze and Guattari when they say 'A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo . . . [and] . . . the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and . . . and . . . and . . ."'³ However, this research diverges at the point in which they articulate the rhizome model as moving outwards in lines of stratification and multiplicities, giving rise to "a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle".⁴ My research model refuses such glorious progress; it is slimier and slower; the swamp moves imperceptibly from within itself and for itself, a multi-species soup agitating gently with no directional alliance.

This divergence of imagery reflects a significant difference in scale, intention and ambition. As the central organising dynamic threading through *A Thousand Plateaus*, the rhizome model is presented as a big gesture. Applied across swathes of abstract thought, psychology and linguistics, it sets out to shake up Western philosophical thought in the post-modern moment. In contrast to this, three decades on, and in a climate of human self-doubt, my research seeks out a small gesture. It seeks to apply the

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

² Foucault et al., *Society Must Be Defended*, 36–40.

³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 25.

⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, 25.

conjunction *and, and, and*⁵ to a tiny pool of being in my backyard. While the diagrammatic structure of the swamp model traces its lineage back to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, the seeping exchange and multidirectional flow of the swamp model owes more to Morton's notion of solidarity, outlined previously as an active component in a methodology of care.

2.1.2 INTERSECTIONALITY

While this research is not derived from intersectionality theory, it has a commonality of understanding the connection between things to be as influential as the things themselves.⁶ However, I suggest that the contexts diverge significantly. Intersectionality theory developed by critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, is influential within Cultural and Gender studies, draws on systemic interdependencies to identify and articulate intersecting modes of oppression that weave networks of repression, through which individuals and communities are excluded and their voices silenced.⁷ While this systemic violence could be applied to the nonrecognition of those who are not human, I suggest that this would not help to advance the cause of either party. Intersectionality delves into the complexities of rights and repression within the human social and political systems, providing a productive discourse for challenging and negotiating existing hierarchies. As such, it is anthropocentric, which is fitting for inter-human discourse but fundamentally flawed for intra-species dialogue.

2.1.3 NOMEDA AND GEDIMINAS URBONAS: THE SWAMP PAVILION

A notable proponent of the swamp as a fertile imaginary is the artist duo Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas. In their ambitious collaborative project at the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2018, the Urbonas' evoked the swamp as a physical and metaphorical reference point for *Swamp Pavilion* and workshop program *Swamp School*.⁸ The multidisciplinary enquiry engaged the swampland surrounding Venice as "a living organism in which borders defined by social, political and cultural factors are porous

⁵ In this context 'and, and, and' refers not only to Deleuze and Guattari, but also to Halberstam's analysis of the operation of this device in the lowbrow movie *Dumb and Dumber*. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 61,64.

⁶ Kimberlé Crenshaw, *The Urgency of Intersectionality*.

⁷ *UN Women*, Editorial, 'Intersectional Feminism: What It Means and Why It Matters Right Now', *UN Women*, 1 July 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/explainer-intersectional-feminism-what-it-means-and-why-it-matters>.

⁸ Gediminas Urbonas and Nomeda Urbonas, *The Swamp Pavilion*.

and permeable”.⁹ The project drew together a team of architects, artists and scientists, reflecting the artists’ assertion that the transitional zone of the swamp provides a physiological and metaphorical model through which:

to address the vital urgency of human cohabitation with other forms of life, placing the swamp at the crossroad of disciplines and practices. It is more than a biological ecosystem; it is a milieu of manifold sympoietic relationships, a locus of imagination, fostering the dialogue for possible futures. It is also a very particular modality— “an interface of Gaia” —offering a “face,” a certain physiognomy to faceless networks of relations, inviting us to engage in regimes of entanglement.¹⁰

⁹ Gediminas Urbonas and Nomedas Urbonas.

¹⁰ Gediminas Urbonas, ‘Swamps and the New Imagination’. The research is expanded in the soon to be released book *Swamps and the New Imagination: On the Future of Cohabitation in Art, Architecture, and Philosophy*. Edited by Nomedas Urbonas, Gediminas Urbonas and Kristupas Sabolius

2.2 THE 'LONG SIXTIES': LOOKING FOR BABIES IN THE BATHWATER

When Western culture lost its faith in history-as-progress, it had two ways to go. On the one hand, there was the revival of pre-Modern attitudes and ways of life, which occurred in the culture of the flower child, the ecology movement, the revival of myths of matriarchy, and so on. Pre-Modernist revival became one of the post-Modernist array of options. The other way was to turn towards post-Modernism proper – the attempt to relativise the cultural absolutes and flatten cultural hierarchies that sustained modernism while still, paradoxically, retaining some sense of going forwards rather than backwards.¹¹

Thomas McEvelley, in the introduction to his book *The Exile's Return: Toward a Redefinition of Painting for the Post-Modern Era*, addresses the crisis of modernism as the result of a series of events between the end of World War II and the Vietnam War that "brought Western civilisation to the edge of the abyss and pushed it over to look right in." Writing in 1993, with a decade and a half of hindsight, McEvelley provides a simplified yet provocative analysis of possibilities arising from choices made. To read McEvelley now is to experience a peculiar double distanced view of a vital historical moment that this research suggests, curiously mirrors our own. A moment that art historian James Meyer describes as "a tectonic shift in politics and culture. It is modernism's apogee and conclusion, its final bow; and it is the beginning of the time we are in."¹²

On a personal level, McEvelley provides a lens through which to look back on the art discourse of the late eighties and early nineties when I was at art school, an era thoroughly immersed in postmodern discourse. Here I propose to retrace my steps and try one of those other options, both as an artist and as a human. The road that does not lead to the plastic milk bottle, the clipped grass lawn. A pathway that might reconnect that moment with this moment here, in my *Domestic Hub* where hope and determination rub up against feelings of impotence and helplessness in the face of the scale of change the current moment invites.

James Meyer addresses the impact of this cultural turning point in *The Art of Return: The Sixties & Contemporary Culture*. Writing in 2019 he emphasises the importance of this era, arguing that "there

¹¹ Thomas McEvelley, *The Exile's Return*, 5.

¹² James Meyer, *The Art of Return: The Sixties and Contemporary Culture*, 27.

is no past more present during our time than the Sixties. If modernism is our “antiquity,” then the Sixties is indubitably our modernism—or what stands for it at present.”¹³

Meyer differentiates the ideological notion of the sixties from the actual historical decade, referring to the former as “the long sixties”,¹⁴ a loosely defined era of social and political turmoil, of idealism and multiple possibilities that encompassed but were not limited to, the historical decade itself. A notional Sixties that “projects forward, returns. It has returned repeatedly, and always differently, since the historical Sixties came to an end.”¹⁵

Meyer describes an era that has lingered in the Western cultural imagination, suggesting that “the long Sixties has come to represent an ideal of social justice whose promise remains perpetually deferred, forever unfulfilled.”¹⁶ Meyer also makes a useful distinction between a ‘*return to*’ the sixties, research that seeks to revisit and reclaim an era that has slipped into recent history, and a ‘*return of*’ the sixties as a palpable effect. Meyer describes this impact of one period on another as “a pulsion of history, the process by which a previous era becomes resonant in a later time—our time.”¹⁷

The legacy of contemporary art is marked by persistent ‘returns of’ and ‘returns to’ the energetic upheaval of the long sixties. This research draws upon this restless energy, positing that a practice of actively reimagining suburban multi-entity cohabitation might usefully navigate the current moment of social and ideological disruption through facilitating time-space for an *energetic return of the long sixties*. A quiet, reflective sixties return, marked by a desire to forge new forms of personal connection in the here and now of daily life, and a commitment to hope as a verb; a gritty sincerity that is neither idealistic nor cynical. A small located energetic return akin to Hannula's notion of non-naïve localism; “the attitude of a situated self in a context in which he/she has decided to focus as much as possible of his/her energy on participating in the production of meanings within a given site.”¹⁸

2.2.1 PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE: THE HERITAGE OF THE LONG SIXTIES

While the energetic eruptions of the sixties resonated through all disciplines and challenged human endeavour on many levels, this thesis will limit its enquiry to the impact of this era to aspects of the

¹³ James Meyer, 16.

¹⁴ Meyer, *The Art of Return: The Sixties & Contemporary Culture*, 38.

¹⁵ Meyer, James, 8.

¹⁶ Meyer, 44.

¹⁷ Meyer, 38.

¹⁸ Hannula, *The Politics of Small Gestures*, 42.

intersecting fields of contemporary art, ecology,¹⁹ and object-oriented thought that directly inform this research. Contemporary participatory practices trace their roots back through the neo-avant gardes the 1990s and 2000s, to a shared heritage in the experimental art of the sixties and seventies that opened out the notion of 'artist' and differentiated the operation of art from the art object, providing conditions for the emergence of art as an activity. Contemporary engagement with the post-object art of the Sixties is always already in negotiation with the recent history of social practice, from Rirkrit Tiravanija's shared Thai meals,²⁰ to New Zealand artist Audrey Baldwin's 2012 performance 'Canker' at the Blue Oyster Gallery in Dunedin, Aotearoa.

This thesis is cognisant that the persistent energy of the long sixties returns alongside and through fifty years of practice and theoretical discourse, bookended by Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), and Claire Bishop's 2012 critique of participatory practice in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. The following section locates the research firstly in relation to post object art of the sixties and seventies. It then briefly locates the research position of this thesis within the changing landscape of participatory practice.

While many of the concepts and terminologies generated in the sixties and seventies remain vital today, the discussion here is limited to four artists whose work directly impacts this research. It will briefly address specific projects of Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Lygia Clark, and Robert Filliou. This will be followed by a discussion of Allan Kaprow's experiments with 'happenings' and 'activities' as 'un-art', with a specific focus on an experiential account of his 1968 work *Easy* recounted in a 1974 article published in *Art in America*.²¹

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES

In engaging with activities of care and attending to the mundane interactions of daily life, this thesis locates itself within a quiet pooling of art/life engagement, through which the energetic disturbances of feminist art in the seventies continue to bubble up. One such influence can be traced through

¹⁹ Nathaniel Rich, *Losing Earth: The Decade We Could Have Stopped Climate Change*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

²⁰ Rirkrit Tiravanija *untitled (free)*, 1992 took place at 303 Gallery in Manhattan. The event was restaged as *(free/still)* at the Carnegie International exhibition in Pittsburgh in 1995, the David Zwirner Gallery (Manhattan) in 2007 and MoMA (NYC) in 2011. *(free/still)* is now in MoMA's collection and according to their website, "can be displayed either as a vestige of its earlier manifestations or reactivated with food prepared in the Museum's kitchen" (<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/147206>)

²¹ Linda Weintraub, *To Life!*, 90- 91. Weintraub Cites from the article Allan Kaprow, "Easy," *Art in America*, July/August, 1974, 73.

American artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!* and its re-articulation by curator/writer Helen Molesworth in the context of 1990s feminism, art and politics.²²

Ukeles manifesto and public performances of cleaning and caretaking as 'maintenance Art'²³ sought to bring to attention a perceived value disjuncture between the activity and public display of art and the unnoticed 'labour of maintenance' that supported it. By employing the term 'labour of maintenance', Ukeles could include unpaid domestic labour while also provoking a wider sociopolitical discussion on the inequity of visible and invisible labour as a precondition of modernity.²⁴

Fifty years later, it can be argued that labours of maintenance and care remain devalued within the dominant Western economic structure.²⁵ However, on a personal level, as a woman who has grown up in Aotearoa, New Zealand, in a middle-class pākēha environment, my experience is one in which the unpaid labour of the home is negotiated on equal terms between all household members. This situation allows a measure of personal choice in how and to what degree I engage my energies within the private sphere. Here it is useful to turn to Molesworth, who, in analysing the re-emergence of seventies feminism in the nineties, observed that "one legacy of feminist criticism is to establish that it is the private sphere that can help us re-articulate the public sphere, as opposed to the other way around."²⁶

The possibility that the private sphere may, in fact, 'help us re-articulate the public sphere', points to a significant divergence of ontological focus between the 'activities of care' that inform this research and Ukeles' notion of *maintenance art*. Ukeles, navigating the American art world of the 1960s, sought to rebuff modernist power structures through appropriating and subverting what she perceived as a binary division of labour value. In *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!* these opposing poles are identified as *development*; (individual creation, progress) and *maintenance*; (protecting, sustaining and 'keeping the dust off' progress).²⁷ Through overtly positioning mundane activities (maintenance) as Modern Art (development), Ukeles employed her agency as an artist to elevate everyday work to the status of art-work. That is, to contest and reassign allocations of value within human activity.

²² Helen Molesworth, 'House Work and Art Work'.

²³ Sherry Buckberrough and Andrea Miller-Keller, 'Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Matrix 137', *Wadsworth Atheneum Matrix* 137, no. September 20-November 15, 1998 (1998). Ukeles 1973 Maintenance Art Performances at the Wadsworth Atheneum included *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance (Outside)*, 1973, *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance (Outside)*, 1973 and *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973.

²⁴ Helen Molesworth, 'House Work and Art Work', 78.

²⁵ Political theorist Joan C. Tronto, whose analysis of the interconnection of care and economic structure is addressed in section 1.4 of this thesis, is an outspoken critic of the co-option of care as a product within a market-foremost democracy. Tronto contests that the fundamental function of democracy is to provide a system for "the allocation of caring responsibilities and assuring that everyone can participate in those allocations of care as completely as possible." Tronto, *Who Cares? How To Shape a Democratic Politics*, 15.

²⁶ Helen Molesworth, 'House Work and Art Work', 83.

²⁷ Mierle Laderman Ukeles,, 'Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!'

In contradistinction, this thesis proposes to encounter everyday activities of (so-called mundane) care as valuable in and of themselves. Rather than undertaking ‘labour of maintenance’ as art-work, this research seeks out ‘voluntary engagement with things’ and calls upon (the human activity of) art to provide a lens through which a Western-educated human might apprehend it.

LYGIA CLARK

The wide-ranging and increasingly dematerialised work of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark (1920-1988) drew upon everyday objects to elicit sensorial and psychological experience for a participating audience. In *Sensorial Masks* (1967), which is discussed in more detail later in the chapter, affect is elicited between an object and an individual. Later works such as *Biological Architecture* (1969) moved toward collective human-object engagement. Clark was interested in what these objects could do, rather than how they might operate solely as a work of art. Cultural theorist Deborah Frizzell traces Clark's influence through to the current moment, stating:

The everyday objects deployed in these events were merely ephemeral components, ‘relational objects’, as Clark called them: mediating devices removed from the realm of aesthetics. By 1965, Clark had jettisoned the artist's authorship of discrete objects to transform her role into that of an interlocutor of psychological and sensorial healing, prefiguring "relational aesthetics" as outlined more recently by Nicolas Bourriaud.²⁸

While this research would contest the word *merely* in Frizzell's articulation, it acknowledges and seeks to extend upon the possibility that both artist and the everyday object might take the role of “interlocutor of psychological and sensorial healing”.

ROBERT FILLIOU

The Fluxus artist Robert Filliou (1926–87), while less widely known, is an influential forerunner to contemporary participatory practice, most notably for advocating a notion of art that incorporated play,

28 Deborah Frizzell ‘Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art, 1948-1988’, *Woman's Art Journal*, accessed 18 October 2020, https://www.academia.edu/23914886/Lygia_Clark_The_Abandonment_of_Art_1948_1988, 50.

chance, and everyday life.²⁹ Art writer Martin Patrick offers a comprehensive analysis of Filliou's engagement with art as a lived and shared endeavour in his 2017 book *Across the Art/Life Divide: Performance, Subjectivity, and Social Practice in Contemporary Art*. Patrick observes that Filliou "fine-tuned his creative capacities to a precariously balanced yet incorporative approach, often sceptical but spiritually inclined, wilfully naïve but deeply informed."³⁰ Filliou's serious engagement with play and commitment to attuning art and life provides a historical precedent, which this thesis builds upon as it seeks to navigate the rich yet problematic territory where art merges with everyday life in a series of small gestures and sincere engagements.

ALLAN KAPROW

In the early sixties, the American artist Allan Kaprow (1927-2006) ushered the soon-to-be-famous term "happening" into art discourse, employing it as a term for an art event scripted within everyday life, set in motion by the artist but played out by a participating public. In *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings*³¹ cultural theorist Judith Rodenbeck describes these early happenings as "radically material, immersive, hybrid, and performative; they were funky, amateurish, and fundamentally social",³² and that at the inception, "both happenings and Fluxus events were devised as critiques of the dealer-gallery-museum system."³³ It is worth bearing in mind that Kaprow employed the word as a deliberately non-art term, it is only later that it became "a Happening", a proper name for a genre of an art event. Kaprow himself moved away from the term in the late sixties, moving toward more subtle and open-ended participatory events and opting for the more modest term 'activity'.

Art writer and artist Linda Weintraub reminds us that when first proposed "Happenings diverged in so many ways from convention that Kaprow frequently referred to this new art form as 'unart'."³⁴ As an emphatic rejection of the habits and values of an era dominated by a reified notion of abstract painting.³⁵

²⁹ While overlooked in the latter part of the twentieth century, in recent years Filliou's work has attracted renewed attention, due at least in part to a posthumous survey exhibition at Musée d'art Moderne Lille Métropole in 2004, and a solo exhibition at Richard Saltoun Gallery in London in 2014.

³⁰ Martin Patrick, *Across the Art/Life Divide: Performance, Subjectivity, and Social Practice in Contemporary Art*, (Bristol & Chicago: Intellect, 2017) I. 904.

³¹ Judith F. Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (MIT Press, 2011).

³² Judith F. Rodenbeck, 250.

³³ Judith F. Rodenbeck, 251.

³⁴ Linda Weintraub, *To Life!*, 91.

³⁵ Thomas Mc Evilly, *The Exile's Return*, 4.

The radical parameters of "un-arding" welcomed the messy unpredictability of ordinary life that had long been banished from art. At the same time, they discarded art's look-but-don't-touch protocols. By activating the body's full capacity for sensual interaction with the material world, Happenings incorporated visual, aural, olfactory, tactile, taste, temperature, and kinesthetic experiences as they occurred in real time.³⁶

The 1968 work *Easy* occupied a moment of transition from Kaprow's more choreographed Happenings toward events that enlisted the participant to attend to a simple interaction. *Easy* was first enacted with a group of California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) students in 1968, as a spontaneous, undocumented activity. Later a retroactive score, or instructional manual, was made with text and staged photographs. Like a musical score, it was codified as a set of potentials that might be played-out anew in the future.³⁷ Weintraub suggests that "in this manner the Happening never becomes congealed into an iconic instance. Instead, it remains embedded in the flow of real-life occurrences."³⁸ Unlike Weintraub, I am less confident that a Kaprow *Activity* might escape the shadow of the artist's legendary status and successfully reinsert itself into everyday life. However, it is this *intention* to embed the art event within the flow of real-life occurrences that this thesis seeks to reinvestigate. Four aspects of Kaprow's *Easy* re-emerge as currently vital to the energetic re-engagement with everyday life this research project enacts: (1) the simplicity of the activity; (2) a mundane suburban location; (3) convening an interaction between two entities; and (4) acknowledging that the art event is the experiential moment, resisting documentation and solidification into an artefact.

Easy occupied a discrete time-space, featuring a group of CalArts students, at a dry creek bed near the campus, on a hot summer's day in 1968. The artwork involved the experience of each participant within the dynamic of the group, along with the wetting of some stones and the movement of people and stones in a dry creek bed. There was no documentation, no exhibition of photographs, no artefacts collected. The event endured only in the memory and anecdotal recounting of participants. In an article dedicated to *Easy*, published in the 1974 edition of *Art in America*³⁹ magazine, Kaprow reflects on the activity and the student's response, offering a rare insight into the experiential moment.

The score for *Easy* was a simple list of actions:

(dry stream bed)

³⁶ Linda Weintraub, *To Life!*, 91.

³⁷ This score gave rise to the 1972 work *Easy*, sponsored by Colorado College, and a more recent reinvention in 2006. Eva Meyers-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk, and Stephanie Rosenthal, *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life*, 226.

³⁸ Linda Weintraub, *To Life!*, 91.

³⁹ Linda Weintraub, 73.

wetting a stone
carrying it downstream until dry
dropping it
choosing another stone there
wetting it
carrying it upstream until dry
dropping it⁴⁰

Simple: *Easy* was ostensibly a simple work; the students chose a stone, wet it, then carried it until it dried out. Returned it to the streambed and repeated the process. However, the layers of conceptual and affective complexity activated in this interaction reverberate throughout this thesis. The encounters enacted in this thesis share ground with (and invite the return of) the notion of an activity or happening that Kaprow convenes in *Easy*. The happening, (the thing that happens) is simple. It appears effortless or easy. However, the conditions behind the simple event were carefully considered. Details such as the location, the season, the time of day. The match between activity, location and the characteristics of the participating 'audience', in this case, a group of art students from Cal Arts.

Local: The chosen location was a dry streambed near the CalArts campus and running alongside a housing development. It seems likely that for the participants, this would have been a familiar and inauspicious element of the local landscape.

Convening an interaction: Kaprow provided the score to structure the activity, then allowed the event to unfold as a direct interaction between human and nonhuman participants; water, stone, and student. Kaprow reflects that this led students to think about the movement of water – not flowing in this creek bed, flowing from the tap to provide the water they brought with them. It also invited them to think about "the correlation between the rocks/water/riverbed the stone/sweat/palm."⁴¹

The experiential moment: *Easy* convened conditions allowing for affective wonder to potentially emerge within individuals from an encounter with ordinary things. [Weintraub quotes] Kaprow:

Now a second stone was required for the walk upstream. As reported in discussion afterwards, this choice was a little more difficult because the first stone had become

⁴⁰ Linda Weintraub, 90.

⁴¹ Linda Weintraub, 91.

a sort of token of the self or at least a "possession" on some dim level . . . yet [by the end of the event] the second stones had become, if not as private as the first, fond adoptions like the second car, and when they were dropped onto the dry sand of the stream bed, the satisfaction of completing the event easily was mingled with small regrets.⁴²

Simple activities, local engagement, a focus on the activity of interaction and the experiential moment, are focal points returned to throughout the research presented in this thesis. The particular configurations of these dynamics are articulated in the multi-species interaction of the Domestic Hub,⁴³ the object-oriented participatory interactions of *To Dream While Waking (Wilderness of Things)*⁴⁴ and the material collaborations articulated in Chapter Four: Shared Agency.

2.2.2 THE VIEW FROM NOW: NAVIGATING CONTEMPORARY PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE

The emphasis on the energetic return of the sixties in this thesis is an acknowledgement of the reappearance of the cultural, racial, ecological and social unrest, that characterised both the long sixties and the current moment. This focus aligns with the position put forward by Georgina Born, Eric Lewis and Will Straw, editors of *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*,⁴⁵ who link contemporary participatory practice directly to the long sixties. Drawing on Rodenbeck, they contend that "today's relational aesthetics and participatory art form part of a genealogy, previously unrecognized, that should encompass not only such ancestors as John Cage's 4'33" of 1952, Marcel Duchamp's lecture, 'The Creative Act' of 1957, and Umberto Eco's concept of the 'open work' of 1962, but also, above all, Allen Kaprow's invention of happenings and the advent of the Fluxus movement."⁴⁶

The commonalities this research identifies with the early participatory practice outlined above is also a tacit differentiation of the intentions of this thesis from the formulation of relational aesthetics put forward by Bourriaud in the late 90s, and the more commercialised and institutionalised developments in mainstream participatory and social practice of the 2000s. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to address this territory in depth. Consequently, the following discussion limits itself to noting key areas

⁴² Linda Weintraub, 90. Citing from 'Allan Kaprow, *Easy*,' *Art in America*, July/August, 1974, 73.

⁴³ Chapter Three

⁴⁴ Chapters Three and Four

⁴⁵ Born, Lewis, and Straw, *Introduction*.

⁴⁶ Born, Lewis, and Straw, 7.

of convergence, influence and differentiation via four theorists: curator/theorist Nicolas Bourriaud; art historian/critic Claire Bishop; art historian Grant Kester; and cultural theorist Josephine Berry.

As a curator and theorist, Bourriaud brought to attention and, his critics would suggest, sought to direct a nascent movement toward post object art in the nineties. In *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud outlines an emergent relational art “that takes as its theoretical horizon the sphere of human interactions and its social context”,⁴⁷ providing conditions in which the viewer is no longer passive but participates in “moments of sociability”.⁴⁸ This definition loosely aligns, albeit with multi-entity inclusions, to this thesis, as does Bourriaud’s articulation of the potential for relational art to “create free spaces and periods of time whose rhythms are not the same as those that organize everyday life, and they encourage an inter-human intercourse which is different to the ‘zones of communication’ that are forced upon us.”⁴⁹ And provide conditions in which a community of sorts might be “formed in relation to and inside the work”.⁵⁰

However, while acknowledging the influence of Bourriaud’s thinking, the methods and intentions of this thesis diverge from relational aesthetics in scale, historical location, and scope. Bourriaud’s intentions were ambitious; he posited relational aesthetics as a “radical upheaval in aesthetic, cultural and political objectives brought about by modern art.”⁵¹ This thesis favours small scale and simple gestures. Where this thesis acknowledges the participatory practice of the long sixties, Bourriaud explicitly located relational aesthetics as an aesthetic and attitudinal break with art history, stating that:

“Relational art is neither a ‘revival’ of some movement nor the return of a style. It is born of the observation of the present and of a reflection on the destiny of artistic activity. Its basic hypothesis - the sphere of human relations as site for the artwork - is without precedent in the history of art.”⁵²

The grounds Bourriaud claims for this historical break, and the second point of difference from this thesis, is the understanding of relational art as *purely* social, and that social is exclusively human. For Bourriaud relational aesthetics is a new form generated as a human response to a global transition toward urbanisation in the second half of the twentieth century. From Bourriaud’s (anthropocentric and arguably Eurocentric) perspective, this demarks a progressive cultural development and a step away from the naïvety associated with Nature. Bourriaud makes this point explicit, stating:

⁴⁷ Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Relational Aesthetics*, 14.

⁴⁸ Bourriaud, 103.

⁴⁹ Bourriaud, 16.

⁵⁰ Bourriaud, 16.

⁵¹ Bourriaud, 14.

⁵² Bourriaud, 44.

The city permits and generalises the experience of proximity: this is the tangible symbol and historical framework of the state of society, or the 'state of encounter', that has been "imposed" on people, as Althusser puts it, as opposed to the dense and unproblematic jungle of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's state of nature.⁵³

Bishop critiques the scope and efficacy of this social focus in the 2002 issue of *October*, her argument articulates problematics that remain pertinent to this thesis. Bishop asserts that rather than acknowledging that an artist or an artwork might provide conditions conducive to communicative interactions, Bourriaud posited relational art as a "social form" capable of producing positive human relationships."⁵⁴ Consequently, Bishop extrapolates, Bourriaud intimates that "the work is automatically political in implication and emancipatory in effect."⁵⁵ Bishop suggests that this leads into the problematic situation in which "open-ended conviviality was [perceived to be] sufficient evidence of social engagement."⁵⁶ Navigating the possibilities and problematics of affect and effect within social practice in the wake of relational aesthetics, remains a central concern within participatory practice. As Bishop observed in 2012, "One of the achievements of Bourriaud's book was to render discursive and dialogic projects more amenable to museums and galleries; the critical reaction to his theory however, catalysed a more critically informed discussion around participatory art."⁵⁷

One such critical voice is that of Grant Kester, the founding editor of *FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism*.⁵⁸ Kester is an outspoken critic of the commodification of participatory practice, contending that the proliferation of performance-based and social practice projects recently appearing in galleries and art museums disguises the economic transactions and politics of the institutional funding that supports them. In a 2018 interview with Tihomir Topuzovski at the Museum of Contemporary Art - Skopje, Kester suggests that:

We might even say that the event-based work exists in order to be re-monetised in this manner, in order to "build the brand", as the art dealer David Zwirner has argued. While this work typically claims to embody a critique of existing capitalist reality, it is also

⁵³ Bourriaud, Nicolas, 14.

⁵⁴ Bishop, Claire, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October* 110 (n.d.): 62.

⁵⁵ Bishop, 62.

⁵⁶ Bishop, Claire, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, 245.

⁵⁷ Bishop, 2.

⁵⁸ Grant Kester, 'FIELD | A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism', accessed 6 November 2020, <http://field-journal.com/>.

defined by a steadfast refusal to engage in any way with forms of social or political resistance that might challenge that reality.⁵⁹

Cultural studies scholar Josephine Berry extends this argument into the broader political realm, pointing to a problematic disjunction between the autonomy and critical distance claimed by modern art, and its parallel desire to engage with the thick of life. Berry contests that the two are:

mutually affecting dynamics whose entanglement reaches a peak in the contemporary logic of the cultural industries and the "creative city"; an economic logic that solicits art and culture precisely for their life-affecting characteristics, as well as their capacity to boost gross domestic product (GDP) through the promotion of cultural tourism, innovation, inward investment, and commodity differentiation.⁶⁰

While acknowledging that a comprehensive analysis of contemporary social practice exceeds the scope of this enquiry, it is important to note that a commitment to personal engagement and small acts of suburban cohabitation is a calculated bid to engage three social dynamics. Firstly, it aims to include and respect nonhuman entities: the social of social practice is not limited to human participants. Secondly, the events convened are purposely small in scale and modest in scope. It seeks to provide familiar, mundane conditions within which it becomes possible for a simple human-nonhuman interaction to elicit an unexpected care-affect, activating the imaginative potential of the encounter, as previously discussed in relation to Kaprow's work *Easy*. And thirdly, it is intended as a strategic circumnavigation of commodity value and assimilation as a commercially or politically manipulable product.

⁵⁹ Tihomir Topuzovski, *The Large Glass*, 19.

⁶⁰ Josephine Berry, *Art and (Bare) Life. A Biopolitical Enquiry*, 14.

2.3 SMALL LIVELY GESTURES

This research operates within an emerging network of participatory practice engaging with activities of care and post-anthropocentric reimagining and reclamation in Aotearoa, New Zealand. This network is a loose grouping of artists who tend toward creative practice that is engaged with reclaiming or reimagining life-affirming activities and rituals, affiliated with but not dependent upon the gallery or art institution, and grounded in the experience of living together and enriching our communities and shared urban environment.⁶¹ This research suggests that this upswell of participatory practice might be considered to align with Hannula's 'non-naïve localism'.⁶² Art practices that are embedded in daily life, and able to resist both commodification and institutional co-option as 'community-oriented public art' which, in the words of Josephine Berry, "has come to provide the image of inclusion the neoliberal city needs."⁶³

The challenge of addressing in written form art that operates through small gestures and moments of embodied participation is twofold: how to locate and point to such moments, and how to communicate in words something whose efficacy resides in experiential affect. The physical, emotional, imaginative and cognitive response elicited for the participant, resides in the moment of encounter and slips from view. To open out some of the experiential intricacies at play, the following works are articulated through the lens of my own participation. Works that I have felt, tasted, spoken to, joined with, and reflected upon.

One such example of non-naïve localism can be seen in the 2019 exhibition project *How to Live Together*, curated by Balamohan Shingade for ST PAUL St Gallery at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT). ST PAUL St Gallery provided a hub for a multifaceted and geographically dispersed enquiry, in which culturally diverse practices of care, hospitality, and sociability were entered into as both a curatorial framework and a navigational device.

The exhibition takes its name from Roland Barthes 1976 – 77 Collège de France lecture series, *How to Live Together* and draws on Barthes' discourse on community and individuality, providing a responsive

⁶¹ In addition to the artists and curators addressed in this section, this informal network includes but by no means limited to: curators: Charlotte Huddleston, Director at ST PAUL St Gallery, Auckland University of Technology 2010-2021, Andrew Clifford, Director at Te Uru Waitākere Contemporary Gallery, and Abby Cunnane, Director at *The Physics Room* and cofounder, with artist Amy Howden-Chapman, of *The Distance Plan* (2011- ongoing) Artists: Melissa Laing, Christina Houghton, Becca Wood, Chris Berthelson, val smith, Pīta Turei, Layne Waerea, Monique Janson, Sarah Smuts-Kennedy and the community nurtured through the research hub *For the Love of Bees* (2016 – ongoing).

⁶² Hannula, *The Politics of Small Gestures*, 42.

⁶³ Josephine Berry, *Art and (Bare) Life. A Biopolitical Enquiry*, 284.

structure that facilitates "a type of sociability that respects differing rhythms, temperaments, and needs."⁶⁴ Shingade draws the exhibition together around the following paired questions: "What is the intimacy we must develop to create a community? What is the distance we must maintain to retain our solitude?"⁶⁵ The exhibition structure allowed the works to unfold at "differing speeds and slowness"⁶⁶ and across gallery and non-gallery sites, both on and off-campus. The emphasis throughout the project was on ways of building empathy and trust that might facilitate sharing and communicating different cultural and personal knowledge. Shingade is playing a long game of small parts: "Not everything may be visible or unequivocal at various stages, but by the end, an experience will have been lived through, a landscape sketched in, an approach figured for a life together."⁶⁷

Within *How to Live Together*, two participatory projects emerge as pertinent to the research concerns of this thesis: *Art as Medicine*, gatherings for women by Poata Alvie McKree comprising three events acknowledging people, place and season; and *Invitation to Dialogue* by Christopher Braddock (with dialogue group), a dialogic project in which thirteen conversations took place over thirteen weeks.

2.3.1 POATA ALVIE MCKREE: *ART AS MEDICINE* GATHERINGS FOR WOMEN



FIGURE 14: POATA ALVIE MCKREE *ART AS MEDICINE*, GATHERINGS FOR WOMEN 2019. PRESENTED IN *HOW TO LIVE TOGETHER* 2019, ST PAUL ST GALLERY, AUT, CURATED BY BALAMOCHAN SHINGADE. DOCUMENTATION FROM THE FINAL EVENT OF THE SERIES, MAHURU: E HINE E. WEDNESDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2019, KAREKARE BEACH. PHOTO CREDITS EMILY PARR

In locating *Art as Medicine* within the contemporary art framework of *How to Live Together*, McKree brought together the conceptual structures of participatory art practice with ceremonial practices from

⁶⁴ Balamohan Shingade, 'How to Live Together: Exhibition Guide', 1.

⁶⁵ Shingade, 1.

⁶⁶ Shingade, 1.

⁶⁷ Shingade, 1.

her Māori and African heritage, and her experiences as a midwife and end-of-life carer. For McKree, operating within the field of participatory art practice granted her "permission to critique ceremony", to test, experiment with, and develop her work by engaging with ceremony and practices of spiritual healing as a robust and vital field of enquiry.⁶⁸ Conversely, the format and conceptual space of participatory practice provided implicit preconditions for respectful, unselfconscious engagement and made available the possibility that the group was not merely participating in an existing ceremony, but collaboratively giving form to their own ceremony. Through inviting participants to share in the process of generating ritual, McKree was able to propose the possibility of sacred daily life rather than mundane daily life.

While McKree works from a cultural position dissimilar to my own, I suggest an underlying parallel can be drawn with the intentions and operation of the Domestic Hub. Both practices seek to engage the platform of contemporary art as speculative space within which to imagine together ways to access the sacred within daily life.

2.3.2 CHRISTOPHER BRADDOCK: *INVITATION TO DIALOGUE* (WITH DIALOGUE GROUP)



FIGURE 15: CHRISTOPHER BRADDOCK, (2019). 'INVITATION TO DIALOGUE', IN *HOW TO LIVE TOGETHER*, AUT ST PAUL ST GALLERY (AUCKLAND: AUT UNIVERSITY), CURATED BY BALAMOCHAN SHINGADE. PHOTO CREDITS SAM HARTNETT.

Braddock's *Invitation to Dialogue* brings the proposition of dialogue, put forward by David Bohm in his 1996 book *On Dialogue*, to bear on Barthes' provocation to navigate the space between the individual and the collective.⁶⁹ Following Bohm's proposition that dialogue might be approached as a practice of self-reflexive thinking-together, *Invitation to Dialogue* specifically posed no topic of conversation.

⁶⁸ A face-to-face interview with McKree, 10 September 2020.

⁶⁹ Bohm, *On Dialogue*.

Participants were encouraged to listen attentively and consciously resist an opinion-based or knowledge-sharing response. The idea is that dialogue will unfold through the attentive listening to others and becoming aware of one's own internal dialogue. In practice, it quickly became apparent that attempting to have a conversation that avoids topic quickly falls into discussing the topic of not having a topic. However, this led into a series of discussions on the activities of thinking and talking, guided obliquely by Bohm's *On Dialogue*. Over the thirteen weeks, the dialogue group became a weekly practice in the skill of thinking and conversing consciously.

Braddock's investigation of the activity of thinking and talking both aligns with and significantly differs from this thesis' proposition of conversation as a mode of speculative thinking-together developed in *Conversation Pit*.⁷⁰ Both projects seek to draw out conscious self-aware conversation, However, where Braddock's investigation addresses the process of thinking itself and so deliberately eschews topic, the aim of *Conversation Pit* is to open out a defined subject area and to move from an articulate provocation into a profuse entanglement of possibility, in which thoughts, ideas, feelings, and intuitions feed off one another as they play between each person's thinking and speaking.

Here it is useful to note that in both projects, it is acknowledged that thinking is not separate from feeling. Bohm addresses this directly, proposing that "feelings which have been recorded"⁷¹ in the body as memories linger as 'felts' (the past tense of 'feeling') intertwined with thoughts. He goes on to contend that "our culture gives us a wrong lead about thoughts and felts. It constantly tends to imply that they could be separated and that one could control the other. But thoughts and felts are one process; they are not two."⁷²

A second commonality was refusing a productive outcome, resisting the need for an agenda, a series of directed points to cover or the intention to reach a resolution. Both projects sought to oppose the assumption that value is associated only with productivity and measurable outcome. However, when it came to feeling-tone and material engagement, the projects diverged. My experience of Braddock's Dialogue Group⁷³ was of an objective and intellectually driven approach to dialogue. In contrast, *Conversation Pit* drew on play and make-believe, explicitly ascribing value to the act of putting aside normal adult behaviour and entering into an alternative space to be childlike with nonhuman others.⁷⁴ It invited participants to think-feel together what it may have been like not to have been taught to put

⁷⁰ Discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis

⁷¹ Bohm, *On Dialogue*, 61.

⁷² Bohm, 61.

⁷³ Christopher Braddock, *Invitation to Dialogue*.

⁷⁴ This is expanded in section 2.4, Heterotopic time-space

aside the liveliness of objects and things, to have not had to grow up to be productive citizens and sensible adults.

2.3.3 RICHARD ORJIS: CRUISING THE PARK: A QUEERING



FIGURE 16: RICHARD ORJIS, *CRUISING THE PARK: A QUEERING (BTMMING THE WALL)*, 2010. ALBERT PARK AND THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND. PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Auckland artist Richard Orjis⁷⁵ locates his research at the intersections of queer ecology, multi-species contra normativity and a 'passively active' approach to participatory practice that "prioritises openness, slowness and empathy."⁷⁶ *Cruising the Park: A queering* (2019) took the form of a walking conversation traversing Auckland's Albert Park and giving voice to alternative histories that have been overwritten by the hetero-normative mainstream narrative. Here I shall focus on a moment in which the group paused for a performative event led by Orjis in collaboration with artist val smith.⁷⁷

The group lay lined up on the warm concrete, legs extending up the wall of the University of Auckland library, bottoms nestled into the crack where the wall meets the ground. While lying in this position, a bottom-text written by smith was passed from person to person and read aloud. Words about bottoms, subversion, failure, and overwritten histories. In this way, Orjis shifted the physicality of the group, the words, and the wall, inviting body and mind to participate in a queer experience.

⁷⁵ At time of writing Orjis is in the final stages of completing a PhD at AUT.

⁷⁶ Orjis, Richard, 'About Walking: Richard Orjis: Cruising, Lazing, Leaning - Te Uru', Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery, 2019, <https://www.teuru.org.nz/index.cfm/whats-on/events/about-walking-richard-orjis-cruising-lazing-leaning/>.

⁷⁷ The artist val smith prefers a lowercase spelling of their name.

Orjis articulates an "approach to art-making, pedagogy and kinship driven by the tenets of connectivity, pleasure and sub-version"⁷⁸ that closely aligns with the contra normative dwelling-with enacted in this thesis. The multi-entity cohabitation of the Domestic Hub, and the notion of a material-experiential heterotopic time-space in participatory practice, are similarly immersed in connectivity and pleasure and seek to participate and invite participation in small acts of species/entity queering.

2.3.4 MARK HARVEY: WEED WRESTLE



FIGURE 18: MARK HARVEY, *POLITICAL CLIMATE WRESTLE*, 2013 THE MALDIVES EXODUS CARAVAN SHOW, AT THE 55TH VENICE BIENNALE. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.



FIGURE 17: MARK HARVEY, *WEED WRESTLE*, 2017 IN HEAT: SOLAR REVOLUTIONS, TE URU GALLERY

Mark Harvey's performances employ strategies of simplicity, humour and a well-honed balance of idiocy and seriousness to question societal assumptions that construct 'masculinity', 'the white male academic' and in more recent works, our unwillingness to acknowledge climate change. Of particular pertinence to this research is Harvey's 2017 work *Weed Wrestle*, in which Harvey, clad as a middle-class businessman in a white shirt, trousers and leather shoes, wrests a juvenile wattle tree from the ground. This work is a playful extension of his 2013 performance *Political Climate Wrestle* in which Harvey, similarly dressed, invites members of the public to join him in a wrestle to contest their opposing political views regarding climate change.

Weed Wrestle took place as part of *Heat: Solar Revolutions* at Te Uru Gallery, in Titirangi, where suburban Auckland dissolves into native bush and regional park. Harvey's work responded to a public debate on whether non-native species should be removed from the fringes of native bush in the area. *Weed Wrestle* was performed live as part of the exhibition's performance program and then presented

⁷⁸ Orjis, Richard, 'About Walking: Richard Orjis: Cruising, Lazing, Leaning - Te Uru'.

as an eight-minute video, played on a small screen in an awkward corner of the gallery as part of the group exhibition. The positioning of the work meant that if several people were viewing at the same time, they had to cluster together, forming a provisional crowd. The tree was reluctant to be removed from the ground, and the man was persistent in his ineffectual pulling and pushing, so the struggle was long. Before it was through, it seemed that the audience had largely sided with the tree, murmuring reproaches such as 'what's wrong with the tree anyway'. The humour and pathos of the situation reminded the collected audience of the impotence of a human without a tool, against even a small tree who could have been cut down in seconds with a chainsaw. It elicited a degree of caring for the tree, leaving to the viewer questioning of the cultural norm of dividing our fauna into exotic weed and valued native species.

What I perceive Harvey's works to do, and what this thesis sets out to address, is to allow the viewer a pause for caring reflection. The duration of *Weed Wrestle* and the pathos of both participants allow experiential time for caring to emerge. It is no longer *a tree*, pest or otherwise, it becomes *this tree* for whom we care. Conversely, the performer enacts the conflicted position of an individual struggling earnestly to achieve a task, while at the same time his businessman persona casts him as perpetrator/victim of our neoliberal system. Harvey's choice of a despised tree and the construction of a conflicted persona elicits a felt response that ducks-under the nature-culture politics of native bush versus exotic weed. In becoming an act of mutual failure, it allows the viewer to conceive of the struggle between *this entity* who is a tree and *this entity who is a man*. This operation of ducking under assumptions that prop up common sense circulates throughout the pages that follow.

2.4 HETEROTOPIC TIME-SPACE

Heterotopic time-space is a term this research brings into play to define an experiential and durational space in which the norms of everyday life are altered, to provide conditions in which specific habitual assumptions of human-nonhuman interrelationship might be brought to the fore. In using the term heterotopic, the research embraces the return of a disruptive energetic aspect of the long sixties articulated by Michel Foucault in his discourse on heterotopia.⁷⁹

Heterotopic time-space develops two core aspects of Foucault's thinking. Broadly defined, Foucault invokes heterotopia to refer to a place (physical location) within which a space (spatial and cultural location) of behavioural norms that run counter to the dominant culture are contained and permitted (in the case of a brothel or a playground) or enforced (in the case of a prison).

In his 1967 essay, *Des Espace Autres*, translated as *Different Spaces*⁸⁰ or *Of Other Spaces*⁸¹, Foucault identifies six principles of heterotopias across a range of cultural and historical conditions. This thesis predominantly engages with principles four and six.

Principle four defines heterotopia as a physical and spatial phenomenon which occurs within and in response to historical time. Foucault posits that "The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time."⁸² This research proposes that the current cultural moment, which is defined in terms of climate crisis, the Anthropocene, the sixth great extinction and more recently, global pandemic, is such an absolute break.

Foucault's sixth principle addresses the relationship between heterotopia and the culture within which it exists. Foucault elaborates the functions a heterotopia can provide; it may oppose or run counter to the rules of society and so "create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory". It is this function that informs this research's use of a heterotopic time-space as a place for post-anthropocentric reimagining. Conversely, it actively resists a second, opposing function Foucault articulates, in which a heterotopia operates as a space of compensation where the rules of society are amplified and perfected. A compensatory heterotopia provides an idealised space that is "as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill-constructed, and jumbled."

⁷⁹ Foucault and Miskowicz, 'Of Other Spaces'.

⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. Faubion, James D, trans. Hurley, Robert, vol. 2, *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984* (New York: New York Press, 1998).

⁸¹ Foucault and Miskowicz, 'Of Other Spaces'.

⁸² Foucault and Miskowicz, 6.

Rather than claiming to be a heterotopia, this research seeks to convene a temporary heterotopic space within a specific location. The term *heterotopic time-space* is employed to designate this more modest enterprise, seeking to facilitate a moment of contra-normative reflection embedded within the mundane time-space of daily life. This research proposes a provisional heterotopia whose self-evident construction suggests neither a retreat from, nor a utopian alternative to, the everyday life it punctuates. This is not the monumental heterotopia of the museum; it is more akin to a sideshow tent at a fair, erected for recurrent, brief moments over multiple sites.

Of course, it has been long acknowledged that arts institutions – galleries, museums and art schools – are themselves heterotopias. In 1976, Irish artist, writer and critic Brian O'Doherty published the seminal text *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*⁸³ in which he observed that:

A gallery is constructed along laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light . . . The art is free, as the saying used to go, "to take on its own life".⁸⁴

While O'Doherty does not invoke the term, this description aligns with Foucault's notion of heterotopia. In 2007 O'Doherty appended this assertion, reflecting that the art institution is able to persist as it "transforms while remaining itself unchanged".⁸⁵ As the gallery adapts to diversification in art practice it "becomes a site — "the place", the dictionary says, "where something is, was, or is to be." The gallery function O'Doherty describes is congruent with a culturally sustained and durationally stable heterotopia embedded within a culture.

This research is cognisant that when working within an art context, even when located outside of the gallery, an art/heterotopia pairing will always be a *heterotopia within a heterotopia*. This inbuilt constraint aligns with my research intentions as it inserts a level of critical distance, flagging that this heterotopia is to be read as a construction. It provides the discursive structure for a speculative heterotopia, grounded first by its participation in mundane daily life, and again by the critical imaginative of art discourse.

Rather than circumnavigating this doubling, the thesis actively engages the energetic collision between the culturally embedded heterotopia and its occupation by an overt temporary heterotopia. A time-

⁸³ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica, San Francisco: Lapis Press, 1976).

⁸⁴ O'Doherty, 14.

⁸⁵ Brian O'Doherty, *Studio and Cube: On the Relationship between Where Art Is Made and Where Art Is Displayed, Vol. One, FORuM* (Buell Center, 2007), 39.

space for shared make-believe inserted repeatedly into the space of the gallery, festival, educational institution or home. Playful and entirely serious, it seeks out the possibility that a heterotopic time-space might be opened out within the enclosing heterotopia of the site of art discourse to provide a time-space for embodied imagining and speculative thinking.

2.4.1 HETEROTOPIA IN ART PRACTICE

Artist Thierry Fournier's 2019 exhibition *Heterotopia*⁸⁶ provides an instructive counter-position to this research. While there are formal similarities with Fournier's multimedia installations and video projections, I suggest that the heterotopia he proposes is the inverse of the one put forward by this research. Fournier seeks to provide a window onto an existent, virtual heterotopia. A heterotopia he locates in the phantasmagorical space of social media. Fournier's is a disembodied heterotopia of human thought-space untethered from chronology and territory.

The materiality of Fournier's installations leads to the immateriality of human thought. The viewer is invited to pass over the material world and look into "a parallel space that is both utopian and dystopian . . . [within which] . . . human beings are permanently interacting with the trail they leave behind on the network, with their images, simulacra or extensions."⁸⁷



FIGURE 19: THIERRY FOURNIER, *HETEROTOPIA*, 2019. SOLO EXHIBITION AT SAINT-DENIS ART AND HISTORY MUSEUM. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

⁸⁶ Thierry Fournier, 'Thierry Fournier | Heterotopia', Thierry Fournier (blog).

⁸⁷ 'Thierry Fournier | Heterotopia'.

While this thesis also works with digital technology, it does so as a bodily encounter of human and object. In this regard it shares two particularities with South American artist Lygia Clark's pivotal 1967 participatory work, *Sensorial Masks (Máscaras Sensoriais)*.⁸⁸ The first commonality is emphasising the causal relationship between materiality and the embodied experience of the participant. In different ways, each recontextualises familiar things so that the participant may encounter them as bodies perforating and perforated by their own body. The second convergence is in locating the value of the artwork in the experiential moment rather than the artefact.



FIGURE 21: LYGIA CLARK, *SENSORIAL MASKS*, 1976. REF N° 20380; PHOTOGRAPHER - UNKNOWN. COURTESY OF *THE WORLD OF LYGIA CLARK* CULTURAL ASSOCIATION.



FIGURE 20: LYGIA CLARK, *SENSORIAL MASKS*, 1976. REF N° 21012; PHOTOGRAPHER - UNKNOWN. COURTESY OF *THE WORLD OF LYGIA CLARK* CULTURAL ASSOCIATION.

Fifty years after *Sensorial Masks* were first exhibited, and on the other side of the planet, a person visiting the exhibition *A Space to Dream: Recent Art in South America* at the Auckland Art Gallery⁸⁹ was able to slip their head into one of Clark's masks. Not the original artefact, a replica. As the artist explicitly locates the value of the work in the materiality of the object, rather than its authenticity as an artefact, the masks can be replicated and made available for ongoing participation. I suggest that to participate and slide on the mask, is to enter a heterotopia in which one's immediate material and psychological experience is stitched in with moments shared with innumerable imagined others. I propose that such a moment opens out a heterotopia of chronologically and geographically dispersed intimacy.

⁸⁸ 'Lygia Clark Artworks | The Art Story, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/clark-lygia/artworks/>

⁸⁹ Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 'Space to Dream: Recent Art from South America'.

2.4.2 HETEROTOPIA AND PLAY

Foucault provides many examples of heterotopias, from graveyards to colonies, prisons and museums. The example most instructive for this research is from a little-known radio lecture Foucault gave for the channel *France Culture* in 1966. In the essay 'Brief History of the Concept of Heterotopia', British Heterotopia Studies scholar Peter Johnston translates an excerpt from this lecture, in which Foucault articulates the heterotopic nature of children's imaginative play:

These counter-spaces . . . are well recognised by children. Certainly, it's the bottom of the garden; it's the Indian tent erected in the middle of the attic; or still, it's . . . on their parent's bed where they discover the ocean, as they can swim between the covers, and the bed is also the sky, or they can bounce on the springs; it's the forest as they can hide there . . .⁹⁰

Play, material playfulness and reference to childhood imaginative play are key strategies within this thesis. While the three overlap, it is useful to note the distinct roles of each.

Childhood imaginative play is a significant reference point in the dwelling-spaces addressed in Chapter Three. Play tents and the blanket huts are employed to evoke the heterotopic space of children's imaginative play articulated by Foucault.⁹¹ This strategy also draws on Morton's contention that the rupture between childhood and adulthood is a ripple-on effect of the severing of humans from the biosphere, and those with whom we share it. Morton proposes that "A functional definition of 'child' is 'someone who is still allowed to talk with an inanimate stuffed animal as if it were not only an actual lifeform but also conscious'."⁹² A condition segregated off from adulthood, evidenced through the tacit understanding that "A functional definition of an adult book is one in which nonhumans don't speak and aren't on an equal footing with humans."⁹³ Convening an event in a blanket hut in a lounge room or a gallery serves as an imaginative material prompt, seeking to elicit within the participant, familiar recourse to childhood games of make-believe. For individuals normalised in human-centred Western traditions, the memory of childhood make-believe appears to be one of the more accessible routes for facilitating the imaginative transition towards speculative engagement with the entanglement of human-nonhuman cohabitation. *Material playfulness* is addressed in Chapter Four as a surprising and

⁹⁰ Johnson, 'Brief History of the Concept of Heterotopia (Revised)'. Quoting from: Foucault, M. (2009a) [1966] *Le Corps Utopique – Les Hétérotopies* [Utopian Body –Heterotopias]. Clamecy: Éditions Lignes.

⁹¹ Johnson, 12.

⁹² Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, l. 300.

⁹³ Timothy Morton, l. 301.

humorous strategy for encouraging a person to notice his or her assumptions of what a thing is and does, raising the possibility that an object or entity may have qualities that we habitually overlook.

Play, in this creative research, is evoked in its verb form, *to play*; it invites a participant to suspend disbelief and play along with an imagination experiment. To physically and conceptually step into a heterotopic time-space, a sanctioned container for speculating and daydreaming of alternative possibilities for humans and things. The hopefulness of this gesture emerges from my own experience, firstly through the process of psychotherapy,⁹⁴ and again in the experiential research for this thesis; that imaginative play can provide a conduit through which an individual might integrate new experience, knowledge or insight. Sociologist Thomas S. Henricks, author of *Play: A Pathway to the Self*, attests that "Play is a profoundly important 'pathway of experience' that cultivates self-realisation . . ." ⁹⁵ and that "play forms, however various, are similar in that they all facilitate self-realisation — essentially, comprehending the situations in which persons find themselves, the pertinent capabilities they possess, and the action-strategies they can effectively pursue." ⁹⁶

⁹⁴ My personal experience is congruent with the description provided by The Psychosynthesis Trust in the blogpost 'The Benefits of Guided Visualisations and Imagery'.

⁹⁵ Thomas S. Henricks, 'Play Studies: A Brief History', *American Journal of Play* 12, no. 2 (2020): 120.

⁹⁶ Thomas S. Henricks, 126.



FIGURE 22: THE TENT AS A SITE OF IMAGINATIVE PLAY

Top: Left: A floral tent remade from the tent my husband and I first camped in.

Right: Sun umbrella, video projection and lilo.

Significant Others, Whangarei Art Museum 2016

A six-sided dome tent sewn from projection cloth and patterned fabric, supported by the tent poles from our family camping tent.

Bottom: Left: *I Don't Know If The Water Knows How She Will Make Her Way To The Sea*. Presented at 2019 ASLEC-ANZ Conference, UNE Australia.

Right: *Significant Others*, Whangarei Art Museum, 2016

2.4.3 TENTS, HUTS AND DWELLING-SPACES

This thesis draws on Foucault's thinking on heterotopia and the heterotopic content of childhood imaginative play in its use of tent-like and hut-like dwelling-spaces, as a segue into make-believe time-space. This research extrapolates on childhood imaginative play to propose that the camping holiday performs a similar heterotopic function in adulthood. For a wilderness visit, the tent provides a temporary structure in which the functions of a house are transformed and miniaturised. Sleeping, cooking, eating, and socialising become informal and delightfully provisional. The rules of the house are sufficiently intact as to provide familiar structure, but also adequately flimsy so that they may be bent at will. While camping is arguably more arduous than staying home, the tasks of setting up and cooking are play-tasks, pleasurable in their provisional, voluntary and temporary nature.⁹⁷

Extrapolating Foucault's argument above, this thesis suggests that both the camping holiday and the childhood blanket hut can be framed in terms of a culturally sanctioned heterotopic time-space, and that both perform the function of legitimising a make-believe version of mundane daily life. Drawing on the provisional construction of the childhood hut and the structural integrity of the tent, the dwelling-spaces in this research are neither hut nor tent but participate in both. Conflating the tent and childhood hut is a deliberate ploy to tap into a socially endorsed mode of imaginative play. Through offering a balance of familiarity and strangeness, they seek to elicit an embodied imaginative response; the viewer is *unexpectedly* drawn in, suddenly reminded of that camping trip or half-forgotten childhood hut.

⁹⁷ This should not be confused with the situation in which people are forced to live in a camping tent for lack of housing. In this case the inversion of 'voluntary' and 'holiday' becomes cruelly mocking.



FIGURE 23: HUTS FOR IMAGINATIVE PLAY

Dwelling spaces/ blanket huts

Top:Left: *Domestic Hub Conversation Pit*, 2019. In the lounge at my home, right: *RM Conversation Pit*, 2019. RM archive room. Dwelling-spaces for the conversation *Sharing in an Intimate World*
 Bottom: Left: *Tree/Hut*, 2017. Temporary dwellings with Chris Berthelson at *Temp*, Corbans Estate, Right: *Dwelling with grapevine*, 2019 in the shed/studio

2.5 LOW THEORY: J. JACK HALBERSTAM

The horizontalising strategies introduced in the swamp model and articulated throughout the thesis, draw upon J. Jack Halberstam's articulation of *low theory*,⁹⁸ a theoretical model that refuses, and seeks to dismantle, the hierarchies of knowing that constitute high theory. "Low theory may draw on eccentric texts, popular culture, stupidity, the childish or the perverse. It refuses the accepted hierarchies of knowledge and aims to take us out of charted territory." Halberstam challenges 'seriousness' as the only path of knowledge and insight, suggesting that we use low thinking to subvert or creep under disciplinary correctness and so-called right thinking.⁹⁹ More recently, Halberstam has applied low theory to *wildness*,¹⁰⁰ seeking to reclaim the term as an anarchistic alternative to the current, forcefully normative notions of society and nature promulgated in late-capitalist societies. They suggest that wildness might "offer a counter-archive of bodies and modes of being that fall out of the definitional systems produced to describe them."¹⁰¹

Halberstam invokes the early twentieth century Russian anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin's¹⁰² critique of a capitalist logic that presumes competition and combat as the preeminent dynamic in nature, countering that *mutual aid* is a more accurate reading of wildness, as species employ diverse forms of cooperation and interaction. Halberstam suggests that read in this way, wildness provides many models better suited to human coexistence than competition, models for reclaiming diverse forms of commonality. Halberstam goes on to propose the *rewilding of theory*, an unconventional and dangerous intellectual journey, which might involve eroding autonomous selfhood and "abandoning the security of coherence"¹⁰³ in favour of colliding, crashing and allowing things to fall apart. I understand this as a tool with which to prise open repressed zones of contra-productivity, devalued places, beings and knowledge forms that run counter to Neoliberal Capitalism's¹⁰⁴ extractive narrative.

In the contra-productive resistance of the swamp, my own small gesture of wildness and anarchy gesticates. I am referring here not to 'Anarchy' as an explicitly political movement for human beings, but to a contra-normative, and thereby political, engagement running across species divisions; a quietly anarchistic re-engagement with the tiny patch of biosphere in which I dwell. Alongside Halberstam's

⁹⁸ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 16.

⁹⁹ Halberstam, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Halberstam and Nyong'o, "Introduction: Theory in the Wild."

¹⁰¹ "Public Thinker."

¹⁰² Halberstam and Nyong'o, "Introduction: Theory in the Wild," 459. Referring to Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest the Bread*, published in 1892.

¹⁰³ Halberstam and Nyong'o, 454.

¹⁰⁴ As articulated in Chapter One, market-foremost democracy and neoliberalism.

rewilding of theory, I am advocating for the rewilding of the (contemporary/Western human) imagination. While committed to ecological reparation, actively in suburban Tāmaki Makaurau and as a[n aspirational] principle, it seeks bottom-up imaginative change rather than confronting political structures head-on. Through participating in small, patient, located acts of care it aims to model, articulate and facilitate incremental imaginative and perceptual shifts toward an embodied understanding of interconnection.

Morton offers an adjacent discourse from a philosophical position located within object-oriented ontology. Morton seeks out the disruptive potential of attending to and making visible the nonhuman entities and agencies to which much of Western philosophy is wilfully blind. Morton articulates this in terms of *hyperobjects*,¹⁰⁵ entities massively dispersed over time and space and incorporating a conglomeration of actants which may or may not be perceptible to the human senses. Morton suggests that, as hyperobjects exceed our usual comprehensions of scale, duration and volition, we fail to perceive them. They are invisible to us because we are inside them (climate change). Or the time scale is so vast (nuclear waste). Or they permeate us and the whole of our biosphere (plastics, pesticides), we detect only their symptoms (melting snow, radiation contamination in groundwater, cancerous cell growth).¹⁰⁶

Morton posits that an encounter with such a non-human-scaled entity serves to shake up human worldviews. They cause us to reflect on our place in earth and cosmos, as they bring about humiliation and force us to abandon anthropocentric worlding and consider an existence in which we are simply one of many entities co-existing inside an object. The notion of human exceptionalism becomes no longer tenable, as what we took to be power and freedom is exposed as fragility and interdependence. It awakens us to human weakness and requires us to relinquish our special status and attune with other entities and collective actants.¹⁰⁷ For Morton, however, this weakness and sudden smallness of stature is not a demotion so much as an escape path, allowing us to creep under the seemingly insurmountable structures of modernisation and global capitalism.

At the time of writing the Covid-19 pandemic is spreading throughout the biosphere, accompanied by the rhetoric of ‘unprecedented times’ and ‘global crisis’. In other words, a paradigm-shattering hyperobject. This pandemic has three qualities that heighten its ideological impact: firstly, its sudden emergence and the immediacy and severity of the resulting global health crisis. Secondly, it emanated

¹⁰⁵ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects*, l. 2193

¹⁰⁶ Morton, l. 712.

¹⁰⁷ Morton, l. 388.

from 'Nature' as an accidental (from an anthropocentric perspective) trans-species virus transfer, and thirdly, its immediate contagion within wealthy, globally mobile nations with accompanying horrific devastation of first world health systems and economies. (Differentiating itself from other trans-species virus outbreaks; the more manageable SARS pandemic of 2003 and the ongoing episodes of Ebola Virus Disease, which remain mostly contained within Sub-Saharan African nations,¹⁰⁸ with little impact on Western countries).

The irruption of a microscopic pathogen into human social and economic space tears at the ideological fabric of the dominant world-construct, in which the human drama is played out against the passive background of 'Nature', offering a glimpse of a harsher form of coexistence. Morton likens the experience of the dissolution of world-effect to waking up within a charnel ground, "a place of life and death, of death-in-life and life-in-death, an undead place of zombies, viroids, junk DNA, ghosts, silicates, cyanide, radiation, demonic forces, and pollution."¹⁰⁹ Morton conjures this prescient image of the charnel ground:

Since there are no charnel grounds to speak of in the West, the best analogy, used by some Tibetan Buddhists (from whom the image derives), is the emergency room of a busy hospital. People are dying everywhere. There is blood and noise, equipment rushing around, screams. When the charm of world is dispelled, we find ourselves in the emergency room of ecological coexistence.¹¹⁰

While a comprehensive discussion of the ideological impacts of Covid-19 exceeds the scope of this thesis, the advent of a global pandemic has complicated the final phases of this research, accelerating and amplifying some of its core concerns. The specific impact of the Covid-19 pandemic for this research is addressed in Chapter Four.

¹⁰⁸ 'Ebola Virus Disease'.

¹⁰⁹ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, l 2193

¹¹⁰ Morton, l. 2197.

CHAPTER THREE: REIMAGINING SPACE/SPACE FOR REIMAGINING



FIGURE 24: DWELLING SPACE, *I SEE YOU SEE ME SEE YOU*. 2020, DOMESTIC HUB

This chapter expands and contextualises the experiential and site-specific activity framed in research question three as an intention to; 'convene a physical and conceptual space for an art encounter that might elicit understanding that is critical, embodied and imagined.' This intention aligns with and seeks

to physically and conceptually articulate a central concern of the social aesthetics put forward by Born et al. who propose that:

by arguing that the sensory, perceptual, and embodied modes of experience at the heart of aesthetic theory should be grasped as immanently encultured and social, a social aesthetics ushers in novel and long-overdue means of analysing aesthetic experiences themselves."¹

This chapter brings the thinking of Born et al. to bear on Miwon Kwon's 2002 schematic analysis of site, put forward in *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*.² It outlines a strategy to build upon Kwon's exhortation that:

the chance to conceive the site as something more than a place—as repressed ethnic history, a political cause, a disenfranchised social group—is an important conceptual leap in redefining the public role of art and artists."³

It then locates specific research activities within this framework, defining the key research terms 'dwelling-space' and a 'dwelling within a dwelling' and outlining its usage of the terms 'immersive installation' and 'immersive video installation'. These research components are then articulated in terms of 'reimagining space'⁴ and 'space for reimagining', a conceptual structure that refers to Boetkes' notion of post-anthropocentric reimagining introduced in Chapter One. It will introduce the creative research projects *Conversation Pit* and *To Dream While Waking (Wilderness of Things)* and position them in relation to the main theoretical and philosophical research areas that flow through the thesis: a) the need to move beyond binary thinking, b) the agency of things, c) the practice of reimagining and d) the efficacy of the small gesture.

It will extend upon the notion of heterotopic time-space introduced in Chapter One, and return to the philosophical and practical activities of the Domestic Hub, locating it in relation to the work of the American artist Fritz Haeg.

¹ Born, Lewis, and Straw, *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*, 4.

² Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.; MIT Press, 2004.), 26.

³ Miwon Kwon, 25.

⁴ This terminology is not intended to be a direct reference to the 2009 exhibition *Reimagining Space: The Park Place Gallery Group in 1960s New York City*, although this research does share the Park Place Group's desire to integrate art and life. Dalrymple Henderson, Linda, *Reimagining Space: The Park Place Gallery Group in 1960s New York City*.

The creative research is interwoven with contextual reference to philosophers, theorists and artists who this research suggests, are also invested in opening out conceptual space for post-anthropocentric modes of being, thinking and doing.

3.0.1 SITE AND SITUATION

The nuances of engagement with site, activities of sited engagement and attentive situation that flow through this research can be usefully articulated through reference to two theoretical touchstones. One of these is the discursive space where social aesthetics meets the affective and effective capacity of things. A discourse that:

recognises that our aesthetic pronouncements and embodied experiences are saturated with social meaning, are routinely enrolled to serve multiple social and cultural purposes, and are as much about the subjects of aesthetic experience as they are about aesthetic objects. Indeed, in this sense a social aesthetics both depends on and augurs a relational, historically situated conception of aesthetic subject and object

The second is Miwon Kwon's discourse of site-responsive art. Writing in 2002, Kwon identified and elaborated an emergent dynamic in site-oriented art practice whose influence flows through this thesis; "the pursuit of a more intense engagement with the outside world and everyday life—a critique of culture that is inclusive of nonart spaces, nonart institutions, and nonart issues".⁵

Writing in 2002, Kwon analyses this development by identifying three distinct characteristics in site-oriented art:

the distinguishing characteristic of today's site-oriented art is the way in which the art work's relationship to the actuality of a location (as site) and the social conditions of the institutional frame (as site) are both subordinate to a discursively determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate.⁶

And that:

⁵ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, 24.

⁶ Miwon Kwon, 26.

the three paradigms of site specificity I have schematised here—phenomenological, social/institutional, and discursive . . . are not stages in a neat linear trajectory of historical development. Rather, they are competing definitions, overlapping with one another and operating simultaneously in various cultural practices today (or even within a single artist’s single project).⁷

The following analysis employs and extends upon Kwon’s schematic as a framework through which to articulate the nuances of site encountered within this thesis. Each of the three site modes are addressed in turn.

Discursively determined site/ delineated as a field of knowledge: this thesis attempts and enacts situations that bring together multiple phenomenological, social, and importantly, *material* sites as conditions that enable (physically, imaginatively, conceptually) the discursive site of reimagining and re-embodying everyday multi-entity coexistence.

The art work’s relationship to the actuality of a location: firstly, there is a material and structural relationship of connection and response. Here the particularities of site draw out material-agentive response from the collaborative agency of participating allelos and human researcher/artist. This relationship is characterised by attentive interconnection; allelos enter into structural interplay with the formal attributes of a place in such a way that neither the place nor the participating allelos/materials are permanently changed.⁸

Nested within this site-dynamic is the relationship of event/encounter to the actuality of a location. The research proposes the possibility of an encounter between the human participant and a hybrid site composed of the (actual) hosting place and the (actual) provisional constructed place or habitable installation within it.

Inextricably intertwined with this are “*the social conditions of the institutional frame*”. The social conditions of the home, the gallery and the University are embedded in its/gweis architecture; walls, carpet, furniture, multi-species inhabitants and the qualities they impart to the air that permeates them. All these things speak the social of a place. When considered from an anthropocontineric perspective, each of the participating allelos (materials, objects, video projections, tools, food) bring

⁷ Miwon Kwon,30.

⁸ This is elaborated in section 4.1 of this thesis

with them their own social site; in the context of this discussion, they might be considered to operate as *entity-sites*.

Consequently, within the multi-entity social place of the actual site (home, gallery, University), a further layer of site, or a *situation*, is convened; a material/energetic/experiential coalescence of entity-sites. In this situation, each of the provisional multi-entity dwelling spaces of this thesis — which applies equally to constructed dwelling spaces to the pre-existent dwelling spaces of the Domestic Hub events — might be apprehended as a locus of overlapping entity-sites. Each situation is formed through the coalescence of the phenomenological, social, imaginative, energetic, material and embodied site-qualities of each of the allelobeings, including human beings.



FIGURE 25: SITE AND SITUATION: GALLERY, UNIVERSITY & HOME

3.1 IMMERSIVE INSTALLATION, DWELLING-SPACES AND A DWELLING WITHIN A DWELLING

In the context of this research, the term immersive installation is employed to describe an installation that surrounds or encloses the viewer and requires some level of bodily engagement or active participation. The term dwelling-space refers specifically to an installation or element of an installation that offers physical comfort or provides a restful place that invites a person to stay a while. It provides a space in which to dwell, (to live with, to spend an open-ended period of time with) and to *dwell upon* (to think about intensely for a duration).

The two terms intermingle; a dwelling space is itself an immersive installation, and it may also be part of a larger installation. An immersive video installation lays a skin of moving light over the interior surface of an architectural space, providing a transient, insubstantial dwelling space. The distinction between the two is raised as a strategy to navigate two currents of affect as they flow through the sequence of participatory installation events. In simplified terms, immersive installation can be understood to refer to the overall installation event, a dwelling space is an element within or function of the immersive installation, that provides an opportunity to participate in the activity of 'dwelling'.

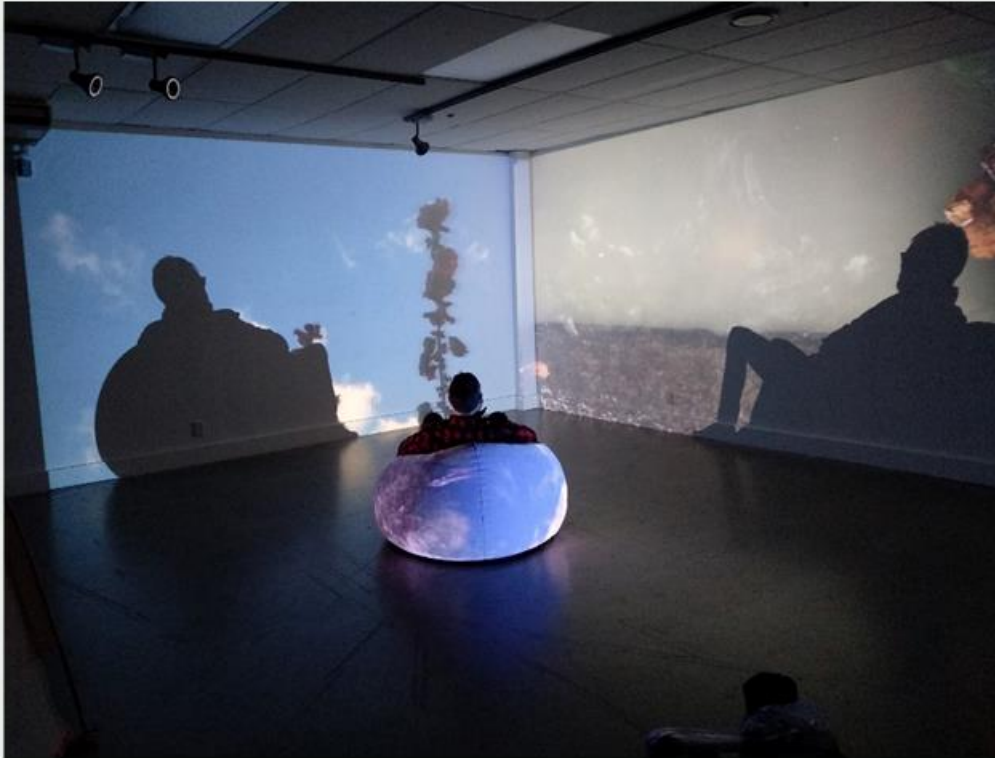


FIGURE 26: IMMERSIVE VIDEO INSTALLATION, 2018

Top: Research development residency at Pearce Gallery, Whitecliffe, 2018
Bottom: *I Don't Know*, solo exhibition at the artist-run space Mayonez, 2018

3.1.1 A DWELLING WITHIN A DWELLING

The particular usage of the verb form *to dwell*, just described, requires the convergence of attending-to and duration; this notion of attentive time-space informs my strategic use of the *dwelling within a dwelling* – a hut or tent-like construction inserted within the larger dwelling space of the home, gallery or social event. The material attunement embedded in the dwelling's structure indicate conceptual as well as playful intentions, suggesting a speculative or make-believe space that accentuates the cultural norms of the everyday space it occupies. Such a dwelling within a dwelling invites a participant to enter a space (a physical activity of stooping and climbing into, a conceptual activity of participating into the heterotopic space sanctioned by contemporary art) and to dwell for a moment (dwell with the body relaxed, dwell upon; the mind meandering and reflecting).⁹

3.1.2 VIDEO PROJECTION AND DWELLING SPACES

When a video projection is laid over a dwelling-space, the disembodied presence of a physically elsewhere entity is introduced. The projected image allows the visage of entities from outside and of an exterior scale to be brought into an interior space. The dwelling-space becomes immersed in water rushing or flowing on the street, looking and sounding wet in the viscosity-controlled indoor space. When lying inside the tent, the image is brought close. Video projection allows the variant scales of the interactions to be conflated; water gushing from a drainpipe could be a waterfall, water pools in what could be a flooded curb-side, a bath or a lake.

⁹ The potential physical, psychological and time based constraints that may limit participation are acknowledged and a working definition of 'participating viewer' provided in the introduction to this thesis.

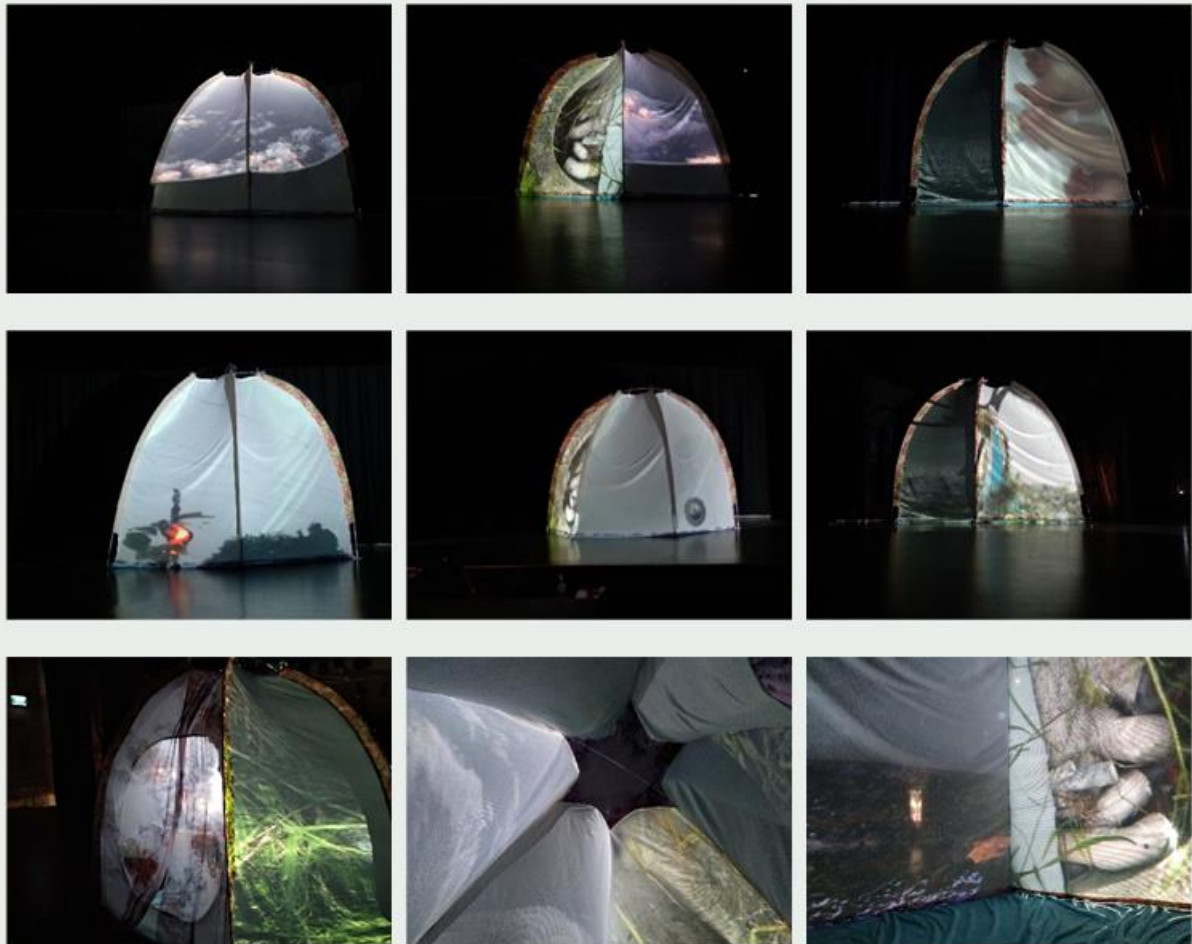


FIGURE 27: *I DON'T KNOW IF THE WATER KNOWS HOW SHE WILL MAKE HER WAY TO THE SEA*, 2019. GROUNDING STORY THE 7TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF LITERATURE, ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE, AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND (ASLEC-ANZ), AUSTRALIA

Video projections/ dwelling space

Conference attendees were invited to step out of conference time-space space to rest and reflect and experience stories told by water encountering the human. The everyday activities of water as gweie/it flows through my home (a bath filling and emptying, water pouring into the drain from our house, a fish-tank), through our street (rushing, pooling, gathering leaves and sticks,) falling as rain and gathering as clouds are shared through the medium of video projection.

The site, the university's historic theatre, allowed for multiple participatory options; a participant could slip into a seat for a long view of the installation, or they could follow the strip lighting through the darkened auditorium to mount the stairs to the stage and enter the dwelling. Inside the dwelling, they could relax and listen to the water and could listen to the recorded stories or contribute a story of their own.

3.2 REIMAGINING SPACE AND SPACE FOR REIMAGINING

Reimagining space: In this research, 'reimagining space' refers to the activity of convening a self-contained habitable installation within the everyday space of the home, gallery, conference or festival. It denotes an intention to respond to the physical, conceptual and social attributes of the site through the materiality of the installation with the intention that both site and the allelos/materials are rendered unfamiliar, and so opened for possible reimagining. The material engagements between artist, objects/materials and place seeks to provide an evocative space for an encounter in which the non-verbal object voice of the participating allelos/things might be perceived.

Space for reimagining: This refers to the time-space of participation; the experiential component that unfolds through the combination of activity, place, provocation and duration of the encounter or event. This research acknowledges that while each participant will experience something, it might or might not, or might to some degree, be an experience of heterotopic time-space. Speculation and reimagining might arise, and if so, it will be as one aspect of a multifaceted experience. In this context, reimagining is understood to be an active step of trust; to participate, one must agree to suspend disbelief, that is to suspend anthropocentric time-space and enter a heterotopia housed within mundane space. The intention is not to transport the viewer to another world but to invite them to hold open a time-space for thinking differently within the existing world.

Here it is important to reiterate that this research aims to facilitate subtle embodied moments in which a human might interact with, recognise, and reimagine a small aspect of relationship with a nonhuman entity. This reimagining might be a direct response to the experience or may arise in the days or weeks following, it might or might not be shared or articulated. This research seeks to provide conditions in which relationship and reimagining might emerge, heeding the advice of performance philosopher Will Daddario that "it is best to approach the impossible with the verb 'to strive,' thereby ignoring the promise of a thing done and embracing instead a plan of action."¹⁰

¹⁰ Will Daddario, 'Life Is Doing That Which We Must Think', *Performance Philosophy* 1 (2015): 168–74., 170.

3.2.1 CONVERSATION PIT

PART ONE, *DOMESTIC HUB CONVERSATION PIT*, WAS HELD AT MY HOME IN SUBURBAN MOUNT ALBERT, AUCKLAND, SEPT/OCT 2018.

PART TWO, *RM CONVERSATION PIT*, WAS UNDERTAKEN THROUGH A RM ARCHIVE RESIDENCY AT RM GALLERY & PROJECT SPACE, NOV/DEC 2018



FIGURE 28: *RM CONVERSATION PIT: THE AGENCY OF THINGS, 2018*

Conversation Pit was a two-part dialogic and dwelling project, in which twelve conversations were convened over four months in the spring of 2018. Each *Conversation Pit* event brought together a small group of people, a dwelling space and a provocation addressing a specific instance of suburban cohabitation. The primary intention of *Conversation Pit* was to facilitate reflection, consideration, and speculation on the influences of and alternatives to, normative Western demarcations of 'nature' and 'culture'. Bringing together the act of thinking through a verbal provocation with the physical and affective qualities of the dwelling space, *Conversation Pit* provided the conditions for a temporary heterotopia in which conceptual, embodied, and experiential modes of thinking might be brought together. Situated at the intersection of contemporary art practice and ecological discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand, *Conversation Pit* sought to bring together individuals who shared the environmental concerns addressed, but who might address these concerns through different disciplines. Participants with a background in science, industry and/or art, and with ecological involvements ranging across academic research, DIY, gardening and activism, were invited to think together around a small moment of cohabitation in our biosphere.

For *Domestic Hub Conversation Pit*, the participants were invited to enter the privacy of my home, then enter the intimacy of another internal space within it. In *RM Conversation Pit*, the invitation was to visit RM gallery after hours, walk through the deserted gallery and enter the small glass-walled archive room where a dwelling-space was convened amongst the archive shelving. The somewhat unusual situation of travelling to someone's house or a gallery after-hours for a two-hour conversation with strangers, sought to amplify the intimacy and playful strangeness of the dwelling space and provide conditions conducive to heterotopic time-space.



FIGURE 29: CONVERSATION PIT PROVOCATION #1: *SHARING IN AN INTIMATE WORLD*, 2018

Top: *Domestic Hub Conversation Pit*, 14 September 2018.

Bottom; *RM Archive Conversation Pit*, 27 November 2018.

Sharing in an Intimate World acknowledges the impossibility of maintaining an anthropocentric worldview in an era of eco-crisis and invites us to tease out ways to orient ourselves within a biosphere in which we are continuous with the network of entities we previously called nature. (Excerpt from transcribed verbal provocation)

The conversation was seeded with a speculative provocation which asked *how might we, as humans, relate to other entities in a post-anthropocentric manner?* It is important to note that this is a different question from *how we might bring about societal change?*. That is, the former addresses how we might reimagine the underlying structure of human/nonhuman relationships. In contrast, the latter addresses how we might bring about such a behavioural change *within the existing norms* of wider society. The emphasis on the speculative and relational possibilities of conversation provided conditions for generative thinking-together, in which imaginative possibilities might be expanded, and doubts, fears, and differences of perspective ruminated upon. It favoured imaginative alternatives over habitual discourses, such as that of the environmentally conscious individual struggling against an unsympathetic system. *Conversation Pit* explicitly refused traditional academic use-value, with no conclusions reached, professional outcomes achieved or ‘takeaways’ parsed.

Conversation Pit posed three provocations: *Sharing in an Intimate World*; *The Agency of Things*; and *Dwelling With*. The following is an excerpt from the text shared with participants before the conversation as a theoretical and philosophical ground within which each provocation addressed a specific aspect of daily life:

A common thread that may be traced through discourse surrounding the Anthropocene¹¹ is the critical role of active imagination in making the transition from an anthropocentric stance to the yet un-named identity-value arrangement we are, literally dreaming up for ourselves. This project directly engages contemporary art practice as a modality for this imaginative passage from disempowered, passive consumption in the Holocene to the active caring required in the Anthropocene. These conversations set out to catalyse moments of active engagement in which we might ponder together the implications of this re-imagined being. To speculate on how we might act and interact now that we find that we are human, and not our anthropocentric alter-ego Human. Talking our way into small steps of reimagining the here and now of dwelling together. [Conversation Pit 2019]

¹¹ Chapter One provides a discussion of the term Anthropocene.

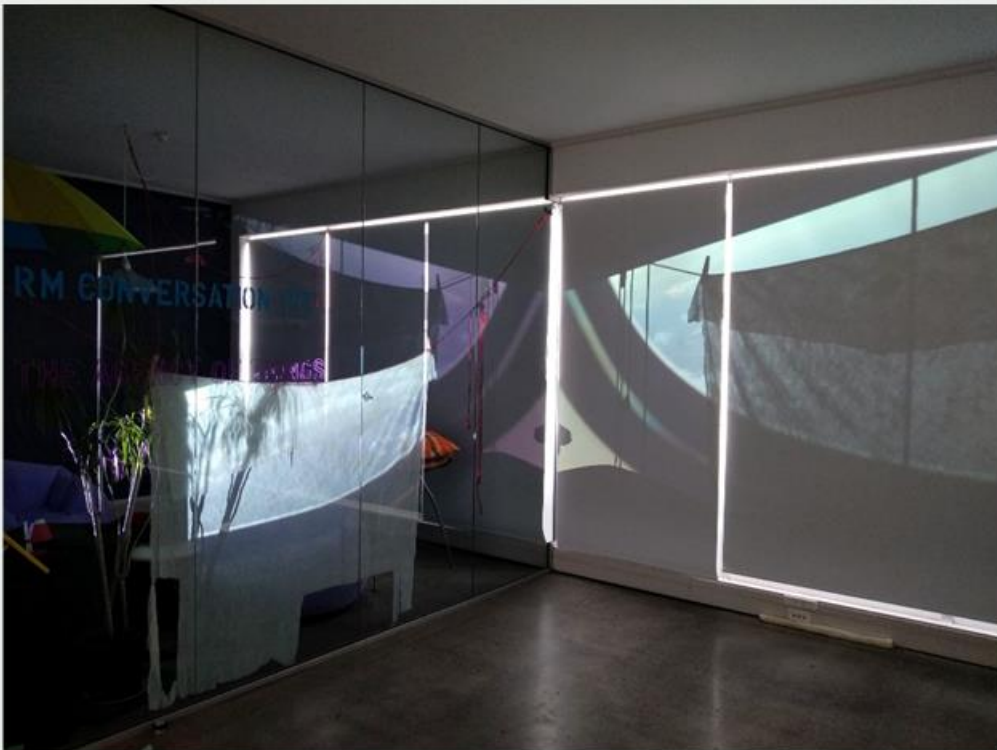


FIGURE 30: CONVERSATION PIT PROVOCATION #2: *THE AGENCY OF THINGS. (PETROLEUM AND WATER)*

Top: *Domestic Hub Conversation Pit*, 24 October 2018

Bottom: *RM Archive Conversation Pit*, 4 December 2018

Petroleum and water, four participants: two hydrologists, three motorbike riders, three adrenaline sports fanatics, a gardener, sharing a space with four motor bikes, five mountain bikes, two road cycles, six snowboards and a whole house water filtration system. The conversation followed these entities through discursive threads involving knowledge and care, passion and doubt.

The *Pit* in *Conversation Pit* provided a physical location for the conversation; a small dwelling space inserted within a conventional dwelling space. Each 'pit' enacted a playful material connection between site and provocation; a material structure through which to bring allelobeings/nonhumans into view. It asked the participants to consider the possibility that nonhumans might have a voice in our conversations and thinking, not just in this constructed moment, but as part of a shared nature-culture. While formally diverse each conversation pit took the form of an enclosing structure in which everyday objects were repurposed and their physiologies put to unconventional use. The construction was provisional, intended as a practical and strategic re-visioning and re-presenting of the object's material possibilities. The scale and function of these spaces were calibrated in terms of objects, things and places rather than to the physiology of the adult human being, creating a space of unfamiliar physical proximity for participating humans, animals and allelos/things.

The interweaving and overlapping of these qualities of object-being informed the character of each *Conversation Pit* in a material conversation: an orchestrated interplay of formal qualities like scale, colour and texture; of proximity between objects and discussants; of duration and participation. Beneath this, another conversation emerges, a tactile and bodily conversation of shared cultural histories and physical spaces. An exchange always at play between the objects themselves and with the humans who live among them.

To ensure the comfort of participants, and to convene conditions within which it might be possible to enter freely into speculative conversation and imaginative thinking together, the particularities of each event were fully discussed prior to the conversation. Personal email conversations took place with each individual to ensure they were well-informed on both the conversation and the nature of the dwelling space, and able to make an informed decision to engage with an experiential event. These communications included discussing the details of the provocation and the particularities of the dwelling space within which the conversation would take place, as well as providing some background reading to the provocation.

For *Domestic Hub Conversation Pit*, participation was via personal invitation, while in the case of *RM Conversation Pit*, conversations were facilitated via an open call from RM inviting expressions of interest in participating. From this pool of interested parties, small groups of two to four participants were negotiated, and a time and specific provocation agreed upon for each conversation. This process required the participant to commit to attending the event and to agree to enter the time-place of the conversation for a two-hour engagement. More importantly, it sought to ensure they were well-prepared to enter a heterotopic space and feel comfortable to participate with body and mind.



FIGURE 31: CONVERSATION PIT PROVOCATION #3: *BETWEEN ELSEWHERE AND AWAY (DWELLING WITH)*

Top: *Domestic Hub Conversation Pit*, 26 November 2018
Bottom: *RM Archive Conversation Pit*, 18 December 2018

Urban dwelling emerged from a culture in which we imagined our human selves as cradled between infinite earthly resources and a mythical 'away'. Home became normalised as a house and garden, a two-part structure demarcating an inside for human dwelling and an outside for all other entities. (Excerpt from transcribed verbal provocation)

The intention of the conversation element of *Conversation Pit* was to invite participation in thinking together as an activity, through which to hold open a hopeful space of unknowing. It invited rumination on what we do not know yet but might conjure in the shared imagination-space of conversation. I had hoped that this would be facilitated through the triangulation of the contra-anthropocentric provocation, the materiality of the object-centred dwelling space and the two-hour duration of the conversation with the stated intention of speculative reimagining. While participatory thinking together emerged spontaneously in some conversation pit events, other conversations, while interesting in themselves, stayed in the territory of discussing known content.

This led me to reflect upon how deeply entrenched the normative expectation that conversation is based upon talking together about what we know. It was a more considerable step to speculative conversation than I had anticipated. It became apparent that proposing and articulating the dynamics of thinking together was in itself no guarantee that the dynamic arising in the group would move beyond habitual conversation forms into speculative thinking.

It was only some months after the completion of *Conversation Pit* that I was able to participate in Christopher Braddock's *Invitation to Dialogue* where I was introduced to the thought of David Bohm, which has become influential for this research. *Invitation to Dialogue* followed Bohm's suggestion that a dialogue group should meet regularly over an extended period of time so that participants could learn to think together. As noted in Chapter Two, Braddock's dialogue group convened weekly for thirteen weeks, allowing time for the group to practice and become comfortable with observing and thinking about the activity of thinking.

Had I experienced *Invitation to Dialogue* before undertaking *Conversation Pit* I would have chosen to format it as an ongoing series of conversations, rather than discreet one-off events. However, I would retain the two-hour format of *Conversation Pit* over the shorter 40-minute duration of Braddock's project.

A second, related complication to entering into in-depth conversation about human-nonhuman interactions in the urban environment, was the predominance of a conception of ecology that conflates Nature with wilderness. In *Rambunctious Garden: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World* conservation biologist Emma Marris suggests that the tenacity of such a wilderness ideal is in part due to the conflation of science and ideology that underpins the notion of a baseline, a (Marris would suggest mythical) time at which a wilderness was pristine and stable.¹² Marris states:

¹² Emma Marris, *Rambunctious Garden: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World* (Audible Studios, 2011), 4.

for many conservationists, restoration to a prehuman or pre-European baseline is seen as healing a wounded or sick nature. For others, it is an ethical duty. We broke it; therefore we must fix it. Baselines thus typically don't just act as scientific before to compare with an after. They become the good, the goal, the one correct state.¹³

In the context of *Conversation Pit*, this perception made it more challenging to attend to the possibility that we might be part of and located within, a wider concept of nature, and on occasion, appeared to somewhat obscure the intertwined human/nature hybrid that is suburban cohabitation. I consider that this was at least partially a limitation arising from a verbal, human thought-based, provocation. Consequently, subsequent projects have investigated the efficacy of an object-oriented provocation.

¹³ Emma Marris, 4.

3.2.2 TO DREAM WHILE WAKING (WILDERNESS OF THINGS)



FIGURE 32: *TO DREAM WHILE WAKING (WILDERNESS OF THINGS)* PRESENTED AT THE 2019 ART ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND (AAANZ) CONFERENCE *Ngā Tūtaki - ENCOUNTER/S: AGENCY, EMBODIMENT, EXCHANGE, ECOLOGIES*. 3-7 DECEMBER 2019

The installation *To Dream While Waking (Wilderness of Things)* was part of an international conference¹⁴ which invoked *encounter* as a modality through which to articulate the four themes of *agency, embodiment, exchange* and *ecologies*, as applied to contemporary and historic art discourse. Over the week, these themes would be extensively verbalised and discussed in the abstract; in counterbalance, *To Dream While Waking* sought to directly engage non-verbal, experiential modes of inter-entity communication.

The installation incorporated three experiential modes; the dwelling space provided a resting place, a sensory buffer to the intense, cerebral engagement of the sessions. The installation of objects, the *Wilderness of Things*, used the language of site-specific installation to re-frame individual entities and draw in an audience familiar with this discipline.¹⁵ For those wishing to engage further, the participatory thought experiment *Imagination Encounter with Things* offered a moment of reflection on non-verbal interactions between humans and objects.

The playful invitation to enter a blanket hut was also a serious invitation to reflect on imaginative and child-like relationships with objects. Through inviting non-verbal, object-oriented participation within a language-centric conference, it sought to elicit critical reflection on the play between verbal articulation, internally verbalised thought, and the non-verbal material-language of objects. It invited participants to pause their perceptual process at the point at which the sensory (seeing, touching, smelling) transitions into articulation in language-based thought. That is, to hold back from a conditioned assumption of knowledge and wait with the object:

To dream while waking asks you to daydream consciously. To see with eyes half-closed what we cannot see with eyes wide open; the wildness of things. The agency and persistence of the things we have made, an agency or being which precedes and exceeds their human-use value as consumer goods. It invites you to enter seriously into playful imaginings and fabulations for a post-anthropocentric lifeworld, a wilderness of things. (Excerpt from artist statement)

¹⁴ The AAANZ conference was held in Auckland University's Owen Glenn building, a showcase of institutional prestige, eponymously named after its benefactor, businessman and philanthropist Sir Owen Glenn. I was allocated a room to the right of the spectacular glass foyer framing a view of the Auckland domain, Room 041, a bland thoroughfare room, with an indeterminate function as a student study area and venue for occasional events.

¹⁵ *Wilderness of Things* shares formal and installation ground with the work of New Zealand artists Dan Arps and Paul Cullen. This research shares the acute sensitivity to the materiality of domestic objects that inform the work of these two artists, however in this context the familiar vocabulary of the installation is a strategy that aims to draw the viewer into the participatory elements of the installation. The layering of three experiential modes, and the interactive aspect, clearly distinguishes a difference in intent and dynamic form from these other sculptural practices.

The installation element, *Wilderness of Things* spread out from the dwelling to occupy the surrounding space. To anchor the installation within its institutional context, the tables were inverted to form a terrain of sorts. These table-territories were populated by allelos/objects from the Domestic Hub, who I have worked with repeatedly. Here I am drawing on their ability to be recognisable items while also referring to something else. For example, a yellow knee-high stocking references a flesh-tint stocking, and by association, a human leg. It also calls to mind a flower or a treetop when attached to an inverted table leg.



FIGURE 33: *WILDERNESS OF THINGS*, 2019

To Dream While Waking (Wilderness of Things), 2019.
Details of *Wilderness of Things*

3.3 THE THIRD PLACE

Is there a way to bridge the distance between the scale of the phenomena we hear about and the tiny Umwelt¹⁶ inside which we witness, as if we were a fish inside its bowl, an ocean of catastrophes that are supposed to unfold? How are we to behave sensibly when there is no ground control station anywhere to which we could send the help message, "Houston, we have a problem"?¹⁷

This is the question with which Bruno Latour opened his lecture at the launch of the Sciences Po program in arts and politics in 2011. He concludes by positing that this is an issue of imaginative capacity, and that "to close the gap between the size and scale of the problems we have to face, and the set of emotional and cognitive states that we associate with the tasks of answering the call to responsibility without falling into melancholia or denial",¹⁸ is the challenge and "the triple task of scientific, political, and artistic representation."¹⁹ Latour returns to this question in his 2016 lecture, 'Why Gaia is not the Globe – and why our future depends on not confusing the two'.²⁰ Here Latour articulates the physical impossibility of globalism on a finite planet with the equally impossible desire of returning to pre-global nationhood, positing the need for a '*third place*', an as-yet-unnamed identify-value arrangement we are, literally, dreaming up for ourselves.²¹

The notion of a 'third place' opens out the imaginative possibility of a mode of being that is neither progressive nor regressive that, in the words of cultural studies scholar Lauren Grayson, "allows us to imagine engendering futures that are neither naïvely hopeful nor hopelessly apocalyptic."²² While the need for such a third-place is increasingly widely acknowledged both philosophically and, in the wake of Covid-19,²³ socially and politically, finding the steps toward achieving it is anything but straightforward. The one point of agreement is that such a transition will be ushered into being through an imaginative shift.

¹⁶ Umwelt refers to 'the perceptual life-world of an organism', drawn from the thinking of Estonian biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944)

¹⁷ Bruno Latour, 'Waiting for Gaia. Composing the Common World through Arts and Politics', 18.

¹⁸ Latour, 11.

¹⁹ Lauren Greyson, *Vital Reenchantments*;, 18. Referencing Latour's words quoted above.

²⁰ 'Why Gaia is not the Globe.' Panel debate with Bruno Latour. Accessed 19 November 2017, Faculty of Arts, Aarhus Universitet.

²¹ Latour suggests the name 'Phusis' for this third-place, the Greek word for 'everything that is movement, all that makes up life and death'.

²² Lauren Greyson, *Vital Reenchantments*;, 18.

²³ UNESCO, 'Water, Food and Energy Sustainability Nexus'.

This imaginative equation opens the possibility of imagining a notion of 'now' and 'future' that slides off the binary scales of regress-progress or utopia-dystopia. For theorist Donna Haraway, this third place requires us to 'stay with the trouble'²⁴ of the current moment. Rather than projecting trouble or salvation into the future, Haraway considers that: "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."²⁵ Haraway articulates her notion of a fecund, earthbound and intertwined third-place by invoking the portal of science fiction, cultivating a fertile territory of shared imagining that operates outside of normative expectations. Haraway plays with the acronym SF, entangling science-fiction with feminist and philosophical discourse; in Haraway's hands SF becomes not only science fiction but also "speculative feminism, science fantasy, speculative fabulation, science fact, and also, string figures."²⁶ This linguistic device allows Haraway to open the imaginative space of storying into the philosophical sphere, and to productively encounter the irreducible connection between imagining, articulating, building a narrative or story, becoming a fact and informing the structure of worldview. "It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories."²⁷ Haraway also addresses the process of imagining—together new stories with acuity, using the model of string figures or cat's cradle, a game in which string patterns are passed from one set of fingers to another, and the pattern worked as a collective endeavour.

Conversation Pit's three provocations, entitled *Sharing in an Intimate World*; *The Agency of Things*; and *Dwelling With*, were nested within this philosophical framework. Each provocation was manifest materially through the dwelling space and articulated verbally as a short text. This multimodal approach sought to link material stories with material things, to navigate a balance between habitually dominant, or — to borrow Haraway's words, heroic — verbal communication and frequently unnoticed material communication.

The last thing the hero wants to know is that his beautiful words and weapons will be worthless without a bag, a container, a net. Nonetheless, no adventurer should leave home without a sack. How did a sling, a pot, a bottle suddenly get in the story? How do such lowly things keep the story going?²⁸

²⁴ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

²⁵ Haraway, 1.

²⁶ Haraway, 10.

²⁷ Haraway, 12.

²⁸ Haraway, 118.

To ameliorate this bias, the verbal provocation was provided to the participants in advance but was not referred to directly in the *Conversation Pit*. Correspondingly, the material voice was amplified through playful juxtapositions and coalitions of everyday items. Through a considered balance of the enclosing materiality of the dwelling space and words held in the mind as memory, the conversation was subtly directed, while remaining in physical, associative, and conceptual interaction with the allelos/objects themselves.

The act of entering a hut for the purpose of a conversation restaged the everyday activity of conversation within a reflexive art context. It restaged humans doing what humans do; talking, laughing, eating and drinking in the company of objects, re-presenting it as an overtly multi-entity interface. It provided conditions that allowed the humans to come into awareness of the invited allelos/objects²⁹ as they quietly offered their thing-selves. Across the series of *Conversation Pit* events, I observed that the heterotopic conditions of *being with, attending to, and verbally acknowledging together* those who are not human, was itself an act of re-imagining human-nonhuman relationship. A subtle interaction of tactile affinity and imaginative association seemed to flow under and emerge through, the conversation.

To Dream While Waking (Wilderness of Things) sought to let things speak for themselves. In the participatory activity *Imagination Encounter with Things*, participants were invited to enter into a wordless encounter with an allelobeing/thing. In this situation, the object offered itself to the participant, in the first instance, as a *thing in the world*; a material provocation, inviting the participant to notice that it and they are entangled in a nature-culture cohabitation. To see that this person-object relationship disappears at their feet when they look for nature that is separate from human activity. Secondly, the object reveals itself as *always already*³⁰ entangled in a relationship of care, within which the participant finds they unwittingly bear the mantle of responsibility. In this instance, the object requests a relationship choice from the human participant: to be re-wrapped for a second encounter; to be thoughtfully placed in relationship with other objects; or to commit to an ongoing relationship and the responsibility of care that underpins ownership.

²⁹ I use the term 'invited object' to acknowledge that each *Conversation Pit* involved objects familiar with the specific provocation and location. Each object present was considered, invited and given a place in the same way that the human participants were invited and made to feel welcome.

³⁰ Terminology used by both Haraway and Morton for the situation of finding that a situation or relationship pre-exists your awareness of it.



FIGURE 34: *TO DREAM WHILE WAKING (WILDERNESS OF THINGS)*: IMAGINATION ENCOUNTER WITH THINGS, 2019

Wall text for Imagination encounter with things

Select a package from box of wrapped objects to take with you into the dwelling. Once inside I invite you to open the wrapping and contemplate (on and with) this thing. Imagine this inanimate object as a thing-in-itself, an entity with a lifeworld that does not fully coincide with its object-role in your human lifeworld. What preceded this object's current moment and what will follow-on? We have words to frame these two questions, and words are not neutral; let me ask these questions in three ways:

What material transubstantiation have brought this entity into being, and what possible future existences and transubstantiations might await it once it moves out of the human cultural sphere?

or

What materials is this thing made of and where do they come from? Where will this thing go, and how will its materiality change when it is discarded or thrown away?

or

What natural resource have humans drawn on to make this thing, and how can we dispose of it responsibly?

Then there is the more difficult question: if this object is an entity, how do we be together here, now?

On behalf of the objects, I make the following requests:

That you engage with this object seriously and participate fully and deeply in imaginative contemplation, for as long or short a duration as seems right to you.

That you respect the privacy of the object; what is said and thought in the dwelling space stays in the dwelling space. The contemplation is between you and the object alone.

That you part thoughtfully from the object; you may choose to find a place for it in the dwelling space; you may re-wrap it and return it to the box, or if wish, you can take it with you when you leave.

The *always already* flavour of this entanglement leads into the territory of object-oriented ontology and the suggestion that the operative mode of relationship between a human and an object is one of entanglement, rather than a clear-cut distinction between an active owner and passive object. From this perspective, an object always requests a relationship choice.

Here it is instructive to return to Morton's notion of 'access modes'. For Morton, thought, and particularly thought verbalised into language, is considered by the dominant culture to be the highest human access mode. Consequently, it is assumed to be the dominant access mode for understanding and narrating the world. Morton describes the action of biting into a peach as a mode of human accessing the peach³¹. A mode of experiencing, interacting with, participating in and understanding the peach. This is not a primarily thought/language-based experience. While such experience may be analysed and articulated through a thought/language translation, the incommensurability of the two is evident in the difficulty of accurately communicating a non-verbal experience, evidenced in common language phrases such as 'I can't find words for it'. The activity 'Imagination Encounter with Things' seeks to occupy this zone of incommensurability in such a way that the primacy of experience remains embedded in the bodies of the human and object participants.

³¹ Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, l. 1003.

3.4 NEW MATERIALISM AND AGENCY

While this research addresses ecological issues, it aligns with a growing body of thought that doubts the efficacy of an environmental movement that operates within a binary, humanist worldview; arguing in contrast, that change requires humans to accept and foster a biosphere in which agency is dispersed throughout all matter. It aligns itself with new materialist thinking, drawing on Jane Bennett's formulation of nonhuman agency and agentic assemblages, proposed in her 2010 book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Brian Massumi's *incorporeal materialism*,³² Karen Barad's *agential realism*³³ and Rosi Braidotti's *critical posthumanism*. Finally, it draws upon Lauren Greyson's re-articulation of this thinking through the lens of *affective wonder* in her 2019 book *Vital Reenchantments: Biophilia, Gaia, Cosmos, and the Affectively Ecological*.

Rather than rejecting the Western philosophical tradition outright, new materialist³⁴ thinking draws upon a parallel tradition that rejects Cartesian dualism in favour of the thought of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). Two early proponents of Spinoza's philosophy can be traced through the Baltic German biologist Jakob von Uexküll's (1864–1944)³⁵ notion of *Umwelt*, the experience-world made available by an entity's access modes, followed by Gilles Deleuze's *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*,³⁶ first published in English in 1988.

Bennett proposes a vital materialism that re-negotiates the efficacy of objects, materials and phenomena, positing that there is an intersubjective agency shared between human and nonhuman participants. Bennett positions her theory in relation to a history of human agency and free will, from Augustine through Kant, post-Kantian, Merleau-Ponty, Coole and Latour. Moving beyond the usual boundaries of vital materialism, Bennett engages Deleuze's notion of 'a life' and asks us to expand our understanding of life and vitality to include the sub-atomic vibrational energies of matter.

Applied to creative practice, Bennett's intersubjectivity takes the directive that the artist should 'let the materials speak' a step further, into the murkier territory of shared agency. Approached in this way, my research becomes a team project that is negotiated between my conglomerate self and the actants I call into play. In this context, the term 'actant' may be seen to nullify the semantic differentiation

³² Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect*.

³³ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*.

³⁴ New materialism is not a tightly defined movement, it is more a term that gathers range of re-evaluations of materiality, immanence.

³⁵ Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the World of Animals and Humans: With a Theory of Meaning*, Posthumanities 12 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

³⁶ Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*.

between 'material' and 'participant'. In developing a home into a biological hub, an earthworm operates as both (art) material and participant. A video projection may be understood as an agentic assemblage of entities, places, tools, devices, bodies, energy, electricity and light.

Once thought-space is open to the possibility of multiple nonhuman agencies, all of which may range from uncannily alike to radically dissimilar from human agency, the question arises: how might a human perceive a nonhuman? There are many voices with which to respond to this. Braidotti speaks from a feminist, neo-Spinozist perspective of radical immanence. This thesis aligns with Braidotti when she states:

In my view, the point about posthuman relations, however, is to see the inter-relation human/animal as constitutive of the identity of each. It is a transformative or symbiotic relation that hybridizes and alters the 'nature' of each one and foregrounds the middle grounds of their interaction.³⁷

The thesis similarly aligns with her articulation of the entanglement of nature-culture and mind-body and her call for extended minds and distributed cognition; however, it resists Braidotti's further step to entangle posthumanism and trans-humanism. This research expressly differentiates itself from the transhumanist readings of human-technology relations as tending towards hybridity; in contradistinction, this research seeks to collaborate with the autonomy and object-being of the individual technological device.

Feminist and theoretical physicist Karen Barad, draws these two perspectives together to formulate "an epistemological, ontological and ethical"³⁸ framework for agential realism. Barad addresses the question of how a human might perceive a nonhuman at a fundamental level through seeking to expose and discredit the assumptions that other entities should be ontologically defined in terms of not being human. They put the term posthumanism to work, articulating a definition that aligns with the intentions of this research and expresses the wider territory within which this thesis is located. Barad states:

my use of "posthumanism" marks a refusal to take the distinction between "human" and "nonhuman" for granted, and to found analysis on this presumably fixed an inherent set of categories. Any such hardwiring precludes a genealogical investigation

³⁷ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 79.

³⁸ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 32.

into the practices through which “humans” and “nonhumans” are delineated and differentially constituted.³⁹

Morton addresses the above question in terms of solidarity,⁴⁰ suggesting that humans might attune to and become cognisant of, the diverse ‘access modes’ through which individuals and species perceive or gain sensory access to their surroundings. Morton suggests that it would be useful for humans to acknowledge that thinking is one of many access modes available to the human, and is not the primary access mode of the biosphere.⁴¹

Auckland artist and biodynamic gardener Sarah Smuts-Kennedy has provided support and guidance in perceiving and acknowledging the agency of allelos/other than human entities. Smuts Kennedy joined me for a *Conversation Pit* in a blanket hut in my lounge, and in the unfolding conversation, suggested that if we think that we cannot communicate with another being, it is likely that we are speaking the wrong language. From Smuts-Kennedy, I learned that a woman can meditate with a Kauri tree⁴² and experience her body as part of their tree-body, traversing their energy flow from root to bough. I also learned that if a human wants to communicate with a bird, she should use the energy point on her forehead, known as both the eyebrow chakra and the third eye. Smuts Kennedy related a story of focusing this energy in communication with a flock of Pūkeko devouring her garden, offering them the gift of an area beyond her garden. The birds moved away. Smuts-Kennedy reflected that while this was good for her garden, she wished they had not gone quite so far away as she missed their presence. I tried this technique with the Blackbird who scratches up my garden; however, I found that he persuaded me that this was his garden too. We settled on him scratching less and me minding less. Now I love the Blackbird, and I indulge his garden scratching and fruit-eating like the besotted parent of a toddler.

A comparable methodology of open-ended waiting to attune may also be observed, albeit on a vastly different scale, in the research of the astrophysicist Luis Alvarez Gaume presented in the UK artist duo Semiconductor’s documentary *The View From Nowhere*,⁴³ included as part of the City Gallery Wellington’s exhibition *Semiconductor: The Technological Sublime*.⁴⁴ Gaume highlights the importance of imagination in astrophysics research. Gesturing to a wall of sophisticated technology, he explains

³⁹ Karen Barad, 32.

⁴⁰ See section 1.4 of this thesis.

⁴¹ Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, l. 197.

⁴² ‘Sarah Smuts-Kennedy Artist Residency | McCahon House’.

⁴³ Semiconductor *The View from Nowhere*. Accessed 17 June 2020, <https://semiconductorfilms.com/art/the-view-from-nowhere-2/>.

⁴⁴ ‘Semiconductor’.

that they have created this ambitious device to detect something that he cannot imagine, observing that if he knew what he was looking for, he wouldn't need all this equipment. Maybe it will detect something; a signal, a frequency of some sort, perhaps it will detect the third dimension. Or maybe it will find nothing. I suggest there is a similar methodology at play here, a curious parallel between this large-scale research operation and my small earthbound enquiry in which I am seeking to attune my physical body to receive as yet unimagined communications from the entities with whom I cohabit.



FIGURE 35: WATER

Top: Collecting rainwater

Middle: Collecting shower water and kitchen water

Bottom: Diverting rainwater to garden

3.5 DOMESTIC HUB: DOING, THINKING, AND FEELING

The chicken nestles eggs carefully under herself, scooping them gently with her neck and underside of her beak. Watching her loving interaction, I feel an inarticulate mixture of empathy, compassion and uneasiness. I will collect her eggs for my family to eat, and beyond that, I have ensured that her eggs are not fertile by excluding roosters from the flock. Caring, manipulating and eating are incommensurate in the world I was raised in, the Western worldview I am holding in abeyance. The either/or equation I am keeping at bay is - either it is much less sentient than me, and I eat it, or it is a sentient individual, and I do not eat it. I am waiting to feel, think and articulate a third option, in which respect, sentience and eating are reconciled.

Small in scale, slow in duration, the Domestic Hub endeavours to reinvent the daily acts of cohabitation that play out in my own suburban home. In so doing, I am actively revising my own role as a human, carer, fellow entity, consumer, and civic landholder. As a woman, I am recalibrating my internal balance of freedoms. *Freedom from* a gender-based allocation of household tasks and *freedom to* care for and take time with the multi-entity co-inhabitants of my home and garden, and to frame this activity as voluntary acts of interspecies communication rather than unpaid labour.⁴⁵

The methods that strategically slow this research and embed it in daily life are usefully articulated by Will Daddario in an essay for the *Performance Philosophy* journal with the grammatically ambiguous title 'Life Is Doing That Which We Must Think'. Daddario uses this title to navigate the text, suggesting that "Where we hear the phrase, 'Doing life is that which we must think,' then, we can imagine a fusion of the first and last words—Doing/think—to combine into something like Adorno's thinking actionism."⁴⁶ Daddario proposes that a research methodology of doing, enacting, or performing allows a researcher to:

re-conceptualise what thinking means, does, and is. For if thinking no longer refers to an act that faithfully adheres to the criteria of one privileged discipline but now emerges through the doing of artistic and intellectual expression, then there are many forms of thinking that compel exploration and that have hitherto resisted exploration because, perhaps, of their radical banality.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ As articulated in section 2.2.1

⁴⁶ Will Daddario, 'Life Is Doing That Which We Must Think', 169.

⁴⁷ Will Daddario, 169.

In a gesture of 'radical banality,' this research is founded on a practical response to a speculative hypothesis. At the outset of the thesis, I proposed that If I was to take seriously the philosophical notion of the third-place as an imaginative rather than physical location, then a interspecies relational third-place might be found here, now, in my ordinary life in my conventional, middle-class suburban home.

This hypothesis frames the research question: 'Can creative research committed to attending with care, holding a receptive space of unknowing, and attuning to nonhuman agency reimagine and reframe suburban cohabitation so as to open these relationships for re-negotiation on new terms, understood experientially and viscerally, as well as intellectually?'

The research project, the Domestic Hub, was instigated in 2016 to test this proposition, with no predetermined idea of an outcome or what role it might play within the thesis. I set out to put aside my habitual knowledge and assumptions of human and nonhuman roles and learn to participate with my domestic community and respond to their myriad life-needs. Attending with care led to revised gardening, cleaning and waste disposal habits. I drew on the shared knowledge-pool of the DIY community to build a composting chicken house and to learn how to make water-conserving wicking gardens to grow food for my growing multi-species family.

The project of the Domestic Hub has unfolded over the past four years as an imaginative recalibration of my day-to-day multi-entity interactions. During this time, I have documented and invited participation in the slow process of transitioning my home from passive participation in urban infrastructure to a biological hub more responsive to the cycles of actants that move through it, such as water, oxygen, carbon dioxide, and the allelos/things that traditionally enter as food, processed goods or hardware, and leave as waste. It is an ongoing and non-linear process of learning to perceive and respond to the volitions of the many actants significantly other to myself. Here I qualify 'learning' as a verb; seeking to learn. Learning to learn from nonhuman entities themselves.⁴⁸ Trying, with indeterminate efficacy, then trying again, slowly building a repertoire of sensory modalities. The whole process is marked in equal measure by missteps, loss and painful insights, as well as by thriving biodiversity, increasing awareness of solidarity, and plentiful harvest. It has involved negotiating with

⁴⁸ Carl Mika, *Indigenous Education and the Metaphysics of Presence: A Worlded Philosophy*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 62. My experiential leaning finds an instructive parallel in Carl Mika's differentiation of the Māori notion of *Ako* from the Western concept of education. Mika states: "The worlded self (and here I address education in its more conventional vein), in order to authentically learn something, must be in awe of it. He or she must be essentially mystified by the fact that it simultaneously constitutes the self and yet appears outside of the self; the learner must be thoroughly rapt with the possibility that an object is retaining an element of the unseen to itself; and he or she even needs to forego learning about the object and instead involve him- or herself with the deep uncertainty that comes from a lack of knowledge about it, brought about because of the thing's self-retention and its constitution of the learner."

family members, neighbours, and local authorities. In the latter part of the research, it has involved the balancing of both writing an exegesis and attending mindfully to its many research participants.

3.5.1 DOMESTIC HUB: SMALL MOMENTS OF COHABITATION

While this research project is based in care, its intentions are in no way utopian. Every step of the way through my DIY experiment, I have bought plastic and things (allellos) from China, used toxic paints, unearthed living organisms, and limited the freedom of seven chickens. It has made me realise how thoroughly complicit I am in our systems of consumption and consumerism. Where possible, I have repurposed materials and objects, and drawn on the resources hoarded in our garage, slowing slightly the flow of entities passing through a global system of consumption. The value of this venture, and undoubtedly its most important outcome, is that by participating in this way with those I now consider my significant others, the way I apprehend and experience other entities on a bodily level has been significantly modified. I value *things*, entities, objects and time, differently. I have experienced shocking moments of finding myself identifying on a visceral level with bodies such as water flowing down the street gutter, or the trees thriving in their mismatched profusion in my local cycleway⁴⁹.

Similarly, common garden 'weeds' take on value as delicacies for chickens, worms, or compost. I see them in other people's gardens. I desire them and grieve their neglect. I no longer see 'waste' and 'weeds' but things that 'we', those of us who cohabit together, can eat or use.

⁴⁹ Oakley Creek Walkway, an urban stream running through a wooded gulley in which the history of colonisation and redressing of colonisation can be experienced in the aggregate of old oaks, miscellaneous self-seeded trees, and native re-plantings.

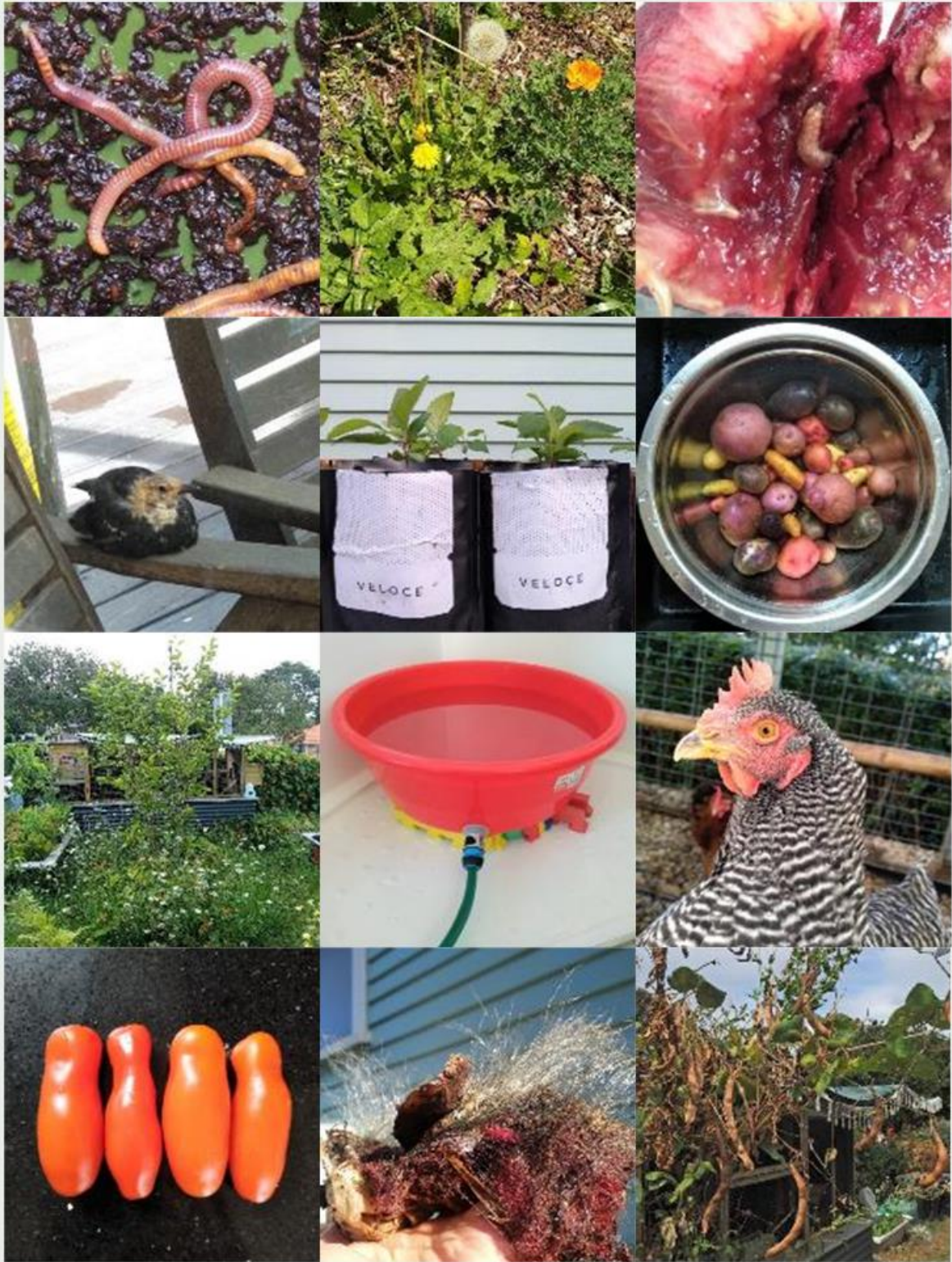


FIGURE 36: DOMESTIC HUB: SMALL MOMENTS OF COHABITATION

3.6 SUBURBAN ENTANGLEMENTS

3.6.1 FRITZ HAEG: *EDIBLE ESTATES*



FIGURE 37: FRITZ HAEG, *EDIBLE ESTATES REGIONAL PROTOTYPE GARDEN #2: LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 2006* PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

In converting a suburban property into an organic multi-species community, the Domestic Hub shares common ground with the large-scale participatory project *Edible Estates* by American artist Fritz Haeg. Between 2005 and 2013, Haeg worked with suburban landowners, communities, and galleries to convert sixteen front lawns across the US, London, and Amsterdam into edible gardens. Haeg leverages the platform of contemporary art to challenge the suburban norm of the well-kept front lawn. The *Edible Estates* project incorporates; a personal working relationship with a homeowner, a provocative artwork for a gallery audience through photo documentation, and a subsequent print publication⁵⁰. It also becomes a visible intervention into the suburban landscape, inviting passers-by and the wider suburban community to reflect upon suburban norms and the possibility that different choices could be made.

While Haeg's large-scale project and the Domestic Hub discussed in this thesis both bring creative practice to bear in transforming suburban property, the difference between the two is not only one of scale but also of intention. *Edible Estates* starts out with a suburban lawn and reaches completion a year later with an established multi-species edible garden. It challenges the established norm of front lawn by superimposing the traditions of biodynamic and organic gardening.

⁵⁰ *Edible Estates: Attack on the Front Lawn*. Expanded second edition 2010, Metropolis books.

The model Haeg employs is one in which the artist pays an extended visit to lead a participatory art project within a (suburban) place and community. The artist participates with consultation, community building, knowledge sharing and resourcing, seeking to visibly challenge suburban lawns and facilitate alternative ways of cohabitating. When the project is complete, the artist moves on. In the hope that this garden will seed others, Haeg provides extensive instructional support on his website.⁵¹

In contrast, the Domestic Hub research project is focused on working intimately with one particular suburban location. The intention here is to bring about transformation through working with and responding to the entities/allelos who live here. While this research draws on organic gardening and DIY resources, it aims to respond to the site as a community of beings, proposing that it might be the human, rather than a place, that is in need of correction. My project operates at a lower level than Haeg's. From the perspective of such a fundamental, earthy reimagining it could be contested that in replacing lawn with a multi-species edible garden Haeg superimposes the traditions and norms of biodynamic and organic gardening over the existing norms.⁵²

The research commitment to waiting with receptive unknowing articulated in Chapter One, where I state my intention to 'remain alert to new knowledge forms' requires me to hold in abeyance the *certainty* that underpins human-based knowledge forms. Here I am resisting the certainty of biodynamic gardening principles in the same way that I am resisting the certainty that grass is preferable to a dandelion. The primary concern of the Domestic Hub project is learning to cohabit alongside others – the making of a garden is simply one step in this learning process.

Haeg's current project now directs his focus to the care of a single place. In the art-life undertaking Salmon Creek Farm, Haeg has purchased a rundown 1970s commune in California and is reimagining it into what he describes as "a sort of queer commune-farm-homestead-sanctuary-school hybrid".⁵³ In two relevant respects, Salmon Creek Farm reflects on a larger scale the activities and intentions addressed in the Domestic Hub. Firstly, in translating an art practice with a suburban focus to a rural context, it challenges the assumptions that underlie the demarcations of what human-nonhuman cohabitation is possible and appropriate in each. Secondly, through perceiving art, life, and place as mutually entangled, it may provide imaginative conditions in which, rather than humans teaching humans about nonhumans, humans might learn directly from the nonhumans they cohabit with.

⁵¹ Fritz Haeg, 'Edible Estates / About'.

⁵² This critique must of course be underwritten with the caveat that a) it is a life-giving and biosphere healing replacement, and b) Haeg's intention is to bring about just such a transition of norms.

⁵³ Fritz Haeg, 'Salmon Creek Farm', accessed 22 October 2020, <http://salmoncreekfarm.org/>.

3.6.2 SUBURBAN FLORAL ASSOCIATION: *SHOPFRONT*



FIGURE 38: SUBURBAN FLORAL ASSOCIATION, *SHOPFRONT*, 8-19 MARCH 2011. 12-DAY EVENT-BASED INSTALLATION PROJECT FOR AUCKLAND ARTS FESTIVAL, COMMISSIONED BY *LETTING SPACE*. STATION SQUARE, CNR BROADWAY AND REMUERA RD, NEWMARKET RAILWAY STATION, AUCKLAND. PHOTO COURTESY OF SUBURBAN FLORAL ASSOCIATION

A further generative reflection on suburban cohabitation may be found in the 2011 participatory project *Shopfront* by Suburban Floral Association, a “collaborative art enterprise”⁵⁴ of Monique Redmond and Tanya Eccleston, in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland. *Shopfront* occupied a not-yet-leased shop and spilled out into the adjoining square of a newly built retail and apartment complex in the upmarket urban centre of Newmarket.⁵⁵ For twelve days the square was occupied by a shifting array of potted plants and bench seating, and the shopfront was filled both physically and digitally, with the plants and flowers of the suburbs. People passing by could stop to talk and if they chose, they could take a plant home with them from the array of cuttings propagated by Redmond and Eccleston. By day, the shop hosted *Hibiscus Film*, a long take of a single hibiscus flower moving gently in the breeze, and a schedule of events which included a flower arranging workshop and a series of public talks. By night, the front window was used to screen *Drivebys 2010:2011*, a series of still photographs of hydrangeas flowering in suburban front gardens, shot from the perspective of a passing car.

Aspects of Suburban Floral Association’s project may be interpreted as intersecting with the intentions and methodology put forward in this thesis. This research proposes that in *Shopfront*, Suburban Floral Association set out to bring the suburban coexistence of humans and plants into the social space of urban dwelling humans and in addition, the critical space of art discourse; an intention that resonates in this thesis. While *Shopfront* was directed towards the subtleties of social and vegetal dynamics within

⁵⁴ Suburban Floral Association, *SHOPFRONT*, accessed 13 November 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/suburbanfloralassociation/>.

⁵⁵ *SHOPFRONT* was presented in association with of the Auckland Arts Festival 2011

urban and suburban locations, this research contends that a parallel methodological approach can be detected in Suburban Floral Association: multimodal strategies of de-familiarising, reframing, and inviting caring interactions with nonhuman suburban cohabitants.

In addition, this research suggests there is a more subtle research congruence at play, proposing that the growing, sharing, admiring, and imaging of vegetal forms evidences caring interactions that have much in common with Morton's notion of solidarity and the multi-species form of caring-with that this thesis proposes in Chapter One.

In the essay accompanying *Shopfront*, garden writer, educator and gardener, Hannah Zwartz, suggests that front gardens are "the faces we show society"⁵⁶ and can be an expression of personality, a reflection of the era of their planting, and the adherence to or flaunting of normative expectations of gardens and upkeep. This research suggests that *Shopfront*, *Edible Estates* and the Domestic Hub project engage with aspects of the public-private interface of the suburban front garden. It might be in the etiquette of passing by and looking; the resilience of the hydrangea noted from a car window in Suburban Floral's *Drivebys*,⁵⁷ the ambiguous space between footpath and front garden observed by GoPro and bike in *Sidestreet* addressed in Chapter Four of this thesis, or an anonymously initialled passionfruit hanging on the street side of the Domestic Hub. Or it may take the form of personal interactions, from the social tradition of exchanging plant cuttings discussed by Zwartz,⁵⁸ to the donation of flowers and foliage in *Shopfront*,⁵⁹ to conversation generated with neighbours and community in each *Edible Estates*⁶⁰ iteration. At the Domestic Hub, it might be a neighbour stopping to enquire about a DIY rainwater diversion system or arriving at the door with a stray chicken having heard our chickens from the street.

⁵⁷ Hannah Zwartz, 'The Welcoming Committee'.

⁵⁸ 'www.lettingspace.org.nz - Suburban Floral Association'.

⁵⁹ Hannah Zwartz, 'The Welcoming Committee'.

⁶⁰ Fritz Haeg, 'Edible Estates / About'.

3.7 THE WATER, WHICH IS BRACKISH AND FULL OF LIVING THINGS

These waters are slow-moving. There are many biting insects. The Blue Heron stands on one leg and waits. These waters favour wriggling and swimming, sinking, floating up and emerging with wings. Neither swimmable nor wade-able this water is physiologically incompatible with mammals; legs become tangled and trip, skin gets bitten and torn. Boats become entangled or run aground. Here movement is on the swamp's terms.

While this research methodology involves touching and feeling (or, the haptic and related affect), it should not be misunderstood as 'feel-good' or utopian in its intentions. Grounding the research in the everyday activities of coexistence in the Domestic Hub is a conscious strategy to resist anthropomorphising⁶¹ nonhuman entities and glossing over the often-gritty reality of human-nonhuman interaction⁶². Even on the small-scale of a suburban property, the messy reality of caring, with its attendant brutal decisions of whom to kill and whom to let live, and my frequent gardening failures, provide a less than idealistic 'back-to-nature' reference point:

The chickens that I raised from eggs are no longer laying regularly; should I kill them and eat them? The cat, my research companion, is hit by a car and crawls into the garden to die. I cannot find her until I smell her decomposing body and follow the blowflies to her hiding place.

This research methodology of seeping boundaries refuses to limit the possibilities of encounter or to turn aside from the uncomfortable and socially or professionally compromising material that arises. This includes the decision not to censor experience that may go beyond the norms of appropriate sensation and behaviour for inclusion in academic research. Morton's thinking on the intimacy of coexistence with nonhumans is instructive in this regard. Morton proposes that rather than a utopian togetherness "coexistence is in our face: it is our face. We are made of nonhuman and nonsentient and nonliving entities. It's not a cozy situation: it's a spooky, uncanny situation." He goes so far as to conjure up the vision of "the charnel ground at the end of the world" to describe the place in which we find ourselves when the aesthetic effect constituting our notion of 'world', collapses. When we were situating ourselves within this anthropocentric worldview, the (appearance of) world provided a

⁶¹ The distinction between acknowledging nonhuman agency and projecting human agency or characteristics is addressed in the definition of agency in Chapter One.

⁶² A reality brought into sharp focus in the Covid-19 pandemic. This is addressed in more depth later in this chapter.

foreground, in which the human drama was played out against the passive background of 'nature'. When we are forced to acknowledge this foreclosure, we find ourselves obliged into closeness and intimacy with all things: animals, garbage, nuclear waste, plastics, bacteria, and fellow humans.

My experience of transitioning toward an understanding of nature as not-other, brings with it the embodied awareness that other entities are my sister, my brother, my mother and continuous with me. It requires me to feel the damage to life and being right here beside me, inside me, and ongoing as perpetrated by my actions. Acknowledging intimacy with the nonhuman world requires recognising my implication in continuing systemic violence and subjugation of these lives and beings. It necessitates feeling this violence, trauma and loss in my own body. It requires me to be racked by gut-wrenching sorrow and not to hide in shame, but to be humble and receptive to uncomfortable knowledge and experiences, to acknowledge my complicity in unwise knowledge and ways of knowing. To meet these others on common ground is to feel the anguish of our actions. In this regard, my intention is to draw participating individuals into the experience of reimagining themselves within the biosphere as both caring and cruel. In Morton's words; "Art in these conditions is grief-work. We are losing a fantasy—the fantasy of being immersed in a neutral or benevolent Mother Nature."⁶³

⁶³Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, l. 3462.

3.8 SMALL (POLITICAL) GESTURES

The scholarship of the curator, teacher, art critic, and writer Mika Hannula is informative in relation to my own navigation of philosophy, theory, and creative research within this thesis. In his 2006 book *The Politics of Small Gestures: Chances and Challenges for Contemporary Art*,⁶⁴ Hannula provides a detailed analysis of the affective potential of creative research that is embedded within daily life:

A small gesture generates opportunities to think, feel and hear alternatives — and then to learn how to implement and to maintain them. Not in a full-scale solution for the big gesture, but in a mundane, day-to-day act of trying to make everyday life a little more worthwhile. It is about the beauty of ordinary acts. A process that is filled with trials and errors, and with amazingly few successes.⁶⁵

In articulating the small political gesture, Hannula delves into the everyday details of listening, attending to, and making space for the emergence of something that is not entirely quantifiable. A situation in which "something in the experience or act of person A that cannot be separated from the actual experience. It is therefore to a certain extent not translatable. Something cannot be communicated."⁶⁶

In a similar vein to my current thesis research, Hannula places emphasis on combining rigour with playfulness as a working dynamic for experiential art practice. Hannula is clear that playfulness is not merely a decoration or sweetener; instead, he argues for play as an integral component of experiential research and the thinking-and-doing of meaning-making. Hannula aligns the small political gesture with a cognitive stance of playful-speculative engagement, with trying and failing and trying some more. A cocktail of pleasure, risk, sincerity and fallibility that opens out a participatory project for affective experiential engagement. It is a research perspective in which 'to a certain extent' and 'good enough' are more trustworthy (life-worthy) guidelines than absolute certainty and unequivocal success. They provide ground for "Something that makes the ends meet, not perfectly and not always even so elegantly, but it does the job. It keeps things going. The idea of 'to a certain extent' is synonymous with 'good enough'. That 'something' is what makes the act or event worthwhile, it is the core content of the activity."⁶⁷

While Hannula's analysis is focused on the complexity of human life-worlds as they intersect in participatory practice, I suggest that these dynamics might be productively extended as a working

⁶⁴ Mika Hannula, *The Politics of Small Gestures*.

⁶⁵ Hannula, 16.

⁶⁶ Hannula, 46.

⁶⁷ Hannula, 45.

proposition for participatory creative research that engages equally with humans and allelos/things. I propose that an artist, attending carefully to things (objects, entities, plants and animals) might *feel and hear alternatives* to the anthropocentric narrative and might *learn how to implement and to maintain them* as the core dynamic of a participatory research practice.

Here it is important to note that for Hannula, the small political gesture is small in terms of style rather than scale. It is politically small, seeking out subtle, personal impact, as opposed to a large emphatic gesture that aims to bring about sweeping change. Scale and duration are two components of the many elements that contribute to the efficacy of a small gesture. Sometimes a large-scale project can repeatedly activate a small gesture. I suggest that a pertinent example of a large-scale small political gesture can be seen in *HighWaterLine* by American artist Eve Mosher.



FIGURE 39: EVE MOSHER, *HIGHWATERLINE*. LEFT: *HIGHWATERLINE E NYC*, 2007. RIGHT: *HIGHWATERLINE BRISTOL*, 2014, IN ASSOCIATION WITH *INVISIBLE DUST*, *CREATIVE CATALYSTS* AND ISOBEL TARR (COORDINATOR). PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF EVE MOSHER

HighWaterLine was initiated in 2007 as a performative and participatory work in which Mosher used a line marker to draw a chalk line along seventy miles of New York waterfront, ten metres above the existing waterline, indicating the level that scientists, government agencies and insurance companies understood water would rise to in a big storm. Marking a chalk line across a city is a small but visible gesture; the chalk line and the hand pushed marker familiar on the sports field are rendered strange in their unexpected appearance in an urban street. The work becomes personal and political once the residents approach the artist and begin to talk about the mark and its implications. Encouraged by the impact and community engagement generated by *HighWaterLine* New York City, Mosher and a group of collaborators opened the project for a collaborative extension, leading to *HighWaterLine* Miami, Philadelphia, and Bristol, and to the provision of an open-source 'action guide' available as a learning

tool for communities wishing to participate. While *HighWaterLine* has its own website and multiple iterations; each time a person from a community pushes a chalk line marker through the streets and talks to a stranger about rising water levels the gesture is small, political, and new.

This research does not set out to provide a template or instructional guidelines for developing a domestic hub, in the way that Mosher does with *HighWaterLine*, and as Haeg does with *Edible Estates* discussed previously. This research does, however, offer a model for embracing speculative unknowing in everyday life. Specifically, it seeks to spark a moment of affective wonder within mundane interactions with nonhumans, with the possibility the experience might linger as imaginative potential to re-emerge spontaneously at a later date. This dynamic can be observed in a student commenting that she could not look at her disposable coffee cup in the same way after encountering the work *Milk bottle*⁶⁸, or a participant of *Thanking the Birds and the Bees the Vines and the Trees*⁶⁹ observing that the next time she visited, she met the trees like old friends.

On other occasions, it is the quietness of a small work encountered alone that provides the efficacious moment. Hannula recounts a small gesture that resonates with this thesis; the 2003 work *A Bag Full of Snow* by Irish artist Peter McCaughey.⁷⁰ While attending a workshop in Helsinki, McCaughey exchanges his personal belongings for a suitcase full of snow. On his return to Glasgow, he shared his bag of snow with friends, arriving at their door and inviting them to stand barefoot in his suitcase of Helsinki snow. "This was about the sensation of confronting a difference through an individual experience of it. And yes, it was definitely about doing something rather silly, but something that generated a logic of its own, and a sensation that you cannot repeat, and an experience that belongs there and then to these friends of his."⁷¹

The research that forms this thesis is undertaken as a series of small political gestures that are also personal and intimate in scale and that generate an experience that belongs to the participants, both human and not. Each event focuses on gestures that unfold slowly, attend to mundane activities and take time with things so familiar that they are habitually overlooked. It may be a small act of taking seriously, in thought, action or conversation the things that unfold here and now; within my lungs, under my feet, in the space between my kitchen and the compost bin. This thesis contends that convening time-space to speculate on contra normative possibilities for cohabitation, or asking an art

⁶⁸ *Milk bottle*, 2019

⁶⁹ *Thanking the Birds and the Bees the Vines and the Trees*, 2020, Chapter 4

⁷⁰ Hannula, *The Politics of Small Gestures*, 93.

⁷¹ Hannula, 96.

audience to sit with and think seriously – and with care – about and with an object, is a small act of subversion and resistance to the “instrumentalization of our life worlds”.⁷²

⁷² Mika Hannula, *The Politics of Small Gestures*, 4

3.9 CONVENING HETEROTOPIC TIME-SPACE

This thesis uses active verb forms such as ‘holding space’ ‘convening’ and ‘attentively waiting’ to point to the conception of time-space as active potentiality. It acknowledges that while the artist might provide favourable conditions, the experience of heterotopia arises as a spontaneous incursion of strangeness through the fabric of the normality of everyday life. In ‘actively waiting’ the research seeks to quiet for a moment the external clamour of activity. However, more importantly, it seeks to pause the habitual internal noise of productive, knowledgeable thinking and to provide a moment of silent thought space. Here my thesis runs parallel to the ideas of philosopher and educator Carl Mika (Tuhourangi and Ngati Whanaunga), when he points out that, from an Indigenous perspective, silence is an active component of being, thinking, and speaking:

Silence may indeed be construed as a language of sorts. This equality of language and silence should not lead us to think that silence has to be language in order to be of any worth, however. It declares itself by virtue of its own taciturn presence; it coalesces as itself and thus expresses itself to all other things in the world. Silence’s own brand of clamour is not the same as loud speech – it is not as direct and forthright – but it is no less demanding for all that.⁷³

Mika continues with a simple statement that articulates a problematic space for the Western mind. “Without a reverence for silence, the world would simply be comprised of what is able to be heard or felt.”⁷⁴ Within this thesis, convening an object-oriented heterotopic time-space is a strategy through which a Western-educated artist/participant might encounter such a philosophically complicated and historically and culturally contested silence.

In this situation, agency rests on the things themselves, expressed through the material agency of the constructed dwelling space. The artist works with the allelos/things, attending to materiality, hospitality and the compatibility of participants. However, once the event is convened, the artist fades into the background, allowing quiet, energetic interactions to unfold between alleobeings/objects, between things and place, and between things, place and participant. In the context of the conference, this proffered a small gesture of resistance to normative institutional research expectations, opting for a dispersed unmeasurable experience rather than an institutionally productive ‘provable research outcome’. However, it brings to the fore a paradox innate to the research: To grant autonomy of the

⁷³ Carl Mika, *Indigenous Education and the Metaphysics of Presence: A Worlded Philosophy*, 47.

⁷⁴ Carl Mika, 47.

human-allelos interaction requires me to forego the artist-centric, and I suggest anthropocentric expectation, that I would in some way witness, observe or gather information from the exchange. In this way, the anthrocontineric research methodology resists producing an outcome with human use-value. The encounter can be traced only through the movement of objects. As the artist, I can return after the event and critically reflect upon from the absence of a particular object, and the careful placement of another within the installation.

DOMESTIC HUB CONVERSATION PIT: BETWEEN ELSEWHERE AND AWAY; MULTI-SPECIES
CONVERSATION

THE CONVERSATION WAS HELD IN THE LATE AFTERNOON SO THAT DUSK WOULD FALL, AND THE CHICKENS WOULD DEPART OFF TO THEIR BED SHORTLY BEFORE THE CONVERSATION PIT GUESTS RETIRED FOR THE EVENING. TOWARD THE END OF THE CONVERSATION PIT AS WE WERE TALKING AND THE CHICKENS WERE READYING THEMSELVES FOR SLEEP, MAMA ROCKETTE, THE LEADER OF THE FLOCK, USHERED THE OTHER CHICKENS OFF TO BED THEN CAME TO THE OPEN DOORWAY OF THE CHICKEN HOUSE. LOOKING DIRECTLY AT US, SHE STOOD UP TALL WITH HER WINGS TO HER SIDES AND OPENED HER BEAK WIDE IN A SILENT EXPRESSION OF COMMUNICATION, THEN DEPARTED UP THE RAMP INTO THE NESTING BOX TO JOIN HER SISTERS. IT WAS A PERPLEXING MOMENT OF INTERACTION, THE THREE OF US HUMANS FELT THAT SHE HAD MADE A COMMUNICATION TOWARD US, BUT WE WERE NOT SURE EXACTLY HOW TO UNDERSTAND IT.

3.9.1 ON HOLDING SILENCE: TO DREAM WHILE WAKING (WILDERNESS OF THINGS) AND TALKING: CONVERSATION PIT

Rather than requesting feedback or inviting participants to share their experiences, the project *To Dream While Waking* requested that the participant respect the privacy of the object and keep the contemplation between themselves and the allelobeing/object. Instead of giving voice, the participant was invited to a material expression of response, an action of care that might or might not be accessible to, or noticed by, other humans. The request that the thought exchange be kept between the participant and the object was a strategy to pause the encounter in the transitional zone between sensation and articulation. To privilege the materiality of the experience over the verbal expression that might follow.

Within the conference context, it became an attempt to resist translation into academic use-value, ascribing value to the experiential moment, rather than locating value in its translation into terms of theoretical discourse. It sought to insert an experiential hiatus into the smooth assimilation of experience into human-centred knowledge. To insert an interlude of material unknowability into the scholarly discourse of the conference. In writing this thesis, the project is returned to an academic context, once more navigated by the written word; however, there is a hiatus in the unspoken space within which the interaction between person and object occurred. We speak of the objects, and see them in photographic form, wrapped awaiting participation. After the event we encountered them again in a changed or unchanged state; what passed between person and an object remains silent.

Waiting quietly in the space between providing favourable conditions and the energetic emergence of a heterotopic dynamic, was a significant constituent of *Conversation Pit*. To convene conditions in which open-ended conversation might move into speculative thinking-together, *Conversation Pit* needed to hold the balance between the content provided by the provocation, the materiality and object presence of the dwelling space and the dynamic sparked between participants. Preparations were made, people and objects gathered together, and over the two hours, the group relaxed into the dwelling-space, and one another's company; human-human and human-object. The conversation legitimised the potentially awkward situation of sitting together with strangers in an enclosed space and provided a reason to spend an extended time within the dwelling-space. At times and for moments, the energy and excitement of imaginative speculation was palpable, at other times the group was immersed in the quiet pleasure of conversing.

This research is acutely cognisant of the paradoxical nature of the twofold dynamic that *Conversation Pit* seeks to operate. Both activities, *dwelling-with* and *speculative thinking-together* are predicated on the subjective experiential engagement of those participating. Both arise somewhat spontaneously as

an energetic dynamic between people and things. This research does not claim to enact or provide either activity; rather, it provides material, physiological, and conceptual conditions within which such an energetic exchange might unfold. It seeks not to direct an enquiry but to convene an attentive time-space for hopeful waiting.

The project was underpinned by the understanding that setting conditions for an interactive dynamic by no means ensures the emergence of that dynamic. If this were the assumption underlying *Conversation Pit*, it would have to be acknowledged to have failed. It set out instead to engage the participants in the possibility of holding space for an as-yet-unknown energetic dynamic to arise. It recognises that the first step towards this is to whisper the possibility that we, four humans gathered together in this blanket-hut, might reach below the surface-play of our anthropocentric reflection and feel around in the earthy waters for something that we have misplaced.

I suggest that this dynamic is also at play in the works of McKree and Braddock, discussed in *Small Lively Gestures* in Chapter Two. It is addressed directly in Braddock's *Invitation to Dialogue* through the reference to Bohm's theory of proprioceptive thought in which the participants in dialogue endeavour to suspend and objectively observe their assumptions and opinions and the bodily response they incur.⁷⁵ In McKree's *Art as Medicine*, the dynamic was more subtle, and my experience was of energetic exchange facilitated through slowly building a sense within the group that each person held and contributed to the shared sacred space.

⁷⁵ Bohm, *On Dialogue*, 29.

CHAPTER FOUR: SHARED AGENCY: WORKING WITH THINGS

Adopting the low ground of the swamp, I consider my agency as a human and a researcher to be immersed within the multi-entity relational dynamics that are the subject of my study. I am one entity of many participating in a liquid, circumambulating exchange of energy, materiality, thinking, feeling, and being-with. As with the swamp, where the clear surface of the water is never far from the earthy sludge below, activities of daily care mingle with academic research and bubble up as conscious relationships of thinking and doing.



FIGURE 40: MOUNTAIN BIKE GoPRO RIG, 2018

This thesis engages the term *shared agency* as both a research aim and a systematic speculative practice of waiting on and responding to nonhuman agency in the material and durational outworking of creative research. It is cognisant of Harman's observation that, "It is the nature of tool-being to recede from every view. In the strict sense, we can never know just what equipment is".¹ Here the practice of *waiting with an attitude of receptive un-knowing* and *responding to nonhuman agency* is applied to the processes and interactions of studio research. In this context 'practice' refers to both art practice and 'to practice'; a practical activity undertaken repeatedly in the hope that something is learned, or a skill developed. Speculative in that it requires suspending expectations of what might arise, I am waiting to see what things will teach me.

This chapter will address the practical, philosophical and art historical application of shared agency as an anthropocontineric mode of working with things. Once more invoking the energetic return of the long sixties, it draws upon artist/writer Katherine Behar's post anthropocentric reading of the conceptual artist Robert Morris. It then locates a convergent flow of object-oriented theory and practice through the lens of social aesthetics.

Returning to the creative research of this thesis it tracks the speculative and experimental methods of artmaking enacted in response to the participating agency of materials, tools, technology and places. It outlines a research practice of attuning to allelos/things and working with their idiosyncratic characteristics to image (through video and projection) and elicit (as installations and dwelling spaces) the intimate interactions that make up daily coexistence in suburban life. It outlines the guidelines developed for working with devices and interacting with material and immaterial entities and provides practical and methodological contexts for the configurations of material, object and agentic collaborations. Following this, it returns to *Conversation Pit* and *To Dream While Waking* and elaborates specific instances of material attunement and shared agency. This chapter will introduce *DIY Alternative Reality Hut*, an impromptu research project developed in response to the emergence of the global Covid-19 pandemic and Level 4 lockdown in Aotearoa, within which the many currents of shared agency pool for a moment. And lastly, it will introduce the final presentation for this thesis, *I See You See Me See You*, which draws these two models of exploration together with an object-oriented participatory event at the Domestic Hub.

The attitude to material and process put forward in this thesis resonates with artist/writer Katherine Behar's rereading of minimalist sculpture of the sixties from the perspective of object-oriented

¹ Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, l. 132.

thought.² Despite the obvious aesthetic divergence, this research suggests that Behar identifies an important line of object-oriented thought that remains vital today. Behar proposes that:

we might also read, running beneath the canonical accounts, a chronicle of how during the 1960s minimalist artists were cultivating nonanthropocentric practices and producing art that contributes to nonanthropocentrism in manifold ways³

Behar argues that minimalist artists approached process as a two-way interaction between artist and material, recognising and responding to the tendencies and properties inherent in matter. She continues to discuss the work and writing of the conceptual artist Robert Morris, suggesting that “One way of understanding Morris’s term ‘anti-form’ is that ‘form’ is not negated but reduced to material process: the readymade process preprogrammed as ‘tendencies’ found in and as material. This modesty of minimalist process brings minimalism’s nonanthropocentrism to the forefront.”⁴ And, with particular relevance to this thesis:

The specific form of an art object is only resolved in practice, through the process of engaging dialogically with commonplace things. For example, rigid materials efficiently form rectangles. Similarly, whole forms are more true to their materials than multiple forms, in which artists impose their own anthropocentrically biased organisational logic over the object-oriented internal logic of the material.

Through viewing minimalist notions of process through the lens of object-oriented theory, Behar brings to view a line of contra-anthropocentric material attunement emerging from the cultural upheaval of the sixties that is obscured in the modernist narrative.⁵

This research sets out to resist ‘anthropocentrically biased organisational logic’ and respond to ‘the object-oriented internal logic’ of not only materials but of all objects, tools, technology and bodies involved as material, process, subject or site. Here fabric stretches to form a canopy, a tent pole bends to form an arc, a tree, a ladder, an umbrella and a tentpole hold out an arm to support a fabric canopy. An exposed ceiling beam suggests a clamp, suggests a rope, suggests a washing line, a sheet and a peg. The glass wall of the gallery suggests a suction cup, a reflection, a chalk pen, a word. I cannot say with certainty that it was my idea or if the thing suggested it to me. I propose that a rigid form may have similarly suggested to Morris a box.

² Behar and Mikelson, *And Another Thing*.

³ Behar and Mikelson, 23

⁴ Behar and Mikelson, 28.

⁵ The cultural repercussions of the sixties are discussed in section 2.2

This pursuit of material attunement aligns with Born, Lewis and Straw's call to recalibrate the aesthetic dimension of everyday objects. In the introduction to *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*, they propose "A social aesthetics less concerned with demarcating a class of aesthetically valuable objects than it is with explaining how and why a given set of objects or experiences . . . is judged to be valuable"⁶ This congruence continues as they propose an 'entangled locus of social-aesthetic experience'⁷ within which:

art objects and events are thought to transcend their narrow material, temporal, and spatial boundaries and to participate vitally, richly, and vigorously in the larger socio-material assemblages within which they are created, circulated, and consumed— within which they and the subjects of aesthetic experience that they elicit and encounter together live their lives."⁸

In seeking to facilitate and participate in the energetic and aesthetic interplay of humans and allelos, this research aims to provide conditions that invite such a 'vital and entangled social-aesthetic experience'.

It is pertinent to note that I do not presume to think that I am unique amongst artists in seeking to attune with objects, tools and materials; the point of difference that I am proposing is in addressing this attunement in terms of agentic collaboration. The aim of this research is to go beyond a sympathetic working relationship with objects, tools and materials and test the possibility of a collaborative dynamic in which authorship is dispersed among participating entities.

This position is usefully articulated by the artist/musician/writer George E. Lewis, who draws on the lens of social aesthetics to analyse digital musical in provision, as a collaboration between machine and human.⁹ Lewis takes the San Francisco Bay area digital improv collective *League of Automatic Music Composers*,¹⁰ a group that Lewis describes as "itinerant rather than institutional activity; social, conversational, convivial, and communitarian ethics; and collective, networked, democratic work, expressed in terms of a lack of hierarchy between human and non-human roles, as well as between

⁶ Born, Lewis, and Straw, *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*, 3.

⁷ Born, Lewis, and Straw, 3.

⁸ Born, Lewis, and Straw, 2.

⁹ George E. Lewis, 'From Network Bands to Ubiquitous Computing: Rich Gold and the Social Aesthetics of Interactivity', in *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics* (Duke University Press, 2017).

¹⁰ The *League of Automatic Music Composers* was an evolving collective of musician-programmers active from the early seventies through to the late eighties.

humans and other humans.¹¹ While the media and context are different, the relationship between the musicians and their technology may be seen as analogous with the material collaborations enacted within this research. The collaborative dynamic Lewis describes resonates with this research when he observes that:

when League members took hands-on improvisative roles with their machines, they did so from a collaborative rather than an instrumental standpoint, negotiating with their machines rather than fully controlling them. “Letting the network play” became a key aspect of its performance practice, and when the humans performed, they became part of the network, as well.¹²

Interestingly, a recurrent methodological strategy in the human-machine collaborations Lewis presents, is the use of a list of guidelines through which the human partner negotiates and moderates their input and response.¹³ The following section outlines a similar list of guidelines developed to facilitate material working-with in this research.

¹¹ George E. Lewis, ‘From Network Bands to Ubiquitous Computing: Rich Gold and the Social Aesthetics of Interactivity’, 94.

¹² George E. Lewis, 96.

¹³ Lewis refers to the guidelines lists of musician Jim Horton in “Unforeseen Music: The Autobiographical Notes of Jim Horton”(1966) (p100), and an essay (circa 1953-1954) by the psychologist/cyberneticist/artist Gordon Pask, in which he lists a set of conditions aimed to facilitate “an aesthetically potent environment” (p101).

4.1 MATERIAL AGENCY; A COLLABORATION WITH THINGS

In seeking to provide conditions for material collaboration, I make use of my experience in contra handed drawing, applying it here to consciously suspend my assumptions of the roles of artist and material, and to participate in an agentic flux shared between participants. This methodological attitude allows for a working relationship that might be described as 'terms of engagement' between artist and allelos/things. These terms of engagement are negotiated via a pool of responsive strategies, object-centred protocols and care-based working methods through which to engage and render visible, the methodological and material agency of allelobeings; tools, materials, objects, machines and other entities. As the human/artist I adhere to the following guidelines:

1. **Respond to and engage with the attributes and qualities of others.** (Allow the qualities, inclinations and agencies of collaborating materials and entities to direct the making process)
2. **Be receptive to agency that is dissimilar to human agency.** (Put own assumptions aside and wait for agency to emerge in awareness.)
3. **Work with allelobeings/things respectfully, occupy spaces and places lightly.** (Allow allelos/things to direct your handling of them. Consult and involve all who inhabit a space, environment or site.)
4. **Invite objects and entities from surrounding areas to participate.** (As part of an installation, as a cohabitant, as food for someone or someone who can eat something)
5. **Whenever possible work with those available in their existing states** (Resist purchasing or trimming to size. Resist correcting or aesthetically modifying).
6. **Reuse and repurpose allelobeings/things.** (Respect the agency and being of entities and materials; do not put them aside and reach for something new. Invite existing allelos/things to take on new functions, test all options before requiring a new allelobeing/thing. When working with allelos/things repurposed from surroundings ensure they are unchanged and able to return to their original purpose)
7. **Acknowledge the materiality of structure.** (Expose ropes, clamps, projectors, extension leads.)
8. **Work to the scale of the allelos/entities involved, favour intimate engagement over a spectacular outcome.** (Ensure that allelos/objects are not overwhelmed by the making process)
9. **Be kind.** (Care for things, repair things, provide food and drink.)
10. **Be inclusive.** (Anyone can participate. Resist hierarchies of material or aesthetic value.)

These guidelines and the allelos (materials, objects, tools), have coalesced into a multimodal human/allelo research collective that participates in cycles of gathering and dispersing. Alongside my human enquiry runs a material dialogic manifest in an interplay of dwellings, experiences, and convened activities. The material participants engage and re-engage, taking on different roles and relational modes. A participating allelo may be physically present or may participate in a virtual or imaginative form, as a projected image, a subject of conversation or a text.

An example of this material and conceptual dialogue is evident in the repeated material collaboration with a particular collection of fabric. These fabrics were purchased from Geoff's Emporium in 2018 for *Bathhouse*, commissioned for *Splore*¹⁴ music and arts festival. The criteria for the fabric was cheap, semi-transparent and strong. The fabric selected was synthetic, brightly coloured and un-fashionably patterned, with a slightly scratchy skin feel. I suspect that these fabrics will never biodegrade. We have an awkward relationship; they will outlive me, and I feel sorry and responsible for them. These lengths of fabric wind their way through the dwelling-spaces of *Conversation Pit* and *To Dream While Waking*, accumulating traces of activity, twigs, leaves, stains and tears. This material collaboration seeks out the possibility that the aesthetic response of a human viewer/participant to an object or experience may "often signal, consciously or unconsciously, either a commitment to or a questioning of given social identifications and political positions".¹⁵ When these synthetic fabrics involve themselves in an installation or dwelling space, the set of material qualities described here are called upon to signal that sophistication should be left at the doorway with your shoes.

¹⁴ Splore is a three-day music and arts festival staged annually on the shores of Tāpapakanga Regional Park, Aotearoa, New Zealand. (<https://www.splore.net/about>)

¹⁵ Born, Lewis, and Straw, *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*, 4.

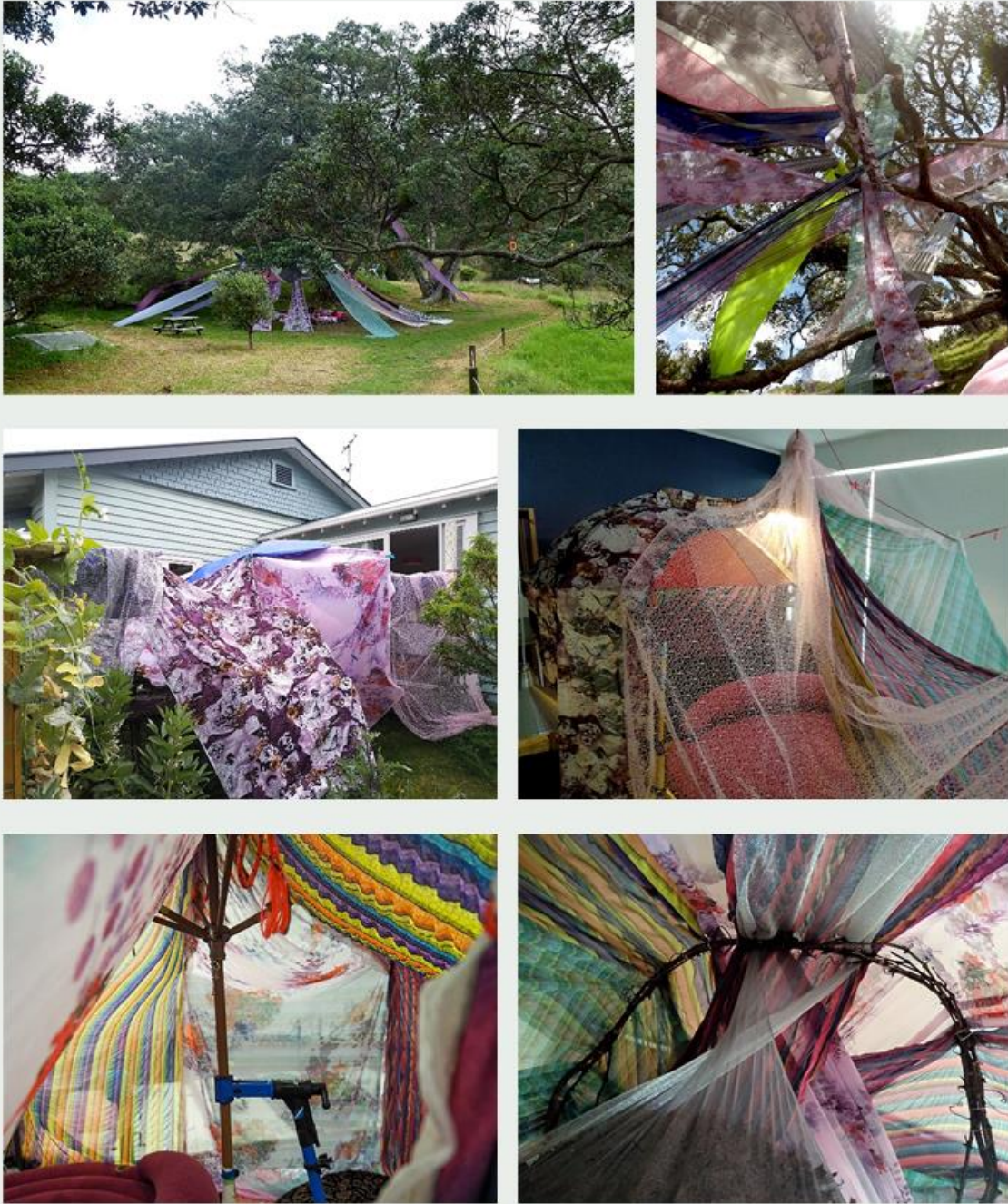


FIGURE 42: TRANSITIONS OF FABRICS AND OBJECTS, 2017-2020

Top: *Bathroom @ Splore*:

fabric interwoven in Pohutakawa tree, Splore 2018, Tapapakunga, 21-24 February 2018.

Middle, left; *Domestic Hub Conversation Pit: Dwelling-with*, 2018:

Fabric and small trees and umbrella frame.

Middle, right: *RM Conversation Pit: Sharing in an Intimate World*, 2018:

An umbrella and a light fitting stand in for a tree

Bottom, left: *To Dream While Waking*, 2019:

Interwoven fabrics, umbrella frame and bike stand.

Right: *Dwelling with Oaktree*, 2020, Garden Shed:

Fabrics with grapevine hoop and oak leaves

4.2 SHARED AGENCY IN *CONVERSATION PIT*

Conversation Pit set out to engage nonhuman entities in a material conversation within which to stage a language-based conversation. Each *Conversation Pit* intertwined a location, the allelos/things that occupied that location, the provocation and the humans invited to participate. For example, our garage houses multiple motorbikes and our whole-house water filtration system; *Domestic Hub Conversation Pit: The Agency of Things* convened a space among these allelos for a conversation focused on petroleum and water. Two hydrologists, one of whom also rides a motorbike, were invited to attend, along with two motorbike riders who also have a passion for water.

Each conversation pit or dwelling-space set out to bring the allelos/things endemic in the location into conversation with members of my collaborative-object collective. Many of these things were asked to take on a role other than their usual human-use function and to perform in less familiar ways: as structural elements (umbrella, fabric, rope), storytellers (video technology) or simply to be present as non-verbal bodies in the conversation circle. Other objects perform their usual roles but in the altered scale and context of a miniaturised dwelling space; a double mattress is a comfortable place to sit and can also provide the floor-structure for a blanket hut. A plate can hold food, and when placed on a small box, it can perform as both plate and table. Food served on this plate can be eaten; here it can be eaten in conversation with the transformation of its vegetal body into the consuming human body.

Objects were acknowledged as *material beings* and were invited and given a place within *Conversation Pit* in the same way that the human participants were invited and made to feel welcome. Each object brought with them a personal history of cultural and material associations. A rain umbrella and a flimsy structure of tent poles can both hold up the fabric of a dwelling space: both bring with them a bodily association with outdoor places, rainy urban days and summer camping. For the human participant, drawing aside a draped fabric and stooping to fit themselves between a rain umbrella and a potted tree, I suggest that the incongruity of their roles in the construction of an indoor dwelling renders these familiar items surprising.

RM Archive Things

The objects I “befriended” from the gallery storeroom and the archive room itself became primary collaborators in the project. The broken yellow industrial-light tripod who I repaired with blue tape, and gweis/its close associate the rainbow umbrella, who I recovered from a corner of the room. The archive room tree in gweis/its undersized pot, who I watered carefully and made space for in every conversation. The little white stool that I could dangerously stand on to install things. Gweie/it was invited to participate as a guest, as a gatekeeper but never as a seat. The disparate collection of retro drinking glasses found in the gallery kitchen, retired now but bringing with them the memory of previous iterations of this artist-run space and its long association with op-shop drinking vessels. The space heater, incongruous in the summer heat, who never strayed far from gweis/its corner despite gweis/its wheels. Overlooked when the other furniture was removed, there gweie/it was in the corner, quietly sculptural on the polished concrete floor.

I miss these things even now, long after I have left the space. I miss them in the way that you miss a friend when they move to another city. Or maybe as you miss a lover, a bodily awareness of the absence of the shape-of-you in relation to my own body. It sounds foolish. I feel foolish writing the words. It is a contra-normal emotion. I invited contra-normal into my hopeful space of unknowing, yet it continues to surprise me. It is invited but not necessarily comfortable.

Here, affect theory offers a useful lens. Greyson's notion of *affective wonder* as "the realisation that the affects one is undergoing are new, or, expressed in slightly different terms, it might be called a sudden attunement to affects that one had not been attuned to before",¹⁶ is an apt description for my own experience. Greyson draws on the seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza to articulate the complex dynamic of apprehension and affect:

Following Spinoza, we do not know beforehand what a body or mind can do, we cannot circumscribe the range of affects, yet we also cannot say that with everybody, not to mention every body, everything is possible. Potentials are neither fully ours, nor assigned to us, neither fully innate nor learned¹⁷

This thinking I suggest, makes possible a research position within which the experiencing human is not an autonomous body but a porous participant. An active subject, both agentic and limited, partaking in the multidirectional flow of agency and affect.

For Spinoza, interaction is understood as a body's ability to affect and be affected on a plane of immanence. It is clear that this is an active engagement in which one chooses "to install oneself on this plane which implies a mode of living, a way of life."¹⁸ An allegorical reference to music and musical composition is evident throughout *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Deleuze's articulates Spinoza's notion of interaction as ongoing collaboration something like free-form jazz composition:

It is not just a matter of music but of how to live: it is by speed and slowness that one slips in among things, that one connects with something else. One never commences; one never has a tabula rasa; one slips in, enters in the middle; one takes up or lays down rhythms.¹⁹

This research draws a parallel between Spinoza's musical metaphor and a playful and responsive creative research methodology through which it attunes to moments of affective wonder in everyday life. I slip into the life of this house, these trees, this extended family of blackbirds. The trees I plant slip into this shared time-space of person and place; for me, a significant era of my life, for the tree a youthful moment. They will continue as I move on and other humans and blackbirds take up the rhythm.

Similarly, the GoPro responds to the rhythm of the bike-body-pedal; the image projected later repeats this rhythm in another place with other objects. The lengths of fabric from Geoff's Emporium slip into

¹⁶ Lauren Greyson, *Vital Reenchantments*, 76.

¹⁷ Lauren Greyson, 66.

¹⁸ Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 122.

¹⁹ Deleuze, 123.

my life and work; a repeated presence, always necessary as roof, wall, canopy or cover, yet always a discordant edge.

4.3 SHARED AGENCY IN TO DREAM WHILE WAKING (WILDERNESS OF THINGS)

The tent-like dwelling-space in *To Dream While Waking*, enlisted the two umbrellas from *Conversation Pit*, a wooden sun umbrella with no covering, and the rainbow umbrella from RM gallery.²⁰ Their role was to provide structure and, as outdoor objects, to suggest that the inside of this building was also the outside of something else, and by extension, the outside of the whole building is the inside of something else. The Splore fabrics did their job, with particular attention to the patterning of light from the window through their layers. The *Wilderness of Things* drew in long time collaborators of whom I have become fond, for example, the mop glove; gweie/it is like a cloth for wiping, it will do its job, but it feels foreign on the hand especially when wet. I find gweie/ it to be a humorous object, and more so when standing in as a flower or strangely bushy plant.

4.3.1 INTERACTIONS OF CARE: IMAGINATION ENCOUNTER WITH THINGS

Imagination Encounter With Things invited participants to choose a wrapped object and unwrap it in the privacy of the dwelling-space for a meditative moment of reflective thinking-together.²¹ I was asking the participant viewer to enter into a caring interaction with an object, and I was also asking the objects to open out a moment of caring interaction for the viewer.

To honour the anticipated reciprocal interactions of care, I chose to work with objects whom I had cared for and learned to love. At the same time, I wanted the objects to be encountered as familiar and unexceptional, and yet to have material qualities that I, and hopefully a viewer, would find interesting in themselves. Familiar; to increase the likelihood that the object's materiality, history and possible future was accessible for the participant. Unexceptional; to increase the likelihood that the encounter was an opportunity to look again at something habitually rendered invisible by its mundane use-value. Yet also be sufficiently compelling, formally or materially, to invite imaginative engagement and sensory pleasure in the hope that this would elicit a care response from a human participant. In response, I selected twenty-two objects from around my home with the following criteria:

- a) familiar objects that have no significant use or monetary value within our shared culture,
- b) human hand-sized, and

²⁰ Who I could not bear to part with and discreetly adopted at the completion of my residency.

²¹ *Imagination Encounter with Things* is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

c) have elicited a caring relationship from me on the grounds of their material and formal qualities.

To realise category c) I applied a 1-10 care scale, modified from the medical pain scale in which zero is *no pain* and ten is *unbearable pain*. I selected objects who weighed in on the 5-8 range; if an immediate and strong sense of loss arose at the thought of letting go of the object, I moved on. If the response was slower and more considered, less urgent, the object was selected.

Some of the things were human fabricated or 'man-made' – objects that humans have called into being and that we commonly rank from 'synthetic' through to 'natural'; plastics, glass, woven cotton, wood, metal. Objects variously manufactured and crafted in a factory or by an artisan, or that I have made myself. An egg cup, now chipped, from a market in Pirongia. A pottery candlestick I was given for my tenth birthday. A piece of jewellery that I made in my undergraduate degree.

The origins of other objects were more evident; a blue egg laid by my small brown chicken, Germaine. A glass jar of honey from our bees, essential oil extracted from a plant then packaged and sold. I hoped that a connection could be made to the bee or plant unseen but presumed to exist, providing conditions for a possible drift of imagination to the insect flying or crawling, the plant growing or crushed.

Allelobeing



wrapped



re-wrapped, relocated
or rehomed(leaving no trace)



Brooch



Candlestick



Chair-sock



Cotton



Cup

FIGURE 42: IMAGINATION ENCOUNTER WITH THINGS: OBJECTS, 2020

Allelobeing



wrapped



re-wrapped, relocated
or rehomed(leaving no trace)



Egg



Eggcup



Flannel



Glove



Latch

FIGURE 44: *IMAGINATION ENCOUNTER WITH THINGS: OBJECTS*, 2020

The opportunity for a second project of participatory caring-with arose unexpectedly in response to New Zealand's nationwide Covid-19 lockdown. From 25 February to 27 March 2020, New Zealanders retreated indoors for a four-and-a-half-week hiatus of confinement and waiting. At this time the home became a fortress, humans were locked in and *it*, the virus, was locked out. The research project *DIY Alternative Reality Hut* was a response to this heterotopic moment of national self-isolation. It was an invitation to actively engage with what this moment of suspended normality could offer. It also offered the solace of a voluntary alternative reality within a potentially distressing externally imposed alternative reality.

The en masse retreat of people into their homes brought with it an associated spatial and durational proximity with *things*. In our house nothing changed, the proximity of things was already our new normal. I observed the frenzy of vegetable seedling buying leading up to the lockdown, and noted the absence of flour on supermarket shelves and wondered if people were paying more attention to things. One participant of *Alternative Reality Hut* describes her experience of lockdown:

In this unsettling time, I turned to a self-grounding technique commonly used in mediation, that is naming and noticing the things one can see or hear in their immediate surroundings. The extended time I spent in my home helped me recognise that it was constantly shifting. As the days slid by my attention was increasingly drawn to these inside moments, particularly the way light moved through the space. The structure of the house itself and the objects within it would dance with the light and sigh with the wind.²²

The unusual proximity of people and things suggested to me the possibility of further sharing of agentic roles within a socially distanced participatory project. In a reversal of my usual process I took a facilitating role, communicating from a distance through social media to seed ideas, provide prompts and encourage participants to appeal to the material agency of their belongings to construct their own imaginative dwelling within the confinement of their homes.

²² Lexi Kerr, art student at Whitecliffe and participant in *DIY Alternative Reality Hut*.

Speculation #1

I have been reflecting on human responses to coronavirus, the use of warlike language, the indignation that a microbe/virus might not respect our special status. I find myself somewhat sympathetic towards the virus, or at least curious of its foreign and energetic being as it makes its mysterious journey from one species to another. This is another element of intimacy and closeness with nonhuman people. The species jump of this Corona virus, as with SARS, may be traced to so-called wet-markets or wild food black markets, nightmarish places of animal suffering and human brutality. A grotesque conflation of premodern/traditional lifestyles of hunting and gathering from wild and a repressed form of consumer capitalism.

Imagine if, rather than trying to stamp out this virus we imagine it as a bee who has inadvertently flown into our house. We might shepherd her gently back towards the window with a sheet of paper or capture her in a jar and let her go back to her honey gathering.

Imagine that we could extend this generosity to a wasp, who would also sting us, without the redeeming features of industry and honey making. We might also usher this wasp, who would sting us and who gives us nothing, carefully back out the window with the surety that in her own territory she will not bother us.

Could we think of this virus in the same way? A tiny entity who has inadvertently strayed from its accommodating host and into our defenceless human bodies. Would we think or feel differently if we considered not that we were not warring or stamping but rather ushering carefully? Corralling them cautiously with our facemasks and ventilators, directing them back to the place where they do no harm. That is, putting it back we should never have picked it up from.

Of course, we can never put it back, and course we do not want it to kill us. And of course, despite my claims to understand otherwise I too to am complicit in perpetuating the normative conflation of world and world effect. I too am disquieted to be prey rather than predator, afflicted rather than afflicting.

4.4 DIY ALTERNATIVE REALITY HUT



FIGURE 45: *DIY ALTERNATIVE REALITY HUT*: 22 – 27 APRIL 2020

DIY Alternative Reality Hut: A dispersed dwelling event for the last week of the Level 4 Covid-19 lockdown in Aotearoa New Zealand, 22 – 27 April 2020. The project reached completion over the Anzac weekend, aligning with Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s exhortation that we use this day to reflect on what we value and what we choose to do with the society our forebears fought for:²³

It is too early even to fathom let alone to pontificate the moral, philosophical, or metaphysical dimensions of this pandemic and what it is doing to our world. All we can really do is to pause and find comfort zones where we can collect our wits and wonder²⁴

Before the emergence of Covid-19, the final research for the thesis was in development; a series of small-scale events acknowledging and responding to the seasonal flows of life energy through the Domestic Hub, with the project title, *In Season: Domestic Hub Sessions*. The first event of this series, *Thanking the Birds and the Bees, the Vines and the Trees*, took place on 7 March 2020. It was intimate both in scale and social interaction, held within the domestic sphere, sharing small intimacies of living together, sharing food, sharing blessings.

That weekend the number of confirmed Covid-19 infections in New Zealand rose to five; internationally, it was an epidemic of international concern, but the World Health Organisation had not yet declared a pandemic. Three weeks later, New Zealand was in Level 4 lockdown; everything other than essential services stopped or was moved online. People were required to stay within their homes and domestic group or ‘bubble’ for an indefinite duration, with the stated minimum of four weeks.²⁵

From the perspective of the first uncertain weeks of lockdown and strict social distancing, this event of four weeks earlier appeared to have taken place in another world. A world more innocent or naïve; the last days of the Holocene before awakening to Timothy Morton’s “charnel ground after the end of the world.”²⁶

In a disconcerting convergence of personal research and global phenomena, acknowledging nonhuman agency and convening heterotopic time-space were reflected darkly in the lethal agency of a virus and unprecedented episodes of human self-quarantine. Throughout the biosphere, human life was paused; in Aotearoa, giving rise to what this research would term a four-week, nationwide heterotopic time-space.

²³ The Spinoff - “Let’s Finish What We Started”.

²⁴ Dabashi, ‘One Day and One Dream in the Life of a Self-Isolating New Yorker’. The above quote was followed by the remark “Yet surprisingly, I learned that Slavoj Žižek has come up with a whole book on coronavirus already! Sight unseen, this itself must be added to the bizarre symptoms of this pandemic”.

²⁵ Lara Strongman, ‘Covid-19 Pandemic Timeline’.

²⁶ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, l. 2999.

HOW CAN WE PLAYFULLY INHABIT THIS HIATUS IN THE EVERYDAY?

WHAT LIBERTIES OF CHILDLIKE CURIOSITY AND QUESTIONING CAN THIS MOMENT OF CONFINEMENT OFFER?

DIY Alternative Reality Hut was foremost a response to the social anxiety rendered visible through this sudden breach of ordinary life. It was a spontaneous project inviting people to transpose the isolation of lockdown with an interlude of embodied engagement with things. Part one of the project invited people to build a hut from the things in their home as an imaginative 'alternative reality' inserted into the personal and social hiatus of lockdown. Through the playful activity of hut building, it sought to encourage the speculative play of noticing and responding to the material and energetic agency of everyday things.

The second part of the project brought in a dialogical component with *together apart*; an invitation for participants to connect for a Zoom conversation from the sanctuary of their dispersed huts. It was a chance to share stories and virtual tours of huts, but it was also an opportunity to speculate on the potential of the heterotopic conditions of lock-down as time-space for personal and cultural reflection. *Together apart* proposed the imaginative possibility of a network of provisional mini heterotopias existing within an enforced nationwide heterotopia.²⁷ Physically dispersed but connected by an imaginative and technological thread, it stitched together an Alternative Reality village, a network of hopeful imagining stretched out across Aotearoa.

²⁷ This research is cognisant of the diversity of experience and the social and economic inequity that underpinned Level 4 Covid-19 lockdown in Aotearoa.

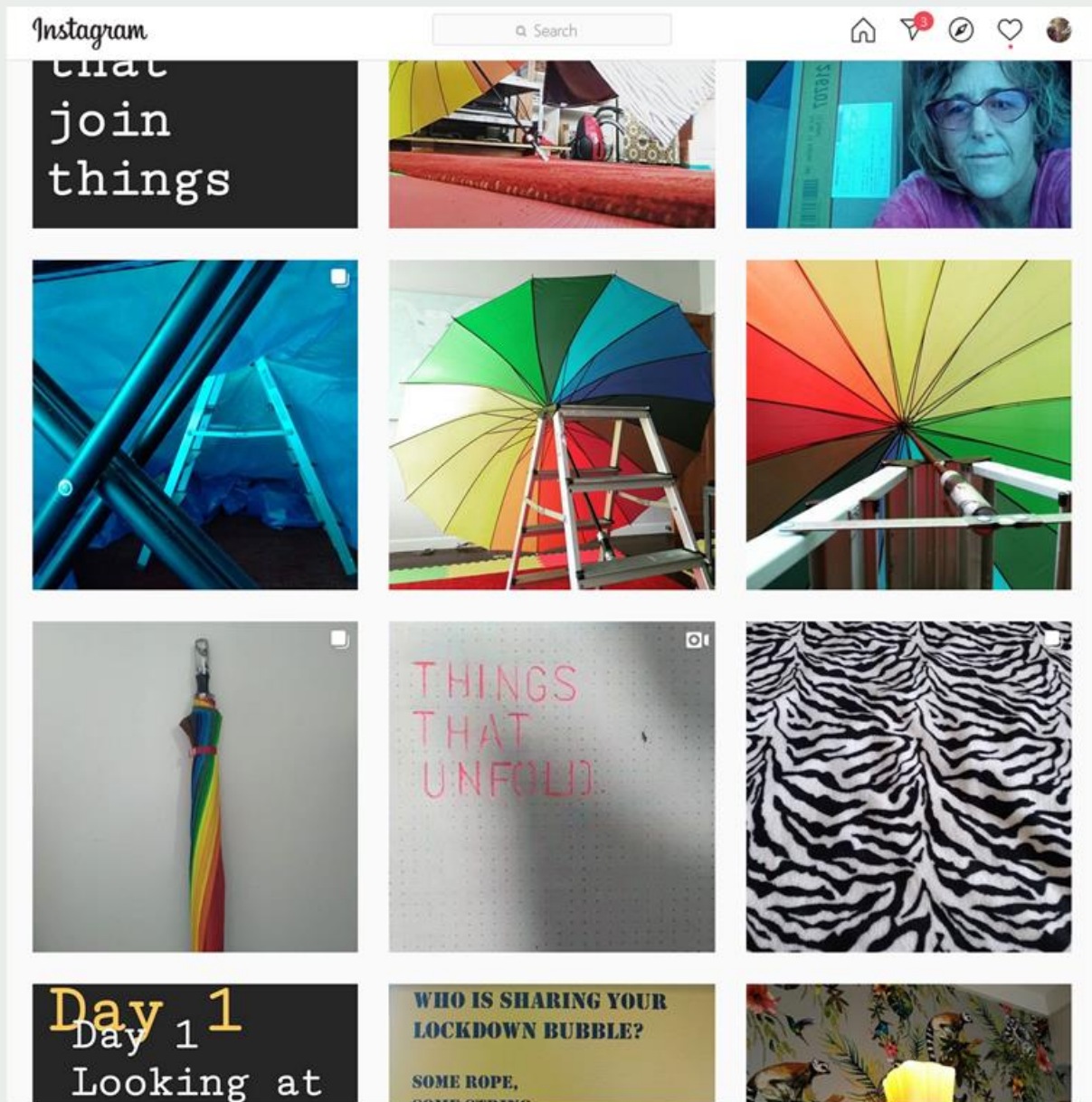


FIGURE 46: INSTAGRAM FEED, 2020

DIY alternative reality Hut is a participatory art-structure for playful and thoughtful engagement with the last week of Level 4 lockdown in Aotearoa. Over this week I will be posting step-by-step guidelines on how to customise your lockdown zone into a smaller but more friendly Alternative Reality Hut. Each day will focus on ways in which you might reconfigure the things (objects, materials, furniture and other stuff) with whom you share your covid19 bubble. Excerpt from Instagram feed.



FIGURE 47: INSTAGRAM THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS, 2020

Imagination experiment #1

Make a mental inventory of the things you could use to construct your hut. Take a moment to reconsider this list rephrased as these things as things who share my home. You could go further and imagined thinking of them as these entities with whom I cohabit.

imagination experiment #2.

Imagine for a moment that things are real in the same way that you and I are real. Imagine that they have an actual, material existence that only partially coincides with our experience of them. Pretend for a moment that objects have material capabilities other than the use designated by humans. Play along with the possibility that a thing is an entity, a being of sorts that is dissimilar from ourselves. Now that your thing is an autonomous entity, you can allow yourself to will feel the kindness of things.

DIY Alternative Reality Hut used the social media platforms of Instagram and Facebook to invite participation and share material, while my website provided broader contextual support.²⁸ Updates and guidelines for the material interactions of hut building were posted daily. Instagram provided the possibility of sharing moments of interconnection and material agency in photographic form, while the *DIY Alternative Reality Hut* Facebook page²⁹ provided a broader contextual base for the project. The daily Instagram feed³⁰ moved through what things can do; things that unfold; things that offer support; things that join other things together. Over the week, I explored the material, structural and comforting qualities of the things I live with. For this week, I worked with allelos/things that I interact with in daily life, but that are not my usual research companions. Each day I posted a new collection or construction.

This social media component located *DIY Alternative Reality Hut* in the context of numerous social media interactive projects offering creative challenges and online interaction that emerged in response to lockdown and social distancing. These catered to a range of audiences and art and cultural contexts: In New Zealand, popular feeds ranged from local teens sharing bedroom karaoke (featured on TVNZ), through to #sportsdaynz³¹ (Te Uru Gallery and *Walking About*). There was also the globally popular Tussen Kunst & Quarantaine³² (Between Art and Quarantine), inviting people to restage a famous painting using only three household items, photograph and share (the origin of the Getty Museum challenge³³). On a larger scale, the ICI (Independent Curators International) relaunched Hans Ulrich Obrist's ongoing instructional project *do it (home)*³⁴ on multiple digital platforms, as well as through over thirty collaborating art spaces within its network.³⁵

DIY Alternative Reality Hut was not primarily a social media project, it was a physical, participatory project with a social media interface. It sought to engage Instagram and Facebook as a platform for a small intimate encounter, rather than seeking to build a large fan base or grow its audience. While this approach to social media was consistent with my research, I struggled to reconcile a methodology that favours the slow and personal with an unfamiliar media and the timeframe set by the lockdown. Consequently, there was a degree of mismatch between the intentions of the project and the way in which it was translated via social media. Viewed in retrospect, the Instagram element of the project awkwardly straddled aspects of an autonomous social media work, in which a single provocation opens

²⁸ Jill Sorensen, 'Jill Sorensen'.

²⁹ Jill Sorensen, '*DIY Alternative Reality Hut*'.

³⁰ Jill Sorensen, 'Jill Sorensen (@alternativerealityhut) Instagram Photos and Videos'.

³¹ #sportsdaynz hashtag on Instagram Photos and Videos'.

³² 'Tussen Kunst & Quarantaine (@tussenkunstenquarantaine) Instagram Photos and Videos'.

³³ 'People Are Recreating Iconic Works of Art With Objects Found at Home During Self-Quarantine'.

³⁴ 'Hans Ulrich Obrist Invites You to 'Do It!''

³⁵ This large-scale digital version of *Do It (home)* utilises video, image and text and includes specially commissioned contributions from artists designers and is available in English and Spanish.

out multiple responses and evolves in social (media) space (the Kunst & Quarantaine model), and an intimate event based in personal connection. The process of posting a stream of social media to elicit participation tended toward a focus on an outcome (in this case, the outcome of participation), a discomfoting contradiction of my research commitment to the slow, small, and personal. Within the context of this project, Instagram was useful as a platform for sharing visual provocations, but not as a rallying call to action.

This disjuncture highlighted the importance of responsive communication between facilitator and participant to enable a shared conceptual and energetic imaginative space within which an experiential encounter can unfold. Instagram and Facebook lend themselves to a sharing outward, allowing the individual to share to a broad audience and yet, for the inexperienced user, they do not so readily facilitate a strong feedback loop.

4.4.1 THREE ALTERNATIVE REALITY HUTS



FIGURE 48: DIY ALTERNATIVE REALITY
HUT: MELANIE ARNOLD (ARTIST) PHOTO
COURTESY OF MELANIE ARNOLD

I made my alternative reality hut out of the backs of two chairs, a coffee table tipped on its side with an old typewriter placed on the leg acting as a counterbalance, a painting easel for height, some rope for support and some old sheets and blankets I used to sleep in as a child. Mum gave me these after our house fire. Making and spending time in the hut brought back nice memories both of my childhood experiences of making huts over the dining table (I think some of this was the familiar patterns and colours of the fabrics), and also making huts with my kids when they were little. On rainy days we would make huts and invite the toys in to have a picnic inside. Huts are always precarious and fragile. I think this makes them more special because you have to be gentle and careful or they collapse. I thought about what makes a good hut, blocking out all light and gaps between the covers, a dedicated entrance, one you have to crawl through is best. Food, company, and pillows for comfort. I think it makes you look differently at the function and form of familiar items as you recognise their qualities could also be perfect for an alternative purpose, like the easel, the typewriter and the coffee table. [Melanie Arnold]



FIGURE 49: DIY ALTERNATIVE REALITY HUT: NELL NUTSFORD
(ARTIST) PHOTO COURTESY OF NELL NUTSFORD

We shared our house over lock-down, and I gave up my studio temporarily to make space, so for this Alternate Reality Project I built a drawing hut in our outdoor bath . . . it was a strange time to be building the hut, like a refuge within a refuge within I guess the refuge of ‘wealth geography’, and again of NZs island refuge. Lockdown quite starkly reinforced the difference between actual and virtual connection with the world. You’re physically separate but retain the virtual connection just the same. I had an interesting time regarding my experience of dwelling in the bath-hut (will write more later. . .) and my conversations with others in my bubble regarding my dwelling in the bath-hut . . . no one else tried it out and all were hesitant to believe or at least imagine what I was attempting and why. I tried to explain the tentative reimagining/building of a new understanding through inhabitable speculative metaphorical spaces... Constance likes the idea and did deeply consider the conversation pit idea back then, but decided it was too invasive/she is too private/it was too conscious/a hut is too literal/self-conscious. Pete looked uncomfortable, although I’m sure he would have loved being in the hut! it turned into an argument with Murray, I might have said something mean about no wonder the world is fucked if people refuse to even try to change it, and he responded with “well you can’t change the fucking world by lying in a bath!” Hmmm. Pete looked even more uncomfortable. We got over it quickly, (Constance made me a coffee) and I get his point, but I would like to try and articulate why and how the bath hut was successful and important to me . . . next instalment!

[Nell Nutsford]

Despite my discomfort with how I engaged with social media platforms, the project itself remains valid within my research parameters. For the small group of participants who constructed an alternative reality hut in their homes, gathering for a virtual conversation in their dwelling-spaces, the sense of a shared imaginary was evident. This was voiced at the time of participation and in feedback shared after the event. The energetic network of an alternative reality village flickered briefly, a tenuous web of technological, dialogical and imaginative interconnection.

Curiously, despite the inevitable technological hitches, the activity of conversing within an alternative reality hut via Zoom's real-time audio-visual network elicited a compelling sense of connection. Gathering over shared laptop screens in the semi-dark of a provisional dwelling-space appeared to heighten the sense of childlike make-believe. The technology facilitated moments of uncanny intimacy as we peered through the camera's eye into one another's dwellings constructed from our sheets and blankets, deep within the homes we had not left for four weeks.

The conversations were seeded by the making and inhabiting of an alternative space within the home, moving into speculative imagining slightly more organically than in *Conversation Pit*. Three of the participants had also attended a *Conversation Pit* event, which may have facilitated speculative thinking. All the participants commented on how their hut transformed their familiar home space. Their reflections indicate that their hut manifested a physical and conceptual 'other space' within which 'normal' life could be ruminated on, and alternatives mulled over.

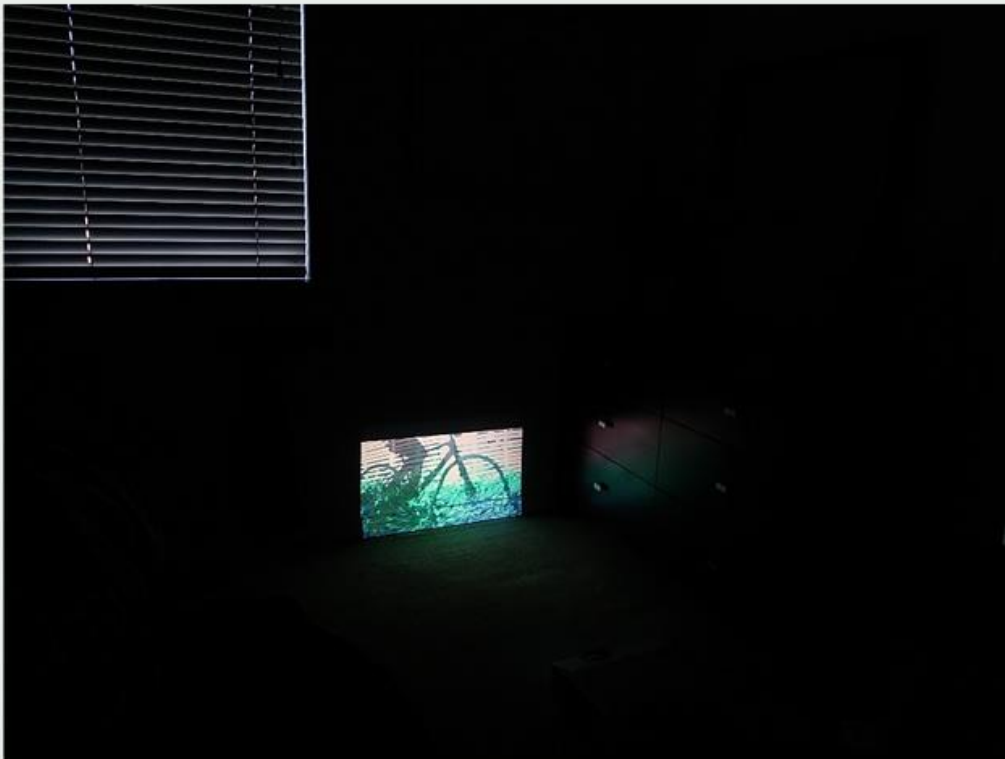


FIGURE 50: *SIDESTREET*, 2020

Top: GoPro Bike Rig for *Sidestreet*.

Bottom: *Sidestreet*, projection on bedroom wall parallel to street.

4.5 AGENCY OF DEVICES: CAMERA-BODY-MACHINE DYNAMIC

Equipment is not effective “because people use it”; on the contrary, it can only be used because it is capable of an effect, of inflicting some kind of blow on reality. In short, the tool isn’t “used” — it is.³⁶

Consistent with the material agency guidelines above, this research privileges *working with other entities* over the human-centred terminology *use of tools and materials*. My intention is neither to remove myself from the process of making nor to remove the trace of myself intimating that the artist was not present. Instead, I aim to position myself as a collaborating agent in a multi-agentic coalition. The camera is apprehended as an independent entity and I respond to the hallmarks of gweis/its physiology, drawing out gweis/its characteristics through direct human-device interplay. The evidence of the collaborative activity embedded in the footage is an integral component of the interaction recorded.

My interactions with technology are strategically lo-fi; for example, my GoPro and cell phone are customised with provisional DIY accessories constructed with cardboard and masking tape. Rather than seeking to master the camera this research adopts the attitude of a curious amateur, drawing on an open-ended potential that the artist/writer Joe Scanlan identifies as “the idea of the amateur as someone who doesn’t know what, if anything, will result from their efforts and yet they revel in that state of not knowing.”³⁷ A stance that, Scanlan contends, “has nothing in common with the algorithms of the average, but much in common with the political resistance of disabling.”³⁸ Through avoiding technical mastery, this research seeks to resist taking an authorial position, preferring to leave the hallmarks of the technology intact, openly acknowledging its use of video as a method for guiding observation into often un-noticed aspects of daily life.

³⁶ Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, l. 405.

³⁷ ‘Joe Scanlan | Artist - Not Knowing: Contemporary Art and the Amateur’. Accessed 2 March 2020, <https://joescanlan.biz/not-knowing-contemporary-art-and-the-amateur/>.

³⁸ ‘Joe Scanlan | Artist - Not Knowing: Contemporary Art and the Amateur’.



FIGURE 51: *TRAVELS WITH FRIENDS (TJ DEMOS)*, 2019

A bike ride with T.J. Demos. Demos talked, and I listened and pedalled. He spoke via the multi-layered avatar of a downloaded PDF, (the introduction to *Decolonising Nature*), read aloud via the Voice Aloud Reader app on my phone, delivered via Bluetooth to my in-helmet headphones. Demos talked about the way in which we apprehend nature impacting on how we assign responsibility for climate change, as we travelled over and alongside the motorway, passing manicured parks and rambunctious mixed-species urban thickets.

I breathed the rank air of the cars, and the soft air of trees, a momentary waft of roast potatoes as Demos promised catastrophic circumstances. I inhaled mudflat, and post-rain sewage as Demos evoked the plethora of voices speaking with him through the litany of thinkers and writers listed in numerical order in the notes accompanying each page, read out in full detail by my reader. He spoke of the complicity of big industry as the cycleway crossed over a train yard and ended in an industrial park. We turned for home with the setting sun in our eyes.

Through predominantly employing single-take video, the research aims to embed the act of observing in the image produced, and thus implicate the (unseen) body (human or other) that holds the (also unseen) camera, through whose lens we, the human/s viewing the recorded image, see. The camera is a mechanical device with distinctive attributes immersed in a substance (air, water) making a series of data recordings of some-thing it passes by. Similarly, the footage taken from a bike might refer to the bike's own passage through its surroundings, rather than the rider's view from the bike. The camera operates as a participating being, not a disembodied eye.

This might be rephrased to speak from the perspective of the collaborating allelos and artist, for ontological effect phrased in the third person.

The GoPro has characteristics that allow gwei to observe quickly and with a clear focus. Gwei can recall in digital language from positions to which the artist cannot align gweis eye. The bicycle has gweis way of moving through space. As they cycle through their neighbourhood, gwei snakes and weaves gweis two wheels over the cement covered earth of the cycleway, if it is wet gweis two tyre tracks cross and re-cross, run parallel then sequentially. Gwei clatters quietly as gweis chain and cogs interact. The contour of the road translates as a sequence of tremors, vibrations and jolts moving through gweis frame. The GoPro, attached to the front fork of the bike observes these internal bike movements, embedding them in gweis visual record of the things they pass by. The GoPro's interaction with the space they move through is dissimilar to the artist's pragmatic forward-looking stance. They pass by the same allelos, but they encounter them differently; the artist's eyes flit this way and that. The camera directs gweis gaze in one continuous act of looking, as a plant, a rock, a cigarette butt are all equally scrutinised.

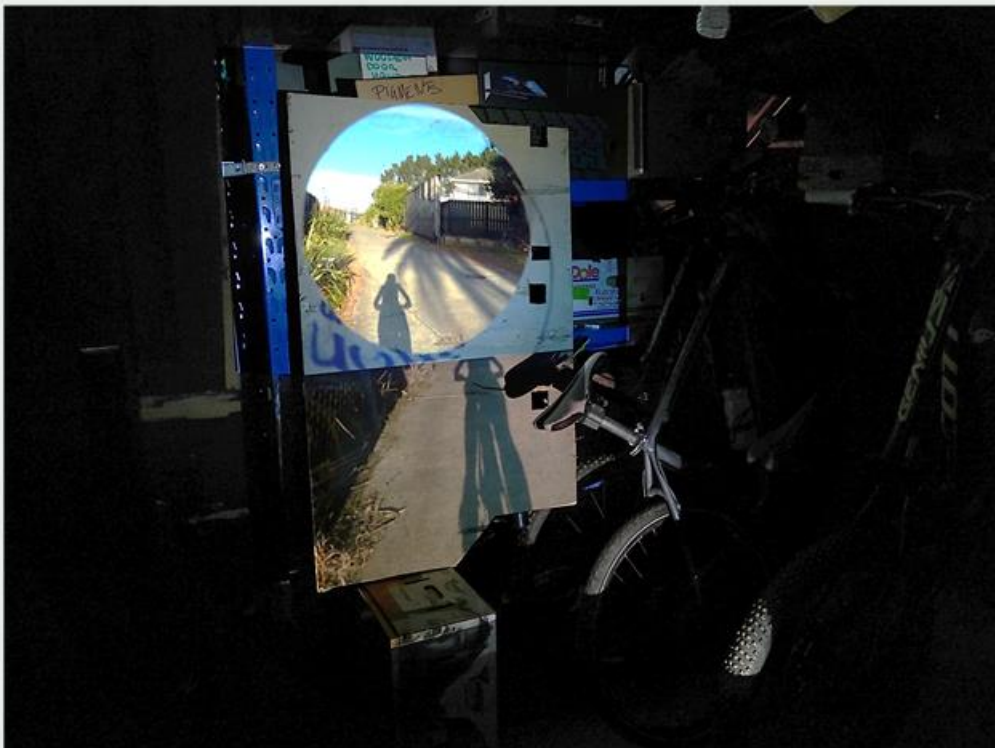


FIGURE 52: *TRAVELS WITH FRIENDS (TJ DEMOS)*: INSTALLATION TRIAL IN GARAGE, DOMESTIC HUB, 2020

Travels with Friends (TJ Demos): Installation trial in garage.

Top: Projected onto the garage roller-door, incorporating motorbikes and motorbike equipment. The projection is scaled to fit the door. The detail becomes soft on the door's corrugated surface and slight metallic sheen. The movement of bike, human and camera is amplified at this scale.

Bottom: Projected in the bike storage alcove of the garage. This is a confined, slightly awkward space. Here the projection is smaller and spills off the piece of ply that provides a provisional screen.



FIGURE 53: MOUNTAIN BIKE RIG FOR FILMING *I DON'T KNOW IF THE EARTH KNOWS THAT I TRACE A MAP ON HER SKIN*, 2018

One pair of crutches, a mountain bike, a GoPro and an assortment of nuts and bolts.

The crutches reconfigured to make an ad-hoc GoPro rig, with the intention that the GoPro would film the rear wheel of the bike as it passes over the mountain bike tracks at Riverhead Forest. The rig was only moderately successful until it broke, allowing the crutch and GoPro to trail behind the bike with the camera suspended at ground-level. Afterwards the crutches were cleaned and reassembled.

4.5.1 VIDEO PROJECTION

The camera records a transcript of data stored as digital memory, which can be held in my hand as a USB. This digital memory may be unfurled as a play of light emitted from a video projector. This remains endlessly mysterious to me; it is as if the ghostly body of the allelbeing/thing is poured from the machine and flows like a skin over whatever is in its path. I suggest that this strangeness is constrained in the familiar context of an image projected onto a flat surface, where the image appears to be contained on a screen. In this situation, the body of light-activated image-space between the projector and the projection surface is overlooked. When the video projector is brought into an installation, this three-dimensional image space can be brought into play.

This research engages with video projection as an entity, an incorporeal body of image-infused light that alludes to, yet is distinct from, the corporeal body imaged. Following this logic of embodiment, this research proposes that in an immersive video installation, the projected play of light layers visual and durational modes of seeing that are disembodied from the entity imaged. In the instance when an image is projected onto the body of another entity or object, I suggest it becomes a chimaera of looking and overlooking. The observer sees the body physically present, the body virtually present through projection, and may also recognise the bodies implied but not present. For example, in the video installation *I Don't Know* at Mayonez gallery, the viewer/participant can see the bodily presence of the object that the projection falls upon (stairs, pole, body, wall) and the not-present body of the ghost-entity projected (Hurricane wire, oak tree, morning glory vine, clouds, or at a later moment, a bath, a plane window and clouds). They also see their own body inserted as shadow and may perceive the bodies of artist, camera and bike embedded in the moving image.

Here the intention is to invite the viewer into a soft embrace of light, image and space that is at once strange and familiar. This engagement with the space of projection has much in common with what Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist describes as 'wonderlight', the freeing of the moving image from the flat plane of the screen or wall, allowing it to fill the space and "put it back to our bodies".³⁹ Similarly, Rist speaks of video projection as a ghost or a soul, a presence that can interplay with embodied human being. However, where Rist seeks to tell huge, fabulous stories and journey into psychological space with her viewer, this research seeks to tell a small quiet story here, now.

³⁹ Pipilotti Rist, Interview: Freeing the Wonderlight, 30 April 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjmmAzS63H8>.



FIGURE 55: *I DON'T KNOW IF THE EARTH KNOWS THAT I TRACE A MAP ON HER SKIN* 2018

Top: Video still from *I Don't Know If The Earth Knows That I Trace A Map On Her Skin*, 2018 (2:21min)
Bottom: Projection trial, Pearce Gallery 2018

Through keeping interactions with technology personal and straightforward, and allowing the interactions of devices, machines, and humans (artist and viewer) to be visible, this research aims to provide conditions for immersive installations that are intimate and engulfing rather than spectacular. The intention is for bodies of people, machines, and things to be brought together in various states of physicality, and that this commingling might elicit a response of reflection or wonder at the familiarity and strangeness of everyday interactions. It seeks to re-present and bring into view the commingling of the spectral entity imaged (bathwater, an overflowing gutter); the flow of light that conjures the image on our retina; and the machine from whom the light-image flows. Here the research approaches a dynamic Morton describes as an encounter with the 'strange stranger'. "the stranger whose strangeness is forever strange—it cannot be tamed or rationalised away. This stranger is not so unfamiliar: uncanny familiarity is one of the strange stranger's traits."⁴⁰ I liken this to the uncanny or gently stomach flipping moment of realisation that a thing, a nonhuman entity, or in the terminology of this research an 'allelobeing', is profoundly and ineffably other than your human self.

In seeking to immerse the participating human/viewer in a strangely familiar and gently weird perspective on mundane occurrences, this research differentiates itself from video installation that aims for a spectacular immersive experience and seeks to overwhelm or elicit an experience of awe. Here a pertinent comparison can be made with the immersive video projection of UK artist duo Semiconductor, who through collaborations with scientists, translate scientific data through processes of computer-generated animation to model in visual form the energetic agency of nonhuman entities.

Here I propose a similarity of enquiry and divergence of philosophical intention in a discussion of the five-channel immersive video installation *Earthworks* in the exhibition *Semiconductor: The Technological Sublime* at the Wellington City Gallery in 2019.⁴¹ This work was derived from seismic data, some of which was gathered from the Kaikōura earthquake. The projection traversed the gallery with an unbroken floor to ceiling image reminiscent of undulating geological strata, digitally produced in what the wall text described as "eye candy colours".⁴² The pairing of scientific data and the reference to rock formation suggested the possibility that the earth's crust moves and wrinkles, but on a time scale too vast for the human to perceive.

On one level, this is a parallel research strategy to this thesis; re-presenting nature/nonhuman entities through de-familiarisation and imaginative suggestion. However, this research suggests that the grand scale of the work and the reference to the technological sublime, serve to maintain both the traditional

⁴⁰ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects*.

⁴¹ City Gallery Wellington, 'Semiconductor: The Technological Sublime'.

⁴² Wall text provided at the exhibition by City Gallery Wellington, and also repeated in the promotional flyer.

roles of viewer-artwork and the anthropocentric division of subject-object. This thesis questions the strategy of summoning up the notion of a technological sublime, with the possible subtext that if a human were to recognise the activity that goes on within the earth's crust they would once more quake in terror before an overwhelming nature, in the moment of environmental crisis.



FIGURE 57: *BATH BREATH* 2019

Top: *Bath Breath*, 2019. Experimental footage stills from video loop. (1:00min)

Bath Breath was made with the camera resting on my diaphragm in the bath with the movement of my breath is embedded in the moving image. The camera traces a digital record of the movement of light and of its own movement as it rises and falls with my body. It records a small repeated sequence of interaction as the water and the body moves, the air above the bath moves, and a drop of water falls from the tap to the bath. The camera documents a perspective and a way of seeing that is not available to human physiology.

Bottom: *I Don't Know If the Water Knows How She Will Make Her Way to the Sea (Bath Breath)* Installation trial, Pearce Gallery, Whitecliffe College.

When projected at full wall scale, the water that flows through my bath appears continuous with the water that flows through the flooded street gutter. I find the experience of sitting in the beanbag with these two waters to be soothing, as if I was sitting by a lake or slow-moving river.



FIGURE 58: *DWELLING WITH OAKTREE*, 2020

Top: The Oaktree, Te Auaunga, Oakley Creek Walkway.

Breathing with Oaktree. I lie on my back with my head next to gwies/its trunk. I start the video running on my cell phone and place it on my diaphragm. I alternately breathe deeply and wait with empty lungs. My cell phone camera records the Oaktree, the slow movement of my breath and the steady beating of my heart. When projected the Oaktree rocks gently with the two rhythms.

Bottom: *Breathing with Oaktree* installation trial in the Garden Shed, Domestic Hub.

4.6 I SEE YOU SEE ME SEE YOU

I, A HUMAN, SEE YOU, TREE/ROCK/ PLASTIC CUP, AND I SEE THAT YOU, IN YOUR WAY ARE AWARE OF ME, A HUMAN, TO BE LOOKING AT YOU AND ACKNOWLEDGING THAT YOU ARE, IN AN UN-SIMPLE SENSE LOOKING BACK AT ME.



FIGURE 59: *I SEE YOU SEE ME SEE YOU* INSTALLATION TRIAL, DOMESTIC HUB, 2020

I See You See Me See You is a planned one-day participatory event with an intentionally low-key drop-in format in order to facilitate slow paced, potentially more reflective interactions between guests/audience and the hosting humans and allelos/things. It will unfold throughout the Domestic Hub, with dwelling-spaces, conversations, hospitality, and video inserted within everyday spaces of garden, home, and shed/studio. Participants will be invited to negotiate the physical and conceptual interplays of personal space and critical distance, of participation, observation and intimacy, complicated by the spectre of contagion. There is no planned “peak moment”; events and participant numbers may ebb and flow casually over the duration of the event, favouring both individual encounters and small clusters of conversation.

The relative simplicity of this participatory event is directly informed by the research that precedes it. It draws upon the hospitality and intimacy of *Conversation Pit*; the object-oriented interactions of *To Dream While Waking* and *Alternative Reality Hut*; and the acknowledgement of the *Domestic Hub* entities that was the specific focus of *Thanking the Birds and the Bees the Vines and the Trees*. Each of these projects has heightened my awareness that my most significant learning has often been gained from the immediate encounter with things themselves, rather than from human accounts of things. As a human, I can provide an occasion in which a person might learn from a thing, but to do this, I have to stand aside and allow the thing to teach the person. Here I want the articulation of my own experience to lead participants to the nonhuman other.

The spatial, material, and durational structures of *I See You See Me See You* are designed to provide conditions in which people and things might encounter one another in a nonhabitual manner. To catalyse private moments of human-nonhuman interaction, an unbroken loop of materiality will thread through both the garden and house, providing both an analogue navigation device and object-oriented provocation. This *Thing-Loop* will be formed by allelos/things having the material qualities of length and flexibility, linked together to form a guide-line; a line that guides a person to another thing and underlines the particularity of that thing. Allowing objects to lead the installation-event is a strategy to draw together the attentive and critical art-relationships between humans and nonhumans and the everyday relationships of living together. A length of fabric twisted to form a rope makes itself evident as an art intervention and traces a path for a human participant. A hose running from a water tank also traces a path for a human participant; however, its art function and everyday function cannot be disentangled.

The material entities I have worked with will be incorporated into the installation or in the research shed. Collaborating materials might give form to a constructed dwelling space, or they might participate

in guiding visitors through the hub. Equally, they might be folded, as a human habitually folds a sheet, or gathered, as a human gathers like-things into a box, then stacks them onto a shelf.

This will provide an opportunity for familiar collaborating things such as fabrics, ropes, and extension cords to adopt new material forms and activities. The *Thing-Loop* takes on the role of host, guiding the visitor and introducing other allelobeings; the allelos/things will, through their form or their activity, suggest ways that the person might 'meet' an entity. There may be an object who suggests a relationship (an empty eggshell nestled into the fabric-rope that traverses the chicken house). Or it might proffer a short text in which the artist describes a bodily action that might provide another access mode (a paper pegged to a line, with words describing how a human might share breath with a tree).



FIGURE 60: *I SEE YOU SEE ME SEE YOU* INSTALLATION TRIAL, DOMESTIC HUB, 2020

I See You See Me See You installation trial, Domestic Hub
Thing-Loop traversing the back garden

Inside the house, the collaborative entanglement of artist and object becomes more complex, with elements of video projection and constructed dwelling space intermingled with the everyday objects constructed, installed, and arranged within the living space. As with *Conversation Pit* and *Thanking the Birds and the Bees the Vines and Trees* I will be offering food, drink and conversation as a gesture of care, inclusion and embodied sharing. Things/allellos from the Domestic Hub will be prepared as food; vegetables from the garden, eggs from the chickens, water from the tap, peaches and feijoas preserved as chutney. In this way, each of the guests is invited to take into themselves a part of this place and literally absorb the artwork on a cellular level. Eating and drinking together is a normal domestic activity, however here the domestic space is also the site of nonhuman agency and the critical, self-reflexive space of art discourse. In compiling these three contexts, the research seeks to elicit a glimpse of the uncanny intimacy that underlies the familiarity of cohabitation and to evoke the strange stranger⁴³ within the nonhuman other. The video work interspersed throughout the Domestic Hub proffers an unfamiliar framing of everyday allelos/things and seeks to bring into view, the sequence of nonhuman interventions embedded in the image.

I See You See Me See You is a participatory art activity embedded into the activity of living. It is intended to acknowledge the material participants of this multi-entity creative research thesis. In recognising these material beings, I am seeking to open out some of the entangled complexities of these relationships to a participating audience. It extends a material invitation to participate in an imaginative encounter, and further proposes a possible material and cognitive pathway for nonhabitual awareness to emerge. It seeks to draw out an embodied awareness of multi-entity attunement available in the mundane activities of cohabitation and to elicit simultaneously, objective reflection, subjective speculation and imaginative participation.

⁴³ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, l. 2150. Morton's thinking on the strange stranger is discussed in section 4.5.1.

CONCLUSION: HERE, NOW. EMBEDDING ART IN UNSPECTACULAR LIFE

Domestic Hub Conversation Pit: Excerpt of conversation between Mark van Wetering, Sarah Smuts Kennedy and Zoe Hoeberigs.¹

MvW- Certainly, what I have found is that through what you're doing [with The Domestic Hub project] is an appreciation of the things around me. From my perspective it might be, when I'm working in the garage, I'm picking up that nail that I've dropped, or throwing that drill bit into the metal recycling. I'm much more aware of stuff like that, I'm much more proud when I can reuse something in a different way to achieve an end result.

SSK- that's an interesting word to use – proud – because I think that 'proud' is a word for that good feeling, that expansive good feeling that comes from feeling connected. of having observed or being part of...

ZH - Or it's just looking after things. You know, you are saying 'that's not worthless', and you are not just discarding something. Two weeks ago, you might have gone 'who cares, it can go off somewhere' – but now you are looking after each and everything that surrounds you.

This thesis reflects four years of creative research focused on 'looking after each and every thing that surrounds me' in suburban Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland. It traces a gentle, slow-moving research process committed to attending with care to those with whom I cohabit. Of waiting hopefully with an attitude of receptive unknowing and seeking to attune to the agentic and energetic communicative modes of things. Of putting aside the assumptions associated with the demarcation of 'animal vegetable and mineral' and adopting a vocabulary of being-words to articulate our relationships with lively, agentic entities. It introduces the terms 'allelobeing' and 'allellos' to speak of things that are in mutual relation with the human speaker. To further articulate an increasing awareness of allelos/things as live agents, it proposes the pronoun 'gweie', rather than the non-being word 'it'. It draws upon the model of the swamp to articulate a methodology in which the human researcher is continuous with their surroundings, proposing this as an anthropocontaineric research methodology. This experimental

¹ *Domestic Hub Conversation Pit: Sharing in an Intimate World*. Excerpt of conversation exchange between Mark van Wetering, Sarah Smuts Kennedy and Zoe Hoeberigs. 14 September 2019.

strategy puts language to work throughout the thesis and contributes a small disruption to the undercurrent of anthropocentrism within the English language.²

This concluding chapter returns to the research questions posed at the outset of the thesis and reflects upon the contributions they make, noting the potential for further research they point toward. The central concerns of this thesis are investigatory and speculative, aiming to open out imaginative possibilities and navigate more subjective, experiential and sensory research modes. The swamp model explicitly resists pinning down an outcome or consolidating a conclusive theory; instead, it offers a research methodology through which to hold such consolidation in abeyance. Consequently, the research contributions this thesis offers are processual and embedded within multi-entity interchange.

The conclusions and provocations that follow, well up throughout the Domestic Hub and articulate research that is local, mundane, and grounded in suburban cohabitation. In terms of the wetland model that has navigated this thesis, the Domestic Hub is the fecund sedimentation layer of decomposition and reconstitution. Over the four-year research period, it has operated as both 'artist studio' and research collective. It has been the locus of the energetic exchanges of attending with care, acknowledging nonhuman agency, and waiting with unknowing that circulates through this creative research thesis.

This concluding chapter follows the embodied experience-knowledge³ emerging from the sedimentation layer of the Domestic Hub, rising through shared agency and collaboration with allelos/materials/objects/tools, and emerging at the water surface as a series of participatory installations, activities, and dwellings-with. Following this trajectory, a summary will be traced through the following points:

- (a) Attunement: Developing a methodology of care and receptivity through which the creative researcher might attune to the agency of nonhuman entities.
- (b) Working together: inviting the agentic collaboration of allelos.
- (c) A multimodal participatory practice that draws upon the material and energetic agency of nonhuman entities and contributes new insights and methods towards convening participatory practice that invites an embodied or self-reflexive experience.

² These custom words are introduced and defined in Chapter One of this thesis.

³ David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, XIII. Bohm's assertion that thinking and feeling are two aspects of a single experiential process is discussed in relation to unknowing and knowing in the Introduction of this thesis.

ATTUNEMENT

This thesis identifies a need for creative research modalities that acknowledge the possibility of, and seek to facilitate, modes of human-nonhuman attunement that run counter to the dominant anthropocentric Western worldview. The intention of the anthropocontineric research model put forward by this thesis is to contribute a practical and theoretical methodology for self-reflexive and embodied engagement with and attunement to, other than human entities within activities of suburban cohabitation. It is a methodology of slow, attentive engagement with the mundane things and activities of everyday life characterised by attending with care to small interactions; reframing 'chores' as 'acts of care' and consciously rethinking 'using' something, (a tool, a milk bottle), as 'interacting with an entity'. It requires putting aside knowledge-based assumptions, and cultivating an attitude of receptive unknowing, of waiting hopefully and attentively for something not yet known. Within this hopeful, attentive research space, allowing the awareness of nonhuman agency to emerge. Attending carefully to lesser used sensory modes that might attune a human body to a nonhuman body.

In practice, this is not an intellectually driven exercise, but rather it is a more embodied activity. I attune to the energetic vibration of a tree through feeling with my spinal column, my spine is like a tuning fork, able to perceive this subtle energy field. To sense the energy of the tree is not altogether different from checking the temperature of the bathwater by immersing a hand; both become sensitive responses to another entity. This thesis traces practices of attunement from the thought of seventeenth century philosopher, Spinoza to the Kauri tree meditations of artist Sarah Smuts-Kennedy discussed in Chapter Three, the attuned research of plant scientist Monica Gagliano, and the human-plant collaborations of artist-curator Ingrid Vranken, as presented in the Introduction.

The Domestic Hub, discussed in Chapter Four, traces small acts of care from noticing what the worms prefer to eat (banana skins, sweet fruits) to acknowledging and giving thanks to a lettuce who is going to seed before removing gweie/it from the garden. This chapter pinpoints moments of energetic exchange that emerged within the research, as I experimented with ways in which I could acknowledge, respond to and record traces of these active presences.

One of the research intentions I stated from the outset, was to pursue the possibility that aspects of the human-nonhuman relationships of suburban cohabitation might be re-negotiated, and that these new terms might be understood experientially and viscerally, as well as intellectually. Four years on, the words I am writing are similar, but now my research incorporates a more embodied understanding, or to cite the words of David Bohm 'a tacit knowledge held within the body'.⁴ The experience that I have

⁴ Bohm, *On Dialogue*, 16.

gained from engaging with the methodology outlined in this thesis over four years, leads me to suggest that the process of sensory attunement to the agency of nonhuman others is both entangled with and informed by, the processes which allow 'thinking-feeling' to be experienced as one embodied activity. This could be described as an emergent tacit or embodied equalising of sensory modes, allowing me to see, think about, feel emotions about, and feel as an energetic vibration and hold, if only for a moment, these modes in unison.

At the outset of the research, I experienced visual sensation as a conjoined activity of 'seeing', knowing and thinking-about, a sensation that was located in my head and floated out slightly into the surrounding space. I associate this description of a complex perceptual mode with the colloquial expressions 'I see what you mean' and 'headspace'. Feeling was seemingly more 'blind' and appeared to be located in my gut, and was more easily accessed with my eyes closed (I align this in turn with the expression 'gut reaction'). Over my four years of research, the two modes have opened out onto one another; I am learning to feel with my eyes open.

As an experience of attunement, I can (at least for a moment) feel the energetic vibration of the tree with the nerve endings of my spinal column, I can see the tree with my eyes, I can think intellectually and feel emotions about the tree, and my experience of the tree, as both a current, tactile activity and abstractly, as embedded in a cultural and historical context.

WORKING TOGETHER: INVITING THE AGENTIC COLLABORATION OF ALLELOS

The experimental practices of agentic material collaboration articulated in Chapter Four of this thesis contribute towards the practical and conceptual reframing of the agentic possibilities endemic in the human-nonhuman collaborative activity of artmaking. This thesis follows up Amanda Boetzkes' proposition that a heightened awareness of existing within an immanent, lively world⁵ might be facilitated through a "cognitive process that is enacted and elaborated through art."⁶ Not only does this thesis put this proposal into practice, but it also extends Boetzkes' visual focus to include the full range of human sensory modes, elaborating strategies for collaborative working relationships with things.

In the same way that the research privileges attentive interaction with cohabitants of the Domestic Hub, it seeks to respond to the material agency of allelos/things within the artmaking relationship. The research becomes an exchange of bodies (human and other), material presence and the occupation of

⁵ Boetzkes' term "ecologicity" is discussed in relation to reimagining in section 1.7.

⁶ Amanda Boetzkes, 'Ecologicity, Vision, And the Neurological System', 272.

space; a repeating process of gathering as alcoves, huts and conversation pits, and dispersing, returning to homes, boxes and domestic purposes.

Shared agency is also extended to tools and devices in the making of video and sound works. Methods are developed, and constructions are devised to draw out the qualities and abilities of cameras, bikes, mobile phones and other things that record a trace or allow things to move. Rather than the qualities of any one participant driving the research, a responsive method evolves in which something happens, an artwork is made, but no one entity can be said to have controlled its making. The interaction might be simple; a phone camera on my diaphragm while breathing with the Oaktree, recording video of the tree above and the movement of my lungs and heart below. Recording also the sound of the wind, my breath, and birds. The interaction can be complicated, and I have devised various rigs to attach a GoPro to a bike to observe my daily ride. Together we have gathered digital versions of what we pass by (verges, sidewalks, multi-species thickets, suburban homes, cycleway and bridges); pass under (trees, sky, motorway overpasses and powerlines); or over (tarmac, road markings, fallen leaves). Equally elaborate, but largely unsuccessful contraptions have been constructed to record the sound of my breath as I cycle and, more successfully, the sounds of the cat purring, and a lament spoken to a milk bottle. Within this experimental, multi-entity interplay the research endeavours to wait quietly and allow a material dialogic to emerge.

MULTIMODAL PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE

This research contributes to the practical and discursive research field of participatory practice. It delineates a multimodal, anthropocontineric research territory located at the nexus where participatory practice, care, small political gestures, non-naïve localism and suburban cohabitation meet with social aesthetics and new materialist approaches to agentic engagement. Within this focused research area, it has convened small, situated, and dialogical interactions and object-oriented participatory events, with an emphasis on multisensory experience.

It has drawn upon the attunement-focused research of the Domestic Hub and the material driven methodology discussed previously, to convene multimedia installation events in which the actively engaged participant is invited to reflect critically and imaginatively on everyday human-nonhuman interactions.

Conversation Pit sought to bring philosophical thinking into dialogue with everyday life through bringing human thought together with the things that it was addressing, through locating it within a potentially defamiliarising, material dwelling-space. In addressing human-nonhuman interaction from a

philosophical position, it brought a (human) idea to bear on a (nonhuman) thing. *To Dream While Waking* sought to reverse this and bring a thing to bear on an idea. It invited a person to encounter an object and allow the object to “speak” to them. *DIY Alternative Reality Hut* developed participatory methods intended to facilitate further attunement directly between the person and thing. Each of these participatory activities offered a contra normative experiential space/heterotopic time-space within which the object might be seen, and the object-voice heard. The final event, *I See You See Me See You* invites a participating human to see and be seen, amid the everyday liveliness of the Domestic Hub.

In concluding, I suggest that if embodied experience can be measured in words, it is likely that these will be words of a poet. This thesis concludes with an excerpt from a collaborative conversation text with the poet Vana Manasiadis, who I met through *RM Conversation Pit*.⁷

⁷ Paula Green, NZ poet, critic invited Manasiadis contribute a response to Covid-19 lockdown in Aotearoa for the online publication Poetry Shelf. Manasiadis invited me to dialogue with her over the two weeks leading up to *Alternative Reality Hut* and the end of the Level 4 lockdown. This is her play of our shared words.

SELECTING FROM THE BUBBLE (DIALOGUING WITH JILL SORENSEN AND VANA MANASIADIS)

VM - I love your dispersed dwelling space project, have spent the day thinking about it; I'm hoping to practice the multi-entity, the idea of co-authored texts as a kind of anti-[sole] authorship –

JS - thought as a participatory process –

VM - energy as a case for non-human personhoods –

JS - Sometimes I sense the energy of the things in my bubble . . . A body compiled, as all bodies are, from the parts of other things; the wood of trees who would have pushed as seedlings from the ground around the time my great-grandfather set foot in New Zealand. The plastic skin of paint, with the memory of the foliage they once were before they were oil, before they were plasticised into paint –

VM – I'm thinking of the physics of dialogue, of energy and vibrations –

JS - and this vibration activates the next atoms, cells, beings. We could more honestly say the energy is spread by contagion –

VM - Yesterday I read your response aloud to the once-foliage then-oil-then-paint of my bedroom walls, to the wooden structure behind the walls, to the boring insects and skin-flakes and various small moulds. I read your part of the dialogue and paused between each paragraph and waited for the sound vibrations to coil and rest against the soil beneath the foundations –

JS - I live here, but this is not my house. It is a house shared with moths, chewing and boring insects, beetles and mites –

VM - I call it my voice...the sound from my larynx, my voice-box, my mouth muscles, teeth, but they're carbon compounds, fleshy materials –

JS – A garden; an active and lively community of plants, worms, soil, sun, bugs and chickens woven together in multidirectional energetic exchange. This bubble is shared with my husband, with whom I live easily and closely, and with a young cat, for whom the bubble is the original normal. (And now you, Vana palpably present) –

VM - (sigh, chant, keening, song). Your response is so embodied, it feels like a tether and matter mattering. And so I enter your bubble –

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