

Invasive Species

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Abstract

This is a documentation of practice-led research into the proliferation of invasive species, a phenomenon analogous to colonialism and its accompanying systemic extraction and displacement of bodies, goods, and earth materials. Sylvia Wynter attributes this spread to the Enlightenment era centering of European man as the hierarchical pinnacle of intelligence. This separation of man from nature caused a rupture with vast indigenous and planetary knowledge that has resulted in species die offs and potential environmental and social collapse. It is an imposed monocultural approach, a term borrowed from agriculture to describe a field planted with a single species, forcing reliance on toxic chemicals to maintain it. Culture, as the cultivation of social spaces, reinforces this model. This is evidenced in Hollywood cinema by whom it offers power to and whom it depicts on screen. Dominant science as well by methodically separating the observer, and objects of observation. It is work in objectification.

There are however other models of cultivation. Permaculture understands that plants thrive best within diverse communities where each works collectively to contribute to larger systems where the toxic measures of monocultured spaces are not needed. It is work in reciprocity. Wilderness is a dynamic form of permaculture. The colonial trope to name wilderness 'uncultivated' for not adhering to monocultural practices, was utilized to excuse mass theft, displacement, extraction, and murder in the Americas and the global south.

Invasive Species aims to fragment this colonial invasion by attending to the following objectives: One, to research and name issues of monoculture documented in the archive and canon through spatial and temporal investigations of exemplary colonial events in history, literature, theory, natural sciences, art, and film, with the intent to amplify the systemic gaps created by colonial violence and its accompanying displacement. Two, to look for alternative epistemologies and ontologies in the counter-archive and counter-canon by focusing on work that engages permacultural modes of thought in science (Margolis and Lovelock, Vernadsky) and the cosmopolitical (Diprose, Ahmed), as an expansion of posthumanist theory (Wynter, Barad, Haraway, Federici). And three, to contribute to the counter-canon by expanding on Gramme L. Sullivan's practice-led research methodology which takes an intersectional approach to knowledge (un)making by weaving between disciplines, proposing creative practice as a form of research, and modeling how to reconnect the subjective to the objective.

Film is applied as the most effective medium for this work as it can reinsert the temporal into the spatial, as a resistance to the colonial separation of place with its history prior to

invasion. The application of uncanny forms of time to image, story, and sound make space for systemic gaps to be witnessed and discussed in a manner that cannot be achieved through the written word alone. As contribution to knowledge, I propose the wilding of cinema, or, 'feral filmmaking,' which rejects modes of domination by rooting in the guerrilla methods of Third Cinema which made modest work to incite social and political engagement. A methodology that attends to further fragmentation of colonial invasion by (re)engaging with overlooked aspects of ceremony and storytelling. The former is activated with Deep Listening, as pioneered by Pauline Oliveros, and expanded by Dr. Elena Marchevska. It is ceremonial work rooted in wandering and open engagement with the sensorial to break through the culturally imposed barrier of objectification. And for the latter, Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation," which insists that fictional narration must be inserted into the archive to attend to its systemic gaps. As the working ledger of dominant culture, the failure to search out these stories becomes a cyclical reenactment of colonization.

The resulting practice outcome is the hybrid documentary film, *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* which tests this methodology on a single region. It investigates the European colonization of its own border that occurred with the mass privatization following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the multi-ethnic multi-religious permacultural union of South-Eastern Europe, as parallel to other global colonial trajectories researched within the written document. As critical fabulation, the film moves between segments of documentary, and the fictional story of a witch in the Federician sense, not as an occult figure, but as a metaphor for the imposed division of human from land that emerged to justify early colonial invasion.

Feral filmmaking works as a weed: tenacious, ever present, ever spreading, refusing to remain contained by borders. It offers a methodology of resistance that can be applied to future research and film practice. A framework for active-isms towards a new and wild cinema.

Acknowledgement

This work was completed on land belonging to the Tongva, Orang Laut, Han, and Hrvati. Some of which are unceded lands, and each of which has had to navigate forms of forced displacement. I acknowledge the deserved sovereignty of each.

This work would have been impossible without the continuous support of my partner, Travis Wilkerson, the man who taught me that making films is work in both politics and aesthetics. That it should make indistinguishable the personal and the social. And that this is part of everyday living, rather than just an accompaniment to it. To creative agitation, always.

It is a continuation of the open education, research training, and notions of deep ecologies, sparked by Alan Kay and Roberta Blatt.

I must also thank my advisors Professor Matthew Johnson from Liverpool John Moores University and Dr. Elena Marchevska from the TransArt Institute. Their push towards engaging with matters of great depth, provocations of other considerations, positions, and points of view, and constant encouragement made this work, though difficult, also meaty and satisfying. I am particularly grateful for Elena's encouragement to refind ritual, and navigate utilizing it within an academic context.

This work would have been impossible without the deep insight from Sunčica Fradelić on filmmaking and former Yugoslavia, as both a muse and a dear friend.

To Krater Collective, and The School for Feral Grounds, thank you Danica Sretenović and Gaja Mežnaric Osole for your enthusiasm for finding beauty in wild places and invasive species.

And a thank you to Marija Gabrijela Perić and Lorraine Richards, for being creative and dedicated librarians. For always being available to help me track down a text. A good librarian is a secret weapon.

And lastly, my long time proofreader, library scientist Cathy Leverkus, who is also the person who first made sure I fell in love with reading and art. Who showed me that mothers can write books, and that we are all responsible for telling our own stories.

Preamble

This academic text will move between voices: the academic or objective voice, and the personal or subjective voice. This is not to honor a duality, in fact the aim in separating these voices is to provide space for them to overlap and entangle, for questions to arise as to why one is not the other, to provoke the shifting of boundaries between the two.

As such, **personal experience is included in the body of the thesis in a serif font to distinguish it.**

“The subjective is characterized primarily by [a] perceiving mind. The objective is characterized primarily by [a] physical extension in space and time,” (Mulder, not dated). But what about marginalized and displaced populations, those with complicated access to space or time, via colonial displacement or systemic inequality? “We confront, then, an epistemological challenge to explain whether, and if so how, some subjective impressions can lead to knowledge of objective reality,” (Mulder, not dated). Both Foucault and Derrida have written on the subjective as interconnected with western notions of sovereignty. Of particular interest is how considerations shift alongside access to autonomy or ipseity, and the relational distance from objectification (Mansfield, 2010, p. 1). “An ipseity that includes within itself, as the etymology would also confirm, the androcentric positioning of power in the master or head of the household, the sovereign mastery of the lord or seigneur, of the father or husband, the power of the *same*, of *ipse* as the selfsame self),” (Mansfield, 2010, p. 2). It is a subjectivity that, as Derrida notes, relies on “the relationship between unconditionality and ipseity,” (Mansfield, 2010, p. 4). A relationship which has the potential to lead to its undoing, in that if hierarchical relationships are altered, then notions of the subjective, must too.

The definition between voices in this text can be further understood as those subject to systemic intersectional marginalization, and those positioned in ‘the androcentric positioning of power.’ Therefore, the objective vs subjective can be cataloged further as the voices that have historically been seen as objective: the theoretical, the critical, the philosophical, and the scientific. And those that have historically been seen as subjective: the woman, the indigenous body, the gardener, the artist, the earth. There is a divide in how these two groups have been cataloged, cared for, learned from. These are also voices navigated within this text. For the sake of clarity in this thesis, as well as to not contribute to systemic marginalization, I will only separate the personal as a serif font. The rest will entangle throughout.

In a similar vein, and as this work is dedicated to ecology as well as social justice, the entirety of this writing will include nature alongside class, race, gender, ethnicity, and indigenously, in defining 'intersectionality.' This is to name the positionality proposed by the "philosophy of science," that emerged during the Enlightenment era which also corresponded with the European witch trials and expanding colonial crusades, "in which nature was seen as an essentially feminine domain of disorder that had to be conquered, subjugated, and indeed tortured in order to extract her secrets," (Ghosh 2021, p. 255). Indigenous bodies and foreign lands have undergone the same fate of destruction and displacement. Both hold wisdom and knowledge that has been largely overlooked.

As the objective is recognized as tied to both place and time, this text will also move between these phenomena. This will occur in philosophical and historical research, but also will engage with subjective observations as I have undergone personal migrations during the course of this research and practice, living in Singapore, Croatia, and China, along with growing up in the southwestern United States. All of these movements have left tracings in my work. Each place is researched with the aim of building a global understanding of varying approaches to rebuilding ties with the human and more-than, as well as exercises in resistance. As this movement at times becomes disorienting, this confusion is harnessed as an opening for gathering new understandings of place and interconnectivity.

Though this text is intended to be read in its entirety, there will be those that find the subjective sections less valuable, and there will be those who may wish to just read these. In fact, the text is intended to act in disobedience of traditional bordering of fields of study, to exhibit what can be gained by cross-examining across disciplines. However, in maintaining traditional knowledge pathways, filmmakers may wish to read just Chapters 4 and 5, two-dimensional artists Chapter 3, botanists and gardeners the beginnings of each chapter and the Introduction, Chapter 2 for scientists, Chapter 1 for historians, and lovers of strange and poetic, the Deep Listening sections in the Portfolio. Nonetheless, the intention is for all to entangle, to become richer in how they work together.

This thesis includes an accompanying portfolio at the end containing:

1. My film, which is also the practical outcome of this thesis.

Strange Flower (little sister to the poor) (2024), is intended to be watched as instructed after reading the introduction to Chapter 5. Film link for reference:

<https://vimeo.com/903231491/26f0e4a267?share=copy>

As well as a brief synopsis, film stills, voice over text, and the trailer for the film.

Trailer Link for reference, to be watched when instructed in the introduction:

<https://vimeo.com/982223512?share=copy>

2. Process Writing and quick Practice Sketches which emerged through exercises of Deep Listening, a methodology for exploring connectivity with the natural world, which is explained in Chapter 2. Some excerpts are notated and embedded in the full text as well.

Let's begin with a brief overview of my relationship to the garden and the land I was born on, as well as how I began making films:

The beginning of my work on invasive species stems from my early professional work in landscape architecture, in Los Angeles, on Tongva and Chumash land.

A region of thriving indigenous communities and documented by 16th century Spanish conquistadors as, "filled with people,' and the villages supplied with abundant acorns, grass grains, cattail seeds, fish, and maguey," (Anderson, 2005, p. 65). My main target for removal was the lawn, a nostalgic vestige of English colonization. "The smooth manicured lawn demands a monoculture of one or two species of grasses; every other plant must be carefully removed or exterminated," (Haeg, 2008, p. 12). Years of gardening to evoke roots in a foreign homeland have created a booming market for plants that cannot survive the minimal rainfall, cyclical and increasing droughts, or the heavy clay makeup of the soil, as requiring substantial watering which taxes the limited water reserves. In this model, indigenous plants become weeds in their own landscape. "Achieving the perfect greenness requires the addition of nitrogen and phosphorus. These chemicals enter the groundwater and drainage systems, which eventually empty into streams and rivers, spurring algae growth that consumes the oxygen in the water, killing all other forms of life," (Haeg, 2008, p. 12). This depletes nutrients in the soil, and can be deadly to beneficial insects and pollinators. "It was once home to the largest concentration of wine vineyards in the country and the capital of citrus production until the population boom and subsequent water wars of the 1920s," (Haeg, 2008, p. 65). The issue of providing water to sustain the population has yet to be adequately addressed. In this region invasive plant species take on another

dimension as well, that of fire. They are quick to spread past gardens into hillsides and wild areas, where the only available water source is from sparse rains, or creek beds that are empty most of the year. The plants dry out, making them perfect kindling. The area is prone to devastating wildfires, which, along with global warming, have been rapidly intensifying in frequency and scale. In the brief winter rains, land without deep roots, falls away. Mudslides do not distinguish between dirt, home, or bodies, they all fall together. These cyclical disasters are part of living there.

Landscape in and of itself, is focused on human alteration of the natural world. It can be either a material place, or a depiction of place, often containing portions of both. Landscape painting emerged before the idea of a physical landscape, as a desire for imagery of the picturesque, (Franke et al, 2022, p. 211). Of note is its tendency to portray the pastoral, a farmed landscape, tended to for the cultivation of plants or animals for human consumption. Both the material and representative landscape are exercises in control over Earth. Landscape architecture examines “physical geographies that have the potential to be reimagined, and visual representations that are constructed to explore and design them,” (Wall, 2020, p. 7). Designs are proposed futures. Some materialize, and some are left on paper. “Material territories are surveyed, drawn, reconsidered and reconstructed,” (Wall, 2020, p. 7). Some propose sustainable futures, although “in the contemporary Western world they frequently adopt ego-centered scenographic traditions of landscape painting,” (Wall 2020, p. 7). Imagery that plays to nostalgia and the imposition of European aesthetics. But what about the, ““other landscapes,’...these complex and often conflicting landscapes are entanglements of places, subjectivities, actions and bodies - migrant, citizen, traveller, resident and indigenous populations,” (Wall, 2020, p. 7). As well as the ones cast aside as byproducts of our extractions: the mines, the waste dumps, the ruins of factories. The field of landscape architecture has done a poor job of addressing these spaces, the ones hidden from the gallery walls. The shift towards this form of cultivation has altered our relationship with the wild, but also the other species humans have lived so long alongside. “Registering the physicality of landscapes in the context of the nonhuman processes from which they are produced, and human practices by which they are constituted, brings complex considerations of landscape into close proximity,” (Wall, 2020, p. 11). Work in the garden is work in both.



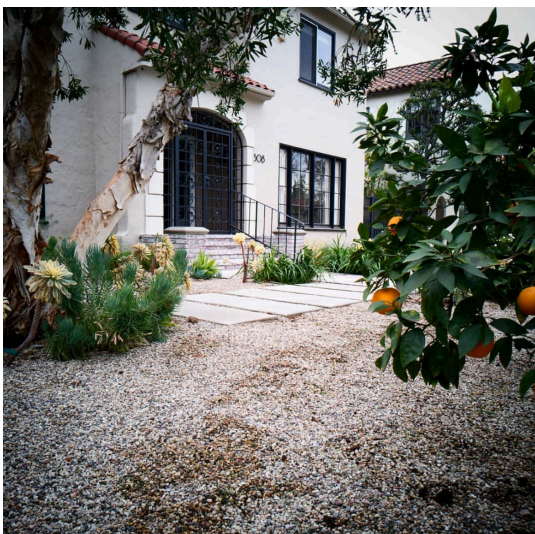
[Thomas Cole (1836) *The Oxbow*. [painting of view in North Hampton, Massachusetts] in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In Public Domain]

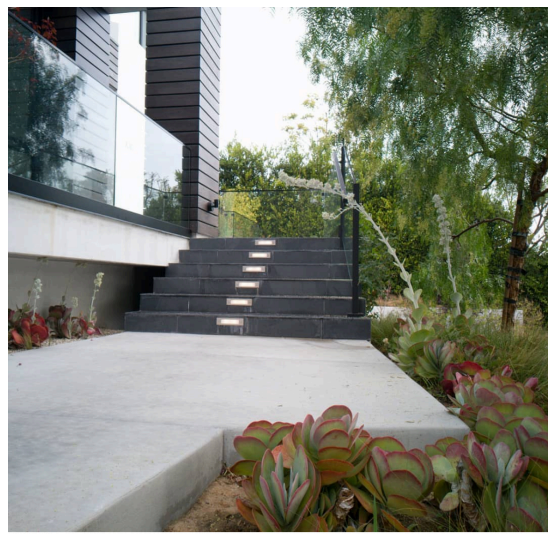
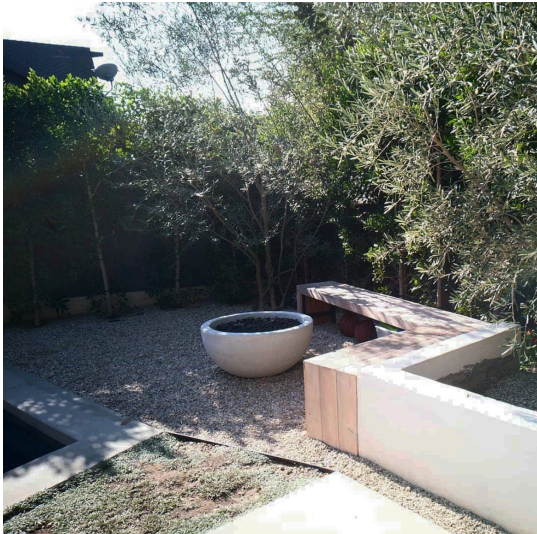
I graduated from architecture school in a time of economic downturn, just after the bank failures of 2008, a time when amongst other things, jobs in the field slowed and many of us were let go from our positions. I was trained to work in an office, instead, I turned to the garden. I began by volunteering at two urban farming projects: The Garden School Foundation, and Silver Lake Farms.

The former is an edible garden at the 24th Street School begun by landscape architect Nancy Powers, located in an old and rundown neighborhood of Los Angeles that was left behind as development projects moved west, (Ritz, 2012). Six- to twelve-year-old children would come to learn how to grow plants, see them develop throughout their growth cycle, and learn how to care for them. This neighborhood at the time, was what is called a “food desert,” neighborhoods with fast food chains and small independent markets lacking produce and fresh foods. I will never forget the day a child came running up to me cupping a raspberry in his hand like a small treasure. He asked me what it was, and when I told him, exclaimed he had never seen one before. The school year culminated in a pizza party, where the food was made from plants they all helped grow. I hope some of them still carry with them the knowledge of the power of a bit of soil and a seed.

The latter, Silver Lake Farms was a working urban food and flower farm run by Tara Kolla, (Swartly, 2006). She taught classes on sustainable urban farming, rather than studying

textbooks, she used the garden as her classroom. I learned through practice, through having my hands in the soil. It was by working with her that I learned about permaculture, which works with combining plants to bring out their best and strongest traits. It is knowing that if cared for, a tomato can take sixty to one-hundred days to fruit. It is noticing that they grow stronger next to plants like basil and marigolds, and weaker when planted near broccoli. It is welcoming earthworms, bees, butterflies, and ants. There is no food grown without these helpers and the sustainable planting food is also planting flowers to invite them into the garden. It is running soil through your fingers after taking the time to know what it should look like and what it is missing. It is the inverse of monoculture, the typical western agricultural model, wherein cultivated production produces a single, or mono, crop, which dominates the plantation and modern commercial agricultural practice. Monoculture plans for now, based on quick economic turnarounds, accepting that it will force barren land. “Our attempt to control nature has perpetuated poor relations with all the beings in the garden, turning everything into some sort of battle, or endless regimes whether that’s mowing, hoeing, watering or attacking some critter,” (Fowler, 2023). It is the breeding of seeds and plant varieties to fit a narrow vision, meant to benefit profits and rapid production, rather than benefit ecologies as a whole. On the other hand, permaculture is a sustainable model where multiple species are planted together, each enriching the others in specific ways. And be it pride in hard work, or the connection of nurturing a plant fully through its cycle, tasting food grown by your own hands, makes it all the more delicious. Work in the garden is work in slowness, in learning the timing of plants and to watch for their signals.





[landscape projects – Little Tomato Landscapes (2011-9). [photographs of architectural projects] Los Angeles. Photos by Erin Wilkerson]

Soon after, I began my own landscape design company, called Little Tomato Landscapes, founded on the principles learned with Silver Lake Farms and the Garden School Foundation. I designed and built urban farms, and drought tolerant gardens in homes all over Los Angeles. But it was a conversation with a landscape architect friend, who was working on a remediation proposal for a notoriously polluted section of the Los Angeles River bank, long owned by the Transportation Department, that sent me into an existential crisis.

She described her research process and the investigation of natural processes to remove the toxic metals in the topsoil. She initially thought she could use the deep root systems of sunflowers to slowly pull up the toxins, but after discovering there was the issue of dumping

the toxic plant bodies and ensuring their seeds would not spread into the environment, she had concluded that the only cost effective way forward was to cover the site in a thick plastic, and add new topsoil. She acknowledged that eventually the plastic would break down, and that signage not to dig there would eventually be lost as well. I had idolized the work of landscape architect Julie Bargmann who had used strategies to clean water infiltrated with mining waste, using plants and terraced ponds as a filtration system, (Gallagher, 2022). It was this conversation where I realized that this process only caused a mild improvement, and the site was still toxic and uninhabitable. This potential to fix human-made disasters, that I found so much comfort in, was just a fantasy.

This conversation sparked jumping in on a project with my partner, documentary filmmaker Travis Wilkerson, with our two small children in tow. We had collaborated before on his films as Creative Agitation, but this project would change the direction of my life and practice forever. I took eight weeks off to film a road trip. But it was not just minigolf and swimming pools, we were documenting a different kind of landscape as well: the hundreds of missile silos of the American West. The bomb was created in the US, but as Gunther Anders' describes in the paradigm of the Promethean Gap, there is a "profound gap between our technical ability to create (like the nuclear bomb or climate change) and our (in)capacity to fully understand the actual affects of this creation" (Horvat, 2021, p. 85). I cataloged botanical samples from the edges of the barbed wire fencing surrounding the silos into indigenous and invading species and filmed eerie landscapes and motel rooms. Instant photographs are a big part of film history, to document the placement of objects in scenes, and what characters are wearing, so if scenes need to be reshot, there is an accessible visual reference to match to. In this project, I began to utilize Fuji Instant Film photos, as a quick supplementary form of documentation. They are made with a camera that fits in my bag, doesn't require a tripod, and can be used to capture quick moments. But also, in the softness of this analogue technique, it references a nostalgia for the pre-digital age, before film imagery needed to be presented as crisp. It spoke to the Americana of a family road trip, even if what it was documenting was precisely what those kinds of excursions avoided.

The most terrifying find while making this project, a *helianthus petiolaris*, a prairie sunflower, displaying the cellular mutation called fasciation, high in the mountains of Montana, surrounded by soybean fields. Resembling the melted clocks painted by Dali, and the mutated daisies found near Fukushima, after the nuclear disaster there. My intent was to describe the movement and erasure of bodies, as echoed in the current botanical makeup of the American prairie. It was a document of invasive species, meant to convey that they function via multitudes of scales, and that they are spreading. As the journey continued, it

was impossible to ignore the close proximity between these doomsday sites and areas of violence against the indigenous people. They were all adjacent to Reservations and indigenous massacre sites. The bombs are a threat to the world, but also, as they are passed day to day by the indigenous peoples, they are a direct warning to both.





[stills from *Nuclear Family* of the White Sands Missile Range Museum, Big Hole National Battlefield, and Erin Wilkerson collecting plant samples near a missile silo in Montana (2021)]

The archival document originally presented here cannot be made freely available because Utah State government documents are not in public domain. It is the Application for Indian War Medal submitted to the state of Utah, County of Wasatch, No. 2551, which states that my great-great-great-grandfather, Abraham Hatch, resident of Heber City, “took chase of a company of horsemen marching into the territory of [illegible word] to the relief of a settlement.” The document was sourced at www.familysearch.com

[my great-great-great-grandfather’s Application for Indian War Veteran Medal (1906), which states his rank as Captain, archived on familysearch.com]

My personal family history too, is connected to the history of settlement, in that I have traced my genealogy on familyseach.com, on my mother’s side, back to amongst the first 17th century ships, arriving from England to ‘New’ England, where they named the settlement Plymouth, after the port they left behind. They were amongst the first wave of British invaders to America. Taking the train from London to Liverpool recently, I was reminded of another train, from Albany into New York City, one side follows the Hudson River, but the other, is a bocage countryside that used to be forested, arranged into plots of land, much like the view across the Atlantic Ocean. It is no coincidence that the

New England countryside resembles its namesake. From there, my family moved further west, across unceded land over the next 300 years, and arrived in California, in the early 20th century, moving into the same neighborhood as the 24th Street School, which had been recently forcibly ceded from Mexico. In each location they displaced the indigenous population, with intent. There are records of Indian War conscription papers for multiple generations of men in my family. The history of the white settlement of the United States, is also my family history, they are inextricable. In manifestations of cognitive dissonance, these brutal actions are described at dinner tables as heroic, as the work of pilgrims and pioneers. The blood from this invasion, rapid and violent, is on our hands.



[Gast, J. (1872) *American Progress* [painting] in the collection of the Autry Museum of the American West. Los Angeles. In public domain.]

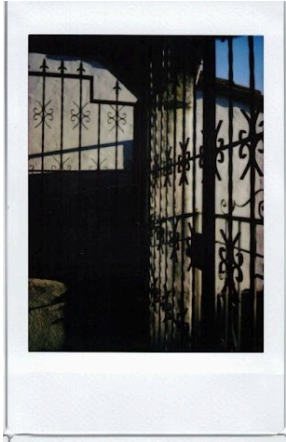
The archival document originally presented here cannot be made freely available because they are in the archive of the Homestead Museum. It shows multiple oil wells along La Cienega, including in the medium. What is now a busy city street, was then mostly undeveloped with just a few cars on the road. The document was sourced at The Homestead Museum Blog.

<https://homesteadmuseum.blog/2017/01/26/drilling-for-black-gold-la-brea-oil-field-1920s/>

[Rancho La Brea oil wells located close to my childhood home (1920s) [historical photograph] in the collection of the Homestead Museum, City of Industry, California]

California is distinct, as it still holds cultural ties to Mexico, and Spain, its former colonizer, as well as the cultural influence of being settled by those of British colonial ancestry. To navigate the city and interact with the people best, you must know some Span-english. That is the language of workers, the backbone of the city. Time moves at a different pace than much of the country. Friendships offer a different generosity. It took my leaving to understand how much the city is still tied to Spanish colonialism and to Mexico. It took distance for this clarity to emerge. The house I grew up in, like much of the architecture there, is of a Spanish colonial aesthetic, with terracotta tiles, stucco, arched entrances, wrought iron gates, with agave and citrus in the garden.

Now when I return I feel the weight of the histories of this place differently, as well as the militarized border nearby. Now I also notice something I had learned to avoid looking at, across the street from the house I was raised in is a tall windowless yellow building, meant to resemble an office building. It houses twenty-eight working oil wells, the mechanics of which sometimes cause the windows in the house to rattle. When I was little, there was an elderly woman who spoke of the whole neighborhood being bean fields and oil wells. My mother was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2021, the doctors say this may be related to her living so close to a functioning oil well. It does not run in our family. This has become a new form of heirloom. This is what we have done with stolen land. The following work comes from time sitting in this discomfort as a means for grappling with immanent forms of justice. This research and practice on invasive species is also a breaking from my personal and ancestral history. There are multitudes of myths to interrogate. I dream of feral futures as resistance to participating in legacies of atrocity, and an embrace of the wild. It is a break with my inheritance. This work is imperfect, but essential.





[Wilkerson, E. - Fuji Instant Film photos of my childhood house (2024)]

It was in learning about these histories of loss, intentional destruction, and failed remediations that I knew I needed to expand my work beyond my local gardens. This marked the end of my career in architecture, though my love for the lessons learned in the garden only grows stronger each year. There is much to be learned in tracking these ecological changes, from looking for the clues plants share with us. It is a kind of listening our society has forgotten how to do. This writing will offer clues for what to look for to understand this entanglement further. It is important to note that humans and plants have a long history of reciprocity, both have been changed by the other, and both have followed each other along pathways of migration. “From the hyper-micro to extra-macro, the human and nonhuman actors constituent within the local and global reach of this environment must be considered as designers of a landscape,” (Wall, . 2020, p. 20). Learning how to prepare and maintain a sustainable garden is also preparation for the urgent precarity of our making: how to try to work through climate changes, drought, flood, and the warfare that accompanies times of great change.

Introduction

My PhD work began with the release of the apocalyptic road trip film, *Nuclear Family* (2021), and the question of how to work through all the unresolved problematics raised in making it. First and foremost, how to attend to the precarity caused by human mismanagement. But also how to best make work in resistance, work that desires to provoke the mending of terrible legacies. I have continued to hone my practice in film, and in entering the academic realm, have opened up these questions to both academic and public audiences. As such this work is a continuation of this aim to Investigate invasive species to fragment colonial invasion through research and creative practice.

I suppose it befitting for a film about a road trip to lead to explorations of migration. “Today, a huge number of human beings are globally on the move, to the extent that the 21st century has alternately been called ‘the age of the migrant’ and ‘the age of mobility.’ Migratory movements, however, are not recent. They have characterized the history of the human species for at least two million years,” (Davino, and Lorenzo, 2024, p. 243). In the last millennia, there has been movement in response to climate shifts and ecological catastrophe, in response to the mechanization of agriculture which allowed for a shift from agrarian living to industrialized urban centers, in response to warfare, but perhaps the largest mass movements have been due to colonization. This movement has affected the trajectory of global biomes and ecologies. It has also allowed for the spread of foreign species, both human and more-than, in new territories. Some have moved benevolently, and become productive and integrated members of their new biomes, and some have not. The latter are invasive species, which are aggressive foreign plants, insects, animals, and parasites. They are biological invaders.

This invasion can begin via natural movements: seeds carried along the winds of storms, or the migration of birds. They can be brought through intentional displacement: seedlings to farm and cultivate for food, for pleasure, or as reminders of home. They can also be the unseen byproducts of migration: falling from suitcases, encased in dirt patches on shoes tracked long distances, embedded in the fur of foreign cattle brought to graze in new pastures. But they can also emerge from movements of colonizers, their middlemen, and their soldiers, and have therefore been spread along settlement and trade routes via ports, rail lines, and silk road caravans. And in reaction to this, there has also been migration from the displacement their actions create: exiles, refugees, and prisoners. They are reminders that the effects of migration radiate out beyond the initial movement of bodies. These movements have enacted rapid change in landscapes: mass species displacement, shifted

ecologies, and a proliferation of species unable to contribute to the biological needs of the region. Questions then arise on how to address this outbreak of our own making.

This rapid expansion of migration, human and otherwise, was spurred by the philosophies of the Enlightenment and early imperialist protocapitalism, wherein European ontology shifted from God centered, to human centered, and more specifically towards Euro-centric patriarchal control. An era researched by Jamaican scholar and writer, Sylvia Wynter, and marked by Descartes 1637 dictum “*Cogito, ergo sum*,” I think therefore I am, wherein he also separated animals from humans, only allowing soul, consciousness, and the ability to feel, to be ascribed to one species. Wynter describes this as “the overrepresentation of man,” (Franke et al., 2022, p. 40). The imposition of this false binary (European Man vs Other) has caused great friction, the results of which have been devastating to the ecological health of the planet, as well as the lives of peoples in the global south and far east.



[de Pere. A (1654) *The Allegory of Vanity* [painting] in the collection of The Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. In public domain.]

There is great hope in the recognition that ontologies have been, and potentially can be again, altered to function as “heresy” against capitalist dogmas,” (Franke et al 2022, p. 42). Prompting the following research questions: Since this era of rampant monoculturalism

began during the Enlightenment, and it is understood that culture and cultivation are socially imposed, what kinds of practices can shift culture and cultivation towards more sustainable models? Furthermore, how do we make suitable space for the massive loss, grief, and justice due this era? And lastly, since Hollywood practices a monocultural approach, can film be utilized inversely as a medium to perform permaculture? The aim of this work is to fragment colonial invasion through research and creative practice and to work towards dismantling boundaries that have been put in place to substantiate invasion. To name the global problematics caused by this era of the human-centered, including exploring its colonial roots. To explore models for returning to an Earth-centered model. And to critically engage with pathways of resistance to our current trajectory in both academic theories, and cultural canons.

My approach to this written thesis, which has emerged as a methodology of learning through circumstance, is framed by observations from my personal global migrations over these years of PhD study. I utilize “critical autoethnography... [which] focuses on linking analysis and action by presenting the insights of theory and context, in practice and performance, and in people’s lives,” (Jones, 2018, p. 5). In particular, by moving back and forth between the West and Asia, the latter of which decentralizes the West, there is potential to gain insights on other ways of knowing and being through observations which may only form clarity from a distance.

A secondary approach for synthesizing and expanding considerations for research will utilize Greame L. Sullivan’s methodology of practice-led research as an active response to the academic tradition of residing solely in theoretical practice. It aims to broaden “the site where research problems and issues are found and explored,” and to consider forms of knowledge that academia has shied away from. It is an active interaction between the dialectical and the conceptual, as an inversion of the “research process because it encourages a working from the ‘unknown to the known’...as a means to critique existing knowledge,” (2009, 48-9). It is a space for questions across disciplines. As such, the research will be informed by practice, and vice versa.

The imposition of dualities on spaces of multiplicity forces the primary question that runs through this thesis as well as the accompanying practice of “what kinds of politics to choose: the ghostly necropolitics of the current movement or a politics informed by other kinds of spirits,” (Bubant, 2017, p. G136). There is an intentional irony in suggesting a divisive question as a means to provoke entanglement, this is intended as a means to break through barriers, not enforce them.

The practical outcome of this work will be the making of a hybrid documentary film, *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)*, which will engage in Sullivan's practice-led research model, as well as a test of the feral filmmaking methodology as a model of anti-colonial resistance. It is a wilding of cinema as counter-cultural response to Hollywood studio methods that mirror the monocultural approach of a broken society.

The first chapter will explore human-centered ontology through slices of history expanded beyond the Eurocentric, theories on culture and cultivation practices, and mythologies that sanctioned mass colonial invasion, in hopes that in describing the making of this era, there are also clues for its unmaking. This will include critical engagement with: theoretical texts, art, historical cartographies, ecological studies, and western philosophies of the spatial.

The second chapter will look towards varying approaches for (re)engaging with the more-than-human, models of interference. This will discuss physical limitations of human beings in understanding the world, alongside scientific models that suggest planetary intelligence that frame Earth as a being, rather than an object. It will explore models for reciprocity and deeper engagement between human and the more-than, after these years of imposed divide. This will be further explored via avenues overwhelmingly ignored by western academia: indigenous and ceremonial philosophy, propositions on decoloniality, and methodological exercises in substantiating the subjective.

Chapter three explores art of resistance to the human-centered model. As the canon was created to uphold the dominating ontology, to mirror a sanitized bourgeois life, this will be work of the counter-canon. I will propose models that interrogate capitalist extraction, in particular how artists have addressed issues of portraying loss, displacement, erasure, and redaction, as well as models for representing other ontologies. This will be done in reflection of their value as research material, but also for how they can inform filmmaking practice. Rather than searching for utopia, this is a search for models of survival, justice, and repair.

Chapter four will look into considerations for how to harness filmmaking as an anti-colonial apparatus and propose how to practice the methodology of feral filmmaking. This expands on the guerrilla tactics of Third Cinema, by proposing the addition of Deep Listening, the experimental, and critical fabulation, to attend to relink the objective and the subjective, and work towards mending terrible histories of erasure and displacement. It will delve into theoretical approaches to the medium, as well as opportunities in the genres of experimental, essay documentary, and speculative fiction to engage in bearing witness to the more-than-human. Films can work to uphold 'the ghostly necropolitics' of the Hollywood model, or they can propose 'other kinds of spirits.' Which means that ethical models for

making are as important as the end result. Different futures must be imagined before they are made and these futures can be witnessed through the screen.

Chapter five will explore how these questions of research and practice informed the making of my film, *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* (2024). After a brief introduction, you will be asked to watch the practice component of this thesis, the film, *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)*. The film will interrogate the western objectification of Earth, women, and indigenous bodies, including the assumption that, “only humans are capable of telling stories,” as an ontological tool for the “silencing of nonhuman voices,” (Ghosh, 2021, p. 201). An assumption all the more problematic when the majority of faces and voices depicted as main characters on screen resemble the same ones who led the colonial brigades. This chapter will describe how the research considerations posited in the thesis were attended to in the practice.

The thesis will conclude with the After-Word wherein this proposed model of work will be ruminated on.

The damage done by invasive species is too massive to be easily repaired or contained, but by naming how they have been allowed to proliferate, offering proposals for mitigation and methodologies to make space for the return of indigenous species and other kinds of ontologies, there is a base to establish frameworks for intervention. Work that must grow collectively to enact actual change. The intended impact of this thesis and film is to do just that; to cultivate collective resistance and incite demand for better ways of being. This means that it is important to sit with what we have already lost, to listen to as many voices as we can, particularly those suppressed, or as bell hooks says, pushed to the margins, to imagine new ways to live with Earth and each other. Strange shifts have happened before. Species can adapt to work in beneficial reciprocity with new biomes. Creatures thought extinct do sometimes reemerge. I propose that we have the choice to participate in cycles of imposed death, or to break from this pattern.

Please now watch the trailer for the film, *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* before we continue on to Chapter 1.

Trailer Link: <https://vimeo.com/982223512?share=copy>

Chapter 1 - Invasive Practices and Spatial Cultivation

Weeds are tenacious. They disperse subversively: seeds carried on the wind, or the fur of a wolf, or the boots of a hiker, spreading underground via rhizomatic systems, working alongside mycelium, and feeding from decay. They do not wait to be planted. The term references a plant settling into an undesirable location. Dandelions, often considered weeds, are amongst the first edible plants in spring, their leaves highly nutritious, as are their roots which can be roasted like parsnips or dried and used as a tea, their buds delicious battered and fried. They are also amongst the first spring foods for bees. They have the tenacity to grow in improbable places, the cracks in sidewalks, or the crevice of a wall. This is how they have thrived beyond their homeland of Eurasia. There is a shift from childhood to adulthood: children see dandelions as magic, as granters of wishes, and in return they blow their seeds to be carried by the wind, adults perceive weeds as a threat, a reminder that nature reclaims what is unintended to. The term refers to a plant growing where it is not welcome, this can be because it is competing with more human-favored species, or simply a trivial perception of aesthetics. Weeds are not inherently invasive species, they can also be indigenous, or of naturalized origin. The term weed is a statement of the perceived value of the plant. Gardener Alys Fowler suggests we call them by a more deserving name, “elders,” as the position they sprout in gifts us much information. “Dandelions are saying your soil is a little compact, low on surface nutrients, particularly calcium and potassium; nettles tell you there is too much surface nitrogen (not as good as it sounds). A flurry of annual weeds – bittercress, chickweed and mouse weeds – say your soil is dominated by bacteria, while thistles, docks, green alkanes and comfrey are another sign that the surface is a little low on nutrients and only those with long taproots to mine the sub-soil layer can thrive. Brambles tend to proliferate where there is excessive nitrogen, but the land has been left alone so they can take better hold,” (2023). A good gardener sees these ‘elders’ and knows how to heal the soil from their arrival, a better gardener still knows how to turn them into food and medicine and to leave some to provide nutrients to aid pollinators in their essential work. Nonetheless, weeds are marked for removal, and ‘weed killers’ are big business, even though they kill much more than ‘weeds.’

Plants can also tell us multitudes about a place. There are clues in their behaviors for what each place requires for survival. For example, the fortitude of *Selaginella lepidophylla*,

known as Resurrection Plant, or Rose of Jericho, which lives in Mexico and the southwestern United States. Moss is usually associated with forests, but this particular variety has adapted to survive the harsh desert conditions it resides in. The rainy season there is called *el niño* and the dry, *la niña*, each lasts about seven years. *Selaginella lepidophylla* can live just as long without water. It appears dead, brown and shriveled, but it is actually just waiting. When *el niño* arrives again, its resilience becomes clear, it unfurls itself, becoming flush with green again. As such, it thrives in a place where many cannot. Human conceptions of animism would consider this pattern as an adaptive response to climate conditions. It remains to be seen which species, including our own, will be successful in responding to the urgent climatic shift taking place. Some have already been lost. Much like how human time is practically invisible in geologic time, we often only notice plant movements when in a time lapsed to match their signature, or durationally divergent, view. Where we can view the turning of leaves to follow the nourishing light of the sun, or their growth around their neighbors. This has led to the assumption that because they are rooted, that other than in their reproduction, they are lacking conscious mobility. *Mimosa pudica*, the sensitive plant, is distinct, in that it reacts to touch in human time scales, tightly pulling in its leaves if brushed against, like a shy child burying their head in their hands.

There is much to ruminate over in the study of more-than-human registers.



[photograph of the concrete portion of Los Angeles River, resembling the train tracks adjacent to it, rather than a natural river, photo by Kaleen Juarez. Permission to reproduce image granted by Kaleen Juarez - image updated from previous text, to address copyright,

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For example, how borders are enacted in nature. The spaces between ecological biomes are called ecotones, such as between wetland and grassland or grassland to forest. They are borderlands. Ecotones may appear as small and abrupt transitions, or cover large, less immediately obvious expanses. “Various studies have shown that species richness and abundances tend to peak in ecotonal areas...[and that] areas nearer to boundaries between ecoregions had more bird species, and also scored more highly in terms of species rarity. The findings of their work suggest that transitional environments harbor many rare species, in addition to high richness.” (Kark, 2007, p. 1,5). This suggests that moving between biomes can be a catalyst for novel development. This is echoed in the term ecotone effect, “The pattern of increased species richness (number of species) and abundance in ecotones and the occurrence of unique ecotonal species,” (Kark, 2007, p. 1). Rather than a solid boundary, ecotones are in constant movement, which will no doubt accelerate in response to climate change. They can also be responses to human ‘development’, such as the ecological divide of thousands of miles of wall, or between an agricultural field and forest. Humans have tried to intervene and control the natural dynamism of ecotones in urban areas through building infrastructures of containment. For example, the Los Angeles River, after a particularly big rain, flooded, and shifted position in the heart of the city. The city responded by enclosing the banks in concrete, a decision that made it unlivable for certain native animal populations. Their naming reveals the European approach to border, as it comes from “the Greek roots ‘oikos’ (home) and ‘tonus’ (tension),” (Kark, 2007, p. 2). It is named as a space of struggle, rather than a place of rich interaction and dialogue between species. Rather than a space of great possibility, it has been deemed a threat. But if a border is a landscape, rather than fortified infrastructure, it becomes a, “much more complex and multifaceted reality that operates as both a divider and an enabler, a boundary as well as an opening,” (Wall, 2020, p. 105).

This is my home
this thin edge of
barbwire.

(Anzaldúa, 2022, p.13)

When considering the human repercussions of migration, foreignness cannot be discussed without also considerations of nostalgia, which can manifest as a longing for home, or a time past; real or imagined. And as memory can be quite treacherous, the longer the time away from home, the larger the distance between the imagined home, and what is actually there. Cultural theorist and artist, Svetlana Boym describes the distinction between the nostalgia of the invader, as much different than that of the displaced, by naming two forms of the phenomenon, which function in direct odds with the other: restorative and reflective. Restorative nostalgia is entrenched in, “national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity.” This form holds on to traditions without introspection, akin to calls to, “make America great again,” that discount the years of enslavement, trails of tears, and apartheid both legally enforced and socially inflicted. This is contrasted with reflective nostalgia, which, “does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity...[it is a] social memory which consists of collective frameworks,” (2007, p. 13). One iteration makes space for collective memory, and the other, in prescribing a singular and set past, does not. But there is a specific kind of nostalgia, most closely associated with climate change that describes totalizing loss: solastalgia. Srećko Horvat names this as a “post-apocalyptic melancholy...[which] naturally creates anxiety – and leads to the difficulty, or rather impossibility, of coping with irreversible loss.” It is the homesickness of the disappeared, the erased. As an example, he cites a funeral, held in Iceland, in 2019, for its first glacier lost to climate crisis. There is a bronze plaque attached to rock that used to cradle the ice, its inscription begins, “A letter to the future...,” as a resounding plea to take notice of this monumental failure of the present; a memento mori for mass extinction. (Horvat, pp. 19-20, 52).

Capitalism emerged from colonialism, from the plantation, from slave labor; the theft of both bodies and land, shifting the living into the “biopolitical category of nonbeing,” (Franke, 2022, 212). Colonialism is permanently linked to this era of expanded migration, and therefore, work interrogating this trajectory has been termed, ‘decolonial.’ It seems a better term is needed, one that acknowledges solastalgia and the extent of damage and the impossibility of reverting back to a precolonial mode after such extreme mechanized violence against

land and both human and nonhuman beings. A term which does not placate the extent of irreversible loss. With that in mind, anti-colonial is a more truthful description of this work. We have inherited this legacy and there is much to attend to. How can we pivot from an era of human centered thinking, to one that engages in reciprocity with Earth and works to mend the damage we have inflicted? How did we forget that Earth is our home? “The Nobel Prize-winning economist Elinor Ostrom, has shown that humans often respond to scarcity and crisis with strategies of cooperation and sharing. Indeed, the ability to cooperate is now regarded by some scientists as a crucial evolutionary advantage,” (Ghosh 2021, p. 176). Where did this get lost? And how can we return to this state? We begin with the stories of the founding of this colonial era in search of clues for how to shift modalities.

How I am allowed to move in the world is quite different from that of a refugee. “Europe remains the deadliest migration destiny in the world,” (Leurs and Smets, 2018). And that is even without factoring in its former and present colonies. Those who have no home to return to because they have been destroyed, or their return would put their lives at risk, are welcomed quite differently than expatriates. “Rather than acknowledging the resilience of those who arrive against all odds fleeing war, persecution and surviving grueling conditions, exploitation, danger, and circumstances during their journeys, they are met with suspicion, fear, and anxiety,” (Leurs and Smets, 2018. p. 4). This is present in Los Angeles, which was once Mexico, where there is still a large Spanish speaking population from these previous colonizers, and movement along the border is heavily policed, as well as foreign populations within the country. This movement is precipitated by “Western interventionism, and the lingering effects of (neo)colonial legacies,” (Leurs and Smets, 2018, p.4). It stems from climate shifts largely caused by Western countries, or the poverty brought from those same countries plundering natural resources without proper permissions or payment for these goods. The European Refugee Crisis, which has expanded exponentially since the Arab Spring, is another iteration of this, and has led to numerous bodies lost in land and sea. Some refugees are able to secure asylum, but many also live in vulnerable statelessness as undocumented immigrants.

“The human body and experience in digital migration is distinctly situated in intersectional grids of power relations shaped by politics, history, culture but also particularly patterns of nationhood, ethnicity/race, class, religion, age, gender, sexuality, language, and able-bodiedness among other factors” (Leurs and Smets, 2018, p. 10). Many of which are reenactments of colonial events. The inequality surrounding migration, creates a need to investigate human migration trajectories “to call into question how a-contextualized generalizations of migrants gloss over everyday practices and experiences of empowerment

and subordination, which might in turn exacerbate power hierarchies,” (Leurs and Smets, 2018, p. 10). Care must be taken to break with this, to subvert loaded colonizing language, that of supremacy and domination. That is a prerequisite for navigating pathways “to root more firmly the orientation toward social justice, and to create awareness of the dynamic interactions and tensions between human rights in practice, legal categories and social realities,” (Leurs and Smets, 2018, p. 12).

This can manifest in unexpected ways, as is evidenced in the work of Saidiya Hartman, who went to Africa in search of her personal history, which was displaced in the forced ancestral migration to America. She writes, “to lose your mother was to be denied your kin, country, and identity. To lose your mother was to forget your past. The letters distilled the history of the transatlantic slave trade to this: I was an orphan,” (2008, p. 85). She expected to feel as if she were returning home to her motherland. Instead she is faced with being tied to two countries, both that wish to void her history and her present, as response to their shame in taking part in it. America was built by the labor of these children torn from their mother(land). Hartman speaks of this abandonment, “my grandfather had discovered years back that the only home he would ever know was the imagined country, the promised land of the heart, the territory of dreams. He accepted the peril and promise of being without a country,” (2008, p. 99). The only space in Africa she could find acknowledgement of her legacy and inheritance, was in a song sung by children as they jumped rope, too young to understand why their elders do not speak this history of lost children.

An adjacent observation, “the United States is a distorted mirror of Europe itself,” (Žižek and Horvat, 2015, p. 42), the manner with which European culture speaks of its distance from America, or for that matter any formerly claimed land, is also a distancing from Europe’s role in slavery and colonialism. It is a denial of accountability for the founding of these places, and the discussion of the wealth their government and corporate entities still extract from it. Imperialism’s role in motherlessness does not disappear with severed treaties or revocations of colonial strongholds. Nor does my personal ancestral bias, even as I work to amend centuries of matricide, both received and inflicted. Documentation of place means the truths you wish were not, must still be told. This is work in reverse redaction. This is my inheritance, even if I refuse to participate in propagating its trajectory.

My movement across borders has challenged my view of home, of history, and my place in this world. As have moments I have bore witness to. My partner and I have been invited to live, visit, and present work all over the world. As mentioned, I have lived in North and South America, in Asia, and in Europe. Over the course of this PhD alone, in Singapore, Croatia, and China. I have lived in these places as a result of transnational academic migration, as my partner is an Associate Professor and has

taught for many years. This means I arrive with privilege into highly educated circles and the accompanying class relations that result from that work. I hold a US passport that allows me freedom to move between places. A freedom much of the global population does not have. I have been privileged to be granted visas to reside in these places, while simultaneously, having to abide by the strict rules over the kind of work and movement I have been allowed by each visa. This movement overlaps with a new kind of work practice that emerged during the pandemic, the digital nomad. To boost post-pandemic economies, countries began offering residence visas to foreigners that can prove meeting certain income bases. In places like Croatia, it has meant that apartment rentals are based on foreign budgets and no longer available to locals. How this movement, and accompanying displacement will shift long term trajectories remains to be seen. Expatriate migration is typically temporary, tied to a specific job or field work, often in companies that are also headquartered elsewhere. It has a distinct class connotation. This means there is less incentive to create deep roots in the local community, and facilitates superficial engagement with place. Furthermore, this type of work often includes annual paid airfare home in the contract. Los Angeles to Singapore is a fifteen hour flight each way.

And international airfare is a massive contributor to global pollution. In the documentation of carbon emissions related to passenger airfare, international flights are categorized as “bunker fuel,” along with commercial shipping data. “In 2018, it’s estimated that global aviation – which includes both passenger and freight – emitted 1.04 billion tonnes of CO2.” But global warming related to air travel must also account for radiative forcing, or the difference between warmth expelled to space, and that which is retained in the atmosphere. And “although CO2 gets most of the attention, it accounts for less than half of this warming. Two-thirds (66%) comes from non-CO2 forcings. Contrails – water vapor trails from aircraft exhausts – account for the largest share.” This becomes another form of invasion. As with automobile manufacturing, there is discussion on switching to sustainable fuel models, but not any active enforcement or timeline for implementing such guidelines (Richie, 2020). And in this context, we cannot separate the dialectics of transnational movement and orientation, from matters of global ecological or humanitarian consequence.

The drastic climate change we have begun to experience, is a symptom of human failure to live sustainably with Earth. Even as I wish to address it, I am also complicit. This era of human driven changes to the environment, a tiny spec in geologic time, has been named the Anthropocene, the human-centered era. It is a “politically infused geology,’...a contemporary situation [where] dissonant occupancies and...geological violence enacted by political, sociocultural and extractive actions” reside (Wall, E 2020, p. 40). It is used to mark this current time of planetary urgency. This terminology has been criticized for describing this

shift too broadly, as a human made crisis, along with the mythology that human nature works competitively, towards the survival of the fittest, the few, and the superior; “a pathological or morbid individualism,” (Ghosh, 2021, 177). Including the assumption that humans are superior to Earth herself. There are however some societies that still live a more holistic life with the resources available to them. And there are still, as residual colonization continues, western companies extracting resources from foreign lands without investment in these lands or the wellbeing of its inhabitants. “A term such as the ‘Anthropocene,’...enacts this ‘over-representation’ by conflating the ‘anthropos’ with the Western and Westernized subject/history, with the result that the specific world-systemic conditions of colonial capitalism become falsely universalized and naturalized,” (Franke et al 2022, p. 9). To address the looming threats of mass extinction, it is argued that new terms must emerge to emphasize that this era stems directly from our mismanagement. “Capitalocene” has been proposed to connect this era to capitalist greed, (Wall, 2020, p. 27). It is the era when humans forgot we are part of the Earth, that Earth is our home, and we in turn need to care for her, just as she cares for us.

Each place offers new plants to investigate, growing typologies, and the occasional encounter with plants that migrated from where I was raised, some benevolent and some not. They sneak up on me at strange times, sparked by smells or a song, or a glimmer of recognition in the face of a stranger. Encountering a California poppy with its delicate orange petals is always a comfort. Same with the smell of a citrus blossom. *Eschscholzia californica*, the native California poppy, if given space to spread out, it can make a whole hillside orange in the brief rainy season, called a superbloom. It loves poor soil. It does not need supplementary water beyond what nature provides. It was shipped home by invaders, seeds carried for gardening. Though a beneficial part of the California ecosystem, it is now invasive in Chile and Australia, ruining grazing land, as it can harm livestock. It is a pharmakon, in small doses, it is medicinal, utilized for its soporific properties, but in large quantities, it is deadly.



[Wilkerson, E. (2022), photograph of California landscapes regenerating after a wildfire]

In each place I bring memories, traditions, idioms, and moments from my time in other places, all of which is weighted by my ancestry as a colonizer, even as I try to move in other modes. I arrive with the intention to share knowledge and expertise reciprocally. Meaning I arrive with an openness for doing so, but also with the understanding that I cannot know how to achieve this without a delicate sensitivity to cultural practices I am just beginning to learn. This is sometimes clumsy, sometimes lost in translation. And this becomes particularly challenging in Asia, where the symbolic attachment to objects is culturally quite different. For example, gifting someone a watch implies you are wishing them an early death, same with gifting a set of four, as the word for four sounds like the word for death. Or mirrors or perfume, which are considered to reflect negative energy, and must only be purchased by the one who will use them. It also means that sometimes I don't see many faces that resemble mine. I am a stranger; I am looked at with strangeness. In Serbo-Croatian, the word for foreigner and stranger are the same, *stranac*.

It is important to note that though I arrive with good intentions, my entire presence in new places means there is the possibility for negative encounter that reflects on more than just my clumsiness, magnifying larger geopolitical issues.

This thesis begins with an investigation of human migration trajectories, as well as Western approaches to land use. This chapter will consider theories on place, space, time, and migration through the examination of histories, cartographies, mythologies, and the making and unmaking of ontologies that are complicit in these events. The aim for wrestling with uncomfortable trajectories is to de-center mono-culture/knowledge/information; to make space for multiplicities. In so doing, it aims to search for clues for how to intervene in unsustainable trajectories.

On Culture and Cultivation

Preparation for future landscapes necessitates training to develop an understanding of which way water will move when it gathers, the components of soil based on its color, density, composition, and smell, or how the sun will face the land as it crosses the sky each day. It requires looking critically at other models for approaching similar spaces, and if those do not exist, considerations for how to possibly build them from working with materials both existing and yet to be fabricated. It is work in researching how we approach our relationship to the land.

'Cultivation' is a form of taming. It is a tangent to landscaping, as both refer to human interference in natural ecologies, but 'cultivation' can expand beyond land applications. It describes breeding, with intent to domesticate crops, soil, or animals for human use; species taming. It takes on a gendered connotation with the synonym 'husbandry,' referencing the belief of the male propensity for management and therefore land or house ownership; spatial taming. As a child I would question teachers why writings were written for, and of, men. I was told that the word 'men' was meant to describe both men and women. This is a myth of patriarchy, and much work has been done to uphold it. Maintaining cultivated crops and animals requires continual technical assistance, and this is because they are artifacts; they are products of technicity;...[an] implicit anthropocentrism" (Simondon, 1965, p. 17). A pig released in the wild will revert to its natural state: a boar with tusks and wild bristled fur. In cultivation, "the species initial adaptation to its environment is broken, if not at least warped," (Simondon, 1965, p. 17). This has been done with over-regard for human tastes and desires, and under-regard for the needs and delicate balances in the natural world. It is the pulling of weeds without understanding that they are actually elders. "To consciously and willingly modify the environment creates the danger of misadaptation, and requires a modification of the human attitudes that make up the content of cultural instruction, while also increasing the

chances of evolution, and simulating the human possibilities of a certain kind of progress...the modified environment offers man a new field of action, demanding a new adaptation and arousing new needs," (Simondon 1965, p. 19). Cultivation is a bending of the natural world. It can be a methodology of colonial domination, or act in resistance to it.



[Uncultivated 17th Century Watermelons - Stanchi, G. (1645-72) *Watermelons, peaches, pears and other fruit in a landscape*. London: Christie's. In public Domain]

The treachery of cultivation is that the ramifications of human alterations to nature are not always immediately clear. Take for example the watermelon, which once grew in varying flesh and rind colorations and patterning, just one of which is seen in the painting above. The cultivation for increased edible flesh, eventually turned towards the genetic modification wherein the fruit is without propagatable seeds, and being seedless, it is sterile. Meaning that it can only be propagated by human intervention and must be pollinated by a sterile watermelon variety. It is also much more delicious. Heirloom seeds are lost in this process,

but perhaps, as long as humans continue propagating the fruit in this manner, there are arguments for this still being a beneficial process. Before human understanding of genetic sequencing and its use for gene modification however, different methods were experimented with, most terrifying being that of atomic radiation. The Atomic Gardening Society, founded by Muriel Howorth, brought the atomic garden from the laboratory, to the gardens of the housewives who attended her Ladies Clubs and gala events. She was allowed to cross the gender barrier into science, as her work pertained to domesticity and the garden. She believed, “that the same power within the atomic bomb could be harnessed to make the world a 'smiling garden of Eden',” (Johnson, 2012, p.551). This was in the aftermath of Hiroshima and rather than condemning this savage attack on civilians and innocent life, she worked under the theoretical pretext that nuclear energy could be tamed and its pharmacological power could reside in closer proximity to the living, than the dead. In so doing, she framed this horror as a necessary evil in a trajectory towards progress. The toxicity of this framing is echoed in the irradiated plants she produced. There is no documentation of where they were planted. There are no charts of the effects of the fruits of such plants on the human or more-than-human bodies that consumed them. It is likely that some of these plants, and their offspring, are in gardens still, potentially spreading their poison to this day. “We have to consider progress as the invention of the catastrophe itself,” (Horvat 2021, p. 144). We must attend to what we have cultivated.

The archival image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material from “Life Magazine” as a subsidiary of “Time Magazine.” It documents women in hats and gloves admiring the Atomic Garden Booth in the 1961 Home and Garden Fair in Cleveland, Ohio. The document was sourced through the Googles collection of “Life Magazine” images at <https://images.google.com/hosted/life/128f1fc51f9a3dab.html>

[Scherschel, F. (1961) “Atomic Garden Exhibit”. *Life Magazine*. New York]

‘Culture,’ or a ‘cultivated [human] being’ originates from this concept of husbandry, or the cultivation of social spaces. “The contemporary usage of the term ‘culture’ is paradoxical: the word is employed to designate the result of direct action of man upon man,” (Simondon, 1965, p. 18). Forcing the dialectic problematic of the single trajectory model: the man which is best cultured, or best bred to proliferate models that substantiate the Eurocentric power structure, is based on nothing more than the subjective preferences for taming established

by the men preceding him. A shifting of being to adhere to, and legitimize, their own domination, while sanctioning the subjugation of those deemed uncivilized or the 'other.' It is a whitewashing of nonconforming cultures and trajectories deviating from that singular trajectory. It is a model, much like the sterile seeds of cultivated fruit, that relies on the presence of other 'cultured' men, for propagation. Culture, or the perceived lack of it, has been used as fodder for attack of any nonconforming body.

Taming is unwilding. It is the imposition of socially constructed notions of culture and cultivation. Feral refers to both uncultivated animals, but also to those who have escaped domestication; a term for re-wilding. As part of our separation from nature, we forget that humans are animals as well. Part of this culture of white supremacy is the notion that some people are further removed from the animal than others. Intersectionality defines 'the other' as those that have been systematically discriminated against. As previously stated, I am in firm belief that the definition of intersectionality needs to be expanded to include more-than-human species, nature herself, as the exclusion of such consideration has allowed egregious abuses to the very ecosystems we depend upon for survival. The conflation of the two meanings of cultivation as the imposed subservience related to the man-handling of nature, as well as related to humans in the context of culture, is evident in the idiom, 'a bad seed,' wherein the imposed division between the taming of nature and marginalized peoples becomes entangled as a method of colonization. Both definitions of cultivation, and accompanying notions of taming, have been utilized to propagate the invasion of species. If intersectionality is expanded to include the more-than-human, then 'culture' must expand as such as well. Meaning that we must reconsider our relationship with wild, and ferality, and the socially constructed separation between both nature and 'other,' and in turn an expansion of the idea of a holistic approach to engaging in place. In this expanded definition of intersectionality, and in turn list, of what has been othered in Western culture, this is also reflected in the separation of writing into a serifed font. Each is connected and must be tended to as such.

Cartographies of Spatial Taming

"The question of absence is as political as that of presence" – Karen Barad (2017, p. G113)

Cultivation can also refer to management of the environment and human methodologies of land use, often guised as preservation; a form of spatial taming. Professor Banu

Subramaniam writes, “As colonists conquered new lands, they imposed new regimes of life. They moved species around the world, willy-nilly. Since 1492, the world has grown more alike as its ecosystems have collided and intermingled in a ‘biological bedlam.’ Bananas and coffee, two African crops, are now the principal agricultural exports of Central America; we would not have the cousins of modern Thailand, Italy, or India without peppers and tomatoes from MesoAmerica. What Crosby termed ‘the Columbian exchange’ transformed the ecology of the planet. Colonialism was nothing if not a bioinvasion,” (2023). “‘Agri’ denotes ‘the field,’” but as Subramaniam writes, in colonization, the field is expanded into the jungle. This continued further with colonial invaders bringing more species in still, as methodologies for land remediation. Subramaniam cites the 1896 World’s Fair as the source for kudzu cultivation in the US. Kudzu, now known as “the vine that ate the south,” swallowing “trees, telephone poles, and houses,” was then seen as a versatile Japanese vine in the pea family, was intentionally planted in the 1930s and 1940s by the federally funded Civilian Conservations Corps, and offered “farmers \$8 an acre to plant the stuff,” (2023). These plants are fighting for survival in new territory, much like the human victims of colonization, they are not to blame for their involuntary dislocation. She problematizes the dominant view on invasive species further, “as a species we have a remarkable tendency to look at almost any living thing and only see another version of ourselves. Even plants are not safe from our projections. We divvy them up into heroes and villains – native and invasive species,” (2023). Subramaniam continues, “I have found a striking convergence in our vocabularies across plant, animal, and human worlds. Our botanical authorities habitually describe invasive plants as hyper-fertile and prone to aggressive, uncontrolled expansion, echoing the stereotype of the hyper-fertile third world immigrant. They warn about foreign plants cross-fertilizing with native species to produce alien hybrids, a callback to fears of miscegenation,” (2023). She connects racist tropes of othering people, alongside othering nature, to defend unimaginable violence, as intertwined with the colonial refusal to accept responsibility for histories of invading foreign land, as well as mitigating the upheavals that continue still from this.

The archival map originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material from the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The map is of the globe, centered on the Pacific Ocean, rather than Europe. It shows the animals, foods and spices, and goods such as oil and lumber from each region. The document was sourced through the Josef Lebovic Gallery.

<https://www.joseflebovicgallery.com/pages/books/CL171-52/miguel-covarrubias-mexican/pageant-of-the-pacific?soldItem=true>

[Miguel Covarrubias (1939) "Economy of the Pacific". *Pageant of the Pacific* - created for the San Francisco International Exposition]

Indigenous American academic, Robin Wall Kimmerer makes clear that a foreign species can also be benevolent. She writes on common plantain, *Plantago major*, "White Man's Footstep...it arrived with the first settlers and followed them everywhere they went. It trotted along paths through the woods, along wagon roads and railroads...In spring it makes a good pot of greens, before summer heat turns the leaves tough. The people became glad for its constant presence when they learned that the leaves, when they are rolled or chewed to a poultice, make a fine first aid for cuts, burns, and especially insect bites. Every part of the plant is useful...Plantain is not indigenous but "naturalized." (2021, p. 214)." She shows that a foreigner can successfully live in a new place with care and generosity. "Being naturalized to place means to live as if this is the land that feeds you, as if these are the streams from which you drink, that build your body and fill your spirit. To become naturalized is to know that your ancestors lie in this ground. Here you will give your gifts and meet your responsibilities. To become naturalized is to live as if your children's future matters, to take care of the land as if our lives and the lives of all our relatives depend on it. Because they do." (2021, pp. 214-215). This kind of naturalization is possible. It is a choice, both collective, and individual, to migrate with respectful inquiry, in solidarity with those already there, to listen to their needs and questions above your own assumptions. If all waterways are connected, then every stream is our home.

Discourse on invasive species must be traced back to the historical arrival of the species to new landscapes. They of course have their own instincts for survival and propagation, but often, as an imposition of cultivation, they are involuntarily dislocated. This extends into certain forms of human migration and settlement as well. A discussion of place then must also include reconciliation with the spatial. Doreen Massy outlines two important propositions on space: "First that we recognize space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny. Second, that we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distance trajectories coexist; as the

sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity,” (Massey, 2005, p. 31).

Massey explores the disconnect between a spatial multiplicity of trajectories, and the Eurocentric linear as seen in Zeno’s discussion of the paradox of place, as expressed by Aristotle, which states “that movement (a continuum) cannot be broken up into discrete instants. ‘It is... because the continuum cannot be reduced to an aggregate of points that movement cannot be reduced to what is static.” In this, Zeno describes two dangerous precedents. First in which “discrete instances,” slices of time, moments of history, are not to be re-examined. This sets up a system for making the same mistakes repeatedly; without justice, without remorse, without searching for a better way forward. And second, only a single line, or trajectory, is acknowledged, meaning that only one history, one voice, one position is represented, and more dangerous of all, that in turn other trajectories are in turn, placeless.

As a counter to Zeno’s paradox, she describes Derrida’s deconstruction theory which names language and meaning as mutable, rather than fixed, thereby rejecting the spatial as a closed singular trajectory by naming “space as interval, and as holding open the possibility of an open future. Within deconstruction (at least in its theory if not always in its practice), space is explicitly temporalized,” (Massey 2005, p. 110). He connects time to place, and in doing so, makes space for future based on volition, rather than fate, meaning that current trajectories are not fixed, they can (and must) shift. But deconstruction is “unable to generate a recognition of space as the sphere of coexisting multiplicity, space as simultaneity of stories-so-far...[It] is not enough to achieve that necessary transcribing of space from the chain stasis/representation/closure into an association with openness/unrepresentability/external multiplicity,” (Massey, 2005, p. 118).

Massey continues her critique with the need for “almost like a shift of physical position...towards recognizing one’s place within continuous and multiple processes of emergence... deconstruction in relation to a reconceptualization of spatiality.” (Massey, 2005, p. 118). This intersects with Slavoj Žižek’s interest in parallax view which originates from the shifted viewpoint of the viewing lens of early cameras which were offset from the view of the lens itself. Though a discrepancy of mere millimeters, it affects the ability of the photographer to capture their desired image. To rectify this, a mirror was placed in the body of the camera so the view of the lens is reflected into the viewfinder. Žižek expands on, “the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight. The philosophical twist to be added, of course, is that the observed difference is not simply ‘subjective,’ due to

the fact that the same object which exists 'out there' is seen from two stances, or points of view," (2006, p. 17). It requires a shift from a linear perspective. In this materialist understanding of positionality, a single subjective view has the potential for objectivity precisely in the movement of gaze or positionality, wherein a comparative analysis can occur. "As Hegel would have put it, subject and object are inherently 'mediated,' so that an 'epistemological' shift in the subject's point of view always reflects an 'ontological' shift in the object itself," (2006, p. 17).

The refusal to reconceive the spatial, and in turn our position within it, is willful work with a "blind spot," or "parallax gap," (2006, p. 17-8). This can be shifted in scale, for example enlarged many times over, to describe our relationship to viewing the moon in the night sky. As the moon, the Earth, and the sun are in constant rotation, and light reflected or blocked depending on the position of each body, we understand the moon to be round. If the positions of these celestial bodies were instead fixed, we may only see the moon as a crescent, or even absent altogether, as it appears on the night of the new moon. We would only live in night, or day, or perhaps the moment in twilight when the sky turns pastel and the trees become silhouettes against it, depending on placement in proximity to the sun. We understand the moon as a round object precisely because of how the light shifts around moving bodies.

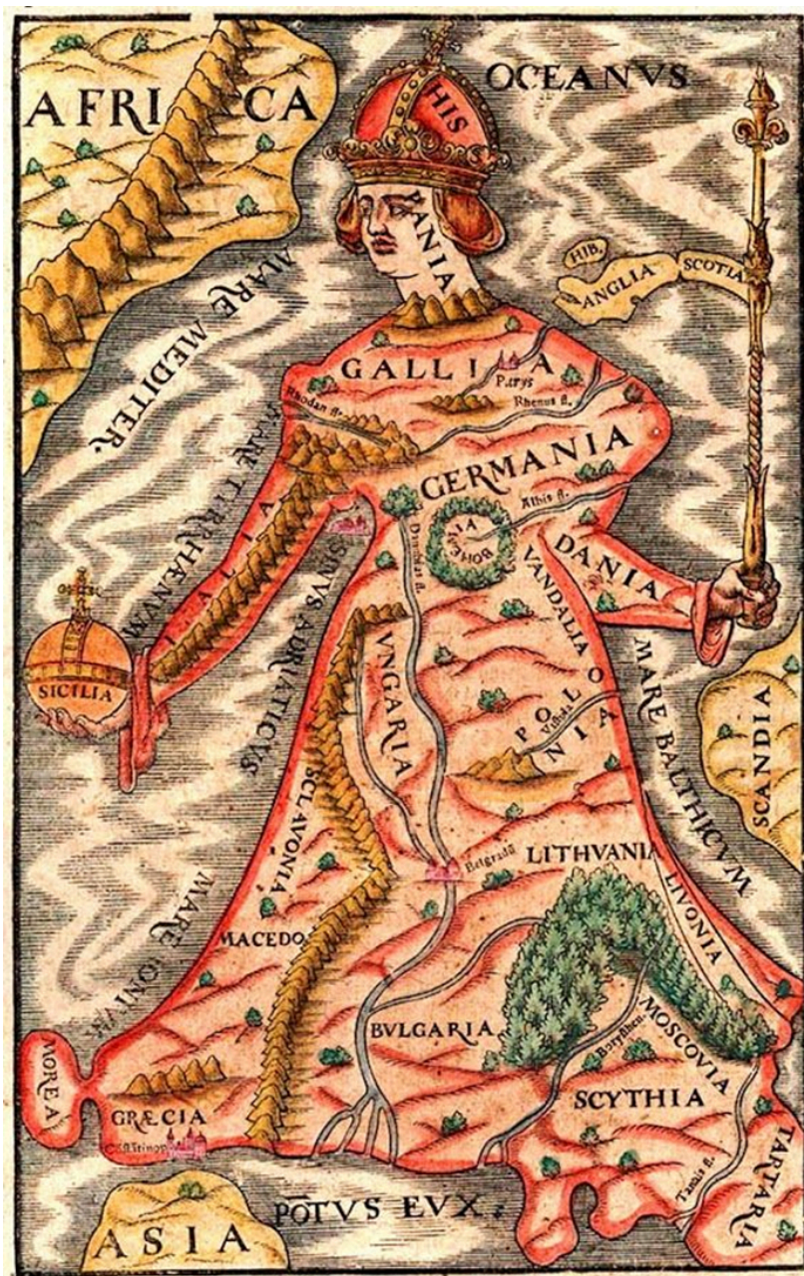
To return to Massey's call for deconstruction, as a 'reconception of spatiality', we must address and reconceive of the trajectories that have been hidden and displaced, the weeds of history, or the "conceptual spaces and real places into which powerful demarcations do not travel well": the purposeful imposition of the parallax gap, (Tsing, 2005, p. 202). According to Massey's theories of the spatial, and the proposed navigation of the parallax gap, this requires a shift of point of view, either from positionality, or the introduction of comparative reflectivity. She discusses Fabian's discussion of "the ruse...to substitute diachrony for history, real space, perhaps the space of human geographers'...while it is actually a taxonomic space, indeed a map," (Massey 2005, p. 87). Much like in classical cartography where unknown places were drawn as seas haunted by monsters, wherein the experience of the cartographer supersedes the experiences of all others, and regions beyond the map maker's knowledge, are not considered as existing beyond the monstrous. "Such structure[s] rob the objects to which they refer of their inherent dynamism. They do indeed try to 'hold the world still' but this eliminates also the possibility of change," (Massey 2005, p. 88).



[Olaus, M., 16th century - detail of *Carta Marina* – map of Nordic territories and the seas beyond. In public domain]

Borderlands, liminal spaces, places once depicted as full of sea monsters, reside in the parallax gap, or what Karen Barad describes as “the void - a much valued colonist apparatus, a crafty and insidious imaginary, a way of offering justification for claims of ownership in the ‘discovery’ of ‘virgin’ territory. The notion that ‘untended,’ ‘uncultivated,’ spaces are empty rather than plentiful, has been a well-worn tool used in the service of colonialism, militarism, imperialism, nationalism, and scientism,” (2017, p. G113). It is a method of spatial taming, wherein the living are made placeless. The term marginalized refers to a forced powerlessness, but it is also a reference to position, of being placed on the edge, physically outside the story, and therefore beyond the visible span of the parallax gap. Still, nothing is removed without leaving a trace. An erased pencil line leaves imprints in the page, even after the graphite is removed. To witness these imprints requires a different kind of vision. Furthermore, “that which is determinate (e.g. intelligible) is materially haunted by – infused with – that which is constitutively excluded (remains indeterminate, e.g., unintelligible,” (Barad, 2014, p. 178). Meaning that the very attempt of erasure, rather than freeing the oppressor, actually binds the oppressed to them. They are more tightly entangled than ever.

Migration is not inherently invasive, and neither is cultivation. Let's begin to unpack the cultivation of land to enact domination over, and the eradication of, the indigenous. This migration pattern, and its resulting mass displacement, entered a period of rapid progression five centuries ago. It is "only by describing colonial modernity and racial capitalism as one cosmology among others, by characterizing its origin myths, can it be described in terms that do not reproduce it systemically, (Franke 2022, p. 150). I have curated brief slices of history, moments to narrate the problematic history of spatial taming; what in film would be considered a montage.



[Munster, S., printed in Basel, 1570 - map of Europe as queen presiding over Europe and Asia. In public domain]

In *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parable for a Planet in Crisis*, Amitav Ghosh scrutinizes the beginnings of early colonial plantation by piecing together historical accounts of the 17th century Dutch seizure of the Banda Islands, near Java, Indonesia. Their intent was to control global nutmeg trade by taking ownership of its production at the source, the trees themselves. He writes, "in the late Middle Ages, nutmegs became so valuable in Europe that a handful could buy a house or a ship," (2021, p. 9). At the time, nutmeg was only grown in its indigenous habitat, the Indonesian spice islands, the most productive being Banda. Dissatisfied with negotiations with the Bandanese people, on May 6, 1621, led by Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen of the Dutch East India Company, in an act of genocide, they burned their homes and exterminated all the people they found on the islands. Those not immediately murdered, fled to sea or the dense forests, many to later drown or starve. Any acts of rebellion were dealt with swiftly and with extreme violence, to set an example, and discourage further uprisings. The Dutch brought in enslaved peoples to tend to the newly stolen plantation. The Banda Islands became a prison for the enslaved forced to cultivate nutmeg, but a border was also enforced on those unable to return to their homeland. And after slaughtering the island's people, they hunted any plants outside the area they controlled, sending out search parties to destroy any nutmeg trees found growing on islands beyond Banda. International law at the time, conceived of in Europe, ruled, "nations are justified...in uniting together as a body with the object of punishing and even exterminating such savage peoples," (Ghosh, 2021, p. 26). A statue of Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen was erected in Noorn, Netherlands, and another in Jakarta; one as a celebration, the other, a warning.

This era began the Western cultivation practice of cataloging species by a Latin naming system to 'universalize' botanicals to facilitate global research. Regional botanical prints were collected by Europeans to document the flora and fauna of the spice region. This was an important shift in science, wherein illustration expanded from purely an artistic medium, to be seen as a tool for scientific and proof based evidence. It is in this era that the scientific method argued for the necessity of investigation and representation beyond the written word, as the written word alone was no longer deemed suitable to convey information. Posing as scientific investigation, these works functioned as a catalog of theft and marked the shifting western assumption, as backed by western law, to extract any recourse without recourse if it was deemed profitable. The one shown here, an illustration of components of the evergreen

tropical nutmeg tree, showing leaves and fruiting cycles for identification reference, as well as the components of the fruit. Western chefs add ground nutmeg seed to creamy dishes, the cooking of dark leafy greens, and a winter/autumn sweets baking spice like in gingerbread and pumpkin pie. What is not shown in this illustration is the violent imperial history Ghosh outlines in the European domination and monopolization of the Banda Islands, the regional name 'pala', that locals utilize the fruit, the seed, and the webbing surrounding the seed called mace in their cooking, that at the time it was valued similarly to gold. This is an erroneous and egregious void in the history of scientific practice.



[Unknown Chinese Artist commissioned by Sir Thomas Raffles. (1824) '*Myristica Fragrans*' Hout. (*Myristicaceae*). Nutmeg Tree. The British Library. In public domain]

If we enact a historical intervention on this scientific practice, by placing botanical prints alongside the plantations they acted as propaganda to build, their true meaning becomes explicitly visible. For example, sugar cane, originating from South and Southeast Asia, alongside black children forced to farm it in the US, where it was planted as a monocrop.

Seeing that “the market value of the sugar cane sector exceeded USD 56 billion in 2022,” (Voorra et al, 2023, p. 1), it seems the propaganda still radiates out from these early prints.



[Zippel, H. (1876) *Saccharum officinarum* [Sugarcane]. In public domain]

The archival image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material from The National Museum of African American History and Culture. It is a stereograph documenting children of African descent, surrounded by partially

harvested sugarcane plants, with text in the bottom corner that reads, "51 – Sugar Cane Plantation, La." The document was sourced through The Henry Ford digital archives and can be viewed by visiting <https://www.thehenryford.org/collections-and-research/digital-collections/artifact/499357/>

[51-Sugarcane Plantation, Louisiana (1920s) National Museum of African American History and Culture.]

Ghosh continues to connect these early colonial incidents on a global scale. He notes that fifteen years later, the first Pequot War between English settlers and the Algonquian tribe in what's now named Connecticut, began, "the first deliberately genocidal war conducted by the English in North America," (2021, p. 24). The English were aware of the Dutch actions in Banda, and briefly colonized a spice island themselves as well. Their arrival was sanctioned by international law, which protected private property, fenced farming practices, and white bodies. "Renaming was one of the principal instruments with which colonists erased the prior meanings of conquered landscapes... 'New' comes to be invested with an extraordinary semantic and symbolic violence." (Ghosh, 2021, p.49) The colonists brought new people, plants, insects, and microbes, which they began to track through the land, including the intentional spread of the smallpox pandemic, an act of biological warfare, at a scale of mass death and illness beyond anything we experienced in the last few years, which the indigenous called "invisible bullets". (Ghosh 2021, p. 60).

"Place-mapping under colonial modernity...[and the resulting] European/Settler-derived cartographic visualizations [resulted in] 'ordering epistemes' that shift and set the codes of 'Sameness and Difference' used to formulate ourselves and the respective spaces where we're located as an I/We," (Franke, 2022, p. 204). A separation from You/Other. "When Robin D. G. Kelly asserts that racism is the secret to capitalism's survival, this is because it imputes the differential valorization of life for the purpose of the extraction of value," (Franke 2022, p. 154). Let's now explore how these cartographies and associated notions of culture and cultivation were accompanied by mythological dogmas and therein proliferated.

Mythologies of Land Preservation

The expansion of Europeans into America was driven in part by the food scarcity of the Little Ice Age, due to a natural climatic earth cycle. European paintings of the era depict ice filled lakes, barren trees, and bundled bodies often huddled together. “While many parts of the world suffered greatly, Japan [responded by]...imposing a range of economic and political controls, limiting consumption, fostering frugality, compelling farmers to adopt a series of prudential measures.” It was successful in that it was written, “Our empire enjoys peace and prosperity; on the roads not one beggar or outcast is seen,” (Ghosh, 2021, p. 149). The same protections were not put in place in Europe. It was in this precarity that people were willing to leave their homelands behind, and in this vulnerability they would become physical pawns of the crown. The first British American settlement was sparked by a climate migration. And each white body that arrived, meant further displacement of the indigenous population. This began with asylum seekers. They could have arrived with the intent to contribute to their new community, to seek out means to naturalize. The inability to do so ignores our role in this crisis. These early settlers could have arrived similar to plantain, as a helper, as nurturers of this new land, but instead, they came more like kudzu and English ivy, viciously eradicating everything they meet.



[Brugel, P. (1567) *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow* [painting] in the collection of Oskar Reinhart Foundation, Winterthur, Switzerland. In public domain]

However, it is important to note that in this time of precarious survival, “during the first two centuries of the history of British North America, one word best characterizes the status of the vast majority of immigrants - servitude. From the founding of Jamestown until the Revolution, nearly three-fourths of all immigrants to the thirteen colonies arrived in some condition of unfreedom,” as either indentured servants, slaves, or convicted prisoners, (Fogleman, 1998, p. 43-4). This included masses of people savagely stolen from Africa. “They [also] included many Scots banished by Oliver Cromwell for their activities during the English Civil War, the Scottish Covenanters who resisted English rule, and criminals. Irish prisoners taken from 1651 to 1654, English Quakers in the 1660s, and some kidnapping victims were transported involuntarily to the colonies and sold as servants. Some personal servants followed [or were forced by] their masters to the colonies. But the majority of unfree arrivals were voluntary migrants who chose America to seek economic improvement and could not afford the costs,” (Fogleman, A. 1998, p. 46). Meaning intersectional disparities were exploited from the very beginnings of colonial settlement, preyed upon to force migration of additional bodies to claim this land for the crown. It was a system founded on steep hierarchies of inequality and problematic labor practices, where hoarding resources secured positions of power. As such, these regional ideas on culture and cultivation that would spread across the land, were founded on these early notions of (un)freedom.

By the time settlement expanded further west, land theft inhabited new mythologies. That of gold and preservation. The Gold Rush immediately followed the forced cession of a large section of Mexican land to the United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This newly stolen land required bodies to defend the treaty boundaries. And bodies came to the Sierra Madres, enticed by newspaper articles promising gold, and in their movement, were weaponized to displace and destroy the indigenous. “More than 300,000 hopefuls coming into the goldfields between 1848 and 1857,” (Anderson, 2005, p. 85). This extended into the Yosemite Valley in central California, called *Ahwahnee*, by the indigenous living there meaning “mouth like place,” (National Parks Service, 2022). A mouth is a means for communication, the telling of stories, passing down of histories, as well as song. In losing its name, the valley also lost its voice. Land grants for mining did not consider that the land was already inhabited. A new form of boundary was proposed by John Muir, framed to protect the ‘wilderness’: the National Park. Stemming from the Old English, *wildeornes*, meaning wild beast; an uncultivated space. And in this definition reinforces the perceived divide between

human and nature. Interestingly, “the word for wilderness is absent from many tribal vocabularies, as is the word for civilization... Contemporary Indians often use the word *wilderness* as a negative label or land that has not been taken care of by humans for a long time,” (Anderson, 2005, p. 3). It marks irresponsible cultivation: areas where the understory has not been cleared, where shrubs have not been foraged to allow denser growth, areas where beneficial indigenous plants would thrive but have not been sowed, or where invasive species have not been attended to.

In 1890, as a Congressional Act led by John Muir, Yosemite was named the first National Park. Muir “described the Miwok people, most of whom had been killed or driven from Yosemite by the time he arrived in 1868, writing that they were ‘dirty,’ ‘altogether hideous’ and ‘seem to have no right place in the landscape,’” therein naming racial hierarchies as motive for land separation, (The Times Editorial Board, 2020). The resulting legislature meant that the US government was land-lord over any indigenous living there, controlling who could reside there and who could not, as well as imposed fee structures on their ancestral land. John Muir went on to form the Sierra Club, an ecological ‘preservation’ society whose directives are explicitly connected to the “white supremacists and eugenicists who were prominent early members of the group,” (The Times Editorial Board, 2020). This included Gifford Pinochet who advocated for “forced sterilization or prohibition of marriage for criminals and other elements seen as undesirable...[he wrote] ‘this provision must include conservation in all its branches — but above all, the conservation of the racial stock itself,’” (The Times Editorial Board, 2020). Begging the question, preservation for whom?

The archival image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material from the University of California, Berkeley. It is a map of the state of California where the location of Yosemite National Park is shown, significant lakes and rivers, as well as indigenous tribal boundaries and dialect boundaries. Interestingly, historical indigenous boundaries within the park are not noted. The map also ignores that tribes did not abide by strict borders, therefore it is a western application of land use to describe non-western land association. The document was sourced through the Yosemite National Park online library collection

https://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/yosemite_resources/early_history.html#page_4

[Bennyhoff, J. (1956) “An Appraisal of the Archeological Resources of Yosemite National Park” *University of California Archaeological Survey*. UC Berkeley – historical indigenous

tribal locations were mapped not to question their autonomy and ownership in relation to the land, but rather to mark potential sites to exhume objects belonging to their cultural and sacred history]

Another myth of early American settlement is of the land, though largely populated, remaining unclaimed until it was farmed only by European agricultural approaches; borders delineated by the fencing of land, wherein it was tended to by white bodies. Ignoring the fact that the indigenous in the Americas did indeed engage in cultivation. “A traveler in French-occupied North America related in 1669 that six square miles of cornfields surrounded each Iroquois village. The governor of New France, following a military raid in the 1680s, reported that he had destroyed more than a million bushels (forty-two thousand tons) of corn belonging to four Iroquois villages,” (Dunbar-Ortiz R. 2014, p. 17). The indigenous methods of tending to the forest as a means for food both foraged and farmed, in addition to shelter, and sustainable raw materials, were ignored in favor of European models as well (Cronon, 2011, p. 79). In another iteration of landscaping, the land was rapidly deforested to make space for fields and for timber to build buildings and fences; all which had devastating consequences. (Cronon 2011, pp. 113-4). With less trees, snow melted faster, the ground froze to greater depths, and there was a lack of deep-rooted vegetation to pull up water from the ground. “New England storms records only one major flood in the region between 1635 and 1720; between 1720 and 1800, on the other hand, there were at least six that produced significant damage to life and property... In the long run, however, even though more water entered drainage systems as a result of deforestation, its irregular and more rapid runoff left the countryside drier at most seasons of the year than it had been before... The drying up of streams and springs continued for decades after their forests were removed,” (Cronon, 2011, pp. 124-5). European farm cultivation was and still is, an invasion.

“Colonization and conquest are, of course, as old as human history itself...What makes the European colonization of the Americas distinctive, however, is the sheer scale and the rapidity of the environmental transformations that accompanied it, radically altering more than a quarter of the Earth’s land surface in a few hundred years.” Ghosh continues on to connect our current global precarity with the brutality of early American colonization, “these transformations may even have contributed to planet-wide climatic disruptions suggests something of the scale and speed at which the changes occurred,” (2021, pp.54-5).

American land preservation is deeply rooted in the colonial trajectory. Though the colonizers noted the swift change to the climate and local ecologies, it did not halt, or even pause, the abuses of settlement or Western land practices. Quite the opposite, it was decided that

larger farms were needed to sustain the swift growth. Meaning the theft and destruction of more land. And, rather than turning to the community for shared labor, it was deemed more profitable to steal bodies from Africa, and force them to work the land. It could be deduced that the post Civil War abolition of slavery ended the plantation system in the US. But in actuality, it is just pretext. Some of the largest plantations shifted into maximum security state-run prisons. The Louisiana State Penitentiary, locally called Angola, for the country its enslaved workers were stolen from, is still a “fully operational eighteen-thousand-acre slave plantation,” (Childs, 2015, p. 94). It is a working mass commercial agricultural center. After abolition, the field workers switched to legally convicted prisoners, the majority of which are still of African extraction. It is notorious for violent practices.

This has also been enforced as a cyclical model. The American missile silos are in the range of the northern indigenous reservations, the southern indigenous reservations, the land the indigenous were forcibly removed to, were also used for over two hundred uranium mines. “Tracy Voyles, in her book *Wastelanding* connects Kit Carson’s army swarming Canyon de Chelly in the Scorched Earth Campaign to cut the five thousand Navajo peach trees lining the river banks, to the mass uranium mining in the same area eighty years later,” (Wilkerson, 2022) The destruction of the peach was two-fold, as a tactic for starvation, but also to erase evidence of “an agrarian indigenous society,” as that undermined the settlement myth of the ‘uncultivated savage.’ “The second iteration of the Scorched Earth Campaign, perhaps more deadly than the first,” (Wilkerson, 2022), as uranium does not remain contained by the borders of the reservation, it spreads along waterways, riding along the wind, pulled up into the roots of vegetables and onto our dinner tables. And there we are confronted with the blight of separating space from time, and time from matter. “Anthropogenic landscapes are also haunted by imagined futures. We are willing to turn things into rubble, destroy atmospheres, sell out companion species in exchange for dreamworlds of progress,” (Tsing et al., 2017, p. G2). Colonial violence enacted on the people, is also executed on the land.



[Ship Rock, New Mexico, Uranium Disposal Cell - contaminated materials capped in concrete on Navajo land - Source: Google Earth. Included via Google Earth attribution guidelines]



[Mexican Hat, Utah, Uranium Disposal Cell - contaminated materials capped in concrete on Navajo land - Source: Google Earth. Included via Google Earth attribution guidelines]



[Tuba City, Arizona, Uranium Disposal Cell - contaminated materials capped in concrete on Navajo land - Source: Google Earth. Included via Google Earth attribution guidelines]

Speaking to different forms of ruin, the mechanics of warfare are the biggest polluters of all, and also done in the name of ‘preservation’ which works in mythologies of freedom, in particular the mythology that freedom can only be attained through the mass implementation of violence. “Today the Pentagon is the single largest consumer of energy in the United States – and probably in the world... A non-nuclear aircraft carrier consumes 5,621 gallons of fuel per hour; in other words, these vessels burn up as much fuel in one day as a small midwestern town might in a year...The Department of Defense ‘generates 500,000 tons of toxic waste annually, more than the top five US chemical companies combined,” (Ghosh, 2021, p. 122-3). The mass manufacturing of weapons and surveillance machines, along with their use, have also meant the mass spread of deadly chemicals into air, water, soil, and bodies. “A new analysis released by the Environmental Working Group says the price tag for cleaning up the ‘forever chemicals’ swelled by \$3.7 billion from 2016 to 2021, to total about \$31 billion. But the Pentagon’s budget for the work rose only \$400 million over that time period,” (Shane, 2023). This becomes yet another trauma handed down generation to generation, cycles of violence embedded in both flesh and stone.



[Wilkerson, E. *Montana Pastoral* (2019), Fuji Instant Film photos of American nuclear missile silos]

As an extension of these militarized policies to maintain control of stolen land, the US border is heavily policed. The lifeless bodies of asylum seekers are regularly found in the deserts between US and Mexico, and in the Mediterranean sea amongst the ruins of rafts. Their migration is spurred by systematic poverty as the direct result of colonial harm. Global warming and climate change lead to drought or flooding. Intensified crop failure leads to political instability and warfare. The colonial era continues. “A border is a marker of violence, it was created in violence, just as it is maintained in violence. It is a demarcation of what is allowed to be visible, and what is not allowed to be,” (Wilkerson, 2022). The US border wall dissects towns, homes, and ancient sacred burial grounds, migratory animals, and families. The northern periphery where the land shifts to being named Canada, is much less fortified than the southern division brown bodies from white. Most of the field workers in California come from the south of the wall, deterred from unionizing or complaining about the working conditions or meager pay, from fear of deportation. Those caught trying to cross without US sanctioned papers, making the dangerous trek across the desert, are held captive, and families separated by gender and age, meaning that children too have been incarcerated and separated from their parents.

The intent to dominate is not inherent in species, human or otherwise, that is a myth to excuse atrocity. For those of us that have inherited this ancestral trajectory of domination, there is a responsibility to cultivate more sustainable models of intersectional care. Advocating for a paradigm shift is essential to prevent apocalypse. It is work in repair and resistance. I wish my work to be in service to liberation from this trajectory. I dream of a

borderless world where humans move like plantain, with benevolence, with respect, with an intention to nurture. It must be a pact of collaboration.

Cognitive Border Walls

“The discussion of void must also address the...cognitive border walls that differentiate what is seen and what is hidden,” (Wilkerson 2022).

There is an intergenerational tenacity to trauma known as epigenetic inheritance. To study this effect on the brain, neurobiologists Kerry Ressler and Brian Dias, “trained [laboratory mice] to fear the smell of acetophenone, a chemical the scent of which has been compared to those of cherries and almonds. He and Dias wafted the scent around a small chamber, while giving small electric shocks to male mice. The animals eventually learned to associate the scent with pain, shuddering in the presence of acetophenone even without a shock,” (Callaway, 2013). They found that the children and grandchildren of these mice, though not subjected to electric shock, were also afraid of the smell. Same for mice born of in vitro fertilization from males who came from this line. “The mice sensitized to acetophenone, as well as their descendants, had more neurons that produce a receptor protein known to detect the odour compared with control mice and their progeny. Structures that receive signals from the acetophenone-detecting neurons and send smell signals to other parts of the brain (such as those involved in processing fear) were also bigger,” (Callaway, 2013). This suggests that trauma may be not only imprinted on the brains of those who encounter it, but that it is also handed down. Which signifies that we may all be walking around with programmed responses to horrible events long past. Even after the initial threat has dissipated, the initial response colors how we react to our environment. Meaning that breaking with these patterns, is also an active rewiring of cognitive structures.

Exerting control over a foreign landscape requires bodies to enforce its privatization. Western expansion was fueled by mythologies of preservation that allowed for some bodies to be included while others were excluded. It has also spread mythologies of the supremacy of some, so as to pardon mass theft. This parallax gap, which made space for tremendous violence, has been created and upheld by epistemic traditions, as Western grammar and semantics allow, even encourage, the abuse of people and land. This is echoed in the spatial. “The placement of the prime meridian is a purely political decision,” By placing it in

Greenwich, London becomes the spatial center of the globe (Ahmed 2006, p 14).

Comparative notions of global positionality are enforced in this assignment.

I lived in Singapore in 2020-2022, the toughest years of the pandemic, in a place with amongst the strictest quarantine regulations. This is also when I began applying to PhD programs. The Singapore government changed laws right after I arrived, to privilege local worker contracts over foreigners, to help with the massive pandemic job losses. This meant I would need additional schooling to be eligible to work in Asia. This also meant that I would be exploring new places, alongside learning new theories and methodologies for practice and research, an overlap I hoped would present as a careful and thoughtful approach to being a foreigner and a migrant. I lived in the neighborhood of Joo Chiat, a former coconut plantation, swallowed up by the city one hundred years before. There were tracings still of plantation, and the workers that lived there, in the towering old mango trees on roadsides that dropped fruit in the rains of monsoon season, wild banana varieties in red and purple and orange in gardens and along the highway, and old palm trees. There was another miraculous event during Covid, the return of the hornbill, a large indigenous bird resembling a toucan with a double beak, that had been pushed off the island with the rapid urban development of the city. It was a wonder to see their return, a reminder that a different future is possible.

Moving to Southeast Asia allowed an expansion of my previous work on US settlement, into earlier histories of migration, savagery, and protocapitalist warfare over global domination. This experience has changed my worldview, and my work indefinitely. Singapore is the most significant port between the spice islands and the west, at the southern tip of the Strait of Malacca, one of the main “channels where the veins of the Indian Ocean narrow into pulse points. By the middle of the sixteenth century [Europe] had their thumb poised near all of them with bases,” (Ghosh 2021, p. 108). It has been fought over by colonial powers since. Every year this region of Southeast Asia, along the equator, is seasonally blanketed in smoke. The jungle is slashed and burned, and the indigenous are further displaced, to erect new plantations for lumber and palm oil. (Tsing 2005). But as a consequence of Covid quarantine enforcement, the skies were clear for two years.



[Wilkerson, E. Fuji Instant film photos of plantation, taken while wandering and deep listening in the neighborhood of Joo Chiat, Singapore (2022)]

There are tracings of the former British colonizers as well, places named after Raffles, Newton, and Mountbatten, a steel and glass city of banks in the central business district that towers over the rest of the region, an island of oil refineries. There is friction between the western expatriates still profiting off these tracings, the Chinese diaspora that came five hundred years before them also interested in capitalizing on proximities to spice and boat routes to the west, the indigenous Malay cut off from the rest of their country by geopolitical infighting, the Tamil and Bangladesh day laborers and Philippine maids whose migratory labor paths were created during the colonial era. American made F-16 fighter jets flew over my apartment every day, in scheduled formation, out over the ocean and the world's second largest port, towards Indonesia. There is one tracing of the indigenous seafarers that is burned in my memory, referred to as the Singapore Stone. It was a towering boulder at the mouth of the Singapore River, covered in ancient text, it once framed a natural passageway into a deeper and protected harbor. Now residing in the National Museum of Singapore, all that remains is a tiny fragment that can fit in the palm of a human hand, and a plaque that tells of how Sir Thomas Raffles of the East India Company blew up the stone to expand this early port for British trade. He is credited with the founding of contemporary Singapore when he claimed it for the English, though it was already found, inhabited, and even cultured and cultivated before his arrival. (Sa'at, A., et al 2021). He also collected and documented

botanicals across Asia, commissioning botanical prints, and naming the largest flower in the region after himself: *Rafflesia arnoldii*, also known as the corpse flower, as its scent is reminiscent of rotting flesh.



[Guan, K. C. et al (2019) from *Seven Hundred Years: A History of Singapore*- photograph of the Singapore Stone fragment on display in the National Museum of Singapore. Permission to reproduce this image has been granted by the National Museum of Singapore]



[botanical print commissioned by Sir Thomas Raffles of his self referential plant, which is said to have been pointed out to him by his Malaysian servant - from the Raffles Collection in The British Library. In public domain]

The destruction of the Singapore Stone plays to the western epistemological myth of peoples without writing being labeled as savages, and savages as acceptable for colonial domination. It left the indigenous without proof of written word. Anna Tsing writes on the plantation, as echoed in the settlement of the American west, as a site of colonial extraction, as “gaps,” or “conceptual spaces and real places into which powerful demarcations do not travel well,” (2005, p. 202). In particular, the gap between cultivated and wild. Colonizing invaders defined wild spaces as those not tended to, particularly land not farmed according to Western agricultural practices. But the jungle is farmed, even the densest segments, and as Tsing writes, if you know what to look for, the location where homes once were can be recognized by the fruit trees and other food plants still growing there; ghost gardens. Just as my Fuji Instant Film photos tell of the *kampongs* (villages), and plantations, that are now covered by modern condos and swimming pools.

We must also account for more-than-human trajectories, migratory or otherwise, as our refusal to do so has caused catastrophic damage to ecological cycles and systems. Human

caused climate change presents us with rapidly increasing instances of catastrophe. Donna Haraway writes on this urgency with her work on 'sympoiesis', wherein she describes multispecies entanglement as essential for the prevention of mass extinction. She begins M. Beth Dempster's definition of the word, "collectively-producing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. Information and control are distributed among components. The systems are evolutionary and have the potential for surprising change," (2017, p.37). We are just beginning to understand these relationships. Some have been named, like the symbiotic coupling of algae and fungi, in lichen, wherein each uniquely benefits from their pairing, neither dominating the other, however many of these crucial symbiotic entanglements have yet to be discovered, and are vulnerable to invasions of species. How do we rehabilitate, or preserve, this vital bond between living things when there are so many we have yet to realize, particularly involving microscopic organisms and bacteria; scales beyond human visibility. "Extinction [much like sympoiesis] is supraliminal because it goes beyond the limits of our understanding, and even our imagination," (Horvat, 2021, p.31). It is important to note, that by designating the bonds of sympoietic systems as highly vulnerable to the current global ecological crisis, she sets up the potential for an etymological shift suffused with urgency, wherein what she terms as "response-ability," is inseparable from the concept. She presses the importance of collective intervention, encouraging "staying with the trouble," rather than succumbing to the fear (2017, pp.32-3). It is a search for dissonance and a form of stewardship.

The collaborative reciprocity between human, jungle, and farm in Southeast Asia is an example of permaculture. It is also a form of sympoiesis. As Dunbar-Ortiz and Cronon uncovered in their research on the initial building of the colonies, the indigenous approach to land practices looks towards permaculture, and the colonizers towards monoculture, another imposition of singular trajectory. Permacultural practice is cultivation too, but it takes the time to consider and observe the more-than-human relationships connected to growing. Each region has its own vastly different indigenous ontologies, based on the climatic and seasonal needs dictated by place, but there is overlap in the practice of permaculture, which looks to sustain a landscape via companion planting, crop rotation, the inclusion of plants favored by pollinators. Landrace is a climate focused methodology of seed saving and propagation; a naturalized and benevolent cultivation practice. It is a collection of those that best thrive in and contribute to the specific microclimate they grow in, the best attuned to local seasonal water availability, temperature fluctuations, humidity patterns, chances of frost, and light. Landrace works in seed saving and the surprises that grow from cross pollination, rather than the placement of uniform human bred specimens without regard to the effects on land around them. It is the creation of a hybrid landscape of farmed wilderness, and a

methodology for growing that attends to the specific regional needs of each garden, making space for fungi, microbes, and insects to flourish, which in turn create healthy productive soil, (Fowler, 2023). Permaculture values the entangled relationship between living things, and creates a nourished landscape for many futures. It is “an embodied immersion in ecological cycles that involves a long period of ‘thoughtful and protracted observation,’ before acting on the land and its processes,” (de la Bellacasa, 2015, p. 705).

The beginning of modern agricultural practice, stemming from the violence of early spice theft, is marked by the fencing off, or imposition of borders on once open land; man made ecotones. Cameroonian scholar and political theorist, Achille Mbembe describes borders as delineating carceral landscapes, in that every border was created and is maintained, in violence. Furthermore, each border is policed, with strict rules on who and what will be allowed to leave, and to enter. He expands on this issue with the discussion on the Western imposition of borders in Africa, organized along divisions of colonial power structures. “Sovereignty means you capture a people, you capture a territory, you delimit borders and this allows you, in turn, to exercise the monopoly of territory, of course, monopoly over the people and in terms of the use of legitimate force and, very importantly—because everything else depends on that—monopoly over taxation,” (2018, paragraph 8). In western context, it raises the individual over the community. Mbembe continues further still, on issues of archive, “If we want to harness alternative resources, the conceptual vocabulary type, to imagine a borderless world, here is an archive. It is not the only one. But what we harness are the archives of the world at large, and not only the western archive. In fact, the western archive does not help us to develop an idea of borderlessness. The western archive is premised on the crystallization of the idea of a border,” (2018, paragraph 14).

Early collectors of the western archive, the Medici family was an early focus of reverence during the Enlightenment due to their central role in protocapitalist extractions. They used their mercantilism fortune from the movement of spices and foreign objects into Europe, to found the first multi-regional bank which also introduced credit to collect debts for the Catholic Church, in 14th century Florence, which they spent on curating art and the collection of fantastical objects, (Goldthwaite, R. 1987). “Throughout the sixteenth century and well into the seventeenth, observation, description, and accumulation were the means by which nature came to be ever more systematically encountered, cataloged, published, collected, and studied. The epistemological objectives sponsored a particular kind of image, an image done *ad vivum*... such images were deeply enmeshed in political and commercial networks that looked at nature in new ways because it was a tangible sign of one’s mastery of the world,” (Smith, 2002, pp. 10-1).

Much of the art from that era depicts the spoils of colonial plunder and the conventions of artistic and anthropological provenance trace these objects to their collectors, rather than their original inhabitants. This is echoed in the cabinet of curiosities, which shifted curation and collection from religious iconography to that of objects that convey domination of distant land. As well as still life painting of exotic fruit and spice, “mute assemblages of ready combustibles,’ perfectly reflect the colonial envisioning of ‘nature’ as a vast mass of inert resources – enframing that is made clearer by the French name for the genre: *Nature Morte*.” (Ghosh, 2021, p. 40). This also marks a shift in the “ritual canonizing function. In place of the religious schemas, whose systems of figuration would become increasingly privatized, it would generate powerful new imaginary schemas. And their conception of Life/Death would now orient behaviors,” (Wynter, 1984, p. 51).



[Cabinet of Curiosity expanded into museum exhibition - Imperato, F. (1599) *Dell Historia Naturale*. Naples. In public domain]

The war against the other, which fueled colonialism, was also turned on its own. Silvia Federici, co-founder of the International Feminist Collective which began the 1970s Wages for Housework Campaign, reexamined why women were targeted in early European witch

hunts in her book, *Caliban and the Witch* (2004). She veers the discourse away from a closed dialogue on religious fanaticism, or occult intrigue. She “argues that the English enclosures [as the fencing and also privatization of the countryside once freely used by farmers and peasants], and more broadly the rise of agrarian capitalism, starting in late fifteenth-century Europe provide a relevant social background for understanding the production of many contemporary witchcraft accusations and the relation between witch-hunting and capital accumulation,” (2018, p. 15). As privatized land became precedent for removing indigenous bodies, it also shifted relationships with land in Europe. Under feudalism, women had an autonomous relationship with land. They foraged and grew food and medicine, they knew which plants were poison, and they traded with other women in the community. They were midwives, knowing which herbs prevent pregnancy, and which aid in birth. Knowledge of herbs was demonized when it began to be associated with witchcraft. This important ontology, the knowledge of plant medicine, allowed women autonomy over their bodies. Women have yet to recover from demonization of their autonomy and sexuality, as magic, rather than essential health care.

Even the poorest woman had access to commons land she could feed herself and her family from. The shift to capitalism, coinciding with colonial invasion, though a detriment to all genders, unequally targeted women by ending that practice. Land became taxed, and rack rents put in place. “Older women were most affected by these developments, for the combination of rising prices and the loss of customary rights left them with nothing to live on, especially if they were widows or had no children capable of or willing to help them. In the rural economy of the English manorial society, widows and poor people in general had been provided for,” (2008, p. 17). The severing of women from the land, also meant this knowledge of caretaking through collecting wild food and medicine was diminished. The Enlightenment outlawed the rights of persons to guaranteed food and shelter. The female body, just as with the land, shifted to an exploitable commodity. Federici argues witch trials were an intentional suppression of these protests. Records of trials show that “the poverty of the ‘witches’ was noted in the accusations,” (2008, p. 18). All people suffer from separation from the land, but for women it was also a social divide; a loss of community.

As Federici astutely describes, “we have to think of the enclosures as a broader phenomenon than simply the fencing off of land. We must think of an enclosure of knowledge, of our bodies, and of our relationship to other people and nature, (2008, p. 21). Eve Sedgwick, scholar of queer theory, adds to this concept with her “aperture of visibility,” wherein she argues that in instances of human rights violations that “violence that was from the beginning exemplary and spectacular...[was] meant to serve as a public warning or

terror to members of a particular community,” to enact silence and subservience, and fortify the rule of the oppressor (1997, p.19). It is a violence so spectacular as to terrorize its target into silence. “The witch hunt instituted a regime of terror on all women, from which emerged the new model of femininity to which women had to conform to be socially accepted in the developing capitalist society: sexless, obedient, submissive, resigned to subordination to the male world, accepting as natural the confinement to a sphere of activities that in capitalism has been completely devalued,” (Sedgwick, 1997, p.19)(Federici 2008, p. 32).

Federici writes that the “naming and persecuting women as ‘witches’ paved the way to the confinement of women in Europe to unpaid domestic labor. It legitimated their subordination to men in and beyond the family. It gave the state control over their reproductive capacity, guaranteeing the creation of new generations of workers,” (2008, pp. 47-8). A process of patriarchal domination, which did not exist before to this extent, is underway in the global south with the rapid development in those regions, and black and brown bodies in the north, as well, particularly in places of migration and entrenched colonial histories. Federici describes the modern expansion of femicide, in her 2018 update, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*, as the rapid westernization of former European colonies, is creating similar gendered instability, and in so doing expands her work as Euro-centric, and into the global south. She describes it as an expansion of plantation violence. As well as medical violence that gave women lobotomies and hysterectomies for succumbing to the weight of depression over their lack of autonomy.



[Matteson, T. H. (1853). *Examination of a Witch*. [painting] in the collection of Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA. In public domain]

Ghosh also writes of this era, “this temporal overlap between European witch-burnings and the “Great Dyings” of the Americas did not come about by coincidence... These conjoined processes of violence, physical and intellectual, were necessary for the emergence of a new economy based on extracting resources from a desacralized, inanimate earth,” (2021, p. 38). Federici continues with, “the root causes of this new surge of violence are the new forms of capital accumulation, which involve land dispossession, the destruction of communitarian relations, and an intensification in the exploitation of women’s bodies and labor. In other words, the new violence against women is entrenched in structural trends that are constitutive of capitalist development and state power in all times,” (2008, p. 47). Including that “witchcraft accusations are more frequent in areas designated for commercial projects or where land privatization processes are underway” (2008, p. 52). Not only are instances of femicide rapidly increasing, but “it has become more public and more brutal and is taking forms once seen only in times of war,” (2008, p. 46). She continues, “we are [currently] witnessing an escalation of violence against women, especially Afro-descendant and Native

American women, because 'globalization' is a process of political recolonization intended to give capital uncontested control over the world's natural wealth and human labor, and this cannot be achieved without attacking women, who are directly responsible for the reproduction of their communities," (2008, pp. 49-50). It is a continuing legacy of global colonial enforcement.

Let's bring this discussion of cognitive border walls to the present day, the current culture war, which is rooted in media consumption. Podcaster Jon Ronson traces the trend of political divide seen in the aggressive bashing happening on social media, to responses to the counterculture movements of the 1960s. This bred the yippies, but it also bred the televangelists who have amassed fortunes preaching conservative dogma to an ever growing fan base. And from this, cultural trends, such as 'virtue signaling,' or the portrayal of embodying moralistic characteristics, particularly on social media. It is about making statements to those already in your circle, rather than any attempt to foster larger dialogue or action towards larger change. Virtue signaling is done by conservatives and liberals alike. It has bled into legislative territory, resulting in backwards motions on previous progress, such as the reversal of Roe vs. Wade, which de-legalized abortion (Ronson, 2022, S:1 E:1). It can also be seen in the social media posts of the January 6th rioters as they stormed the US capital. "Under certain circumstances progressive people can also succumb to moral panics," (Ronson, 2022, S:1 E:4). Evidenced through identity politics and the push for protest to take certain prescribed modes. "Intolerance among young people and their academic sponsors in the university is more entrenched than it was before, and both administrators and a large proportion of the liberal professoriate are running scared, fearful that they will be accused of thought crimes if they speak out against even the most obvious abuses and absurdities," (Chotiner, 2019). This is compounded by instances such as trolling, or the intentional posting of provocative statements intended to incite argument and deepen divisions. "Trying to square your liberal principles with your sense that people who are with you on most things—on the obligation to move the world as it is closer to the world as it should be—are increasingly suspicious of dissent," (Chotiner, 2019). Our current state of precarity should be proof enough for the need for different models of action.

There is evidence of a shift of engaging in discourse in consideration of multiple viewpoints, towards the refusal to discuss or engage, in exploring shifts of terminology, a phenomena called, "'skunked words.'...A term that was coined by Bryan Garner of *Garner's Modern English Usage*, writer of books on legal usage and also English usage, general English usage. ...He coined this word specifically to refer to this category of words that has one meaning that is fully established, and then a new meaning develops," (Brewster, unknown).

This can happen quickly, as with the current confusion thanks to reality television, over 'literally' perhaps now meaning 'figuratively' in some circles, causing an aversion to the word in others, or can happen at a slower pace. But of particular interest to this discussion are terms like, 'moot point,' which in the eleventh century meant, "a meeting, an assembly of people, esp one for judicial or legislative purposes...Dating from the 16th century, a moot is 'the discussion of a hypothetical case by law students for practice; a hypothetical doubtful case that may be used for discussion.'" It was a word for debate, as well as the analysis of varying arguments. Now in the US, moot is used quite the opposite, "to mean not open to debate," whereas in the UK, it has remained closer to its original meaning, "as a verb to mean proposed," (Marsh, 2015). There is also the term, 'table a bill,' which in the UK parliamentary process means to put it up for discussion, and in the US, means remove it from discussion. We are losing our ability to engage in dialectics. There are a few possible deductions from this, one that the UK is more open to discussion or dialogue, or, that the UK is less inclined to tolerate this kind of change in word meaning. The most important takeaway is that the culture wars have fostered an intentional turn away from complex and multipointal dialogue; it is a failure of speaking, but also in listening.

The instability created by the terrible histories outlined in this chapter, and aggravated by unhinged inflation, a poor job market, perpetual warfare, and lack of affordable healthcare and housing, is trapped in the infighting of this imposed divide. The noise of sectarian factions has become a paralysis. Rather than arguing for better ways, it deflects from demanding governmental responsibility, institutional action, or infrastructural progress. There have been many attacks on discussion of critical race theory, or even speaking on these histories. It can be said, "it is human to want to underplay the violence perpetrated by your side," (Ronson, 2022, S:1 E:2). But the opposite has also become true. This has resulted in both liberal and conservative factions shifting to the political right. We cannot cultivate better ways of being without being able to discuss multiplicities, to ask questions, to consider multiple points of view with empathy and openness. There are more mythologies to unravel and more boundaries to challenge, work that will be difficult to undertake in this antagonistic era.

The war on women, the war on nature, the war on the global south have also cultivated resistance to this, resistance that works towards permaculture. After these terrible histories, how can we reconnect the human with the natural world when so much work has been put into enforcing this loss? I name this reunion as the bodylandscape as an argument to the potential strength in this intersectional alliance, and in the refusal to abide by sectarian infighting. It is an ecotone, and as such is richly sympoietic, and able to move and shift. In

fact, with its long history of attempted control by forces plotting to dominate it and subject it to forceful displacement, the bodylandscape understands better than most how to grow from movement. It is a resistance to division in its ability to question and listen and respect difference, rather than in enforcing dogmas. This is an important subversive act. Filmmaker Jonas Mekas said, “in the end, civilizations perish because they listen to their politicians and not their poets,” (2016, p. 70). So how do we make space for poetic listening not just to the marginalized, but also to each other? The next chapter explores pathways towards becoming reacquainted with listening, beginning with counter-theories to the human-centered approach.

Chapter 2 – Mapping Interference: Working Towards Reparative Landscapes

“The landscape crossed out with a pen reappears here.”

- Bei Dao

For the first months of the pandemic, before moving to Singapore, I stayed with Travis’s family in Michigan, the home of the Ojibwe, the Odawa, and the Potawatomi. When the market shelves went empty, I built a make-shift greenhouse to grow seedlings, and offered free tutorials on growing food from the land, but also from kitchen scraps. Many cut ends will grow anew when placed in the dirt, or in fresh water. I also turned to the forest that extended off the back of the house. It was early spring, but the forest was soon providing wild garlic shoots, ramps, morels, and gyromitra, dandelion greens and buds, lemon balm, eastern redbud and violet flowers. An old felled tree offered oyster and coral mushrooms. The naturalized young shoots of hosta and bamboo are wonderful, tasting a bit like asparagus. There was an invasion of garlic mustard greens, native to Europe, they covered the forest floor. They begin growth early in spring, by the time the local plants begin to sprout, they have already taken over. The local forestry service asks anyone able to remove them all the way to the root system, before they bloomed, to pack them inside plastic bags, and not allow them in the compost where they reseed. They are also a delicious and nutrient rich cooked green, and pesto. I spent hours pulling them, making sure to safely dispose of what I couldn’t eat.

Times of crisis demand introspection. The repetition of pulling overgrowth for better plants to root provides space for this.

On the other side of the country, my city was on fire again, as the grief for George Floyd was a reminder that Rodney King had suffered for nothing. I watched on the news from afar, the same streets I saw burn as a child, filled with people chanting Floyd's last words, "I can't breathe." Meanwhile, thousands of people on ventilators were thinking the same thing. In the aftermath of the 1992 riots, my family joined in the clean-up, sweeping up ash and separating out good bricks. We donated clothes to a Baptist church in the south of the city. The physical infrastructures were rebuilt, but the systemic and targeted racism and inequality was never addressed; legacies my family too, had a role in. I felt this failure, from afar, through a screen. But in this moment, it also felt like a shift. Statues of colonizers were being toppled: Christopher Columbus, Father Junipero Serra, Kit Carson, Robert E. Lee. The slaveholders, pirates, eugenicists, and conquistadors, the headmasters of epigenetic inheritance, were being dethroned.

In witnessing resistance, I arrived with a determination to follow Donna Haraway's plea for, 'staying with the trouble.' I also felt an intense calling to return to the lessons I had gathered from my years of working with plants and dirt. That perhaps in cultivating and sharing different understandings of land, and my place within it, that it could provide entrance into examining other forms of resistance as well.

Growing begins with breaking. Few things will grow in unbroken ground. Seeds break their own hull to release their first tender leaves. Limbs must be trimmed just above their nodes to ensure strong future growth. Plants feed each other, just as they feed us. As referenced in the failed approach to the Los Angeles River project, some plants are particularly gifted at removing heavy metals and toxins from a disturbed landscape, pulling them up into their own system; a sacrifice. Plants either pull up nitrogen, or fix it back into the earth, and a good gardener knows which plants provide and which take, planting so that there is a balance. Invasive species must be closely watched and maintained, to allow room for beneficial growth. A garden centered on permaculture has holes in the leaves, as it allows insects too to eat from the bounty. It recognizes that this is not just for people, and not just for the present. This is a different model than is currently practiced in commercial sectors, whether that be architecture or agriculture, fields obsessed with production yields, and maximizing profits. It is an unsustainable model of productionism, meaning "the process by which a logic of production overdetermines other activities of value...aimed to produce for humans at the expense of all other relations," (de la Bellacasa, 2015, pp. 699-700).

Dirt is denatured soil. Little will grow in dirt, it needs to be tended to, and cared for. Good soil is full of minerals and bacteria, worms and mycelium, all of which work together. "Soil is

created through a combination of geological processes taking thousands of years to break down rock and by relatively shorter ecological cycles by which organisms and plants, as well as humans growing food, break down materials that contribute to renewing topsoil,” (de la Bellacasa, 2015, p. 695). Making compost, or allowing kitchen scraps to decompose with leaves and paper trash, is a wonderful way to return nutrients back into dirt, and if you are lucky, perhaps even new edible plants from rogue seeds. This is soil making. “Soils gained new consideration in public perception [as they] have been mistreated and neglected, prompting a close, gloomy future of exhausted fertile land and correlated food crisis,” (de la Bellacasa, 2015, p. 692).

Soil loss is a direct result of planting of monocrops and climate inappropriate specimens, which require the use of pesticides to maintain them. Monocultural applications extend past the lawn. They are also a customary practice of commercial agriculture, often neglecting necessary crop rotations which balance soil nutrients and ensure healthy crops. Chemicals from insecticides or industrial mismanagement, kill these helpers that break down organic material into fertile topsoil, and the chemicals also move from the soil, into streams and lakes. The early use of industrial fertilizer is in fact related to colonization, “the agricultural revolution in 17th-century Britain was fueled by the introduction of off-site natural fertilizers first extracted and imported from the colonized Americas,” And in the colonial tradition, “as these resources became exhausted, fertilizers were developed artificially,”. This shift propelled “soils chemistry through its contribution to industrial manufacturing,” (de la Bellacasa, 2015, p. 696). The loss of topsoil is a devastating event, which was evidenced in the 1930’s Dust Bowl phenomenon, where “wind storms carried away the topsoil of intensively farmed land, devastating livelihoods and leading to the displacement of hundreds of thousands in the North American high plains” (de la Bellacasa, 2015, p. 696). This illustrates the importance of sustainable agriculture and the embrace of permacultural practices.

Work with wilderness requires land care that encourages new and sustainable growth. This too is a form of permaculture and works in benefit of nature and humans. In California, the indigenous would do careful and selective burning to prevent large scale fires, and to improve the yields of fruiting and integrity for plants that provide wild foods. This would not only remove young kindling plants, but improve water intake for the plants that remained. (KCET, 2016). A permacultural approach to cultivation works in reciprocity, rooted in the understanding that the thriving of humans relies on the flourishing of multiplicities of species. The turn away from this practice, coupled with climate change, has contributed to the increased presence of super fires in the region. The collection of wild foods must also follow

key principles for a responsible forage: Make sure to positively identify a plant or fungi before eating. Never take the only one, collect only from bounty. Only take what you need. Leave some for both human and more-than-human others. Do not take rare or endangered species. Harvest with care so as not to damage the plant or the environment.

For a place with extended dry periods, California has a surprising bounty of food and medicine to forage, with the coast climatically being similar to the Mediterranean. Fennel, dill, and brambles grow wild in the hills and on the sides of the road. Wild rose hips and elderberries are plentiful and great for immunity. Sometimes you'll come across old citrus, olive, and pomegranate; remnants of both orchard and European settlement. And there is a proliferation of native salvia species, from the sage family, the leaves are naturally antibacterial, and drunk as tea with a bit of honey, when the throat is sore. Bees love their blossoms too. One variety, *salvia apiana*, white sage, is especially sacred to the indigenous peoples, who burn it as smudge sticks for protection. It has been illegally poached by settlers for commercial sale in burning kits for new agers, dramatically shrinking its wild plant population. Even if you come across a patch that appears bountiful, it is not to be harvested by anyone without indigenous ancestry. (Marantos, 2022). I planted *salvia apiana*, with its soft gray foliage and intoxicating scent, in many gardens, hoping its seed would be carried back to the wild.

We can cultivate better modes, but there is more to break with first.

This chapter will engage with further research that has the potential to reunite humans with Earth. It will look towards reimagining the cosmos in earth system science, geology, and geophysiology, as well as our understanding of humanness in physiology, psychophysics, and social sciences, beginning with outer space and then shifting towards inner space. I will begin with the proposition of agential realism as applied physics to engage with materiality, alongside the scientific proposition of Gaia Theory as an entrance into reimagining animism. It will explore forms of resistance that work towards permaculture as more than a notion of garden, but expanded into how it can also encapsulate the human.

Agential Realism as Kinematic Diffraction

To return to the methodology of practice-led research as 'working from the 'unknown to the known'...as a means to critique existing knowledge.' Let's explore how this can amplify

research on invasive species and modes for (de)colonization. “In established fields of research, making is generally regarded as consequent to thinking – at least in theory. Thus a series of experiments, for example, is carried out in order to test a certain assumption, i.e. to solve a problem or answer a question. In the field of practice-led research, praxis has a more essential role: making is conceived to be the driving force behind the research and in certain modes of practice also the creator of ideas,” (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48). This not only makes space for practice and cross-disciplinary invention, but also collaborative processes and the opening of discourse for non-traditional knowledge bases. Allowing for an expansion of source material for the production of new knowledge. This also questions the historical model of dividing disciplines along rigid imposed boundaries, and therein a disciplinary gate-keeping of important innovations in knowledge, as well as assumptions that knowledge making can only reside within the limitations of the scientific method, or academic processes.

The introduction of dialectics into the contextual “explores the uniquely human process of making meaning through experiences that are felt, lived, reconstructed and reinterpreted,” as well as the conceptual which is “at the heart of the thinking and making traditions whereby artists give form to thoughts in creating artifacts that become part of the research process,” (Sullivan, 2009, p.50). It is a reflexive form of critique and analysis, a reflexivity that can expand or contract depending on the views of the practice based researcher as being separated from, or entangled with, the communities and world around them. In fact, “recent studies in cognitive neuroscience offer tantalizing evidence that ‘insight’ is a consequence of precisely the opposite approach to the thinking advocated by the clinical model of inquiry that promotes progressive focusing, the elimination of confounding variables and distractions and exercising control. It is this intense attention to detail that is framed by prior knowledge that can limit creative links that may lead to insightful outcomes. The implication is that creative options and new associations occur in situations where there is intense concentration, but within an open landscape of free-range possibility rather than a closed geography of well trodden pathways,” (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48).

So how do we engage in modes of thinking that are opposite what we have been taught? To break with ‘well trodden pathways.’

Sylvia Wynter is interested in “how we might give humanness a different future,” one that breaks with the current trajectory, wherein, “humanness is no longer a noun. Being human is a praxis,” (2007, p. 23). A new era. It is a recreation of spatiality that is active, and activating. She sees promise in Aimé Césaire’s “A Science of the World,” which holds in equity, “the study of the word (the mythoi) will condition the study of nature (the bios),” (2007, pp.17-8).

This acknowledges the historical reverence for “universalizing” the words of white men, rather than other ontologies which often do listen closely to nature and the land, but also to intuition, multiplicities, ancestry, somatic practices, the domestic, and the lived. It is important to note that Wynter has been criticized for how she “overemphasizes the ‘biocentric’ conception of race...which potentially obscures how race in fact operates by appeals to ‘culture’ within the modern foundational discourse of the aesthetic, and we might add, in post-emancipation and postcolonial liberal discourse at large,” (Franke et al, 2022, p. 153). This thesis tends to that gap by engaging in both culture and cultivation. Her writing on the canon as party to wealth accumulation however, does provide an entrance into this tangential look into the cultivation of the politics and aesthetics of boundary making. It is interesting that she ties these ideas to nature, as it harks back to the patriarchal notion that women are entangled with nature, and men, with reason. It calls into question the classical Western literary archetype of man vs. nature in stories like *Moby Dick*, centered on a sea captain’s obsession with capturing a white whale. Alongside Wynter’s theories is the idea that women would be perceived as in closer proximity to a white whale, than a seafaring man. In this reading, Western narrative, and its intentional divisive othering, has also created a border between man and woman, and white man with everything Other. But in studying the word and nature, only one is a body.

“‘Dominant science’ has a long history of reinforcing militarism and colonialism, and that it tends, generally speaking, to produce outcomes that favor the world’s ruling classes and nations,” (Ghosh 2021, p. 228). This is also formed by epigenetic inheritance. The last chapter named just a few of these outcomes. This forces a re-examination of scientific ‘objectivity’ in terms of cultural assumptions of what kinds of research it engages in. “Wynter is not inclined to join the common lament that we seem to be better equipped to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism... The question she instead asks is: How does the system have to be known in order for its reproduction to be interrupted? Such an endeavor does not lie for her in proposing an alternative mode of material provisioning, but rather in unsettling the genre of being human that is currently provisioned/reproduced,” (Franke et al, 2022, p. 155).

As resistance to colonial trajectory, let’s explore a different kind of temporality. “Temporality is not just imposed by an epoch of a dominant paradigm, but rather made through socio-technical arrangements and everyday practices,” (de la Bellacasa, 2015, p. 695). In fact, the rigid bordering of academic fields has put these at odds with each other, both creating and maintaining divisions of knowledge. This has prevented discourse. Practice-led research encourages collaborative entanglement, including rupturing with sectarian

disciplinary divides. “Socio-historical critiques of temporality epochs foster different experiences of time. Looking at temporality from the perspective of everyday experience shows that time is not an abstract category, nor just an atmosphere, but a lived, embodied, historically and socially situated experience... Both micro- and macro-timescales of ecological relations involve timeframes different from human lifespan and history,” (de la Bellacasa, 2015, p. 695). This expands into further considerations that de-center the human: geological time, plant time, animal time, marine time, cosmological time, bacterial time, and ghostly time. These studies would be typically segregated as: geology, botany, zoology, marine biology, astronomy, microbiology, and metaphysical philosophy. Consideration of “more-than-human scales” and “alternative temporalities” across disciplines becomes a form of sypoietic research (de la Bellacasa, 2015, pp. 694-5). Part of the very nature of solastalgia is the underlying knowledge that, “time is not a given, it is not that we have or do not have time, but that we *make it* through practices,” which means we can also unmake it through our own foolishness, (de la Bellacasa, 2015, p. 695).

Since this era of spatial centering has been so problematic, other epistemologies must be explored. We must therefore investigate methodological interventions on culture and cultivation as means for anti-colonial intervention of the spatial. “Culture and techniques cannot complement one another while remaining in a static position [or trajectory]; they can become complementary only through a kinematic process of oscillation and inversion,” (Simondon, 1965, p. 23). A temporal process requiring not just momentum, but momentum interfered. While the kinematic can consider multiple trajectories, it does not consider the causes or effects of movement or the markers for when and how trajectories could, or must, shift. In so doing, the kinematic alone is a closed system that reinforces colonial cultural practices. Therefore, a dynamic approach, or one that looks towards the forces that instigate change in momentum, must be taken.

Barad attends to the interference necessary for opening trajectories with her work on “agential realism” is “the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting ‘components,’” and is describes the materiality of phenomena, which she defines as “the primary epistemological unit,”(Bard, 2003, p. 815). It is an investigation into permaculture within the parameters of applied physics. In this theory, human and more-than are intrinsically intertwined. Therefore permaculture must include the human as an integral component rather than an external force. Rather than Massey’s interaction, Barad is concerned with intra-action, the former evokes a false independence of entities, and therein intra-action is a profound conceptual shift. If phenomena are dynamically entangled, “the absence of a classical ontological condition of exteriority between observer and observed provides the

condition for the possibility of objectivity...[which] constitutes a reworking of the traditional notion of causality," (2003, p. 815-26). Meaning that the instances of the violent creation and maintenance of the parallax gap previously discussed are human-made segregations of intra-acting phenomena. The models on which land 'preservation' began in the US, is in direct opposition to natural processes.

So how can the kinematic be applied to agential realism? Although first proposed as a methodology for feminist study by Donna Haraway, Barad proposes consideration of Trinh Minh-ha's definition of "diffraction." "Diffraction does not produce 'the same' displaced, as reflection and refraction do. Diffraction is a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction. A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the effects of differences appear," (Barad, 2003, p. 803). Momentum after all can only be understood, if referenced alongside a change in speed. Diffraction is a methodology of and as, action, thereby working in the performative. It seeks to pinpoint dispersal as "the enactment of boundaries—that always entails constitutive exclusions and therefore requisite questions of accountability", (Barad, 2003, 803). If we look towards boundaries in nature, rather than imposed by humans, to the abundance thriving in ecotones, they become spaces of possibility. It is a (re)orientation, as it makes space for the other trajectories that have always existed, but were not acknowledged or given proper autonomy, by oppressive force.

The expanded kinematic dynamism of agential realism, with the consideration of diffraction, provides a comparative positionality to not only study difference or sameness, but also the catalysts for interference. Diffraction is a weed. Following diffractions offers an opportunity to decipher the conditions that must be in place to divert trajectories, and decode the consequences of these new orientations. Meaning we must work towards the kinematic with a diligence towards not only portraying diffraction, but aiming to function as work of diffraction in and of itself. Barad writes that, "meaning is not ideational but rather specific material (re)configurings of the world, and semantic indeterminacy, like ontological indeterminacy, is only locally resolvable through specific intra-actions... Statements and subjects emerge from a field of possibilities...not static or singular but rather is a dynamic and contingent multiplicity," (2003, p. 819). This provides a conundrum for traditional academic discourse, situated in written word and observation; situated in the static. To address this, she continues to write that, "performativity is precisely a contestation to the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real," (2003, p. 802). This can also be applied to ontologies. With particular attention to "discursive practices" as "boundary making practices that [, which as opposed to monocultural approaches] have no finality in

the ongoing dynamics of agential intra-activity,” (2003, p. 821). There will be further exploration of how this application engages with multiplicity, as well as further applications of this methodology as a performative and embodied practice process-based, in chapters 4 and 5. This work must explore meaning for all phenomena; a ‘we’ that includes the spatiality of more-than-human trajectories. Without the destructive dynamic of observed versus observer, there is possibility of shifting the idea of the other, to reframe it as an extension of the self that still allows reverence for autonomy and self-determination for all.

Let us next consider the further application of agential realism to the geological and cosmological sciences, through the application of it to a scientific theorem: Gaia Theory. Though the scientific community has accepted the passing of this work from hypothesis to theorem, it is still excluded from dominant science. Whereas theorems such as Darwinian Evolution, which intend to cultivate hierarchies of species, centered on the human, and substantiating domination, are taken as objective truths.

(En)countering the Scientific Method: Applications of Agential Realism in Science as Means for Diffraction

“For the first time in the history of humankind we are now confronted with a common environment. As a post-atomic one, it challenges us with the demand that we reinvent our present conflictive modes of group integration. This demand implies that we must now consciously alter our mode of self-troping, together with the related orienting desire/aversion machinery of our orders of discourse [...] This is the price, in the face of the possibility of our extinction, of our self-realization as a species,” (Sylvia Wynter quoted in: Franke et al, 2022, p. 155). This dictates we practice different models of planetary interaction. “Thomas Kuhn points out that the recognition of anomalies is the first step which leads to changes in the paradigms of the natural sciences. And in the same context the linguistic scholar Whatmough has argued that human observers are parts of the cosmos which they observe, that since all the knowledge that orders our behavior is gained from these human observers, such knowledge must either be solipsistic or reduce man to a part of his environment. This knowledge is, therefore, not to be trusted unless the observer in his role as knower finds the means to convert himself into an ‘external observer,’” (Wynter, 1984, p. 38). A conversation that can be enacted by movement through the parallax gap wherein a shift in position not

only provides comparative understanding, but it also has the potential for (re)orientation. However, as this chapter details just a small fraction of disasters inflicted by the notion that man is not only separate from his environment, but given extreme powers to cultivate it. The premise of the 'external observer,' in itself is in direct opposition to the propositions of permaculture, and reinforces this othering of ideas, bodies, and ways of living with Earth, but not all applications of science apply this idea.

"In Western epistemology, a paradigm of truth replaces another through a scientific revolution, and the past often becomes a commodified museum; such is the power of the coloniality of thinking that, although the encounter of different people is the most common reality, the encounter of different truths on common ground often seems unimaginable," (Țichindeleanu, 2012, p. 19). As such, western culture has become entrapped by necropolitics. But there are other models for consideration. In 1984, Lynn Margolis and James Locklock contended that "as some models propose the origin of life itself was a planetary phenomenon,...we broaden the idea of intelligence as a collective property and extend it to the planetary scale. We consider the ways in which the appearance of technological intelligence may represent a kind of planetary scale transition, and thus might be seen not as something which happens on a planet but to a planet" (Frank, 2022, p. 47). In reexamining humanness, we must also do the same for the Earth. This resulted in their formulation of Gaia Theory, which proposes that the interconnectedness between "life and planetary geochemistry," provided for the stasis wherein remains at a temperature suitable for sustaining habitation. "What Margulis brought to the collaboration was a focus on the remarkable capacities of microbes to serve as drivers for Gaian feedback... through her research on evolutionary cooperation (as opposed to competition), Margulis saw the microbial domains as rich with a kind of 'preintelligence'. As she wrote 'the view of evolution as chronic bloody competition ... dissolves before a new view of continual cooperation, strong interaction, and mutual dependence among life forms.," (Frank, 2022, p. 50). A theory that resonates with Barad's intra-active agential realism.

This suggests that the Earth in its ability to formulate a response to varying stimuli and fluctuation, is not just intelligent, but sentient. Which forces the question of whether global warming is not just an inadvertent response to the human-led practices of extraction and the proliferation of wastelands, but is an intentional Earth response to our actions. "On the one hand, a civilization's technological and energy-harvesting capacities may allow it to 'engineer' the world, creating new planetary-scale behaviors and functions allowing that civilization to survive over longer timescales than would otherwise be possible," (Frank, 2022, p. 47). But when read alongside productionism, we must use caution to ensure that novelty is not confused with progress. "Conversely, those same technological capacities may

lead the species, or at least its global civilization, into a kind of suicide (i.e. nuclear weapons). They may also drive the planet into new states of its coupled systems (atmosphere, hydrosphere, etc.) which truncate the civilization's evolution (i.e. climate change)," (Frank, 2022, p. 47). Why do we assume that ancient beings like water and rock cannot communicate or reflect with intention? Why do we assume they are without consciousness? Perhaps climate change is a willful act of Earth to save herself.



[calcium stalactites, rocks that absorb carbon, collected by Ding Ma and photographed by Erin Wilkerson]

I recently organized a conference panel with Ding Ma, a geologist who specializes in studying climate change, and Travis. We presented a panel on Gaia Theory, Ma from the geological perspective, myself from that of culture and cultivation, and Travis on the impossibility of separating inner and outer space. Ma introduced two important factors. Firstly, that the Arctic is rapidly warming, much faster than the rest of the planet, and although there are plenty of theories as to why this is happening, they are all conjecture. We don't actually know why. His second point was that calcium stalactites absorb massive amounts of carbon to maintain conditions for life, a process in geological time scales that as of yet, cannot keep up with post-industrialization carbon emissions. Meaning that there is possibility in utilizing rocks in the collection of excess carbon, to stabilize global temperatures, but also that extractive mining may also be preventing this essential process from occurring as needed for homeostasis. Furthermore, we have yet to understand symbiotic relationships alongside these rocks. We know this process requires water,

however, accompanying bacteria or algae conditions are as of yet, unknown. Bacteria are of particular interest in that they “communicate through a process known as Auto-Induction where they stimulate changes in their genetic expression when certain environmental molecules reach threshold concentrations,” (Frank, 2022, p. 53). Thereby, exhibiting a form of collective knowing. (Ma, 2024). We must also consider in this sympoietic relationship, that the human excavation of large quantities of rock and accompanying bacteria has also led to the release of mass amounts of carbon into the atmosphere, (Wilkerson, 2024).



[depiction of the Garden of Hesperides on traditional Greek pottery, *Meidias hydria* (approx. 420 BCE). In the collection of the British Museum. In public domain]

To transition the discussion of Gaia Theory to cultural realms, it is named after the Greek goddess, Gaia, of Earth and all life, suggesting that Margolis and Lovelock’s work, rather than simply appropriating mythology, was perhaps also intending to erode the division between the scientific and certain forms of mythological cosmology. Looking into the roots of Gaia provides an opportunity to explore the story of the Garden of Hesperides. The Hesperides were the “clear-voiced maidens who guarded the tree bearing golden apples of immortality that Gaea [alternative spelling] gave to Hera at her marriage to Zeus,” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). This by some accounts older Euro-centric origin story of the garden has interesting overlap with the more recent origin story of Euro-centric mythology, “the mythological Garden of Eden...At first a paradise of human innocence, a feast of serene natural beauty, then latterly the Arcadian backdrop to human sexual awakening, shame,

desire and guilt,” (Wall, 2020, p. 76). Arcadia is spoken of as a metaphorical paradise, but it is also the name of an actual landscape, “mountainous region of the central Peloponnese,” in Greece (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). The apple in the story of Adam and Eve revoked immortality, rather than providing it. Also distinct, is that in Greek mythology, women are protectors of the garden and its most precious fruit, alongside a snake-like dragon, whereas in Christian mythology, the perceived tarnishing of the garden as a protect(ed/ive) space is also the perceived tarnishing of the female body, as the ‘fall of man’ is the result of a plot between a woman and a snake. Man is therein portrayed as a victim, needing to defend himself from this betrayal. “So the garden [becomes] a Rebis thing, an alchemical, double-sided concept simultaneously containing its opposites - violence and love, clash and desire,” (Wall, 2020, p. 76). By naming it as Rebis, as in the final product of alchemy, or the transmutation of matter to make it more valuable, it reinforces the western ontological separation of spirit and matter as opposing dualities, as opposed to entangled in intra-action. This also makes the garden into a space associated with the failure of a woman. And women in turn are often described along similar terminology to the garden: fickle, changing, unpredictable; and therein requiring taming. They are both vulnerable in this cultivated mythology.



[Rubens, P.P. and Brueghel the Elder, J. (1614) *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man* [painting] in the collection of Mauritshuis, The Hague. In public domain]

“Origin stories, in Sylvia Wynter’s words, ‘auto-institute’ symbolic systems. They perform a paradoxical operation of self-causation, positing a ‘primordial’ beginning before the beginning. They cannot thus be held accountable to any real events of the past, but the ‘space of otherness’ they produce is rather a function of the imaginary, delineating an exterior that brings into being a positive system of internal differences” (Franke et al, 2022, p. 150). But what if we embrace new origin stories, stories that do not other, stories that reacquaint us with better relationships with Earth? The “idea that the Earth is a living entity in which ‘life maintains the conditions for life’... [challenges] the modern conception of matter as inert,” (Ghosh, 2022, p. 85-6). Just as the role of women as protectors of Earth, working in reciprocity with her, challenges modern assessments of gender roles. These arguments that in addition to concerns of extractive practices, has fueled settlement, “the aim of eradicating ‘the belief that spirit existed in all matter’ thus came to be seen as ‘a final stage of English conquest - over nature, and over those that had improper views of nature,’” (Ghosh, 2022, p. 86-7). Including that the western exemplum the snake “was, among other non-Christian exotica, a proof of Indigenous evil, squarely situating non-Europeans in the sphere of “death” (chaos, irrationality, etc.) during colonialism; rendering their culture a death-cult that needed to be enlightened or simply eliminated,” (Franke et al, 2022, p.224). We must move beyond these self-imposed struggles for domination over multiplicities of species we should be working with in reciprocal tandem with. It is time to reacquaint ourselves with the spirits in all phenomena. In turn, this must affect ideas of culture and cultivation.



[photograph of the Mayan Temple of Chichén Itzá, which reveals an illuminated snake on the solstice, in southeastern peninsula of Mexico - “The Descent of the Serpent in the Chichen Itza Equinox. *Mayan Peninsula* [photograph]

<<https://mayanpeninsula.com/chichen-itza-equinox/>>. Permission to reproduce this has been granted by the photographer, Sergio Vazquez]

Just as we can utilize science to diffract notions of more-than-human relationships with Earth, we can also do the same with culture by examining the work of Vladimir Vernadsky. “Vernadsky, the founder of both geochemistry and biogeochemistry...[writes that] the biosphere was an emergent phenomenon that appeared with, and evolved in tandem with the diversity of individual species. Indeed, the evolution of such species could only be fully accounted for in the context of the wider biosphere. But this emergence, he argued, always involved some degree of cognitive or ‘cultural’ activity...Vernadsky went on to explore the concept of the Noosphere (‘noos’ being Greek for Mind)...for Vernadsky the Noosphere was an emergent shell of influence based on the totality of what he called ‘cultural biogeochemical energy’. In using the term ‘cultural’, Vernadsky meant collective cognitive activity. He held that such activity had always been present in the biosphere from microbes to mammals,” (Frank et al, 2021, p. 49-50). In this light, culture is a more-than-human phenomena that refers to the entanglement not just with all species, but with Earth as well. The perception of culture to be reserved solely for elites as gatekeepers of knowledge and wealth, and as an apparatus for domination, is directly connected to our present precarity.

Our greatest hope for survival is not in our humanness, but in our Earthness; a collective and reciprocal culture. One that appeals for a new cosmology that expands the boundaries of scientific inquiry.

“Cosmologies are precisely the site of encounter of different epistemologies; cosmologies are never fixed and always reinvented, yet they succeed in preserving and enacting trans-generational cultural memory...A functional type of truth which inspires, as opposed to the truth understood as the absolute end of a problem.” (Țichindeleanu, 2012, p. 19). They frame our relationship with the natural world, and have the potential to make space for ‘other,’ to alter epigenetic inheritance. What cosmological encounters can inspire a paradigm shift of human ontology towards Earthness and beyond?

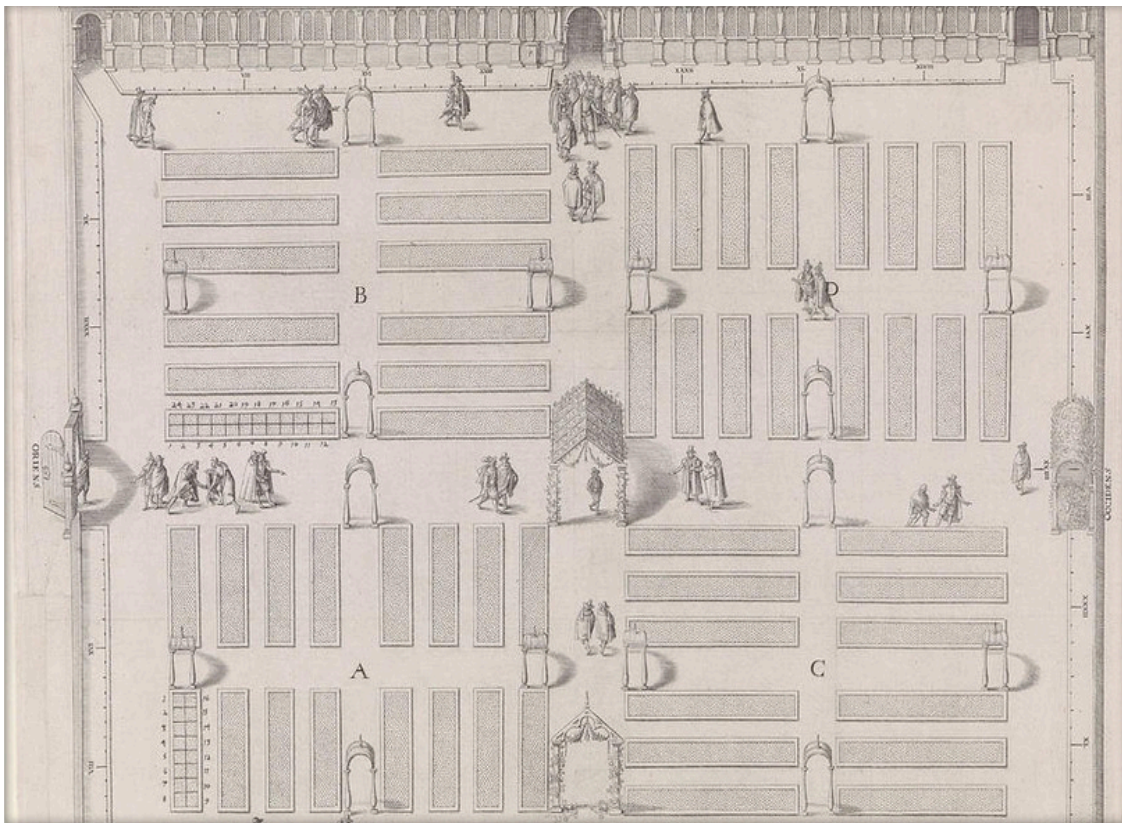
The current dominant western relationship with notions of poison is directly connected to the origin story of poisoned apples and poisoned women, a story which is culpable in forcing the separation of women from the land. Some of western history's most famous women are also associated with it. It is said that Cleopatra poisoned both Alexander the Great and the Roman Emperor Augustus (Inkwell, 2021, p. 15). Poison was also historically a means for subduing political unrest, as with Socrates, who was punished by the Greek state for inciting riots. His punishment was to drink a glass of hemlock extract. Hemlock warns of its poison, causing a blistering rash on the skin if touched. (Inkwell, 2021, p. 16). But in the case of *Atropa belladonna*, the small round darkly colored berries of deadly nightshade are said to taste sweet. It is in the Solanaceae family, along with tomato, eggplant, and peppers, and its blooms are a close resemblance to those of eggplant. It is as enticing as it is deadly. (Inkwell, 2021, p. 86). Poison is also said to have been a common tool of the Medici women to ensure family business went as they wish, in particular Catherine and Marie, who “were rumoured to have a room with 237 tiny cabinets of poison hidden within its walls,” (Inkwell, 2021, p. 23). I imagine the villa that would house this room. I am curious as to how many steps there were between the cabinet of poison and cabinet of curiosities. One meant to be shown off to guests and dignitaries, the other hidden away. Both working in tandem.



[Butlan, I. (1531) *Tacuinum Sanitatis* - illustration from the medieval handbook on wellness based on the eleventh century *Taqwin al-sihha*, an Arab book on health. In public domain]

To expand on the work of Silvia Federici, the history of women in connection to herbal knowledge and to engage in the foraging of medicinal plants, has been demonized in the shift from the discussion of this work as work in medicine, to work in poison. Until the influx of foreign spices and commodities that accompanied the mercantile restructuring of the European economy, local plants were the sources for medicine, both foraged and cultivated. A lithograph from the early 17th century of the garden at Leiden University, which is still in existence today, "*Materia medica* — the makings of medicines... is illustrated by the figure of the robed professor, surrounded by an attentive audience, in the distant center of the image; he points to one of the plots in the garden, in much the same way as we know the medical faculty to have taught from the contents of the garden in the years around 1600," (Smith et al, 2002, pp. 113-4). The other image, from seventy years earlier, depicts a woman in this role, showing that there were great shifts underway in the lead up to the Enlightenment. The garden, the forest, and the roadside were, and, are a pharmacological site. And much like

another term with the same prefix, the *pharmakon*, both are the navigation between the sometimes subtle realm between medicine and poison. A site of healing must be navigated with the understanding of this close proximity between the two. As Christian power began to dominate, schools were formed to teach along their desired ontology, including studies in medicine. This education was only offered to select men. The Bible was retranslated, including the line in “Exodus: *Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live*. This translation, a mantra that is held responsible for much of the witch madness that swept the continent, lines on in most Bible pages even today. But the original Hebrew word in this passage is *mekhashepha*, a word translated by the *Septuagint* as *pharmakeia*: poisoner,” (Inkwell, 2021, p. 27). It was an institutional separation of women from medical collection and practice, and upheld by the written word.



[Jacob de Gheyn (1601) *View of the Herb Garden (Hortus Botanicus) Leiden University* - educational lithograph. In public domain]

The centering of western men and backed by the philosophies, institutions, and laws of the Enlightenment, sanctioned their control over nature, and their right to extract the other,

whether it be bodies or goods. The control over medicine performs the same inequity as the system it was begun in, and as such has instigated its own traumatic epigenetic inheritance. This was seen in the “‘vaccine apartheid’ during the pandemic,” (Mishra, 2024, p.5). Five months after Americans began receiving vaccines in mass, there were reports of India being covered in smoke from the masses of funeral pyres burning in the cities, as well as bodies filling the Ganges, (Pandy 2021). This is also evidenced in examining maternal death statistics in the US. “In 2021, the maternal mortality rate for non-Hispanic Black (subsequently, Black) women was 69.9 deaths per 100,000 live births, 2.6 times the rate for non-Hispanic White (subsequently, White) women. Rates for Black women were significantly higher than rates for White and Hispanic women” (Hoyert, 2021). Colonial inequalities continue.

It is then imperative to expand the search for counter methodologies for diffraction not just across disciplines, but also across origin stories.

Considerations of Displacement

I did not return to visit home to Los Angeles until the summer of 2022. I arrived to a city that was suffering more than I was prepared for. Homeless encampments stretched along the boulevards, well into areas they never previously came close to. Numbers that continue to rise. “The 2023 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count revealed a 9% year-over-year increase in homelessness in the county, and a 10% rise in the city. The data showed 75,518 people are homeless in the county, and 46,260 in the city of Los Angeles, an increase from the 69,144 in the county, and 41,980 the city from 2022,” (Klemack and Lloyd, 2024). Old friends were focused on their own struggles with rent and groceries costs skyrocketing and could not see how the tent camps had grown. In my migration, I had disoriented myself from the place I had always called home; a personal vertigo that allowed me to see things others cast into the parallax gap.

There were also a rush of articles at that time, of the discovery of large and unmarked burial grounds in the Canadian and US Residential Schools. Though school is a stretching of term, as they functioned more like prisons. They were established to separate indigenous children from their parents. (Rasmussen, 2003). “The residential school system attempted to erase and rupture the intergenerational transmission of traditional stories, language, and memory, removing and re-educating children away from Indigenous communities as part of a totalizing process of land dispossession across North America,” (Franke et al, 2022, p. 212).

There were rumors of the physical and sexual violence and disappearances in these institutions for a long time, but it was finally acknowledged all these years later, by mainstream media. It was a brutal whitewashing which for numerous ended with an unmarked grave and therein the severing of not only sacred life rituals, but also those of death. It is an internment.

In the early settlement of the state, “California Indians always said ‘No’ when asked if land was owned in their cultures. They mistakenly inferred that this denial of land ownership meant that California Indians never stayed anywhere long enough to leave lasting influences and had no interest in repeated use of areas,” (Anderson, 2005, p. 133). They did not take the time to understand that their notion of home worked on broader scales. That they engaged in seasonal migrations based on foraging opportunities, land maintenance needs, and weather patterns. Or that their approach was akin to stewardship, rather than ownership. They lived with “usufruct rights. Under this conception, if an area is used and tended, it becomes the domain of the gatherer,” (Anderson, 2005, p. 133). It makes no distinction between individual or communal rights, but centered on active care. An ethos absent in the homeless tents lining the streets.

Within the theories of Gaia and Noosphere, invasive species, in their assault on other species, are directly attacking not just Earth, but also culture and civilization; both collective bodies and collective intelligence. In the human-centered model, invasive species are considered a necessary effect of capitalist accumulation. Addressing invasive species must engage in “a specifically posthumanist notion of performativity—one that incorporates important material and discursive, social and scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural factors. A posthumanist account calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of human’ and ‘nonhuman,’ examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized,” (Barad, 2003, p. 808). How does this resonate with collective displacement?

To begin, let’s refer back to Žižek’s work on the parallax gap, wherein the shifting of position provides objectivity on what otherwise may be seen as subjective. Let’s reposition this from purely an observational exercise that could reinforce legacies of objectification, towards something lived or witnessed; interplay with the bodylandscape and therein return to (re)considerations of human scales. Lucy Lippard writes, “even if one’s history there is short, a place can still be felt as an extension of the body, especially the walking body, passing through and becoming part of the landscape,” (Lippard, 1998, p. 34). She suggests a performative approach to place. On one hand, she suggests the possibility of an intra-active wandering wherein Western ontological boundary between body and nature is shed on

distinctly local scale. On the other hand, she limits the bodylandscape, to places feet have touched; to personal trajectory, and in so doing cuts off the need to engage with ghosts, “the traces of more-than-human histories through which ecologies are made and unmade,” in the indeterminacy of real and imagined futures and pasts (Tsing et al, 2017, G1).

Considerations of diaspora provide an opportunity to explore the effects of differential spatialities. Sara Ahmed in her writing on diasporic space and migration investigates the “politics of location,” (2006, p. 5). She addresses both the political and personal, when she asks that we take notice of how we inhabit space, and who or what we direct our energy and attention towards, and in turn against. “Orientation involves aligning body and space: we only know which way to turn once we know which way we are facing,” (2006, p. 7). This understanding of positionality, calls for thoughtful embodied engagement with the dynamic woven trajectorial momentum towards future, alongside the understanding that the future is open, as there is a choice in where to turn towards futures yet to be decided.

“Phenomenology reminds us that spaces are not exterior to bodies; instead, spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body,” (2006, p. 9). She writes that developing a deep awareness of positionality involves getting lost, an intentional (dis)orientation as a means for “making the strange familiar,” (2006, p. 11). Only after (dis)orientation, or queer phenomenology, is it possible to break through the familiarity and complacency of the false singular trajectory, to make space for the victims of this trajectory. Derrida’s deconstruction is a reassemblage of known trajectories in the hopes that something unusual may emerge, whereas Ahmed’s (dis)orientation leaves known trajectories behind, to the point wherein they are revisited, they are inherently different than before. It is important to note that Ahmed, in her discussion of diaspora, moves considerations of the spatial, to the material discussion of place in relationship to the body. “Cosmologies require an earthly sense of the world and a material configuration of meaning: an embodied knowledge of what is a place (as opposed to space) in the world (or world-system),” (Tichindeleanu, 2012, p. 21).

Let’s then begin to orient towards understanding the indigenous perspective. Origin stories of the indigenous Americans vary from tribe to tribe, but many of which are framed around, “nonhumans [that] have spirits,” (Buller, R. and Marchevska, and Reeve, 2022). Professor Alicia Harris works towards sharing indigenous ontology, reverential towards nature in a manner absent from Western discourse, specifically the meaning of land to its original people. “The awareness of a Gaia-like Earth did not wither away of itself because of literacy; it was systematically exterminated, through orgies of bloodletting that did not spare Europe, although it’s violence was directed most powerfully at the Indigenous peoples of the

Americas,” (Ghosh, 2021, p. 212). In the podcast, *Renewing the World*, she describes stones and dirt as being mother, and shares the words of multidisciplinary artist Suzanne Kite, who writes on Lakota ethics and ontology. “Stones are considered ancestors. Stones actively speak. Stones speak through and to humans. Stones see and know. Most importantly, stones want to help,” (Buller, Marchevska, & Reeve, 2022). By describing a kinship, rather than simply a personification of land, she conveys the anguish of lost and destroyed homeland, as being much like the death of an adored elderly caretaker, of the grandmother that holds the family together. Lines on Earth become wrinkles in flesh, tracings from years of smiling, worry, and showing care. Earth is a body. This also frames the deep injustice of stolen land, with an intimacy and terrifying violence of breaking apart a family. Symptoiesis as kinship, conveys response-ability, one attached to deep and inseparable relationships. This requires expansion beyond western ideas. It answers Wynter’s call for ‘being human’ as ‘a praxis,’ one that has been in place for thousands of years.



[map by Adrian Stimson, *First Nations Stampede* (2021) - a borderless world, lined by waterways rather than the hand of men. Permission to reproduce this has been granted by the artist]

Our approach to the spatial must acknowledge and address the indigenous body, the naturalized body, and the invasive body. Each becomes part of the land in different ways. Ahmed writes, “migration involves reinhabiting the skin: the different ‘impressions’ of a new landscape, the air, the smells, the sounds, which accumulate like points, to create lines, or which accumulate like lines, to create new textures on the surface of the skin. Such spaces ‘impress’ on the body, involving the mark of unfamiliar impressions, which in turn reshapes the body surface,” (2006, p. 9). It is interesting to note her description of impressions is bonded to sensory markers, suggesting the possibility of (dis)orientation and the accompanying shifting understanding of positionality through sensorial experimentation, in addition to embodied movement and inhabitation. Modes that veer into the subjective, which will be explored further later in this chapter. Again, these impressions are vastly different depending on if the migration was forced, or if it was chosen, and if it is done with care and generosity, or as an attempt to dominate. Taking these distinctions into consideration, if the body can be “reshaped” and “reinhabited,” so can the bodylandscape. “How we approach restoration of land depends on what we believe land means, if land is just real estate, then restoration looks very different than if the land is a source of subsistence economy and a spiritual home,” (Buller, R. and Marchevska, and Reeve, 2022). Indigenous representation is imperative.

This thesis and accompanying practice work aim to make space for the marginalized, as interference in trajectories of destruction, to make space for that which has been pushed into systemic gaps. So what tools can we use to reacquaint ourselves with Gaia and indigenous knowledge, with the displaced, with modes of radical generosity? This chapter began with considerations of outer-space as an extension of the more-than-human, it will conclude with examining inner-space as a means to further engagement with the same.

Radical Generosity

How do we enact a diffraction that instigates a paradigm shift for those living in colonized spaces, those whose ancestry is that of displacement, as work in unsettling the genre of being human, and as work in repair?

“When asked by a student what [is] the first sign of civilization in ancient culture, Anthropologist Margaret Mead responded it was a femur that had been broken and then healed. The act of fixing broken bones requires the care and protection of others. It is a

collective act,” (Wilkerson, 2022). Civilization has the potential to be a dangerous word, when it relates to notions of culture as the imposed supremacy of those called ‘civilized’ and their domination over those called ‘savage.’ How can care be implemented collectively, while also addressing systemic inequality? It must be a form of radical care. The etymological radical, as in rooted in the ground, (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). The portion of the growing plant body that anchors and supports the body for future growth, that is intimate with soil and entangled with mycelium and bacteria, pulling up and storing nutrients to feed the whole of it, and communicating with neighboring bodies. Radical speaks to the base, and an entangled support system.

Reciprocity is one of the main values of mutual aid, along with “community-driven care and redistribution of resources... A longstanding practice among communities who experience short-term crises (such as natural and human-made disasters) as well as long-term crises (such as systemic marginalization and poverty,” (Herrenkohl, 2022, p. 89). It is a collective practice of care to address the gaps in support by governing bodies. Mutual aid has long been practiced in the garden, both in times of plenty, as well as in times of sparsity. It has taken the form of sharing seeds, recipes, and dinner tables. This is what I practiced when sharing knowledge of reusing kitchen scraps when the pandemic first hit. In times of prosperity, annual harvest celebrations are celebrated across the globe as a time to gather with family, to share in the bounty; a ritual in gratitude and good fortune. This particular celebration in the context of US history, based on a mythological shared table wherein the indigenous welcomed the european visitors to dine with them becomes problematic as this welcome is in turn implied as an invitation to settlement. It is impossible to separate Thanksgiving from the violence that accompanied this trajectory, requiring an urgent reexamination of reciprocity. It is time to reconsider not just who is invited and who is excluded from our table, but the very actions and beliefs the very table was built on. This is not to undermine the essential work mutual aid has facilitated in the back, brown, and LGBTQ communities that have been most abandoned by formal infrastructural support. Programs like “the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society supported resettlement of Jewish refugees in the United States after World War II...[and the] the Black Panther Party’s free breakfast program,” are work not just in care, but also resistance (Herrenkohl, 2022, p. 91-2). In counter-culture, crisis response may begin with mutual aid, but this is intended to provoke infrastructure for short-term and long-term care. It is meant to act as a temporary support structure, until institutional response-ability is enacted.

Rosalyn Diprose, writes on expanding personal methods of reciprocity in her work on “corporeal generosity,” which much like the discussion of terminologies of de-colonial versus

anti-colonial, she further problematizes the idea of 'decolonization.' She writes that "the opening of modes of living beyond the imperialism sustained by the truth of colonization, rests on the ability of the colonizers to respond to this contestation of their 'truth' generously." Whereas reconciliation, or "restitution implies what would seem impossible: the ability to give back time," (2002, pp. 145-8). And not just time, but time stolen, hidden, erased, and thrown to the parallax gap. Decolonization may be an irreparable practice, but as colonial extractions continue on to this day, anti-colonial resistance is all the more necessary. This is not to suggest that repair is not possible, future depends on such action, but it must be accompanied by acknowledgement of wrongdoing, and the restoration of power, land, autonomy, and legitimacy to marginalized peoples. Diprose writes, generosity "is not reducible to an economy of exchange between sovereign individuals. Rather, it is an openness to other that only precedes and establishes communal relations but constitutes the self as open to otherness." A corporal generosity that should be expanded further to acknowledge the bodylandscape.

The indigenous Land Back movement calls for the return of their homeland to its rightful heirs and protectors. The problematics of land privatization, as evidenced by the specular violence of the witch trials, cross cultures, however, when it applies to land stolen for colonization, this becomes exponential. Addressing this injustice requires questioning the ethics of current models of status, wealth, and assumptions on personal identity. James Baldwin wrote, "a vast amount of the white anguish is rooted in the white man's equally profound need to be seen as he is, to be released from the tyranny of the mirror," (1985, *Everybody's Protest Novel* Chapter). Herein the problematics of Derrida's deconstruction become twofold, in that it obscures the mirrored view in its choice to engage in fragmentation, while simultaneously closing off the possibility for representation of other views. The Land Back movement holds up mirrors for all to witness, which in turn allow reflection of the parallax view.

Caution must be taken to ensure this work does not fall into forms of 'gifting.' You can not (re)gift stolen goods. In this instance, calling the return a "gift" contradicts the acknowledgement of the original theft, or invasion, and according to Derrida, assumes a further debt in return; a phenomenon Diprose calls the, "aporia of the gift." She encourages, "not the expenditure of one's possessions but the dispossession of oneself," (2002, pp. 4-9). A decentering. She delves deeper still, with what she terms, "blood writing", as "an ethical relation to the other," a "radical generosity," and as an act of apology. "While it is not easy or indeed impossible to understand the blood of another or one's own blood for that matter, without vampirism, it is this impossibility that inspires the attempt. The awareness of this

impossibility, of the danger of effecting violence and injustice in every response, inspires a passionate politics that would work through generosity for a justice that is yet to arrive,” (2002, p. 194). It is fragile work, to be approached with care. This is an offering opened through the methodology of critical autoethnography, wherein personal and ancestral histories are too (re)visited and (re)oriented, held up to the mirror. I would add that this in turn harks back to Donna Haraway’s call for, staying with the trouble, while also acknowledging the supraliminal impossibilities surrounding this work, in western discourse.

2023 saw the culmination of a decade-long return of three million acres of land as part of the Tribal Trust Ownership program, wherein indigenous tribes were offered the option to purchase land. “The Land Buy-Back Program’s progress puts the power back in the hands of tribal communities to determine how their lands are used — from conservation to economic development projects,” (Native News Online Staff, 2023). While this is an important start to addressing hundreds of years of displacement, impoverishment, and forced assimilation, by asking for payment for lands forcefully ceded, this falls into a necropolitical iteration of the ‘aporia of the gift.’ And the question of ethics is further expanded still: What expansion of the Land Back movement would be sufficient to amend such terrible histories? It would mean the return of the sacred Six Grandfathers, literally de-faced and replaced with white effigies. It would mean the return of burial mounds in the northwest, without bones, without sacred objects, without mounded earth. It would mean the return of graves dug prematurely for the lives lost to the hands of white men. What about the return of the mountain side that is now a mile long reservoir of poison copper mine run off, named the Berkley Pit? Or the return of the desert now pock marked with the uranium tailings on Navajo land?

There are traces of our ancestors in our cells. We carry them with us always. This means we must take response-ability for our own blood-lines as parts of us were present in their actions, particularly those left unrepaired. This concept is also lost in our drive for ‘morbid individualism.’ I offer mine, weighted in violence and atrocity.

The question still remains, in mitigating these histories, how can we gauge if we are acting with meaningful corporeal generosity, rather than falling into colonizing patterns of objectification?

Deep Senses as an Embodied Approach to Reconceiving of Spatiality

“As silence is not silence, but a limit of hearing.”

- Jane Hirshfield

As our archives are human centered, questions arise on how to work within academic paradigms to listen for the wisdom of the natural world, and perhaps also forms of repressed humanness. I do not know how to interview a flower. As “science polishes the gift of seeing,” I can however research floral reactions to stimuli, (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 48). The flower, in this method of research, is treated as an object rather than a living being with a life cycle, able to reproduce, drink water, and feed from the land. The objectification of the natural world has been created through this “language of distance,” that separates humans from other species and ignores our entanglement (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 49). “The Indian scientist Jagadis Chandra Bose demonstrated long ago that plants can feel pain and fear, and even make audible responses to certain kinds of stimuli...[And that many] scientists now accept that trees in a forest are able to communicate with each other in certain circumstances - they can send help in the form of carbon, to ailing members of their group; and they can warn each other about pestilence and disease. It is now thought that certain plants can even emit sounds that are inaudible to the human ear but are audible to other living things” (Ghosh, 2021, pp. 197-8). Why is western culture drawn to depicting anthropomorphism rather than animism, even as we find further evidence to substantiate the communicative, emotive, tentative, and intentional behaviors of the natural world? This cognitive dissonance within western discourse divides us from our intra-active relationship with nature, but there are also proposals for expanding human understanding of these behaviors. How can Earth’s archive that works in geologic time be understood alongside the human archive and timescales? “Other beings and forces – bacteria, viruses, glaciers, forests, the jet stream – have also unmuted themselves and are thrusting themselves so exigently on our attention that they can no longer be ignored or treated as elements of an inert Earth,” (Ghosh, 2021, p. 197). We must look beyond human time scales to understand what they have been trying to tell us, to engage with the collective culture of the Noosphere.

To revisit with Ahmed’s description of reinhabitation as both a physical, as well as a sensorial, process. Work in intervention requires active practices for searching what is needed. Donna Haraway writes further on ‘staying with the trouble’ that, “this requires reading with our senses attuned to stories told in otherwise muted registers,” (2017, p. 32). The senses can be a guide to crossing into the parallax gap, areas wherein words have intentionally been used to create barriers of understanding, as a means for exploring performativity further. A tree may not speak English, but we also do not speak tree. Imagine what we could learn from them if we could. So how can these conversations be facilitated?

We must look for other entrance into this process. Just as smell is tied to deep memories, listening also holds immense possibilities for re-engaging with the world and with histories.

We are accustomed to constant noise. “There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot,” (Cage, 1961, p. 8). Experimental composer John Cage’s piece *4’33”* (1952), is an exercise in listening. Four minutes and thirty-three seconds of sitting with external and internal noise. It is a relatively short commitment, though one we are culturally unaccustomed to. “At the premiere in 1952 in Woodstock, NY, the initial sounds were of the forest surrounding the concert hall. By the end of the four and a half minutes, however, those natural sounds were drowned out by audience members who began to complain. Reportedly, one person stood up to shout, ‘Good people of Woodstock, let’s run these people out of town!’ Cage was thrilled,” (Oh, 2024). Why is there so much discomfort in listening? Even if we move away from the sounds of the city, we are constantly hearing the hums of Earth: the movement of earthworms and the wind in the trees. And we are also hearing our own internal soundings, the noise of our blood flow and nervous systems, as well as our internal dialogue. And a constant electric buzz.

Experimental composer Pauline Oliveros, wrote that, “Human hearing is non-linear. Our ears are less sensitive to low and high frequencies approaching the limits of audibility. Our ears are most sensitive at about 3000 Hz where some people can hear collisions of air molecules,” (2004, p. 106). Oliveros is the leading practitioner on Deep Listening, “as a practice for art-making, it gives us the tools and the permission to slow down with ourselves and others, to become present, and to respond spontaneously and creatively from a deep source of wakefulness. As a focus for living our lives fully, it supports us in the very same way” (Buzzarte & Bickley, 2012, p. 149). It is an embodied approach, as she encourages listening to the body to understand how to relate to the external environment, but also as a method for internal healing. It is a practice in listening for inherent knowledge. I would add that this also holds the possibility for environmental and social healing as well, as trauma created by the Capitalocene infects on all scales.

The senses rely on the internalized perceptive and intuitive positioning of external stimuli, which can easily bend towards nostalgia. A song can transport your memory to the time you first heard it, sometimes by decades. The scent of a flower, to a time with a childhood friend. There is potential for methodological sensorial work to facilitate engagement with the suppressed, displaced, and marginalized; the communities most in need of care. Steve Goodman, also known as kode9, offers some suggestions in his work on sonic warfare,

particularly in the ability of sound to elicit a form of diffraction he names, *deja entendu*, or a feeling of familiarity, when attached to an unfamiliar visual or story. This is precisely why art can be an effective mode for eliciting empathy for unfamiliar stories. But much like with the trappings of restorative nostalgia, he warns of the “mnemonic problematic,” in that this can be weaponized. He says, “the power of sound to abduct you to another time, to activate memories that obliterate consciousness of the present in front of you, in the blink of an eye, transporting you into previously overpowering sensations and affects,” (2010, p.148). It is a (dis)orientation wherein place is overlaid with slices of histories/places/ontologies and is perceived differently. It can also be utilized as a tool for invasion. Within this idea however, is the possibility of a sonic accompaniment to the parallax gap, to attend to re-familiarize what has been hidden; a great sounding. It is imperative that this work is done with careful consideration to what we amplify, and what we wish to amplify. Particularly when looking towards the sounding of stones, of ancestors, of the dead, and of the void. “Dr. Konstantin Raudive, once a student of Carl Jung and a former professor of psychology at the University of Uppsala and Riga, believed a tape recorder left running in record made in a quiet room can capture voices of the dead,” (Toop, p. 269). But what about non-mechanical applications of these ideas?

In a series of Deep Listening courses, led by Dr. Elena Marchevska as part of her *Deep Listening Certification Program*, over the summer of 2022. Much like Ahmed and Lippard, she encouraged us to wander, to get lost as a methodology for then re-finding our way. We explored this practice by establishing a form of ritual to use with intention for listening to place and the body, alongside instructions written by Ernesto Pujol: A commitment to absolute silence and solitude, eat nutritious healthy food, walk with an intent to get lost, “Seek to see without thoughts, opinions, or ideas. See and hear like an open vessel, without judging, ready and able to surrender and accept difference, the unfamiliar, the new and unknown, (2020). Concluding with a return home and after taking time to rest, writing informally on the experience. Practiced in silence, it is a means to open the senses for sounding internal experience and intuition to understand an environment. She also emphasized the importance of allowing dreams as guides. Wandering is not a new methodology for observative (dis)orientation. Walter Benjamin explored this in his work on Baudelaire’s *flâneur* as a means to engage with the problematics of the modern, (2002). Situationist Guy Debord continued the exploration with the *dérive*, a wander based on the openness to encounters, that in turn sparked new understandings of place; a “psychogeographical” exercise. Much like Derrida, Debord’s *dérive* is concerned with the individual body interactions, manipulation of a single trajectory (1958). Deep Listening is concerned with intra-action between multiplicities. It is the antithesis of myth and tradition, a

reorientation that understands that the body is not innately tuned to violence and domination just because it has been conditioned towards that trajectory.

Deep Listening has become an essential part of my work. I revisit it when I feel stuck and to aid in moving between phases of research and practice. It has become an internal gauge for checking in with and reading intuition, for moving between the subjective and objective, for shifting perspective, a guide for staying with the trouble, and a means to connect with the more-than-human, and to queer the spatial. **There will be excerpts from Deep Listening in this thesis, marked in this same serif typeface as the personal, but differentiated further by the use of italics.** It is intended as a means to listen for pathways of resistance against objectification, and as such is a datum for my research and practice, though dominant science, in protecting colonial tropes, may argue otherwise.

This chapter looked to natural and social science, as well as the metaphysical, for means to cultivate reciprocity and expand ideas of human positionality in regards to nature. To show that we are inseparable, that our frictions are mere social construction, thereby encouraging a reunion to our holistic state. The next will search for lessons on the matter in the artistic canon. It will engage in models of resistance to the colonial necropolitical trajectory, but also depict modes of entangled living.

Chapter 3 - Practices of the Counter-Canon

“If we opened people, we’d find landscapes.”

- Agnes Varda

The Distance Between Poison and Medicine

My early memories of being in the forest were from spending childhood summers visiting the Rocky Mountains. I was fascinated with *Castilleja coccinea*, which we called indian paintbrush, and *Aquilegia caerulea*, columbine, and quaking aspen, *Populus tremuloides*, which is named for how its leaves dance in the wind. Aspen only grows at high altitudes. To witness them is to be closer to the stars. And there, far from the city, are so many stars to see. Their bark bares white and gray patterning, which often resemble a human eye. I would imagine that they were watching after me. That they saw me as much as I saw them. I have

come to find that, rather than individual trees, they are a large and interconnected singular body. “Sweeping across 107 acres of Utah’s Fishlake National Forest is one of the world’s largest organisms: a forest of some 47,000 genetically identical quaking aspen trees, which all stem from a single root system. Pando, as the organism is known (its name is Latin for ‘I spread’), has been growing for at least 80,000 years.” Pando is dying. Reducing in size every year from overgrazing of deer and cattle. (Katz, 2018). I did not realize I was watching the disappearance of an ancient one.

In summer 2022, Travis had taken a professorship in China. Singapore was just ending its pandemic controls of masking and quarantine, while China was cracking down tighter. No one was allowed on campus. All learning and teaching was remote. The new university gave him the option to do this from where he wished. Our Singaporean visas expired when he quit his job there. We moved to Split, an old Roman port on the Adriatic Sea, in Croatia, in a time zone between his work in Asia, my meetings in the US and UK, and the *Nuclear Family* screenings primarily in Europe. When we arrived, it was packed with tourists, making it challenging to move through the tight walkways of the old fortress, built around a palace and trading post for Diocletian, in the 3rd century. The beaches too were packed with bodies. There will be a more in depth discussion of Croatia in Chapter 5, but as a brief introduction, let’s begin with the main complaint of locals, particularly in summer time: masses of inebriated and disrespectful tourists. As I began befriending Croatians, I learned that tourism is the biggest income generator in the country, and that they are resentful of the tourists who come for recreation, lifestyle and parties, but without interest in the local culture or heritage. Memories of the civil war in the 1990s and the fall of Yugoslavia, are still fresh and raw too, memorialized in stories told, murals around the city, decaying brutalist architecture created for a society reimagining utopia, and the missing limbs of men in a certain generation. Why are comparisons to utopia saved for socialist regimes, is it unfathomable to achieve an existence of equitable and radical care within a capitalist system? Shouldn’t we all strive for a better way to live?

After spending some time there, there are a few social traits that stay with me. For example, if a path needs to be made to ease passage, it will be. If you get to the end of a road, there is a good chance you will find courtesy openings in a wall, or a step of poured concrete. Croatians make their own path, and leave it open to be shared by everyone who needs it. And then, how they care for animals. If you see a no dogs allowed sign, there is a good chance you will also see a dog playing next to it. Produce is seasonal and primarily from local farms to be bought at the green markets in town. “The produce in the average American dinner is trucked 1,500 miles to reach our plates,” which is longer than the entire coast of Croatia,” (Haeg, 2008, p. 21). This means that in Croatia, the first bites of spring foods like asparagus and peas, arrive with celebration. Another is their love for foraged herbs, plants that others might see as weeds. Medicinal plant foraging, knowledge which is lost in many places, is still a

huge part of day to day life in Croatia. There is an old tradition of making rakija, herb or fruit, preserved in a distilled grape alcohol similar to grappa. Drank to commemorate weddings, homecomings, and funerals, it is for celebration. There is one variety in particular, *travarica* (tra-var-it-za), brandy from fermented herbs, both foraged and cultivated, long considered medicinal. Some are recipes handed down generation to generation, requiring a precise mix of herbs, some are made based on what is found to be growing at the time, some are plants we use as herbs in the states, others we plant more for aesthetics, having lost the knowledge of how these plants heal. *Travarica* varies by regional microclimate, but commonly may include a mix of, sage, mint, fennel, myrtle, rosemary, thyme, wormwood, laurel, anise, lemon balm, marjoram, oregano, chamomile, yarrow, juniper, almond husks, lemon leaves, lavender, carob, saffron, rosehip, currents, matgrass, along with honey, to encourage fermentation. The majority of its ingredients are indigenous, but some tell of the history of the region. Citrus and almond tell of Croatia's link to early spice routes on sea and by land from Southern Asia, as an entrance into Europe. They are both foreign and beneficial. Some drink small portions or *travarica* daily, to prevent illness. It is made to be shared, toasted with the word, *Živjeli* (ghee-vya-lee), meaning to be filled with life. It becomes both a shared wish, as well as an expression of gratitude for plant medicine. (Dolina, K. 2019).

The extent that the garden and the forest are seen in Croatia as medicine can be seen in visiting what in most places would be described as a herb garden, but there is known as, *Farmaceutski botanički vrt Fran Kušan*, or the Pharmaceutical Botanical Garden of Professor Fran Kušan, located in the hills above the Croatian capital of Zagreb. I documented their medicine on Fuji instant film:





[Wilkerson, E. (2024) Fuji Instant Film [photos]]

Some of these herbs I knew and would use back home, as food, homemade tinctures, and teas. But some, I did not know about until coming here. In separating from my ancestral land, I also lost knowledge about its plants. Though there is historical evidence that this was a multifaceted shift, created by far more than distance. So how has this tradition remained so strong in Croatia, as it has fallen away elsewhere?

This chapter will look towards methodologies in the artistic counter-canon, which has a long relationship to both intended and unintended social critique, to convey both human and more-than-human approaches to land, with particular emphasis on resistance to centuries of colonial invasion and its accompanying epigenetic inheritance. This discussion will also explore expanded kinship, and work in ritual. This offers models for presenting the ideas of Gaia Theory to a larger audience beyond the academic community. It looks for pathways towards becoming more acquainted with our Earthness. In embrace of the sympoietic this will be a base to build from in Chapter four, which will begin to describe how to create practice-led research within methodologies of filmmaking as a means for engaging with

cultivating reciprocity. Let's explore the canon of resistance as a means for tracing methodologies for dialectical difference.

Counter-Cartographies: Landscape as Living Archive

Our archive is founded on the diachrony and taxonomic space of Zeno's paradox described in Chapter 1, constructed to center a certain kind of cultivated man and ignore considerations of intra-action. As such, it must be reconceptualized. "If time is to be open to a future of the new then space cannot be equated with the closures and horizontalities of representation. More generally, if time is to be open then space must be open too. Conceptualizing space as open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming, is a prerequisite for history to be open and thus a prerequisite, too, for the possibility of politics," (Massey, 2005, p. 129). Therein lies both the possibility to make space for future, and a warning. How do we reconceptualize hidden spaces without resorting to the absurdist trope of drawing fantastical sea monsters with tangible cartographic coordinates? But what emerges from continual shifts of physical position? This can result in a holistic idea of one's place in the world. It can also result in further alienation. How can we approach the spatial to invite the openness and multiplicity necessary for reconceptualizing phenomena towards an intra-active ontology?

In working with the methodology of practice-led research, the examination of the artistic canon becomes a primary source for erudition; an archival research base. Looking back to Mbembe's critique on the centering of the Western archive, an archive that was never intended to include the parallax gap. The western artistic canon, much like dominant science, was built to uphold western ontology, instituted by the sparsity of funding, which has dictated who has the time and resources to make art. This thesis and practice work is rooted in filmmaking, but let's begin with an investigation of fixed imagery, imagery that does not work within the temporality of momentum, as a counter-canonical base to expand from. This is intended as an opening of space that has been subjected to a long history of avoidance and under representation. There has been work made in resistance to this, but this has also been undermined with deprecating language: outsider art, naive art, folk art, street art. Curator Okwui Enwezor, who worked to create space for African art in institutional exhibition makes clear, "a radical critique of artistic ontology" must be made to allow marginalized work and ideas into the forefront (Enwezor, 2004). It is a spatial practice in (re)orientation and adjustment of aperture. Let's begin with divergent approaches to documenting cultivation, work that explores human intervention on land.

Dr. Sarah Bennett spoke on her practice work with living archive in her lecture, *Artists and Archives*, given at Liverpool John Moores University, in summer 2022. She described her work as the search for “the somatic rumblings of the site,” or the visual moments of Ahmed’s tracings. Her project on an abandoned British Victorian era mental asylum, documents the ghosts of human interventions still residing there. She finds as much significance in the indentations in walls, chipping of paint, as in the abandoned legers. Though some may be buried more deeply than others, each extraction, each intervention, each moment of violence leaves a trace. It is an inversion of Ahmed’s tracings on the skin. *Wall-wound (Projection) no. 339* (2010), is a video of her physical recreation of a wall repeatedly hit with a doorknob, the violence the institution inflicted against the people incarcerated within its walls, is echoed in the representation of the damage subjected to the architectural infrastructure. (Bennett, 2022). “Landscape itself has offered itself as an apparatus for the interrogation of former and current structures of power,” (Pin and Bruni, 2022, p. 91). This can be expressed in a multitude of mediums, and there is much to be learned from that.



[still from the video project - Dr. Sarah Bennett (2010) *Wall-wound (Projection) no. 339*.
Permission to reproduce this has been granted by the artist]

Filipino American, Stephanie Syjuco’s *Double Vision* (2022) exhibition, utilizes imagery of place and imagery from the canon to critique settlement quite distinctly. She inserts curated segments from the Amon Carter Museum of American Art 19th century art collection, over a large landscape of the Rocky Mountains. Including guns and horses, most present are white man’s hands, as a statement to the “manhandling” of settlement. (Ford, 2022) This same treatment could be attended to the romanticized landscapes further east, of the Hudson

River School. This area just north of New York City was depicted as paradise, vast and empty; a 19th century postcard for settlement. Or the collections of 18th century landscape painters who traveled to British colonized India, most notably, Thomas and William Daniell, whose work, depicting the picturesque and exotic side of the colony, as well as the newly built British style architecture, as proof for financiers back home, of successful domination. I would be curious to see Syjuco's intervention on colonial depictions of the Philippines as well, and I imagine the relationship between the colonization of America, and earlier imperial efforts in Asia, were intentionally present during the creation of this exhibition. Her work takes on a form of counter-cartography.



[artist photo from a segment of the exhibition - Syjuco,S. (2022) *Double Vision*. Amon Carter Museum of American Art. Permission to reproduce this has been granted by the artist]

Syjuco's approach to cultivation is the antithesis to work such as land artist, Michael Heizer, who reenacts representations of parallax gap. His work functions much like the barrier itself, trying to skirt past the violence in these spaces, and never showing what's beyond. I have

walked under his colossal rock many times, *Levitated Mass* (2012), which towers over a gash in the land. It is a work that celebrates displacement. His *City* (1972-2022), the latest large land art installation opened recently, and in the tradition of land art, it too is an exercise in spectacle, rather than a regard for the land, its history, or its people. His ex-wife, Barbara Heizer describes the site before construction began, “nothing [was] there but me, Michael, a few survey markers and a lot of wind,” not only reinforcing the parallax gap, but discouraging investigation otherwise. Alicia Harris clarifies that the installation “was built on Western Shoshone land...[acting] to reaffirm the structure of settler colonialism.” Including that its form appropriates indigenous stacked pyramids, like Chichén Itzá, though without reverence to the snake. And like much of this area of the US, it is “downwind of a nuclear weapons testing site,” on land that was considered for the movement of nuclear waste for disposal. I will add that the form is also reminiscent of the concrete barriers placed atop nuclear waste debris, under the preposterous assumption that feet of concrete can protect air, waterways, and living organisms, from what lies beneath. (Liu, 2022).

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material from the Michael Heizer/Triple Aught Foundation of a photograph by Eric Piasecki. It shows the portion of Heizer’s “City” that most resembles Chichén Itzá residing in the wide open landscape that was formerly Western Shoshone land. The image was sourced through “Ignant” online.

<https://www.ignant.com/2019/05/16/mythos-and-monumentality-michael-heizers-city-stands-unseen-in-the-nevada-desert/>

[photograph of a portion of the land art piece - Heizer, M. (2022) *City*]

This failure of Heizer’s work to address profound injustices on the land and its people, raises the issue with nostalgia for stolen land. It is work in restorative nostalgia, it celebrates invasion and conquest, it is a reminder of the intentional erasure of so many indigenous bodies as well as their way of life. It is a monument to solastalgia, intended to suggest the impossibility of their return. Reflective nostalgia sees the tracings of this knowledge and this ancestry in communities today. In the stories still told, the ceremonial dances still performed, in the weave of blankets and stringing of beads. Resistance lies in the strength of these acts. It chips away at the rock of Heizer’s monument to colonization. It returns to Nils Bubant’s

question of whether we choose ‘the ghostly necropolitics of the current movement or a politics informed by other kinds of spirits?’

Impossible Images

There are those who work in liminal space, performing a spatial shift between the visible and the parallax gap. Performing this border facilitates the comparative analysis described by the parallax view, for a (dis)orientation that results in the illumination of hidden bodies. Shifting the gaze directly into the void for the displaced, the marginalized, and the oppressed requires searching for evidence intentionally hidden; markers of invasion. We cannot fix what we do not name, and naming without action is a hollow act. One of the considerations when embarking on (re)orientation is how to address these hidden histories. In returning to the work of Saidiya Hartman’s methodology of ‘critical fabulation,’ in *Venus in Two Acts*, she explores how to revisit her ancestry through the ledger books of enslavers, searching for stories of her family between the lines listing sale prices and feed costs. She questions how to reshape an archive that has positioned her people in the margins, by proposing a narrative is derived from “speculative arguments” based on “critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history.” She says of this work, “I intend both to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling,” (2008, p. 11) It is a [(re)oriented] history written with and against the archive,” (2008, p. 4). She also raises a question of ethical practice, “How does one revisit the scene of subjugation without replicating the grammar of violence,” (2008, p. 12). A violence that too has been cultivated to repeat as a closed circle.

A parallax gap of both recent and extended speculative violence, is Palestine. “As the Israeli journalist and documentary maker Yuval Abraham put it, the ‘appalling misuse’ of the accusation of antisemitism by Germans empties it of meaning and ‘thus endangers Jews all over the world,’” (Mishra, 2024, p. 6). This raises another case of a skunked term: semite, which describes “a member of any people who speak one of the Semitic languages, a family of languages spoken primarily in parts of western Asia and Africa. The term therefore came to include Arabs, Akkadians, Canaanites, Hebrews, some Ethiopians (including the Amhara and the Tigrayans), and Aramaean tribes,” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Meaning that it was originally a terminology for multicultural and multiethnic regionalism, a term mutilated by the European nationalists that laid the foundation for Nazis to seize power in the last century when it became weaponized to mean the exact opposite. Now described as a monoculture,

'antisemitism' has been colonized to reject its etymology. The whole region has suffered from this.

Israeli artist and curatorial archivist, Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's 2011 work on the impossible image, speaks to this. It began with her requesting the International Committee of the Red Cross to allow her access to their archive. She wished to display their photographs of the Nakba, of Palestinians being forcibly removed from their ancestral homes in 1948, as well as to rewrite the descriptions of each image to reflect the apartheid that began with these events. Stemming from the immense trauma and terror after being subjected to mass genocide during WWII, the migratory search for safety and homeland for the Jewish people makes sense. Genocide necessitates fleeing for safe space. It always results in diaspora. However, "the Zionist logic: that Jews cannot survive in non-Jewish lands and must have a state of their own," sets a dangerous precedent for racial targeting and apartheid practices (Mishra, 2024, p. 3). The cyclical violence enacted on Palestine through erecting borders and the seizure of land, backed by violence and colonial weapons and funding cannot be condoned. The Red Cross consented to allow Azoulay to view the images, but would not agree to her further queries. In response, she traced the photographs, and exhibited her hand drawn outlines of the events, an act of superseding censorship, which she called "the unshowable photographs," or "impossible images". This work is significant because the Red Cross claims to be a neutral institution whose sole function is to help in times of crisis, questioning the claiming of neutrality when witness to atrocity. Furthermore, it conveys a significant issue of the institutional archive, which is funded by, and party to, frameworks of power.

Azoulay's exhibition was paired with the following definition of Universal Rights: "the right not to be expelled from one's home and the right not to be a perpetrator." The former is a protection against victimhood, but the latter is important as well because it explicitly names the response-ability of rejecting calls for oppressive action. These are universal rights of the Noosphere, in direct resistance to monocultural violence. She continues to describe "the right the perpetrator sought to deprive their victims of: the right to imagine their future because in depriving their victims of a future, the perpetrators deprived themselves as well...citizenship is commonly understood as a legal status granted by the sovereign states to its governed subjects, but never to all of them" (Azoulay, 2019).



[selected tracings of photographs of the Nakba in the collection of the Red Cross - Azoulay, A. A. (2011) *Unshowable Photographs: Many Ways Not to Say Deportation*. Permission to reproduce these images granted by the artist]

Palestinian artist Emily Jacir, offers another methodology for portraying the impossible. As a US passport holder, she was allowed back and forth through checkpoints in her homeland. Checkpoints that at the time only 2% of Gazans without foreign passport were allowed to cross. A border that even in more peaceful times, the majority of citizens and diaspora only dream of crossing. In *Where We Come From* (2003), she offers herself as a vessel for doing the impossible. She asked Gazans one thing they would do if they could pass through that border once again; their wish from exile. She then did these things. They ranged from honoring memory and the senses, "Drink the water in my parents' village." To the banal, "Go to the Israeli post office in Jerusalem and pay my phone bill." To reclamations of childhood, "Go to Haifa and play soccer with the first Palestinian boy you see on the street." They spoke to an inability to mourn, "Go to my mother's grave in Jerusalem on her birthday and place flowers and pray." And the wish to be allowed to live a normal life there, "Do something on a normal day in Haifa, something I might do if I was living there now." (Binder and Haupt, 2003). The resulting exhibition documented her process, sharing imagery for those who wished more than anything, but could not do these things, but also for the rest of us to see this heavily militarized boundary situated on once open land. It is a performative and embodied approach that conveys the loss of forced separation, and the savage disparity of allowing some to move over land, while others are imprisoned by it. Borders are demarcations of inequality, stepping from one to the other is to pass in and out of the parallax gap.

Top Image: The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material belonging to Dar Yusuf Nasri Jacir for Art and Research, and Emily Jacir. It shows a portion of a gallery installation, with framed text and an adjacent image affixed to a white wall. The text, in both English and Arabic, reads:

Visit my mother, hug and kiss her and tell her these are from her son. Visit the sea at sunset and smell it for me and walk a little bit...

I have a Gazan I.D. so I should be in Gaza. I left Gaza for Ramallah in 1995 and cannot go back. I also cannot move to any place in the West Bank because of the Israeli restrictions. The Israelis refused to give me a West Bank I.D. because, as they claim, for "security reasons"?

-Jihad

*Born in Shati Refugee Camp, Gaza City
Living in Ramallah
Gazan I.D. Card
Father and Mother from Asdad
(exiled in 1948)*

The photograph shows the artist, Emily Jacir hugging Jihad's mother. The image was sourced through Artnet online.

<https://www.artnet.com/artists/emily-jacir/jihad-wtext-from-where-we-come-from-JPq7UXISUqsMUWCUkN5zIA2/>

Bottom Image: The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material belonging to Dar Yusuf Nasri Jacir for Art and Research, and Emily Jacir. It shows a portion of a gallery installation, with framed text and adjacent images affixed to a white wall. The text, in both English and Arabic, reads:

Light candles in the Holy Sepulcher like I used to do with my grandmother and walk to Musara bakery to buy Ka'ek and falafel, and have it for dinner with mint tea.

The Community of Palestinians with dual citizenship bothers the Israelis who are constantly investing techniques for harassing them. They are a perceived threat to the Israelis since they are a constant and alive bridge between Palestinians on the outside and those on the inside. I am not sure I will be able to leave Palestine at my will if I go there. It is difficult for me to take the risk and ignore all the commitments that make life possible for us here in the U.S.

-Abier

*Born in Birzeit, living in Boston, MA.
West Bank I.D. and US Green Card
Father and Mother from Jerusalem
(exiled in 1948)*

The accompanying photographs show the light candles and falafel and bread, documentation of Jacir's promises fulfilled. The image was sourced through SF MOMA online.

<https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/2008.20.3.A-C/>

[artists photographs of a portion of the exhibition - Jacir, E. (2003) *Where We Come From*]

Mark Bradford and Titus Kaphar both work to shift the 'aperture of visibility' as methodologies for working with impossible images in dialogue with US histories. Bradford works in large scale layering of both painting and collage that appear from a distance, predominantly abstract. His *The Pickett's Charge (The Dead Horse)*, is meant to be exhibited in a circular room, wherein the viewer, physically surrounded by the work, is positioned at the center of it. The impossibility of the work is only evident when wandering around it, as a closer viewing reveals thick layers of paint, archival imagery, trash. Both scales are always present, changed only by the perspective of the viewer. The materials have been shredded, to reveal once hidden and covered imagery. Ropes are embedded as he layers, then methodically ripped away. Much like the void, the work on one scale appears as an unformed field, at the smaller scale, a closer viewing tells multitudes of stories. The tearing of the materials becomes a tearing of history, and abstraction, deeply political. Of particular interest are his reinterpretations of Paul Phillippoteaux's 1886 paintings of the Civil War, from a time when the black experience of those events would not have been accepted into public forums and discourse. The positionality of the viewer, wandering between scales, begs the question, where in personal and ancestral history the viewer sits alongside the work. Bradford asks the viewer to devise their own narrative 'critical fabulation.' He describes the piece as, "a cyclorama of political and historical palimpsest," (Cascone, 2017). Where Hartman looks for the impossible between the lines of ledgers, he looks in the tracings of palimpsest, the faint lines of what remains after erasure.

Top Image: The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material belonging to Hauser & Wirth and Mark Bradford. It shows a portion of a larger multimedia work where archival paper and paint has been ripped to expose thick layers of underimages. The image was sourced through Artnet online.

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/mark-bradford-hirshhorn-museum-1143248>

Bottom Image: The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material belonging to Hauser & Wirth and Mark Bradford. It shows the

full painting showing a large hut, and smaller images of warfare. The rips at a distance are seen, almost resembling bullet holes. The image was sourced through Artnet online.

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/mark-bradford-hirshhorn-museum-1143248>

[Bradford, M. (2017) *The Pickett's Charge (The Dead Horse)*. Photo from the artist's studio by Joshua White for Hauser and Wirth. © Mark Bradford. Permission to reproduce these images granted by Hauser & Wirth.]

Titus Kaphar in, *Shifting the Gaze* (2017), disrupts the canon with a disorientation of gaze. It is an intervention of a traditional painting from the early colonial era, a literal whitewashing of white bodies, the original focal point, from the canvas, shifting the gaze in its entirety towards the likeness of a young black enslaved boy originally painted in the background. He moves what was intentionally depicted as existing in the periphery, to the forefront; making space for this boy that was originally hidden in the margins. The result is the impossible image. It searches for the stories, people, species, images, and traditions redacted from discourse, forcing investigation and curation beyond the canon; a counter-archive wherein rigid historical categorizations are broken.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material of Gagosian and Titus Kaphar. It shows Kaphar's multi-figure painting that appears historical, as a group of men, and a boy, are shown in pilgrim dress, standing at the edge of woods. The white bodies have been painted over with broad white paint strokes, except for a young black boy, whose image remains. The image was sourced through Gagosian. <https://gagosian.com/artists/titus-kaphar/>

[Kaphar, T. (2017) *Shifting the Gaze*]

These works all take on elements of the performative and embodied movement. They are forms of diffraction, working in intra-active space, in direct resistance to the mythology of the linear trajectory. Each a 'discrete instance' of re-orientation and rebellion. Jacir's body performs the border as she documents crossing this barrier for others who cannot. Azoulay, her hand reenacts the removal of people from ancestral homeland, she holds their grief, and works to reopen their future. Bradford rips through abstraction to show black bodies forced to fight a war for the side against their own freedom, a defiance of imposed historical

trajectories. And Kaphar whitewashes in a reverse erasure, to show the resistance that always resides alongside oppression, a refusal to remain in the margins. There is opportunity in curation for these works to be viewed together, to establish the space for a viewer to walk through these diffractions, to view them together at varying scales, to make them a destination for movement and reflection. The cannon must be expanded to make space for impossible images, each of these works is an opening for this expansion.

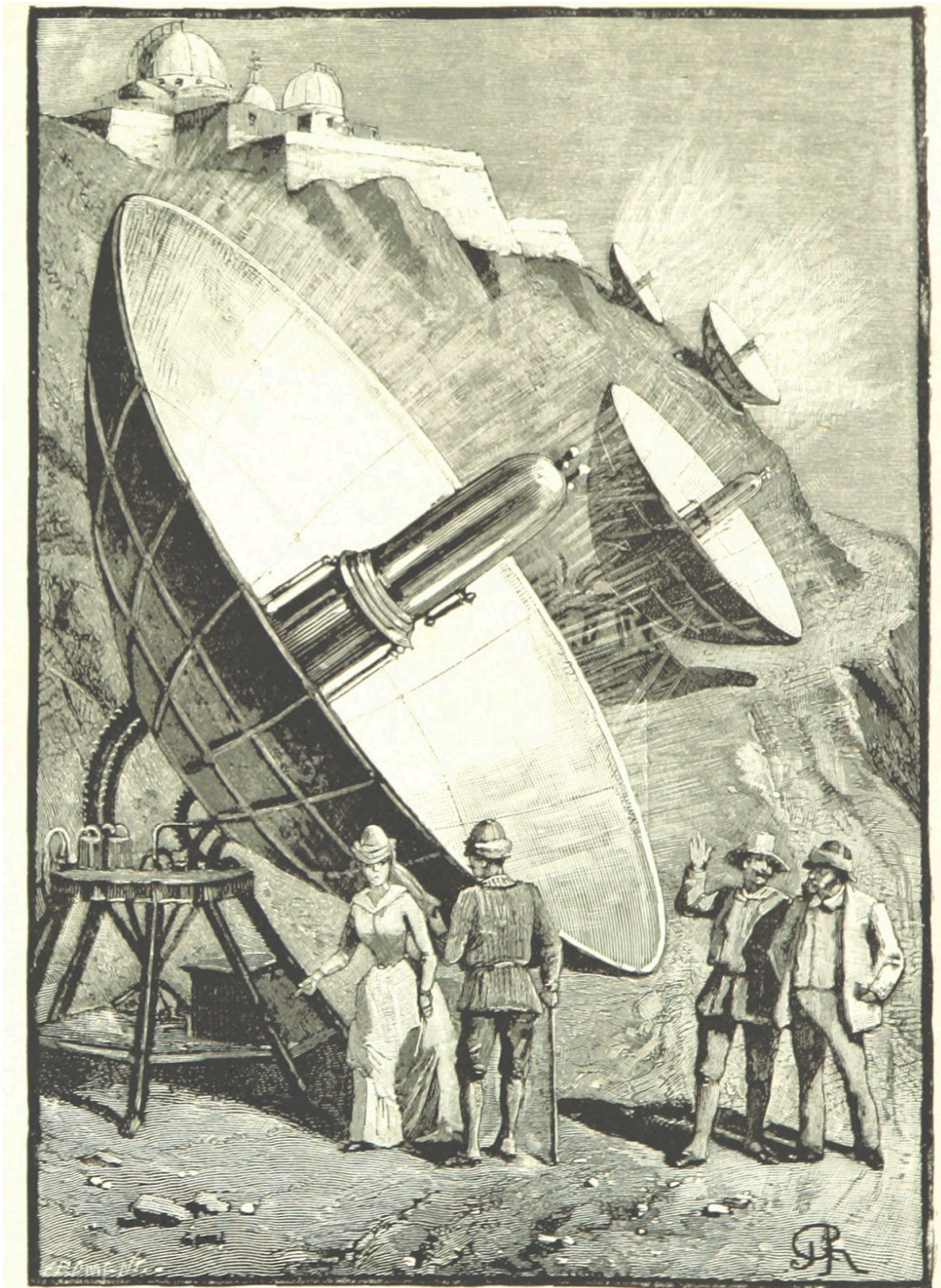
Alchemies of Reciprocity: Cosmopolitical Practices



[a spaceship lands lodged in the face of the moon, film still from Georges Méliès (1902) *A Trip to the Moon*. In public domain]

The cultural tradition of colonizing bodies, human, or otherwise, is so prevalent that large gestures are required to provoke intervention. James Baldwin, a man whose ideas are as vibrant as his words, said “There is a reason, after all, that some people wish to colonize the moon, and others dance before it as an ancient friend,” (1985, *A Question of Identity* Chapter). Warnings of the dangers of colonial extraction are not new. There is a history of this in cultural critique. The 1889 book, *Conquest of the Moon*, (Laurie), which just entered public domain via expired copyright, is a supraliminal speculative narrative on the dangers of extractive practice. It uses fable, a form of genre, as a large gesture. The story is about an attempted expedition to colonize the moon, resulting in being entrapped by it. The characters must escape their self-made detention. They frantically search for a means to return to earth.

Just as we now search for how to return elements essential for living - water, air, and soil - to health. Included in the text are a series of lithographs depicting this failed invasion. It is impossible to ignore the fashion depicted, a rearticulation of the colonizer Raffles and his compatriots. It is not the only example of literature, speculative or otherwise, celebrating colonialism as brave and noble, for example, *Tarzan of the Apes* (Burroughs, 1912), *Voyages Extraordinaires* (Verne, 1863-1965), *Treasure Island* (Louis-Stevenson, 1883), and *King Solomon's Mines* (Haggard, 1885), just to name a few. This also extended to film, as with Georges Méliès, 1902, *A Trip to the Moon*, which was not only considered the first use of science fiction in the medium, but first fiction altogether.



“There are twenty-five exactly like this one.”

Page 107.

[illustration from - Laurie, A. (1889) *The Conquest of the Moon*. In public domain]



[painting George Francis Joseph (1817) *Sir Thomas Samford Raffles*. In public domain]

In *Conquest of the Moon*, parallax shift of safari aesthetic from the jungle to moonscape forces questions on the presumption of propriety over foreign spaces; a statement on living archive as told through an imagined trajectory.

Though now it can be described as an occult practice, alchemy began as a protoscience, and its pursuits have informed science practices to this day. “One of the key principles of [historical] alchemy is the possibility of transmutation of natural substances and, in particular, the transformation of ordinary (base) metals into silver or gold,” an early chemistry akin to what we would now consider a molecular shift, (Trainer, 2007, p. S-8). It is often depicted as the power to tame dualities named both in the text as well as in its accompanying illustrations: night and day, Earth and sky, human and more-than, male and female, the living and the dead. It speaks to the human desire to control godlike realms, to assert a hierarchical relationship to the natural world, rather than working to be part of it. It is a form of cultivation. This can be seen in *The Twelve Keys of Basil Valentine* (first published in 1599, but then republished subsequently with woodblock printed illustrations of the written material). The alchemy of extraction was successful, though not as these early scientists had theorized. Paper money is now traded instead of gold and silver. I imagine this to be baffling to a 17th century alchemist, that pressed wood pulp would replace objects of weight, that reflect sunlight and retain heat. And digital money, even more so, metaphoric gold sent like gusts of wind, from place to place. Though the value of shine is also a mere gimmick. Or that oil, a liquid derived from ancient bodies would be valued as it is, would be frantically pulled from the ground, spilled into highways and waterways, without consideration for the relationships it has nourished and sustained under the soil for eons, or the ones it threatens above. How would they reckon with the idea that the ability to fuel and control movement, would be more valuable than the objects moved. The early alchemists achieved their goals, not with a transformation of other minerals into ore, rather a socially constructed ontological shift of what is signified as representative of value. And the consequences of this have been devastating.

II. GLAVIS.



De Lapide Sapientum.

405

VI. CLAVIS.



XII. CLAVIS.



VIII. CLAVIS.



XL. CLAVIS.



[selections from Merian, M. (1678) "The Twelve Keys of Basil Valentine" *Musaeum hermeticum, Francofurti : Apud Hermannum à Sande* [woodblock prints]. In public domain]

The dual iterations of nostalgia, restorative and reflective nostalgia, or the centering of the individual versus centering of the community in explorations of the past, and the accompanying approaches to political intervention, which are echoed in revisiting historical pursuits of alchemical transmutation. The early roots of the tradition are in the former, now let's explore the latter, beginning with the work of Remedios Varo, which I saw exhibited in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's exhibition, *In Wonderland: the Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States* (2012). Federici's work on the separation of women from nature, as a class based attack as discussed in Chapter 2, takes on interesting connotations when seen alongside feminist surrealist painting and its focus on alchemy and transmutation which depicts fantastical scenes of women work with the more-than-human: the cosmos, elements in nature, light, art, and the physical connection and communication with animals and plants as means for elemental change. The feminist surrealist artists work in both science and the ceremonial, proposing a different way of being, residing near the ask of Sylvia Wynter's interest in Césaire's work towards holding the *mythoi* and the *bios* in equal regard. This is echoed in the ritualized meditations that grow from deep listening. It reclaims the female relationship to nature as praxis. It is a reconnection to kin that humans have shunned. Remedios Varo reclaims the traditional associations of women with nature through the use of critical fabulation. In the instance of 's *The Creation of Birds* (1957), light interacts with paint pigments which are traditionally derived from plant or mineral sources, and creative practice achieved through the hand of a sympoietic owl woman and the string of a ukulele, are able to create new life. She herself is the liminal space between being and not. She uses transmutation for creation. In *Exploring the Source of the River Orinoco* (1959), as counterpose to imagery of woman with water, as either malicious sirens or helpless Ophelias, the woman is depicted as an explorer and expert navigator, perhaps even caretaker of this water/life source. In *The Souls of the Mountain* (1938), women are the internal portions of mountain, fixed and unmovable, in opposition to both ideas of women, and of rock. These are all works in alchemies of reciprocity. They are feral, a reunion of woman and nature.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material from the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City. It shows the painting of

a part owl, part woman, sitting at a desk and using a hand-held device to create birds from moonlight. The image was sourced through "Artchive."

<https://www.artchive.com/artwork/creation-of-the-birds-remedios-varo-c-1957/>

[Varo, R. (1957) *The Creation of Birds* [painting]]

Right Image: The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material from the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City. It shows the painting of a woman, sitting in a boat resembling a fish body with wings, in a river whose water runs from a wine glass sitting inside a hollowed out tree. The image was sourced through "Artchive."

<https://www.artchive.com/artwork/exploring-river-of-the-source-orinonoco-remedios-varo/>

Left Image: The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material in a private collection. It shows a range of mountain peaks that are also bodies of women, their faces visible amongst the rock. The image was sourced through "Artchive." <https://www.artchive.com/artwork/creation-of-the-birds-remedios-varo-c-1957/>

[Right: Varo, R. (1959) *Exploring the Source of the River Orinonoco* [painting]. Left: Varo, R. (1938) *The Souls of the Mountain* [painting]]

Just before Varos was exploring woman as rock, and therein questioning the cultural value and perceived animism of both, Claude Cahun was working in similar terrain in photography. Much of Cahun's work works to queer the perceived divide between male and female, as well as the implications of male versus nature on the status of women. Performed through self/nature portraiture, and often multi-gendered as well as multi-species portraits. In these depictions of woman and nature, as bonded together, it sometimes this takes the form of imprisonment, such as with the imagery of a part woman, part flower, chained to a chair. Their photographic collages of female body parts, fragmented and no longer rooted to the body, much like the effects of the objectified gaze. It is a critique of deconstruction. They also referenced classical alchemical illustrations, however, as opposed to repeating motifs of dualisms in collision, it was a celebration of this new kind of femininity. This work asserted control over not just her personal image, but the female image at large and called for an

emancipation from male iterations of womanhood, in all their falseness, but also in their attempt to dominate over them. A breaking of chains.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material belonging to the Claude Cahun Estate. It shows a photograph of a miniature three-dimensional collage of a small feminine being with doll legs, leaf body, .and flower face chained to an ornate chair, to the side are two realistic butterflies and a black animalistic figure. The image was sourced through Ubu Gallery.

<https://www.ubugallery.com/artist/claude-cahun/>

[Claude Cahun (1936) *The Hours of Flowers* [gelatin silver print] Claude Cahun Estate]

Left Image: The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material belonging to the Claude Cahun Estate. It shows a photographic collage of feminine body parts gripping forms of globe - Earth, solar system, the female eye, and a distorted mirror. The upper center shows a two-headed dove resembling more a circus light than an actual bird. The image was sourced through the Victoria and Albert Museum digital collection.

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1135351/image-of-photomontage-illustration-from-photograph-cahun-claude/>

Right Image: The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material belonging to the Claude Cahun Estate. It shows a photograph of a woman's arms emerging from a stone pillar as if she is both flesh and stone. The image was sourced through "Art Limited."

<https://www.artlimited.net/agenda/collective-exhibition-radical-landscapes-tate-liverpool/fr/7584771>

[Claude Cahun "Untitled" (1930) *Aveux non avenues* 1930 [photographic collage] Paris: Éditions du Carrefour, and *I Extend My Arms*. (1932) [photograph] Claude Cahun Estate]

In a collision of art and active-ism, Cahun's *I Extend My Arms* (1930), reminds me of photographs of the Chipko movement. Emerging from mass logging of the global south, "the

Chipko movement of the mountain region of Uttarakhand [India]...starting in early 1973, [when] groups of villagers, most of them women, began to literally embrace trees in order to protect them from timber merchants,” (Ghosh, 2021. p. 232). They used their own bodies as shields to save the forests from destruction. “They eventually attracted so much support that their regional government was forced to enact protective legislation,” (Ghosh, 2021, p. 232). This can be seen as the beginning of the ecofeminist movement, which has unfortunately wavered between left and right wing orientations. A frame of guidance for maintaining this as an opener of trajectories, rather than the opposite, can be found in the following proposition: “all approaches to the planetary crisis, no matter whether technocratic or vitalist, must be judged by the same criteria...Pope Francis, in his 2016 encyclical, *Laudato Si*: ‘A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor,’” (Ghosh, 2021, p. 233). The Chipko were decidedly listening to both.

Top Image: The photograph originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material. It shows four women pressing their bodies against an ancient tree, like shields. The image was sourced through the TREPA Organization.

<https://www.trepa.com/?p=2301>

Left Image: The photograph originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material. It shows multiple women and children hugging the base of a tree. The image was sourced through the Sugi Project.

<https://www.sugiproject.com/blog/the-chipko-movement>

Right Image: The photograph originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material. It shows a procession of Chipko activists marching with political flags and drums. The image was sourced through the Sugi Project.

<https://www.sugiproject.com/blog/the-chipko-movement>

[Chandi Prasad Bhatt (1970s) documentary photos of the Chipko Movement.]

The work of the feminist surrealists builds new worlds, while their earlier counterparts laid the foundations to tear worlds apart. The collision of the two is seen in the work of exiled Cuban artist Ana Mendieta. Her work reflects on the bodylandscape, or as she named it, “‘earth-body’ art.” She depicts her body as part of the earth, sometimes harmonious, sometimes resonating in violence. She uses her own body to perform extraction; the

interconnected colonization of women and earth. "She created a diverse collection of work that included silhouettes of her body created in mud, earth, rocks, wild flowers and leaves, performance pieces that evoked the folk and occult traditions of her native Cuba as well as her beloved Mexico and subversive self-portraits that played with notions of beauty, belonging and gender," as well as the feminine relationship to Earth. The forced division from holistic states, as discussed by Federici, is also present in Mendieta's work. "People place her in the earth works tradition of Robert Smithson or Richard Long, but when a woman engages with the earth it is a very different statement. Her body was her art and she placed it in the ground. In doing so, she was trying to ground herself in the earth but also reconnect with the earth that she was standing on even if it was not Cuba."

I have included two of her photographs. One depicts the entanglement of the female body with the landscape, the other the violence of its extraction, and the mark left in the loss of it. Both engage with an open wound. This is reinforced in her use of blood as a medium in a manner that conveys it, "'as a very, powerful magical thing', [and in so doing] she evoked the power of female sexuality as well as the horror of male sexual violence." Her work also became a premonition of her own future. In a terrible act of life imitating art, she died at thirty-six years old, after falling from a New York highrise apartment, after fighting with her husband. If woman is Earth, she too can be mined without recourse. Court testimony implicated her husband in her death. He was never convicted. Her death resulted in a femicide, like so many, unaccounted for even while there were protests in the streets calling for justice. (O'Hagan, 2013).

*Left Image: The photograph originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material of the Artists Rights Society and the Ana Mendieta Estate. It shows the imprint of a female body dug into earth. The exterior earth is dusted white, the interior earth is dusted red. The image was sourced through the Scalar USC.
<https://scalar.usc.edu/works/bodies/ana-mendieta-earth-work-2-1976>*

*Right Image: The photograph originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material of the Artists Rights Society and the Ana Mendieta Estate. It shows a female body dug into earth laying on the earth, with small white wild flowers blooming from her body . The image was sourced through E-FLux.
<https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/165634/covered-in-time-and-history-the-films-of-ana-mendieta/>*

[Ana Mendieta. *Untitled: Silueta Series, Mexico From Silueta Works in Mexico, 1973-1977.*
[Color photographs] The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection. New York: Galerie Lelong & Co.]

This counter-canonical trajectory of work provides explorations into forms of de-centered research and practice that expand past nostalgia as restorative or reflective, towards a diffractive nostalgia, a form of proposing different temporalities, and the potential for new futures. This looks towards the feral and other kinds of spirits, spirits we can no longer ignore.

Expanded Kinship

Searching for clues in the counter-canon for how to spark other ways of being, must engage with intersectionality as an alliance of marginalized bodies. “Sylvia Wynter invokes a ‘ceremony’ as a revolutionary rite of passage: a ‘marriage’ that breaks through capitalist modernity’s constitutive antagonisms, overcoming and remodeling the status-granting categories that reproduce its established modes of world-creation,” (Franke et al, 2022, p. 8). Deep Listening is a form of ceremony in that it actively performs liminal space by seeking out different temporalities and the crossing of boundaries, but it is not the only kind. “The power of ceremony: it marries the mundane to the sacred. The water turns to wine, the coffee to a prayer. The material and the spiritual mingle like grounds mingled with humus, transformed like steam rising,” (Kimmerer, 2013, pp. 38-9). It has the potential to function as practice-based intervention towards breaking down the false hierarchies of western culture in favor of models of reciprocity; to reimagine meaning. This is divergent from the methods and practices proposed by classical academia. It therefore requires a different approach. A new spatiality. It offers tools that could be utilized to shift paradigms, “instead of speaking of ‘cultures’ or ‘ideologies,’ ... [ceremony] speaks of ‘cosmogonies’ and ‘counter-cosmogonies’...which [Wynter] conceives as a revolutionary overcoming (‘turning/overturing’) of the world-systemic order of colonial modernity and racial capitalism, and as a consequence, of the modern understanding of the cosmos and the figuration of the human being within it,” (Franke et al, 2022, p. 9).

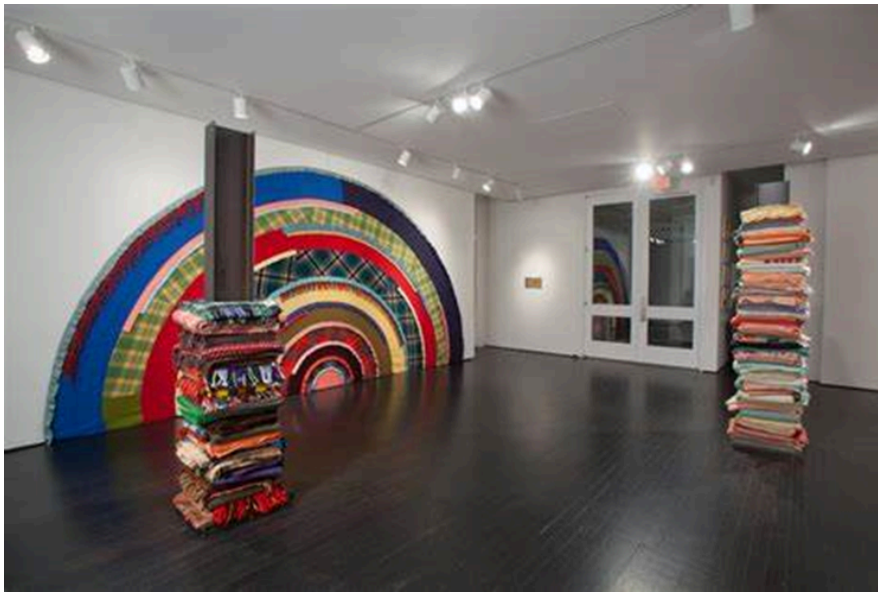
Ceremonial rites of passage that invite communal celebration, such as transitioning to adulthood, the birth of a child, the union of marriage or coupling, are common across cultures. More than a moment of appreciation, it can be a “*ceremony of transition*—a

ceremony of reinventing symbols,' including what we imagine it is to be (more-than-)human," (Franke et al, 2022, p. 84). Ceremony may also work towards providing entrance into the parallax gap, imperative work as, "becoming attentive to our blind spots and seeking to circumvent them has always been of critical value," (Franke et al, 2022, p. 44). Furthermore, the community aspect of this work is key for the shifting of modes of being. Wynter names this as "behavior-orienting oppositions," which have traditionally in the west, been rooted in notions of duality, namely the "connotative system of good/evil, [which] induce[s] stable and shared desiring/aversive endogenous waveshapes in the brain, and constitute[s] the morphogenetic fantasy or mode of the cultural imagination through which the group Subjects are led to imagine themselves as such a Group Subject: one which, internally mediated by these structural oppositions and their related imagery/figuration system, [which] is defined by the fact that its members participate in the same mode of mimetic desire," (Wynter 1984, p. 28). Ceremony then has the potential to act out other kinds of desire, which is then reinforced through the modes of ritual: repetition, slowness, meditative listening, the use of mantras or hymns, communal walk as processional. "The slow repetition of caring labor occupies a different category than our societies often recognize, in relating back to other kinds of temporality, it is maternal time," (Buller, Marchevska, & Reeve, 2022).

The consideration of indigenous temporality, both reclaimed and stolen, can be seen in practice and performance. There is particular emphasis to monument, both in the creation of it, as well as the destruction of old models. A sonic monument, practiced as ceremony, meant to be a repetitive performative meeting is currently underway "in the Navajo reservation border town of Farmington, New Mexico, five musicians gathered recently to perform a single note - a concert D...Delbert Anderson, who is Navajo and plays jazz, led the group into the note, part of the performance of a piece he wrote and calls "The Long Walk...The performance is 1,674 days long – which mirrors the length of the actual Long Walk of the Navajo" which was the forced removal of the tribe from eastern New Mexico, to the west. It was the culmination of Kit Carson's Scorched Earth Policy. Each meeting, Delbery leads the musicians in adding a new note to the composition. Each note is a memorial, a practice in remembering, weighted in grief. (Adomaitis, 2024)

In a visual approach, and as an exercise in both kinship and reclaiming history, *Skywalker/Skyscraper* (2012) is Seneca artist Marie Watt's piece that celebrates both tower and totem. It is reclaimed blankets, braced by vertical steel beams, both form and material tell stories of her people. The blankets are an important part of ceremony, they are gifts, treasures that are brought on journeys and shared in family meetings. The steel beam tells of the indigenous men who were a large portion of the workforce building the early

skyscrapers in New York City, including the as depicted in the infamous 1932 photograph of iron worker eating lunch high in the steel frame of a skyscraper they were building. And lastly, Seneca cosmology, and their first story of ancestry, where the Seneca Sky Woman fell to Earth pregnant. In this origin story, land was made solely to hold Sky Woman and her children, they were born together. As an act of care and veneration, Watt created a tower of blankets to cushion the fall of her creator and first grandmother. (Buller, Marchevska, & Reeve, 2022).



[Watt, M. (2012) *Skywalker/Skyscraper*. Permission to reproduce this image has been granted by the artist]

Sitka artist, Nicholas Galanin, in an exercise on kinship and land art that acknowledges colonial history and indigenous peoples, created *Shadow on the land, an excavation and bush burial* (2020), for the 2020 Biennale of Sydney. It is a grave dug in the dirt for the shadow cast by the colonizer Captain James Cook, who claimed Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii for Britain. Galanin excavated the shadow cast by the statue, writing, “By creating a hole large enough to bury the statue, the work’s excavation (along with its title) suggests the burial of the Cook monument itself, along with the burial of destructive governance and treatment of Indigenous land, Indigenous people and Indigenous knowledge.” It is an anti-colonial extraction. This work spurred the removal of global monuments seen to celebrate colonial violence, making space for the celebration of other voices and histories. By utilizing archeology as an anti-colonial medium, Galanin also

creates a commentary on historical archeological and ethnographic practices which upheld white supremacy. If Ana Mendieta was creating eulogies for the female body as nature, as objects of colonization, Galanin is doing the same for the monuments celebrating the colonizer. It is a call for new kinds of worship and the removal of obsolete models. (Rami, 2020)



[photograph courtesy of the artist - Galanin, N. (2020) *Shadow on the land, an excavation and bush burial*. Biennale of Sydney. Permission to reproduce this image has been granted by the artist]

This reexamination of monument is reiterated in his piece, *Never Forget*, from Desert X 2021. It is a play on the Hollywood sign, a monument to the wealth accumulated in Los Angeles, which reads, "INDIAN LAND." It is a reminder that the industrial film studios are complicit in violence against the indigenous, primarily in the propagation of racist mythologies. In particular, the western, where 'good white folk' had to protect themselves from 'savage indians.' But it is also important to note that "few consider that the sign doubled

as ‘an advertisement to sell Indigenous land to white-only real estate owners and developers,’ says the artist Nicholas Galanin,” (Smith, 2023). The legislative racial redlining of the city, much like the borders of indigenous reservations, is now imposed through poverty. It is a reminder of the long history of indigenous life on these lands far predating European arrival.



[photograph of installation - Galanin, N. (2021) *Indian Land*. Desert X. Permission to reproduce this image has been granted by the artist]

These works show a different way to approach intra-action as a dynamic animism. This includes the discussion of the land as a living archive in and of itself, as well as examples of how this can be depicted. Tactics for engaging with impossible images both to provide space for their visibility as a means for discourse, but also ethical considerations of how to do this without replicating the violence that caused their impossibility. How to engage with the cosmopolitical as a means for encouraging permacultural practices. And examples of

representing expanded kinship as a form of connectivity that expands beyond the human. Our family trees are not just diagrams of blood lines and inheritance, they are also elms and oaks. Every species is covered in the same dust and deserving of the same protection and care. It is time to reimagine what we worship, our monuments and what they memorialize. It is time to practice new forms of ceremony as intervention. What can we bring to our family reunion to heal the familial fractures created by our own hands?

The next chapter will transition these concerns to the medium of film by referencing both research and practice models with a focus on methodologies that would be best suited to the camera. This will consider additional opportunities presented by working with temporality by exploring the potential to shift perception of momentum, by the use of duration. It will also play with attention to engagement with representation and diffraction. It became necessary to explore how to transition the theoretical methodology of agential realism and the ideas of diffraction for intervention and queering space, alongside lessons learned from the natural world, into practice in a way that functions as radical generosity and encourages response-ability. I was interested in experimenting with the camera, film, and artistic process, as a means to listen deeply, to engage in slow and intentional ceremony, to use it to amplify our Earthness, rather than portray the cultivated mythology of *Nature Mort*.

Chapter 4 – Rewilding Cinema: Film Utilized as a Methodology for Resistance

“You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.”

- Angela Davis

A Tree as a Sign of Hope

The photograph originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material of the Artists Rights Society. It shows a prompt from the Yoko Ono book, "Grapefruit," that reads:

PAINTING FOR THE WIND

*Cut a hole in a bag filled with seeds
of any kind and place the bag where
There is wind.*

1961 summer

The image was sourced from the book directly.

[prompts for Fluxus exercises - Ono, Y. (1964) *Grapefruit* Tokyo: Wunternbaum Press]

The sweet smell of a citrus blossom reminds me of childhood, of the orange tree my father planted when I was little. It still produces fruit forty years later. When I still lived in Los Angeles, my father would bring me bags of fruit from this tree. The last time I saw it, its leaves were curled. The summers have grown hotter and longer than when it was planted, and the fire season longer too. We both baked in the sun, while I watered this old friend. Every place I move to, I make sure to have a sunny spot for a small citrus tree. In Singapore a calamansi and a yuzu, in Croatia a lemon, in China a kumquat. Each has been cultivated to thrive where I grew them. Each was gifted to someone who made a mark on me there, when I left. Family tree takes on a meaning beyond naming human names past.

Food is medicine. The planting of a fruiting tree is a sign of hope. First fruit will not come for two to five years. A tree can grow for thirty years before reaching full fruiting maturity, when it becomes round and full of branches to support buds and flesh. Planting a fruit tree is a belief

in future. And a good gardener knows its limbs must be seasonally trimmed to promote healthy growth. Because of their high vitamin c content and long shelf life, oranges are prime scurvy prevention. Because of this, the cultivation history of the orange follows colonial routes. The orange originates from Southeast Asia, from the Malay peninsula, the land mass that culminates in the south, with the island of Singapore. When the Moors invaded southern Europe in 711 AD, they brought with them “advanced new ideas in mathematics (algebra, geometry, trigonometry and calculus), introduced a novel writing system, paper to actually write on, and the bitter orange,” (*The History and Cultivation of the Orange*). The pirate, Christopher Columbus brought the orange to America on his second invasion in 1493 according to the 1552 account of Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas who was also on that voyage. The seeds were collected in the Canary Islands, which is still a Spanish colony, though it is off the coast of Africa. They were sowed in Hispaniola and Isabela, which is now the divided and impoverished Caribbean island of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. (Marquez, 2023). The planting of these seeds, this act of cultivation, is recognized as the signifier of the first European settlement in America. California is dotted with orange trees. The remnants of old orchards are seen in the naming of places, streets like Orange Drive and Orange Grove Avenue, and cities like Orange County. Images of colonization are evidenced on old crate labels as celebrations of domestication of the indigenous and the land, of the prosperity of Spanish monks, and of serving European royalty. Landscapes, like oranges, are deeply political.

The archival images originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material of the Artists Rights Society. They show images of the labels from citrus crates and include drawings of Queen Victoria, indigenous Americans, a Spanish woman with a traditional fan, and Spanish monks. The images were sourced from the Online Archive of California, Collection of citrus labels.

https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt5x0nf4cj/entire_text/

[California citrus crate labels, circa 1920s and 1930s]

It is important to me to not be a tourist. I am not interested in shallow extraction. I wish to travel with depth, as a nomad, open to encounters and foraging deep ties. In Croatia there was so much that has

left a mark on me. I fell madly in love with the sea, foraging the wild hillsides, and the nourishing act of making teas and liquors from wild plants. I shared profound discussions with people I met. Yugoslavia was dedicated to highly educating its citizens. Meaning that conversations there are intense, highly intellectual, full of ideas and curiosity, on art and literature and theory, and steeped in resistance and rebellion. Art is treasured as a form of expression and resistance there. Troubled histories are elegized in elaborate monuments. These large sculptures dot the landscapes to honor loss and sacrifice. Other kinds of elegies emerge from time spent there too. Because of this, in some ways it felt like home. I can not write on a place without writing on the people there who influenced me.

I met the artist Igor Grubic and spoke about his irreverence towards memorials and classical statues as a means to reinvestigate the past and axiologies and our shared desire to make work as interference in the separation of human and nature.





[*Gestures of Activation* - art interventions of cultural objects by Igor Grubic (2020-). Images reproduced with permission from the artist]

And performance artist and curator Tanja Vrvilo, who works with “invisible cinema,” a form of impossible image. I met her in Split where we talked about issues of femin(ine/ist) representation, how to depict troubled histories, and the importance of experimental performance. I had the pleasure of watching an early version of her ŠAHTO-KULTURE (SHAFT_CULTURE) performance of SVI PRIČAJU O VREMENU MI NE! (EVERYONE TALKS ABOUT THE TIME WE DON’T), in Zagreb. A noise performance of interactions with instruments made by the artists from industrial materials. A reclamation of the industrialization that was lost in the fall.



[ŠAHTO-KULTURE (SHAFT_CULTURE) performance of SVI PRIČAJU O VREMENU MI NE! (EVERYONE TALKS ABOUT THE TIME WE DON'T) - Pogon Zagrebački centar za nezavisnu kulturu i mlade, Zagreb, May 2024). Photo by Erin Wilkerson]



[still of Marija Gabrijele Perić from *The Dying of the Light* (2023), directed by Ivan Perić and Alvaro Congosto Martinez. Permission to reproduce this image was granted by the filmmakers]

On a visit to my neighborhood butcher I met Marija Gabrijela ‘Gabi’ Perić. She was wearing a bag from the Rotterdam Film Festival. Known for its bold choice of films that push the medium, that don’t adhere to the Hollywood model. This bag is usually reserved for filmmakers, so I struck up a conversation. She and her husband, Ivan, are members of the Split cinema club. She also works at the local library running their media program, and over shared coffees, cocktails, and dinners, became a dear friend, as well as my go to librarian for information on Croatian culture and history. She invited me to join her book club, where every month I was able to learn more Croatian stories. Literature is a wonderful route into the heart of a place.

And last but not least, filmmaker, curator, and educator, Sunčica Fredelić, who revitalized the cinema club in Split from a relic of socialized culture, to a thriving space to screen films and teach film practice, and criticism. She was the right hand woman to the infamous Bela Tar when he formed Film Factory, the experimental school connected to the Sarajevo Film Academy. But most important to me was the deep friendship we built together over long walks and shared coffees, over watching and debating film, over sharing our processes for making films and how to work through when this feels raw and personal and scrapes at our insides in ways that are both painful and healing, over being women in our forties and how this is both freeing and oppressive, and how we both find comfort in drawing and being in the sea. It is the kind of friendship that does not tend to form past adolescence. It was an unexpected and treasured gift from my time there.



[film still from Sunčica Fredelić's film *Dok Smo Bili Tu* or, *While We Were Here*, (2021).

Permission to reproduce the image granted by the director]

Souvenirs are usually thought of as trinkets that remind us of places we have been. They are objects for tourists. The tracings from deep work as a nomad are another form of souvenir, one of great meaning, one which cannot be objectified. They are stories and shared meals. They are deep connections and the building of community. They are subjective experiences and gestures of radical generosity.

Film as an Anti-Colonial Tool

A sympoietic approach as a manifestation of intra-action recognizes the tentacular and the entangled, as a woven multiplicity. Objectivity and subjectivity are not at odds, rather, radical work requires they intertwine collaboratively. In fact, as evidenced in the section on spatial taming, cultivation, and invasive practices, it is dangerous to favor one over the other. Unraveling uncomfortable histories must be work in both. This chapter will take the lessons from the archive and the canon, as understood through the countering undertaken in the previous chapters, and apply them to film. Beginning with how this is echoed in the theoretical approach to practice-led research, continuing on to explore work by other filmmakers whose work offers clues for how to engage with film as more than a medium, rather, as a methodology for depicting agential realism as an extension of permacultural phenomenon, and in so doing, becomes an extension of applied physics, geology, and cosmology, therein subverting not just imposed divides between fields, but practice and research as well.

To begin exploring this aim, let's examine the schematic outline proposed by Greame L. Sullivan for theoretical processes for engaging with practice-led research, (2009):

The diagram originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material of Edinburgh University. The diagram is noted as "Figure 2.1 Practice-led research: a framework of practices," and organized visually as an inverted triangle, with each segment outlined to emphasize the shape, which can be understood as an inversion of hierarchical dogmas. As partially recreated here:

AGENCY

**DIALECTICAL
PRACTICES**

*Encounters
Dialogues
Narratives*

**CONCEPTUAL
PRACTICES**

*Exercises
Interactions
Designs*

STRUCTURE

**THEORETICAL
PRACTICES**

*Experiences
Transformations
Exhibitions*

**CONTEXTUAL
PRACTICES**

*Enactments
Databases
Texts*

ACTION

The diagram was sourced from p. 49 of the text: Sullivan, G. (2009) Making Space: The Purpose and Place of Practice-Led Research. In Hazel Smith, H. & Dean, R. (Eds.), "Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts" (pp. 41-65). Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

Sullivan diagrams this as a closed triangulated system. When applied to Haraway's theory of the tentacular, the closed system becomes more open, instead of an inverted triangle, there is a body, a body that grounds the tentacular. The tentacles become the knowledge, stories, experiences, ideas, and theories that emerge from engaging in this model, with the understanding that there is always space for more. This opening of the methodology can be seen in Irit Rogoff's work wherein she associates it to, "creative practices of knowledge... A shift [towards] both conceptual and methodological in which it is not only the theoretical but the active unfolding of the work, giving... permission to know from elsewhere rather than to negate dominant knowledge," (2021, p. 47). She stipulates that this should unfold much like an "enchantment: a state of persuasion and seduction which fuses rationally conscious thought with affective conviction, a duality of intellectual clarity and emotional entanglement that are crucial for any acts of affecting knowledge," (2021, p. 47). A practice requiring both

the objective and subjective. This opens up possibilities of art to generate theory, and vice versa. “So the potential is that practice based research might singularize knowledge rather than be neatly placed within its structures. That materials, associations, narratives, methodologies would pursue one another in unconventional modes, invite each other to dance as it were...Not just as bodies of knowledge but as the narrative structures they are recounted in, as drives, impulses, personal histories, modes of curiosity, conceits of intelligence etc,” (Rogoff, 2021, p. 56).

So why engage in the cinematic for this work? Film can bridge the gap between theory and culture, pushing questions culture does not tend to ask. Film can move between academia and art, libraries and film festivals, conferences and theaters, journals and living rooms. But film itself is also colonized, which must be tended to as well. This is evidenced in the terminology of the field, marred by markers of warfare. You ‘shoot’ film, ‘capture’ a scene, ‘expose’ an image, ‘blow-up’ the image size. And also utilizes terminology for settlement, in the ‘master shot’ which shows all characters in a scene in a single image referring back to the surveillance of the enslaved, or following a person or a landscape in a ‘tracking shot’ like a soldier stocking the enemy or a landowner tracking an enslaved person, or a ‘landmark’ film which was once a terminology for an imposed boundary, but now describes achievement or accomplishment. (Studiobinder, 2020). This is reinforced in the hierarchical model of the Hollywood Studio, founded on inequality and subjugation, breeding monsters like Harvey Weinstein.

The dominant Hollywood film protagonist depicted throughout the history of the medium, as well as the majority of the stories that have been represented, are of white men. It is a monocultural institution. It replicates white supremacy. This is compounded by the use of the term, the “affection image,” or close-up shot used to “express unfilmable internal intensive states through this centre as character emotions and feelings,” (Deamer, 2016, p. 16), which too is traditionally reserved for white bodies. What then is the image of the faces left out, and the more-than-human if not a dis-affection image? Hollywood cinema intends to function as propaganda for this method of domination by portraying models of reward for subservience. It intends to tame by working in redaction in what it will and will not portray on screen, and gatekeeping in who has access to the tools to create cinema. Both are forms of objectification. Phases of filmmaking are bordered by being presented as specialized tasks. And just as in the assembly line, to assert control over production, other tasks are never assigned. Editors are always editors, cinematographers remain with the camera, etc. The studios use cameras and gear that are exceptionally expensive as a method to control access to the medium. The material inequality between those in the perceived lower modes

of production, and the perceived highest is enormous. It is the difference between poverty and hoarding.

Fictive films are termed narrative, and traditional documentary is regarded as residing closer to journalism and therefore problematically regarded as less biased. Photographic images are a “notation in light” (Azoulay, 2015, p. 11), as light and its absence is reflected within the camera, to be later projected on screen or affixed to exhibition materials. Just as humans cannot control our trajectorial orbit of the sun, early photographic processes were attributed to the mechanics of the camera. The notion that it is a technological device, a mechanized work in light, was understood as inexorable to human interference. The invention of the camera questioned the legitimacy of painting as a means for representation. How can a human hand reflect the world, when the camera seems to show it for what it is? Painting shifted into explorations of the abstract. Impressionism was a direct response to the camera.

The issue remains that the mechanics of a camera are still wielded by the human hand, and in turn, controlled by epigenetic inheritances. What is not shown in the frame is as important as what is missing, perhaps even more so. And even within the frame, the photographer has the ability to focus on a chosen subject, to crop information out, to attend to chosen places and stories. In the discussion of Eve Sedgwick’s writing on the ‘aperture of visibility’ to describe how systematic violence is used as an apparatus to quell descent and reinforce the parallax gap, it must also be known that aperture refers to the amount of light that enters an optical device, used to describe an eye, but also a camera. In manipulating the aperture of the camera, a secondary effect is enacted. It changes the depth of field, and therein the clarity, or lack thereof, of background in relation to the object of focus. “The camera might, at times, appear to be obedient, but it is also capable of being cunning, seductive, conciliatory, vengeful or friendly. It can be woefully unarmed with information, can magnify the achievements of amateurs, and can destroy the work of master craftsmen, (Azoulay, 2015, p. 15). Azoulay writes on the myth of the unbiased image by first exploring the problematics of willfully being the spectator of disaster, as explored in *Unshowable Photographs*. But secondly by asking the viewer to take note of who and what is being photographed and who and what is not, when she writes, “The photograph is a platform upon which traces from the encounter between those present in the situation of photography are inscribed, whether the participants are present by choice, through force, knowingly, indifferently, as a result of being overlooked or as a consequence of deceit,” (2015, p. 24). This deceit is in and of itself an impossibility of image. “The inaccessibility of the photograph, which might result from the fact that no shots were taken at all, or from the possibility that the holder of the photograph derives pleasure, power or capital from the monopoly that he possesses in relation to it,

effectively eliminates the very possibility of discussing the event of photography,” (2015, p. 23).

This inherent bias means that articulating the positionality of the image maker becomes as important as investigating the images themselves. Azoulay compares the bias of those who are photographed and those the camera avoids, to “the form of a division between those who can retreat to a private space of their own and set a boundary to the incursions of the regime, and those who cannot,” (2015, p. 243). In so doing, she dismantles the division between issues of autonomy and sovereignty, and those of artistic representation, whether it be labeled as journalism or otherwise. Meaning that politics and aesthetics are inseparable, even when they take on grotesque matters. Beyond questioning what is overlooked in the frame, we must also ask who benefits from this framing. There is therefore a response-ability in viewing photographic or filmed imagery, as well as in its creation. Each image must be scrutinized for whether it imposes boundaries, or works to dismantle them. But intention, even if well meaning, is not enough to disrupt systemic intersectional oppression. Research and preparation does not necessarily prepare us for what we find. It alone is not enough to engage in ethical practice. We must dig deeper to establish parameters for ethical practice.

Let’s revisit considerations of temporality. The way in which film works with time is more than a metaphor. Film is a set of sequential still images. In most instances, traditionally, 24 frames of film strip are run through a projector per second, and in this current era, digital video follows the same model; 24 possible ‘Nows’. The rapid sequencing relies on our brain interpreting multiple still images as narrative, whether they are in order of their occurrence as a single action, or pieced together fragments. In *Death 24x a Second*, Laura “Mulvey suggests that, as with photographic images, the still frame at the heart of the moving image is a reminder of the irretrievability of the past and thereby of death...[It is work in both] motion and stillness,” (Pennell, 2012, p. 72). I find it interesting that she can see film as both motion and stillness, but not death.

The archival image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is copyrighted material. The image shows the same film still of a man repeated vertically. His expression does not change. Beside each repetition is a differing image, a bowl of soup and glass of drink, next a woman reclining in Venus pose, next a small child in a coffin. The image was sourced from “Curator Magazine” Online.

<https://www.curatormagazine.com/michaeltoscano/kuleshovs-effect-the-man-behind-soviet-montage/>

[Vsevolod Pudovkin and Lev Kuleshov - film stills of testing the Kuleshov Effect: unchanging expressions of hunger, grief, desire]

The way in which the still frames are manipulated, produces not only temporal momentum, but also spatial. The early Russian director, Sergei “Eisenstein states that what renders a work of art emotionally powerful is the capacity to host within itself a number of ‘shifts’ (*sdvig*) between different historical layers... [a form of] ‘jumping chronology,” (Kleiman et al, 2016, p. 28). He is regarded as the progenitor of the montage, an editing technique, a form of assemblage, wherein the sequence of images is systematically organized as a series of fragments that convey the passing of time, a methodological ellipsis to convey narrative trajectory. “In Montage, ‘synthesis’ becomes the process through which a series of separate, distinct ‘representations’ (*izobrazhenie*) are united into a general, meaningful, emotionally powerful ‘image’ (*obraz*). The principle of filmic and artistic montage is here considered as corresponding to a tendency toward synthesis which can be found in every form of mental activity: sensorial perception, imagination, memory, all the way to inductive and deductive reasoning” (Kleiman et al, 2016, p. 44). Each time a fragment is created, it is termed a ‘cut’ of the longer recorded material, which references to the physical cutting and retaping of film reels. Montage is the curation of slices of history. It is usually used to describe time sped up; a time signature to push narrative. Montage can connect disparate events, places, and stories, the living and ghosts; the meeting of trajectories. Early experimentation into the phenomenon is perhaps best understood through the Kuleshov Effect which was developed by “Vsevolod Pudovkin (1893–1953), [when] he and Lev Kuleshov (1899–1970) alternated a shot of the expressionless face of Ivan Mozzhukhin (1889–1939), a silent-film star and émigré of Imperial Russia, with various other shots (i.e., a plate of soup, a girl in a coffin, a woman on a divan). The audience believed that the expression on Mozzhukhin’s face differed each time, showing hunger, grief, or desire, but the actual shot was exactly the same” (Kolesnikov, 2020, p. 55-6). But just as an ellipsis can provide clarity, it can also be a tool for redaction. As such, the imposition of duration on still imagery must be done with careful consideration, to be utilized in the depiction of multiplicities, rather than in the imposition of a singular, or oppressive trajectory.

In his *Cinema I*, Deleuze describes manipulations of space-time in the production of cinema. Of particular interest is his work on the “crystal-image. He writes, “what constitutes the

crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time... it has to split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past," (p. 81). Which he describes as operating in dualities, "of the real and the imaginary, or of the present and the past, of the actual and the virtual, is definitely not produced in the head or the mind, it is the objective characteristic of certain existing images which are by nature double," (1989, p. 69). He continues by saying, "The present is the actual image, and its contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in a mirror" (1989, p. 79). And though he describes potential in this friction between the actual and virtual, amongst the other dualities he names, for a notion of time "which keeps on reconstituting itself," (1989, p. 82). It is important to ask how this mirroring engages with the hidden, the erased, and other markers of displacement. How can it address the aperture of visibility? A 'perfect' laboratory made crystal produces the visual expansion of the light spectrums contained in it, an expanded mirroring. In nature however, crystals are multifaceted, each facet works to diffract the momentum of light waves, resulting in an array of dispersed light spectrums. Light emerges split into multitudes of multicolored rainbows, multiplicities that were always present, yet previously not visible. Deleuze refers to the imperfect crystal as, "a failing, a point of flight, a 'flaw'," (1989, p. 85). It is here in the uncontrolled, and therein uncultivated state, of the wild faceted crystal-image, that it becomes an apparatus for diffraction thereby functioning as a simultaneous expansion of trajectories and time signatures that were always there, but have not been seen. It expands singular views into expressions of agential realism, opening up false dichotomies, and therein space for different futures. To reference back to Trinh Minh-ha's definition of diffraction as a mapping of interference, this wilding is then a form of active-ism.

To further this opening of trajectories, Barad writes that "diffraction...troubles dichotomies, including some of the most sedimented and stabilized/stabilizing binaries, such as organic/inorganic and animate/inanimate," (2014, p. 168). This includes self/other, as well as human/more-than-human. If agential realism can also be expressed via the wilded crystal-image, then perhaps a diffractive montage can convey this through an application of the agential cut as an implementation of facets to a cinematic image: a face, a landscape, a flower. Barad offers suggestions on how this can be applied. "Agential cuts never sit still [...]. Inside/outside is undone. [...] An uncanny typology; no smooth surfaces, willies everywhere. Differences percolate through 'everything', reworking and being reworked through reiterative configuring of spacetimemattering [...] each being (re)threaded through the other," (Barad, 2014, p. 178-9). It is important to note that the ellipses in the previous quote are taken directly from the text itself. They are intentionally placed by Barad, working like Ahmed's

words on impressions of space as also impressing on the body, to work like scars left visible in the text.

Barad's writing on how diffractions work within concerns of duration and momentum, as the considerations of space-time that are inherent to film, provides insight into wilding active-isms, clues for how to break with unsustainable trajectories. Perhaps most important of all to describe how diffraction can function as a weed when applied to the cinematic. For it to be tenacious and unwanted, interrupt monoculture, move through borders, root without permission. It will not be stopped. Because of the problematics of the current models of culture and cultivation, resistance must be wild and untamed. It must learn from nature and engage in sympoiesis. It must rebuke the colonial trajectory. As such, it is a feral act. It necessitates engaging in a wilding methodology. Therefore, I propose the methodology of feral filmmaking as an active-ism.

As understood in Steve Goodman's "mnemonic problematic," the temporal and spatial dissonance that can emerge from working in duration, and shifted momentum, must be done with caution and intention as to not contribute to romanticizing atrocity. His work makes clear the strong bond between the sensorial and nostalgia in the idea of *deja entendu*. This does not mean however, that we cannot make time for grief. Mourning is an essential step for gathering the strength for fighting for a different path. It is the metabolization of sorrow in the world, of bringing it into the body; a form of corporeal generosity. Numbness to atrocity is an extension of oppression. It pretends that there is the ability to separate the experience of one person from any other living organism. The danger is in (dis)orientation too falling prey to cycles of violence. It must be both an elegy and an intervention. It must embody landrace practices, to take a permacultural approach towards the radical care of the bodylandscape. To work with corporeal generosity for the hyper local and the global, with the understanding that they are inextricably entangled. Film has the power to uphold cultivated mythologies, but it can also work to dismantle them. It is important to investigate its past to source clues for how to enact its future. Including questioning the assumption ingrained in Deleuze's 'affection-image,' that "only humans are capable of telling stories," as an ontological tool for the "silencing of nonhuman voices," (Ghosh, 2021, p. 201). To return to a research question that began this investigation: since Hollywood practices a monocultural approach, how can film be utilized inversely as a medium to perform permaculture? Let's explore models of counter-practice, as a base to establish a framework for feral filmmaking; a cinematic re-wilding.

The Essay Film and Third Cinema as Apparatus for (Re)Narration

The cinematic shifting time-space provides an opportunity to employ the (dis)orientation of queer phenomenology outlined by Ahmed in Chapter 2, as a means to shift understanding of place and positionality. Feral filmmaking must reside in this dissonance, to give space to the discomfort of residing in spaces monoculture trains to avoid. It must strive for the (dis)orientation of gatekeeping. It must encounter and perform liminal space because it understands that in human-made, as well as in nature, ecotones, “boundaries don’t hold; times, places, beings bleed through one another,” (Barad, 2014, p. 179). The documentary essay film engages in this practice.

The documentary essay film, conceived of in exile, offers a practice for the tentacular that is usually guided via a narrator. In 1940, Hans Richter was hiding in Basel, about to be deported back to Germany. He wrote of, “a new genre of film that enables the filmmaker to make the ‘invisible’ world of thoughts and ideas visible on the screen. Unlike the documentary film that presents facts and information, the essay film produces complex thought— reflections that are not necessarily bound to reality, but can also be contradictory, irrational, and fantastic,” (Biemann, 2003, p. 13). This allows an exploration of, “history and memory [which] are necessarily incomplete and full of gaps, lapses, and absences,” meaning that this is a methodology that in embracing both the objective and subjective, can break the barrier and enter into the parallax gap, (Biemann, 2003, p. 20). The essay film works in collage and assembly, crossing, reconsidering, and resituating disciplines, places, and borders. It allows space for the impossible image and the entangled stories, voices, and gazes, of the void. “It is the voice-over narration that ties the pieces together in a string of reflections that follow a subjective logic. The narration in the essay, the authorial voice, is clearly situated in that it acknowledges a very personal view...and this distinguishes it from a documentarian voice or a scientific [or academic] voice,” (Biemann, 2003, p. 83). It is the work of the exile, the outcast, and the disappeared, it is a methodology for reintroducing marginalized voices, stories, and makers back into discourse; a rewriting of the canon. As film can traverse time, it can work similarly to convey multiplicities of stories told. Anna Tsing Lowenhaupt writes, “it is in [deep] listening to that cacophony of troubled stories that we might encounter our best hopes for precarious survival.” (Tsing, 2015, p. 37). But more than that, “It is empathy that makes it possible for humans to understand each other’s stories: this is why storytelling needs to be at the core of a global politics of vitality,” (Ghosh, 2021, p. 240). To revisit Donna Haraway’s tentacular threading of stories, as each tentacle resembles

the next and works together in tandem, there is no hierarchical differentiation between oral and written stories, or between the stories of the archive and the stories hidden in the margins of ledgers. They lean on each other and make space for the void. They can be embodied by narration.



[film still - Biemann, U. (1999) *Performing the Border*. Image used with permission from the director]

In her film, *Performing the Border*, Ursula Biemann, examines the embodiment of borders, through a performative approach, and depictions of landscape. She writes, “these particular bodies that cross the border are racialized and gendered, nationalized and economic, the border becomes not a neutral construct in the process but one that is marked by these very relations...The body doesn’t become the carrier of narration or history, but actively constructs borders, traces geographies and performs transnational principles. It is always

doing something extra to what it is saying,” (2003, p. 86). I am reminded again of the words of Anzaldúa, as she describes the border as an ‘open wound,’ (2022, p.13). I am reminded of the duality of the void in the earth from Ana Mendieta’s body, alongside an image of wildflowers growing from it. In Biemann’s film, imagery and sound are dissonant and jarring, opening the border to discursive readings missing from journalistic and traditional documentary portrayals. She expands on this idea, “When we once thought of borders as unmovable political boundaries that will change their meaning only through pacts or military interventions, performativity allows us to envision them in a radically different way,” (2003, p. 89). Her voice is the narration that ties the voices and bodies of the border, landscapes, and poetics together, allowing the work to function on a transnational level, as well as to shift the aperture of visibility, and therein perhaps notions of border itself. However, she undertakes this as a form of ‘fieldwork,’ an archeological term that conveys her positionality as an outsider, a term that objectifies, even if her intent is to dismantle liminal and violent spaces. In this it becomes a portrayal of otherness, and could be more effective if she connected more to this struggle with something deeper than grief, which is important to spark care, but must be attended to delicately and with depth so as to not emphasize difference. There is much to consider when one voice is used to speak for others.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because, as copyright ownership could not be determined, the material cannot in good conscience be included. The image shows segments of filmstrips. They appear to document Newsreel material shot in situ. One of miners, and the other of combatants running through jungle. The image was sourced from Sin Frontera, Cinema Archive Online.
<https://ufsinfronteradotcom.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/tercer-cine-getino-solonas-19691.pdf>

[Newsreel film frames from Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, *Toward a Third Cinema* manifesto (1969).]

As Travis Wilkerson introduced me to film practice, agitprop, and the essay film, I also learned the knowledge handed down to him. In particular, the ethos of Third Cinema: a form of guerrilla filmmaking wherein urgent work is made collectively and at a modest scale. In the late ‘90s, in Havana, Travis was taken under the wing of the Cuban film director, Santiago Alvarez, whose body of work is documentary essay film that depends heavily on found

footage, and Newsreels which are short, rapid films providing urgent exposure of events and injustice. As outlined in Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's *Towards a Third Cinema*, "Each member of the group should be familiar, at least in a general way, with the equipment being used: he must be prepared to replace another in any of the phases of production. The myth of irreplaceable technicians must be exploded" (1969, p. 127). Much of Alvarez's work from just after the Cuban Missile Crisis, depicts impossible images: the civil rights movement, the war in Vietnam from the Vietnamese perspective, and dictatorship and foreign imperialism in the global south. The embargo of Cuban goods in the US, included this work. Travis documents this time in his film, *Accelerated Underdevelopment* (2001), including segments of the films as found footage, and includes Alvarez's insistence to work with what's available, "Give me two photographs, a moviola and some music, and I'll make you a film." Film is not usually described as a medium suitable for modest means, necessitating extravagant cameras, and large crews, preventing the dissemination of non-elitist point of view. As stated in Julio García Espinosa's manifesto on the form, it is a movement of "Imperfect Cinema," which embraces the faceting traits of the wild crystal-image. "It can be created equally well with a Mitchell or with an 8mm camera, in a studio or in a guerrilla camp in the middle of the jungle. Imperfect cinema is no longer interested in predetermined taste, and much less in 'good taste.' It is not quality which it seeks in an artist's work. The only thing it is interested in is how an artist responds to the following question: What are you doing in order to overcome the barrier of the 'cultured' elite audience which up to now has conditioned the form of your work?," (Espinosa, 1979). As Travis's film screened internationally, so did Alvarez's. This body of work was no longer excluded from the international canon and US viewing. Years later, Travis and I would create our own site for newsreels to honor this history, and continue this tradition called, *NOW Journal*. This reexamination of found footage, posited within this methodology that opens the process of filmmaking to all who wish to engage in Espinosa's ask, attends to performing borders across scales and by removing elitist barriers, also disappears the treachery of objectification. It offers, "a culture of subversion which will carry with it an art, a science, and a cinema of subversion," (Solanas and Getino, 1969, p. 115). It is a revolutionary practice.



[film still from Travis Wilkerson's *Accelerated Under-Development: in the idiom of Santiago Alvarez* (2001), excerpt from Alvarez, S. (1965), *NOW*. Permission to reproduce image granted by the director]

Film and Exploring Reciprocity with Nature

There is also a tradition of film as a means to investigate nature. This can fall into the classical and treacherous dichotomies of man vs nature and the 'fieldwork' of man vs man, or it can work as intra-action by promoting reciprocity and sympoiesis. Much like in tracing the movement of the orange in the beginning of this chapter, much can be learned by tracking the movement and spread of species, the invasive, the benevolent, and the indigenous. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing writes, "when humble commodities are allowed to illuminate big histories, the world economy is revealed as emerging within historical conjectures: the indeterminacies of encounter." She encourages "acts of noticing" to undermine hegemony and spark re-understanding. (2015, p. 118). This is evident in the work of filmmaker Ja'Tovia Gary, who expanded her practice in essay film from beyond the screen, to installation. *As you yield her your body and your soul* (2022), is an object-oriented and critical autoethnographic work on, and of, cotton. If Syjuco works in white manhandling, Gary engages in reclaiming her ancestry through the bound hands of the enslaved. Triangulated panels, covered in thousands of cotton balls, are projected onto, with her personal found footage, her old family home movies. She connects her personal family

archive, their generational trauma of forced labor as slaves on cotton plantations, and the historical and present abuses to the black womb, to the material itself. The creation of this work also introduced her to another history, further back, in West Africa, of cotton being used in spiritual cleansing rituals, a discovery that tied her back to the homeland her people were forcefully displaced from, and reintroduced a sacred and celebratory dimension to the object itself. The pyramid is occupiable, the interior holds hanging flowers. It is performative work on irreversible loss, but most importantly, her piece shows that the instigation of materiality as a form of storytelling, can function as a healing act. (Llornes, 2022).

Left Image: The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material of Ja'Tovia Gary and Galerie Frank Elbaz. It shows an image of a portion of the installation, an occupiable pyramid covered in cotton balls being projected on with video. The images were sourced from artists Instagram.

https://www.instagram.com/j_____g_____/p/Cev7IJdLdRv/?img_index=8

Right Image: The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is the copyrighted material of Ja'Tovia Gary and Galerie Frank Elbaz. It shows an image of a portion of the installation, a close up of the cotton ball exterior being projected on with video. The images were sourced from artists Instagram.

https://www.instagram.com/j_____g_____/p/Cev7IJdLdRv/?img_index=8

[artists photographs of installation - Gary, J. (2022) *As you yield her your body and your soul*]

As work in illuminating big histories, in *Nuclear Family*, I show photographs of prairie plants, samples I collected in the landscapes of the missile silos. Each plant is named with its common English regional name, its Latin name, and then labeled as native, or invasive to describe displacement. I wish I had sourced the names used by the indigenous tribes in the region, rather than engaging in 'universalist' tropes. There is much to learn about a plant, in how it is called by those who know it best. It was a mistake to not investigate this as it recapitulated the problematics of colonial botanical prints that began proliferating in the 16th century. A mistake which has sparked questions about how to approach them in future work.

Feral filmmaking, in striving for imperfection, as well as aiming to reconnect humans with the natural world, must engage with the experimental. This provides entrance into working with

botanicals in ways that do not overlook their wisdom. Experimental film has a precedence of playing with duration to instigate a meditative curiosity. Curator Enrico Camporesi references the experimental filmmaker, Stan Brakhage's "Mothlight" (1963) which is composed of ethereal moth parts, petals, and leaves taped to clear leader. The film runs at the industry standard, at 24 frames per second, so the images flutter by quickly, becoming an abstraction of the biological material they hold. Camporesi's writing is focused on Rose Lowder. Both work in the experimental tradition of focusing frame by frame, rather than shot by shot. Her "Bouquet" films (1994-present), pay homage to the garden by weaving between static landscapes of the French countryside, and frantic botanical moments. By rapidly moving between wide shots of landscapes and close ups of botanicals and insects, she creates temporal jumps, visual vibrato which produce conflation of both place as well as human and more-than-human timescales. Rather than residing in the more typical meditations on the garden as metaphor for fertility or mortality, the work depicts the experience of moving within the landscape, a *dérive* dedicated to the effects of non-traditional engagement with place. When asked about her relationship with the environment in an interview with Sylvia Segura for Loud Spring Collective, Lowder responded: "The subject matter is ecological, I film in situations, where people are working properly. Whether it's Guérande salt farmers or organic farms, the aim is to draw attention to things that are going in the right direction." As the full series began in 1994, it is a visual iteration of the posthumanist discourse that was tangentially emerging in critical theory of sympoiesis and intra-action, agitations for a shift from human-centered thinking, towards a veneration for a dynamic multiplicity of species. Lowder's work invites (re)consideration of the natural world, and perhaps even our responsibility as part of it. The word bouquet is an interesting choice, as it implies a gift or an arrangement for ceremony, but also, unlike a floral arrangement, it is without vase; it is missing the vessel to hold it. She also experiments with techniques to introduce color and geometric color blocking over the frames. By applying techniques from Bradford or Kaphar, there is opportunity to introduce additional narration or narrative, or other kinds of footage and documentation. In this intersection lies the potential to take her work further by inserting more trajectories into the landscape which could provoke a shift from catalog, to anti-colonial apparatus. It is important to celebrate 'going in the right direction,' while also leaving space for inquiry into other places of creative provocation.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is copyrighted material from the Estate of Stan Brakhage. The image shows strips of film from the Brakhage, S. film, "Mothlight," where the living materials attached to the strips are visible: leaves, flower petals, moth wings, seed pods, flower stamens. The image was sourced

from "BOMB Magazine" Online.

<https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2017/09/22/metaphors-on-vision/>

[selected film leader - Brakhage, S. (1963) *Mothlight*]



[selected film leader - Lowder, R. (1994-5) *Bouquet*. Permission to reproduce image granted by Rose Lowder and Lightcone]

As diffraction opens dichotomies by working in the cinematic properties of duration and momentum, as well as place, the impossible can be depicted more dynamically than is conceivable with image or story alone. In Lydia Moyer's *The Forcing no. 2* (2015), made in response to the police murder of a black man named Michael Brown, images of a flower garden play with the non-diegetic sounds of police attacking protestors, the violence is transported from the streets and into the garden, and then sounds of the garden with a sweet song inserted onto video of the police, expand on the bizarre nature of violence. It shows that elements of the Kuleshov Effect can also be experienced through the use of shifting sound. The same sky viewed with ominous music produces a different experience than the same sky with serene, or triumphal music. In Moyer's film the screen becomes performative and the work shifts from an assemblage of a dichotomy, to the (dis)oriented intra-action of the two, producing the understanding that as long as police violence remains unhindered, it will always be part of the garden. Deleuze's cultivated crystal-image would assume the future to remain as such. Instead, Moyer creates a dueling leitmotif where the

illusion of the ability of the oppressor or oppressed to separate themselves from systemic violence is dismantled. Much like Bradford's sequencing of history through peeling back layers, but with the action unfolding both human time while also referencing nature's time scale. Moyer conveys a response-ability. It is interesting to ponder if the further introduction of other time-scales could magnify this dissonance, and perhaps expand upon the provocation. The brain connecting seemingly disparate images through the imposition of duration, is known as the persistence of vision, and as such, her film is an apparatus for diffraction. It is a powerful and scalable tool.



[stills side by side from Moyer, L. *The Forcing no. 2* (2015). Permission to reproduce images granted by the director]

But how can feral filmmaking be utilized as a method for deep research of place without imposing human-centered mythologies of land and the more than human? Because of the extent of colonization not just as a cultural phenomenon, but an internalized one as well, to attend to the systematic severing of trust in the subjective, this work must be done alongside Deep Listening practices as a means to decolonize both thought and approach. As introduced in Chapter 2, it is a means for embodied practice, active work that must be experienced through movement and wandering led by the senses. It is focused on the experience itself rather than destination or arrival. It is also work in paying close attention to the thoughts, memories, and discomforts that emerge, and to sit with why. As such, it is led by an internal and intuitive cartography, not maps or apparatuses, a cartography meant to dismantle borders, rather than uphold them, facilitating engagement with more-than-human collective culture and modes of reciprocity. Each Deep Listening practice concludes with a free writing session to notate what came up in the process for future reference. It is a means to re-wild. It is essential for feral research and practice.

Deep Listening is the methodological tool for the full triangulation of theoretical practices outlined by Sullivan. It builds off the contextual practices traditionally associated with academia, as an experiential theoretical practice by engaging with the encounters of the dialectical and the exercises and interactions of the conceptual. It transitions academic research from a monocultural approach, where each department is a distinct field, towards permaculture by allowing fields, approaches, and knowledge (un)making to entangle. As such, practice-led research is a holistic approach, as a means to reunify the fissures created by false dichotomies, and Deep Listening works as an effective methodology towards reunification. The next chapter will offer more insight on how to approach this. For now, let's examine films that have embraced forms of ferality.

In *Nuclear Family*, my investigation of the botanical invasion of the prairie is a side narrative in the film. There have been a few narrative films since focused on women dedicated to the intensive study of plants or the natural world, a relinking of human and nature. *Enys Men* (Jenkin, 2022), is an interesting example, as flowers begin to control people. It is a depiction of botanical sentience, and if placed along research on Gaia Theory and the Noosphere, it becomes work in critical fabulation in that it is based on theory, but utilizes speculative fiction as apparatus for portraying beyond-human knowledge. In this instance, it tells the story of a woman, isolated on an island, studying a flower, she begins to notice the flowers reaching towards her body, sounding for her. Then, lichen, the sympoietic linking of plant and mycelium, which usually grow on rock and bark, curiously growing on the flowers, then on the scars of a wound on her own flesh. Large stones that were once still in the landscape,

become covered in lichen and come to visit at her front door, a movement not perceived in nature save for rare accident. Bodies begin appearing at sea. Lichen takes over the island. The flowers disappear. Dominant science would name these as impossible images, though there is a hypothetical liminal space where they are so much more.

The film still originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is copyrighted material from the British Film Institute. It shows a woman in a red coat kneeling down to closely inspect flowers, on a rocky cliff. The image was sourced from the film itself.

[still from *Enys Men* (2022) by Mark Jenkin. Distributed by BFI.]

The film tells of the woman's descent into madness, or a portrayal of her trauma, perhaps both. Bodies appear around her in synchronized dance and song. She has a visitor who asks how she is doing living alone, she responds, "I am not alone," it is clear she means the lichen, and the rocks, perhaps also her memories and dreams as well. This is just one of many depictions of women as living in nature as solitary. *Geographies of Solitude* (2022) and *Trenque Lauquen* (2022), echo this device, wherein for a woman to reconnect with nature, she must distance herself from society and the social. But this distance is imposed by whom? This relates to the pejorative semantic shift of "gossip"... "in the meaning of the word from its positive connotation of female friendship to the negative one that refers to malignant speech, alongside the parallel degradation of the social position of women spearheaded by the witch hunt," (Federici, 2018, p. 2). As a tool for dividing women from each other, to prevent organized descent, as they were also divided from the land.

In the film, the dissonance of movement and time are reminiscent of Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), which also features a mysterious white flower. The film also utilizes arret, the in-camera technique of removing or inserting objects into a scene, with a jarring result. And reverse cuts, a disorienting technique that intentionally breaks the 180 degree rule, a guideline for maintaining the perspective of the main character, an invisible line where in the view can alternate between the character's expressions, and then back out to see what she is seeing to reinforce her embodied perspective. Both films depict the main character watching herself from afar, much like an out of body experience, and repetition of events occurring differently in each repetition. She is both observer and observed, a confusion of subjective states. Both films have characters appear, seeming to be spirits, in one, a body cloaked in black with a mirror for a face, the other, groups of women and

children that sing and move in unison but remain unseen by the main character, which is also reminiscent of Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975).

The film still originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is copyrighted material from the Maya Deren Estate. It shows a figure fully cloaked in black. In place of a face is a mirror. She holds a large white flower in her hand. The image was sourced from the film itself.

[still from *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943)]

The film still originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is copyrighted material from the British Film Institute. It shows a woman in a red coat laid out sleeping/unconscious on a rocky cliff, standing above her are a group of women in matching old fashioned maids clothing, all with hands clasped together. The image was sourced from the film itself.

[still from *Enys Man* (2022)]

The results are a dissonant dream space, simultaneous pasts, presents, and futures. Another convergence between *Enys Man* and Deren, is seen in, *At Land* (1944), where much like in the work of Claude Cahun and Remidios Varo, rocks have the power of transmutation. In *Enys Man*, large boulders move, and even come knock on her door. In *At Land*, they must be climbed as a portal to a dinner party where the woman crawls across a dinner table unnoticed by the masses of people sitting around it. Both convey an animism of rock, *Enys Man*, portrays this as closer to kinship, though without understanding the beauty of this, the main character responds fearfully. The results are unnerving, disorienting; a diffraction. But the film refuses to clarify itself as what it intends to reorient towards.

The film still originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is copyrighted material from the Maya Deren Estate. It shows a woman climbing a rocky cliff,

pulling herself up from the remains of a dead tree. The image was sourced from the film itself.

[still from - Deren, M. (1944) *At Land*]

Film has the ability to inhabit and wander through other bodylandscapes, even if it is for a brief time, with the understanding that Earth too is a body. The Earth too has stories, and humans reside inside a tiny tentacle, surrounded by so many more. Much like how species thrive in ecotones, stories are all the richer when told as sympoiesis.

Critical Fabulation as a Means for Giving Voice: Madi Diop's Comparative Approach to Narrative

As a counter to the erasure of monocultural practices, feral filmmaking must attend to the intentional gaps that are rampant in the monocultural archive and the canon, the gaps from where the weeds have been pulled, the sites of redaction. To address this, feral filmmaking further expands on Third Cinema, by practicing Saidiya Hartman's critical fabulation. It refuses to retell the oppressors' stories in the oppressors' words. To attend to other ancestors, there is an ethical imperative to engage in fictional narrative. Fiction diffracts this cycle of erasure.

Hartman writes, "the necessity of trying to represent what we cannot, rather than leading to pessimism or despair, must be embraced as the impossibility that conditions our knowledge of the past and animates our desire for a liberated future... [We must] engage a set of dilemmas about representation, violence, and social death, not by using the form of a metahistorical discourse, but by performing the limits of writing history through the act of narration," (Hartman, 2008, p.13). This can be read in two senses, one as the narrative, or a critical autotheoretical voice, the voice of the essay film. Second, as related to narrative structure, which is often character driven, achievable in either fiction or nonfiction, though not necessitating linearity, follows exposition where in characters and place are introduced, rising action usually depicted as conflict or tension, climax often wherein a choice must be made, and some form of resolution. Whereas with speculative fiction, wherein stories reach beyond the real world as metaphor for truths, critical fabulation reaches to fill in the gaps in the archive itself, working with and working beyond the imposed limits of the archive.

Opening its trajectories. It is a methodology for engaging with the impossible image, for stories intentionally hidden. “If we recognize... that secular concepts of the human have been figured—and disfigured—through metaphor and other tropes, then we might agree that redefining humanism requires an effort to identify and then reformulate the systems of rhetorical figuration that structure our dominant metaphors,” which extend into genre as a categorization of metaphorical typologies (Franke et al, 2022, p. 82). Though when taking on anti-colonial work, the remediation of hundreds of years of brute violence, resolution is not a neat and tidy conclusion where all is solved. The work does not end here, it cannot be predetermined, and it is not a cure. Resolution takes the form of determination to move forward with continued urgency.

Travis and I explored hybrid documentary when we made *Machine Gun or Typewriter* (2015). We filmed tentacular hidden histories in Los Angeles held together, the body being, a narrative love story we loosely based on ourselves, agit-prop inspired by Santiago Alvarez, and the city’s history of noir, a genre that emerged out of the desperation of the Great Depression and functions like an urban western. Noir is/was intended as social critique. “Some principal noir auteurs, like Chandler, went little further than generalized petty-bourgeois resentment against the collapse of the Southern California dream, most claimed Popular Front sympathies... [only a few] like Welles and Dmytryk, alluded to the repressed reality of class struggle,” (Davis, 2006, p. 32). It is a city built on stolen water, and mass land speculation, which refers to the extreme cost of land in the area. Land that in its privatization, was stolen from local tribes. “Unlike other American cities that maximized their comparative advantages as crossroads, capitals, seaports, or manufacturing centers, Los Angeles was first and above all the creature of real-estate capitalism: the culminating speculation, in fact, of the generations of boosters and promoters who had subdivided and sold the West,” (Davis, 2006, p. 36). Travis and I also based the film on our own romance, the black dahlias he gave me on our second date, our late night visit to the old zoo when we walked with a pack of coyotes, our ride on Angel’s Flight which now sits a block from its initial location to make space for banking high rises under the pretense of demolishing slums. The film visits a disheveled Jewish cemetery wherein the poverty of the shtetl remains with those buried in a neighborhood that is now predominantly latino, a massacre of Chinese immigrants in the old Chinatown which is now the cite of the Union Station, the bombing of the LA Times building in relation to union busting, which has moved twice since. The amnesia around the history of Los Angeles is partially due to its own tendency to cover, and recover, evidence. We interlaced the early roots of the city, and what was happening then, with live footage of an arrest in the culmination of Occupy Los Angeles. I made a map of these locations, leading back to our house, they trace both tentacles of place and

tentacles of story. Both personal and political. It felt pressing to revisit this the potential for genre and the narrative to open up space for uncomfortable histories, to attend to the cultural siphoning of the subjective, and as an exploration of embodied radical generosity. Critical fabulation opened space for this.



[Wilkerson, T. and Wilkerson, E. (2015) *Machine Gun or Typewriter*]

The effects of each sense of narrative voice can be further gauged through the work of French-Senegalese filmmaker, Madi Diop who created two versions of her film *Atlantiques*. The first is a 2009 short essay film which depicts interviews of survivors in Dakar, of a failed raft migration to Europe, which claimed the lives of their friends. It is a generation lost to sea. The sea, in turn, a pharmakon, in the Derridian sense, wherein a sea of bodies takes on a new meaning, but it is also a hope for future that can not be created back home. Both scenarios of exile. The story is told by the survivors and their loved ones, but also through the narrative voice, projected on screen as text via intertitles. The most haunting moment is when the camera rests on the faces of women, quiet and still. Diop does not clarify who these women are, she does not tell their stories beyond the deep sorrow in their faces. She does not clarify their lack of voice. Then there is the impossible image, the stories and faces of the boys lost at sea, punished, much like the women full of sorrow, in perpetuity for their journey towards asylum and a better life, unsanctioned by European law. The film becomes

a work of counter-archive, as these stories and bodies are excluded from Europe and its discourse.

The film still originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is copyrighted material of Mati Diop. It shows a woman in Dakar, leaning against a tree, a closeup of her face. Her head is tilted, her eyes full of grief. The image was sourced from the film itself.

[still from *Atlantiques* 2009]]

The second version, from 2019, is feature length, and expands the original documentary into a genre film. A work of critical fabulation. It follows the advice of Hartman into the second sense of narration, coupled with her, “[intent] to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling... [through] speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities), in fashioning a narrative, which is based upon archival research, and by that I mean a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history,” (Hartman, 2008, p.11). In the second *Atlantiques*, critical fabulation gives voice to the women of sorrow and the dead, from the short film. It asks the impossible unspoken question of the women in the first film, for them to explain the centuries of oppression that are embodied in the deaths of their loved ones. This is accomplished, through employing a classical horror film genre, so as to not reenact these horrors on the victims by having them recount such atrocities. The women are turned into zombies at night so they can embody the ghosts of their lost boys, with no memory in the daylight of these ghostly encounters or their nightlong walking the streets of Dakar. It is a fascinating choice, as Diop could have gone the conventional route, to go back and interview the original women now that there has been some distance from this tragedy. When asked about this shift in a 2020 interview, she said, “I wanted the film to give a place for these spirits to find refuge; to ask for justice; to get the money they’re owed; to make love to their lover one last time...It’s essential for film and literature to make the oppressed not only visible, but truly embodied,” (Freeman, 2020). Diop offers visibility to centuries of erasure, and in this, the beginnings of healing troubled histories, and in this expansion presents a wilded crystal-image. And in this work with the dead, it enters into what is perhaps the most taboo liminal space of all.

The film still originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is copyrighted material of Mati Diop and Netflix. It shows a woman in Dakar, walking in the sand, near the sea. Her head is tilted and her eyes look out to the water. The image was sourced from <https://www.rogerebert.com/interviews/a-language-possessed-and-reconquered-mati-diop-on-atlantics>

[still from *Atlantiques* feature (2019)]

The films, particularly when viewed together, become a hybrid documentary, weaving documentary and critical fabulation achieved through genre. Much like in Third Cinema, the actors are all from there, same as the characters they play. The poverty of that place, another form of ghost, from generations of colonial plunder, is felt through the screen. The language shifts between French and Wolof, the old tongue, from before invasion. Diop expands on reconnecting with these ghosts, during her return to Thiaroye, a fishing village in the outskirts of Dakar, after growing up in Paris. Also a setting for the work of her uncle, filmmaker Djibril Diop Mambety, it was first settled by African soldiers who fought for the French Free army in WWII. On the night of 30 November 1944, following protest for pay equal to the white soldiers, hundreds were massacred by French officers. Before that, for three centuries, off the coast, Goreé island, once held enslaved bodies before they were shipped to America. It was the closest those generations ever came to home again. (Freeman, 2020). Though those stories are not told explicitly in the films, the inherited colonial trauma is tangible. It is a view into a world accustomed to living with ghosts, and the embodied communion with them, an honoring of tremendous loss. It is, just as Hartman describes in her own work, “a history written with and against the [western] archive,” (Hartman, 2008, p.12). For Diop, who was born and raised in Paris, her voyage to Senegal, and body of work created there, is a (dis)orientation in and of itself. It is both a search for home, but also for the markers of her separation from it.

Feral filmmaking expands on the performative (re)bordering of the essay film, the revolutionary equality of Third Cinema, the reciprocity of nature from experimental cinema, the intuitive decolonization of Deep Listening, and the bursting open of the archive from critical fabulation. “To address the past (and future), to speak with ghosts is not to entertain or reconstruct some narrative of the way it was, but to respond, to be responsible, to take responsibility for that which we inherit (from the past and the future),” (Barad, 2014, p. 183). Just as the oppressor and the oppressed are inherently bonded, so is past and future, and

therein, the world of the living and the world of ghosts, not as opposing dichotomies, but as phenomena existing simultaneously. Therefore, feral filmmaking is also a haunting. It is in embodying this haunted form of interference that film can shift momentum, thereby becoming a diffraction in and of itself. The 'Now' is of course so much more than what can reside in screen space, but by working through active-ism to diffract our idea of it, and our idea of how we arrived at it, then perhaps we can re-imagine our future momentum as well.

The next chapter documents the applied practice of feral filmmaking, and as it intends to function as a weed, it is also instruction for how to disperse this contribution to knowledge as widely as possible. For I wish it to work like common plantain: naturalized and benevolent. To be full of the kind of hope that may not begin to fruit until after I am gone. To encourage writing in blood, but also leaving out blankets to catch those who fall.. This will be outlined through exploring the process of making the critical fabulation film, *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)*, with the intent that to show that this model can be utilized by anyone wishing to work in resistance, and in enough detail that it can be easily reproduced anywhere in need of giving voice to spirits and the marginalized. The aim is to diffract ontology towards a permacultural model, to act as interference wherein these ideas can be understood with clarity, not as a mythology, but as essential knowledge. Even if culture is not prepared to commit to this way of being, this work will provide a model of active-ism, one that questions what kind of world we wish for.

Chapter 5 - Feral Filmmaking: Cinematic Explorations in Reciprocity

Ours is not the task of fixing
the entire world all at once,
but of stretching out to mend
the part of the world
that is within our reach.

- Clarissa Pinkola Estes

“Shall I speak of spells and love-potions too, poisons brewed, and stepsons murdered?...Greed is usually the root of the crime: no fault of the human mind causes more poison to be mixed, or a more frequent rampaging about with a blade than the uncontrolled desire for extravagant wealth.”

- Juvenal, *The Satires*

As outlined in the last chapter, feral filmmaking is a means to subvert erasure and bear witness, to address internalized colonialism, and make space for the marginalized. It is a mode for Haraway’s response-ability, and therein a form of active-ism. It is a cinematic approach to diffraction as outlined by Trinh T. Minh-ha, Karen Barad, and the divergent reading of Deleuze’s crystal-image through a wilded lens, as guidance for how to have it function like a weed, to ensure stubborn and tenacious dispersal. This chapter will provide more instruction of how to engage with this methodology, as a process and a practice. It will further explain the steps, as well as describe the application of feral filmmaking to the practical outcome, as a testing of the theorem. In this case the film, *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)*. I will outline how to approach the three main phases of film production: development, shooting, and editing through a wilding process, which is intentionally contrary to the Hollywood model. As it is work in engaging with multiplicities, each phase meanders back and forth as research and practice, as knowing and making, as making work and building community, as the personal and the political. Even when seemingly less visible, all are always present.

Applying the Feral Filmmaking Methodology

Alongside the initial base research on place which is done through the archive and the canon, Deep Listening is the first practice to be undertaken in the methodology of feral filmmaking, but it is also to be revisited as needed. Exploration of these exercises should be completed to facilitate the shift from each phase of filmmaking to the next, as well as a tool

for transition between academic writing and filmmaking, as a means for navigating personal positionality within the theoretical and aid an openness to global stories and reconsideration of ontologies, to move between the object and subjective; active transmutations. This acknowledges the limitations of human knowledge, and human assumptions regarding the knowledge capabilities of more-than-human species. It is work in attunement with the more-than-human.

For reference, my full Deep Listening encounters are documented in the portfolio segment of this thesis, with segments quoted within this text and distinguished by an italicized and serifed font. The process will also be further illustrated through the account of making the feral film, *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)*.

Feral filmmaking begins with bodies engaging with place. A practice that is first done without cinematic apparatuses. Cinematic documentation begins only after a connection has been made with place, and of course, as work in social practice, people. Unless an urgent event arises that necessitates the immediate documentation of the Newsreel, only after crossing thresholds through Deep Listening are apparatuses introduced. The camera becomes an extension of intuitive wandering, as a means to subvert its history as a tool for objectification. As stated by Solanas and Getino, pioneers of Third Cinema, it must be a mobile practice, and to accomplish this, gear must be affordable, compact, light, and easy to carry. It must utilize modest equipment, as a true universalizing gesture, one that bursts open the class barriers of the Hollywood model. And with the understanding that modest equipment absolutely can be used to create work that is professional, aesthetic, and cinematic. And to subvert knowledge division, each practitioner should be able to expertly complete all phases of film production to facilitate quick dispersal from remote locations. It understands that the Hollywood mythology of necessitating elitist tools, is a tactic to hold on to their domination and uphold their hierarchical supremacy. (1969, p. 127).

There is never a shot list as this marks predetermined targets, rather a list of places of interest based on the initial wanders and research. Place plays itself and is expanded through the wilded faceted crystal-image to include multiplicities of past and future trajectories. Actors are chosen based on their connection to place and personal relationships to the subject. They are active participants in character and development. As an inversion of the Hollywood model, place, story, history, and character emerge through this practice, and only after practicing Deep Listening without apparatuses. The written word does not dictate the form, neither does the camera, as this would be a premeditated bordering and debilitating act. In fact, the script emerges last, built on what emerges from the intuitive

practices and community building undertaken throughout this process. The work becomes a dynamism of entangled multiplicities.

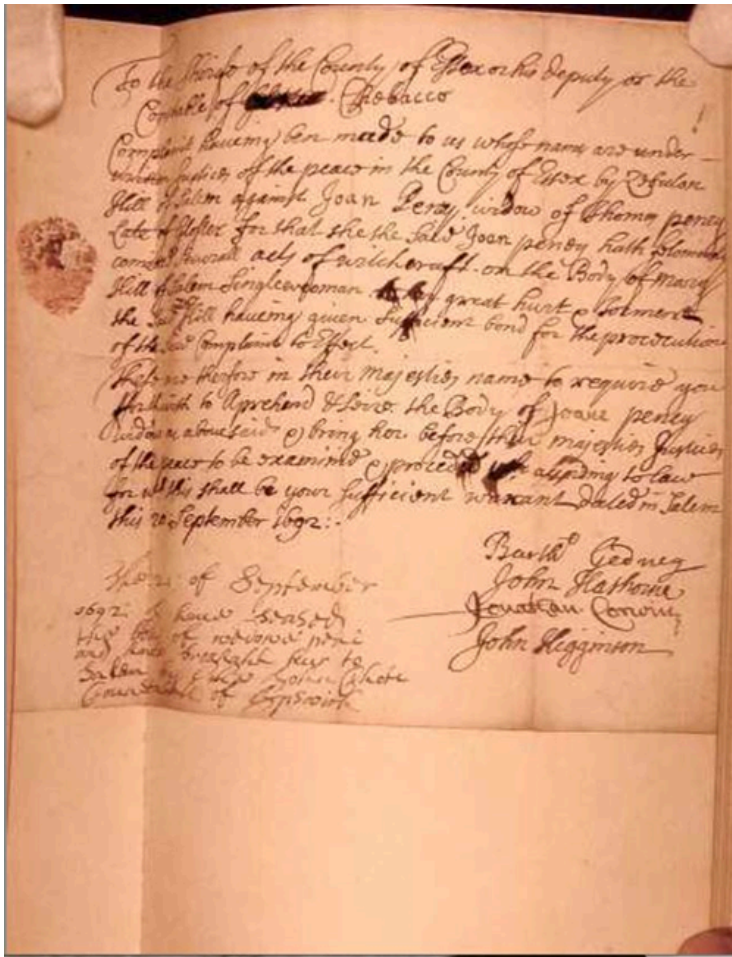
Feral filmmaking recognizes that teaching and learning all modes of film production is an achievable and highly subversive act. As outlined in *Towards a Third Cinema*, to facilitate collective practice, each person should be trained to take on any role as needed.

Filmmakers too must support each other in making work as well as a collective base. This is particularly important in the editing process, when the film is nearly complete, and fresh eyes are required to attend to the final finishing details. This is also a true universalizing gesture as it eliminates hierarchies and the siphoning of knowledge, but also means work can be made without reliance on grants and funding schemes that will only approve work that adheres to the origin stories they wish to proliferate. (Solanas and Getino, 1969, p. 127)

As long as the dominant culture and form of cultivation is monoculture, which is based on imposed borders, it will remain a wild act to make space for the dynamism of the ecotone. Through the methodology of feral filmmaking research and practice become inseparable. They become whole, rather than dialectics. It is reproducible practice in microactive-isms that disperse like weeds. They may be small, but they also cannot be stopped.

Performing an Open Wound

A feral film must focus on a feral topic. It must mourn our distance from nature, and express the great loss that has accompanied this rupture as a form of interference. I have wanted to make a film on witches through Federici's framing for a few years as a means to diffract this history of naming women as occult monsters to displace them from the land, but also to offer it as a model for a return to reciprocity with Earth, as referencing the eulogy to the reversed mounds created by Ana Mendieta and in Galanin's bush burial. I wanted to depict the gathering of medicine in the wild, the sharing of medicine in the community as mutual aid. Much like there was an outpouring of colonizing fiction at the turn of the century, I wish my film, like Mati Diop's work, to move between documentary and critical fabulation, and to push for an anti-colonial future.



[record of the accusation of witchcraft against Joan Penny by Zebulon Hill dated 1692, In public domain as stipulated under Massachusetts Public Record Law, sourced from familysearch.com]

Let's begin with a personal archive, blood writing of my family offered as a parallel to the history of the settlement of the country itself, to diffract trajectories of colonization. It is just one story of many. The search for it began with family rumors that there was record of my ancestors who lived in Salem, Massachusetts during the witch trials there. A time that also coincided with expanding settlement. The invaders were fighting over land with the indigenous, but also amongst themselves. An era made infamous by *The Crucible*. It is from my family line that is traced back to the early ships registers that arrived in Plymouth, Massachusetts, and named in the Indian War papers. I imagined my matriarchal ancestors being threatened by pyre. And they were connected to this history, just not as I envisioned. I recently found documents of the accusation of my ancestor Zebulon Hill (born in 1653, Salem, Massachusetts) against his wife's step-mother, Joan Penny. His accusation of witchcraft led to her arrest. She escaped the pyre, but not the seizure of money trusted to her after the death of her husband.

It was a property dispute, won by fanatical claims. Another terrible inheritance, one that also aligns with larger histories.

Nearly ten years ago, I walked through the old graveyard in Salem, Massachusetts, near the old fishing warehouses. Some of the gravestones are so old that they are no longer legible. It has also been turned into a memorial for the witch trials. Much like in Sherman Indian School Cemetery, or the Big Hole Battlefield, the acknowledgement of the violence buried there was marked only after time had passed. The town center is a museum to this era that veers towards spectacle, with stores filled with packaged herbs and crystals and costumes of capes and pointy hats. The town capitalizes on terrible histories and perpetuates mythologies of these femicides as punishment for occult practices during a period of religious fervor, rather than to enforce land privatization and cultural domination in an era of rapid colonial expansion. It is a living museum of the violence of settlement turned on its own. And in informing this place as such, obscures the incredible loss of knowledge in working within reciprocity with nature, of building community through gossip, of being handed down the understanding of plant medicine, of being able to navigate between medicine and poison.

Speaking of witches in the Federician sense, is also about agitating for new forms of origin story to re-navigate the past, but also to inform coming actions. It is a reminder that we are entangled in relationships of reciprocity, as well as a reliance. It also acts as a reminder of what we stand to lose if we fail to shift to other ways of being. As this is work to attend to ghosts both human and more-than, it must argue for repatriation to the natural world, it must consider maternal time and Earth time, it must work in ceremony and ritual. Some cultures are better at sitting with their ghosts. For example, every year SouthEast Asia celebrates the Hungry Ghost Festival. Food is left out, both plates and offerings, a seat at the dinner table left empty, the first row of performance seats as well, all for troubled spirits. At the end of two weeks of hospitality to spirits, lanterns are lit at the sea and sent out over the water. It is said that the satiated spirits follow the flames out, where they remain until the next year's festival. It is a ritual of attending to liminal space, practiced as much for the living as for the dead.

Strange Flower (little sister to the poor), intends to wild by fragmenting colonial invasion and arguing for a paradigm shift of the human relationship to the natural world. It explores the impossible image by performing possible pasts, presents, and futures of the colonial trajectory. It is guided by earlier models that (dis)orient concepts of women and nature, as presented by Maya Deren, Claude Cahun, Lydia Moyer, and *Enys Men*. It is meant as a sequel to Laurie's *Conquest of the Moon* (1889), where the men are not just stuck on the moon, rather they are captured by her. It is an intentional action of a threatened celestial body meant to provide entrance into marginalized views of Earth and our relationship with

the more-than-human. The men have turned into monsters from extended exposure to the radiation in space and the ingestion of alchemical potions. They are the disfigured hands behind the Capitalocene, asserting their control from outer-space. It is the struggle between feminist alchemical ideologies dedicated to creating life and the colonial alchemies of extraction intent on creating wealth no matter the cost. Their extractions have long turned from the pursuit of gold, to a vengeance towards all life and collective culture. It is an origin story for a possible post-humanist world.

The film's protagonist is a witch, coming from the long Croatian history of working in plant medicine along the European border, who is a caretaker of Earth and Moon, tasked to ensure the colonial vengeance enacted by the alchemists does not go too far. It offers a mythological exploration of the Anthropocene, as well as for trajectories beyond it. However, as it is work in landrace, based in an actual place, regional histories emerge, moments of documentary embedded in the fictional story, which will be discussed later in this chapter. By engaging in forms of genre posited by Mati Diop, Third Cinema as a model for ethical universalization of practice, the shifting liminality of essay film, and the experimental application of the agential cut to montage, it too asks the viewer to navigate the distance between 'ghostly necropolitics' and 'other kinds of spirits,' as a diffraction in favor of intra-active ontology. With the aim to function as an interjection against the problematic tendencies of invasive species, and as a plea for different kinds of movement.

To begin, please watch the practice component of this thesis, my film, *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)*

Please pause reading to watch the film

Access link: <https://vimeo.com/903231491/26f0e4a267?share=copy>

[Please note that the link is for the research version of the film. For cinema version, please contact Erin Wilkerson, or Creative Agitation]

This process began with researching the land, its culture, and its cultivation. As discussed, this was meditated on while engaging in Deep Listening practices, but it was just as much about building friendships through openness: sharing life stories, sharing meals, sharing

work, caring for each others animals, and working through grief together. Another kind of essential listening. This is a holistic approach to researching place, it aims to work in naturalization, rather than extraction, working both with the archive, and making space for embodied research practices as well.

In referencing Silvia Federici's connection of imposed land privatization and the intentional destruction of reciprocity with Earth, enacted with extreme violence on both women and the land, it is important to investigate the trajectories of this specifically in Croatia. We must perform the critical interrogation of slices of global colonial histories undertaken in the early chapters of this text, repeating this preliminary research method toward understanding this specific place. Work to break with the archive, must still engage with it, even if it is to split open its gaps. We must consider migration naturalized, benevolent, and invasive, culture and cultivation, histories of taming and resistance, work in cultural preservation, and border walls of both concrete and cognitive. After which it is possible to plan how to document these tracings, and work towards making space for the marginalized and the hidden, to make space for new trajectories.

To begin, Croatia is a borderland, the transitional space between east and west, a long contested place with just as long a history of resistance. To abridge a complex history, Yugoslavia - the region of what is now named Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Bosnia - fell twice.

First to the invasion of Axis Powers in 1941 when it was overtaken by Mussolini and the Italian fascists who were expelled, then it was overtaken by the Nazis in partnership with the Ustaša, the Croatian fascists. Josip Broz Tito led the Partisan resistance to expel Nazi troops and defeat the Ustaša, in 1945-6, Yugoslavia was reborn and was expanded to include Istria and Dalmatia, the latter of which is the setting for the film. Tito led a drive for the nationalization of land, industry, and public utilities, and setting industrialization projects into motion, which meant migration to the cities. The "communist regime in Yugoslavia was therefore the product of a grass-root revolution, not imposed by the Soviet Union as in most East European countries," (Uvalic, 2018, p. 3). In fact there was a schism between the two.

And the second fall, as a tangent to cold war tensions and backed by NATO and fueled by nationalist differing of ethnically diverse populations that had "centuries of communal coexistence and intermarriage," on June 25, 1991, when Croatia and Slovenia succeeded, and war broke out, with Bosnia soon to take to their side. (Ali, 2000, p. 207). Bosnia was of particular interest, in that being nearly equally Muslim, Serb/Orthodox, and Croat/Catholic, it "was multiethnic and multinational...blatantly defying the argument that national states were

inevitable or that people of different national identities could not coexist,' (Ali, 2000, p. 211). There is great reason to believe the pre-war fractioning of these groups was spurred by outsider forces. The EU was in process in being established, and the 'One Europe' proposal meant that the US, "would lose both political hegemony over Western Europe and control of the new - and very dynamic - capital accumulation process of harmonizing the West European and Russian economies - a frightening prospect for American capitalism," (Ali, 2000, p. 32). The US benefited from the instability of this civil war.

"The fight to create states out of nations in territories that are ethnically mixed eventually becomes a fight over persons and their rights to live on particular tracts of land," which led to a return to the fascist tactics of WWII, and 'ethnic cleansing,' (Ali, 2000, p. 221). "Women became particularly vulnerable, regardless of age, because of the culture of patriarchy viewed their sexual purity and shame as essential to the honor and unity of the family - to violate women is to destroy the family's ability to resist," (Ali, 2000, p. 218). After the second fall, the land was partitioned into new bordered countries that policed who was allowed entrance and passage. "War closed schools and factories in many areas," (Ali, 2000, p. 229). To attend to the decimated economy, nationalized land and industries were devalued and redistributed in a move towards mass privatization, where they were sold off to the highest, and predominantly foreign, bidder. Outside of Slovenia which "was the most export-oriented Yugoslav republic, already well placed on foreign markets with specific products (e.g. Elan skis or Gorenje refrigerators and other home appliances)," they were unable to fund the return of industry, (Uvalic, 2018, p. 31). Slovenia's sole success is attributed to it being "the most developed country in Central Eastern Europe, so it did not have to rely on support of the IMF, nor did it need foreign advice," (Uvalic, 2018, pp. 31-2). "According to the very conservative measurements of the World Bank, poverty rose from an estimated 6% of the population in 1987-1988 to 39% in 1993-1995," (Țichindeleanu, 2012. p. 6). NATO still policies Kosovo in fear of tensions re-escalating. I have seen their soldiers myself, when invited to attend DOKUFEST in 2017, a film festival in the mountain city of Prizren, tanks and guns wielded by men in fatigues and red berets in the streets, and guarding old churches surrounded by barbed wire.

There is no doubt that these feuds have tracings back to the empires and prior colonial efforts that invaded and divided the region previously: Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, Venetian, Illirian, Roman, and Greek. As is the history of foreign invasion. The word 'slave' comes from 'slav.' Before enslaving Africa, Western Europe enslaved their neighbors to the east, (Hartman, 2007, p.5). These splits become a different open wound, each with its own mass graves and epigenetic inheritances. Croatia holds the bodies primarily of Serbian's captured

in WWII, in Jasenovac. And Bosnia, Srebrenica, a massacre of muslim Bosniaks by Serbian forces. The film, *Disturbed Earth* (2021), by Kumjana Novakova and Guillermo Carreras-Candi, tells of the latter via poetic inquiry as intervention on landscape shots, of how red ferns grow out of the mounds to mark the bodies never given proper burial. That area had been declared a UN Protected Safe Area. A declaration that they failed to honor. These legacies are still in living memory. They are seen and felt in the land.

Herein lies the crux of the matter in relation to the subject of invasive species: why the Balkan region, the area that was once Yugoslavia, is part of the dialogue on colonial matters. The region has extensive extractive histories of foreign domination to control goods coming in and out of Europe because of the wealth that could be accumulated from being in such close proximity to the western end of the silk road as well as sea routes from the spice islands. The fact that the region succeeded in carving out its own autonomous zone with the establishment of a unified Yugoslavia is quite a feat of organized resistance. It was also an act of seizing on an opportune moment. During the instability immediately following WWII, and spurred by their successful partisan resistance campaign, the region was able to create a unified, multicultural, and autonomous front. It was a regional reclamation of the European border. An ecotone in the true sense: a vibrant and dynamic space of dynamic multi-ethnic/religious/cultural entanglement. As part of this collaboration, they allied with the Non-Aligned movement, or a grouping of countries who refused to align with the Cold War participants, namely the US or USSR. This act of solidarity went beyond the political, creating theoretical and practice dialogues, exchanges in both culture and cultivation, with Africa and other regions of the global south, particularly in working to undermine racial tropes of “aestheticization and the theory of primitivism,” (Țichindeleanu, 2024). In so doing, the European border was then organized as a permeable region of exchange with the global south.

The rupture of this collective unified front is still radiating outwards today. Immediately following the second fall of Yugoslavia, the Balkans underwent, what Romanian scholar Olvidiu Țichindeleanu calls, “postcommunist colonization.” This is intentionally not described as post-colonial, though many have before, as this naming implies that we have learned or overcome previous colonial trajectories. Furthermore, “colonization is not a metaphor here, but points to the systemic change of reality with a clear redistribution of the power relations, and to the continuation of traditional colonialism in different geocultural forms of coloniality,” (Țichindeleanu, 2012, p. 13). It functioned as an era of mass extraction by foreign commercial entities. This provides a counterpoint in researching colonial trajectories, an opportunity to shift the parallax gap. Europe, after searching the globe for regions to devour,

turned to cannibalize its own periphery. This has manifested in different ways throughout the region, with poverty intensifying in the Eastern most regions. “The historical experience of [central and] Eastern Europe offers a wealth of other-knowledges, alternative economies and cosmologies, of ‘forms of resistance without infrastructure’ and visions of an other-modernity. This wealth has been ransacked and repressed during the postcommunist colonization, but constitutes a recent cultural memory which could flourish through relations of solidarity with non-Western practices of resistance, epistemologies, and philosophies of liberation,” (Țichindeleanu, 2012, p. 18).

This particular investigation will examine the current economy of Dalmatia, in Southern Croatia, now that it lacks industry, it is currently based on tourism, a migration of impermanence, and often destructive, with people invading for souvenirs and quick consumption, leaving as quickly as they arrived. The tourism is based in the sea towns. My apartment landlord would not allow us to stay for prime tourist season, as it switched to an AirBnb with an increased rate of 1250%. Locals and foreigners alike are subjected to this. How do you live with a family in October to June in one place, and then July to September in another? It is a fractured life. Photography theorist Ana Periacă, whose family has lived in the old section of Split for many generations as the neighbors disappeared, calls this, “Airbnb ‘platform capitalism’... [which entails a] deliberate depopulation processes...[alongside] property values increase as a result of growing tourist interest, as well as property speculation on the international market,” (2024, p. 9). It is a form of gentrification as an exploitation of heritage spaces, and in turn the cultural memories associated with them. She names this as a new form of ghetto. It is a phenomenon that is spreading across the mediterranean.

There is another troubling occurrence in the cold months, when the tourists are gone and the streets grow quiet, the city does not rush to cover the thousands of swastikas and the stylized ‘U’s topped in crosses, to represent the Ustaša that are graffitied on the walls of Split. They especially multiplied following the transition from the Croatian kuna, to the euro, as demanded by the European Union. A particularly difficult situation considering, “recent statistics show that Croatia – with more than 50 per cent – is the third country in Europe when it comes to youth unemployment, after Greece and Spain” (Žižek and Horvat, 2015, p. 32). Markets and utilities companies noticeably rounded up in their conversions while salaries remained unchanged. Zagreb, the capital in the north of the country, cut off from the sea, has a stronger job sector due to a longer history of economic ties to Austria, Germany, and Slovenia, and does not depend on tourist income. It also lacks the assault of these markings that romanticize genocide, that fit into what Boym would term, restorative

nostalgia, and in so doing, explicitly argue for the dangers of this form of grotesquely romanticized nationalist memory. The lack of opportunities for meaningful work and estrangement from rapid land nationalization, to privatization, have created an unsettling situation where the possibility of the destabilization of peace, is palpable. In this ecotone, there is also resistance to this. Split was once a partisan city. It could become one again.



[Wilkerson, E. (2024) [location test photographs] - ruins on a cliff with war bunkers Split, Croatia, note in the lower image, the graffiti of the stylized 'u' with cross above as symbol for the Ustaša]

In the unimaginable violence embedded in the graffiti of Split that warns of its possible return, resides an extension of my inheritance. I have engaged in blood writing on my mother's family. But now, I must do the same for my father, which was undertaken as part of a Deep Listening Exercise, This segment begins with blood writing on my paternal lineage to question why some genocides are seen as heroic and others as barbaric:

The story of my father is of a different kind of invasion, one that has only been told as explicitly reprehensible, and rightly so. He was born in 1941, in Germany, in an industrial city in the Rhine Valley. His father disappeared on the Russian front as a Nazi soldier, when my father was two. My father's home was destroyed in an Allied bombing campaign. His mother moved him and his sister to the countryside. The loss of a father and a home seems quite small when compared to whole blood-lines lost in gas chambers. He does not like to talk about these times and though this is no way for a child to live, I do not tell this story to make light of the horror of German fascism, rather to share how oppressors are also marked by their actions, of how the oppressors and oppressed are then linked, like tentacles sutured together. There was an opera singer in Russia, with the same name as his father, Herman Wilhelm Wolfgang Leverkus, and he fantasized for years that this was indeed his father, somehow escaped. He never got the courage to contact him. Or perhaps it was that any answer would have felt unbearable. That man is long dead, and soon after he died, my grandfather was given an official death date from the German government, without notice of how this information was discovered. I have wondered if perhaps this is related to Russia giving Germany a Red Cross ledger of POW deaths from the war, in 1992, but this is all conjecture. His death is now listed: 3rd of March, 1944, in Ingaly, Omsk Oblast, Russia, a small village in western Siberia, from what I can gather, a prison camp.

This time marks my father still. He saves rotten food from the trash. He will not leave food on a plate. He cannot leave waste. He hides valuables in secret spots in the house. He hides in work and projects, a disassociation from his own life and relationships with others. He allows no space for idle thoughts. When he speaks, his topic of choice is apocalypse. He has waited his whole life for war to return. He imagines a single trajectory, one he can never be present in. He taught me how to grow a garden, to save seeds, that growing your own food is how to stave off starvation.

I grew up in a Jewish neighborhood. One year around Purim, when visiting a friend's grandmother, sitting on a sofa covered in plastic, she offered me hamantaschen fresh from her oven, a three cornered cookie filled with the seeds of poppy flowers, the flower of armistice. Purim is a celebration of the Jews surviving genocide in the fifth century. The numbers scarred on her arm, visible as she stretched out her hand, a document of the atrocity of my ancestry.

My father is now eightytwo, he has lived to be decades older than either of his parents, and decades after the German barbarism and death brigades. He has developed a condition where excess fluid gathers around his brain and has been diagnosed with dementia. He never complains about losing his memory, rather, of losing his intelligence. Some people witness genocide and decide to never allow it again, some people witness genocide and decide to ensure it comes for anyone but them, and some people witness genocide and feel it around every corner...

Blood writing emerges from Deep Listening as a means to orient personal positionality connected to the work. It is a space for intuition and decolonization. It is a methodology for engaging in epigenetic disobedience, a critical autotheoretical expansion of Walter Mignolo's 'epistemic disobedience.' It is a methodology for offering amends for impossible acts as a form of ceremony. An all the more pressing act, when facing the rise of nationalism and fascist ideologies.

I heard recently about life on the other side of the Eastern Front in an episode of *The Anthropocene Reviewed*, (Green, 2018), told through the story of the seed potatoes of Leningrad. Botanist Nikolai Vavilov had overseen the collection of the world's largest seed bank. "Vavilov and his colleagues believed that the preservation of seed varieties could help the Soviet Union and the world to develop crops more resistant to droughts and pests, and in doing so end human starvation. They traveled the world collecting seeds and cuttings, most of which were stored in vaults at the Institute of Plant Industry." And included fields of thousands of potato and tuber varieties which were farmed in fields in the outskirts of the city, an area which the Germans began to bomb the year my father was born. Agricultural scientists, Abraham Kameraz and Olga Voskresenskaia, worked surrounded by bombs falling, to harvest their collection and store it in the city. A city that was quickly surrounded by German forces, who intended to seize the city by way of starvation. And the people were starving to death by the thousands. "Wallpaper paste had often been made from potato starches, so all through the city, people stripped wallpaper from their homes, removed the paste, and boiled it to make soup." Bread was made from sawdust. Hitler wanted control of

the city, but he also wanted this seed collection, he was as obsessed with the eugenical cultivation of agriculture as he was with the grotesque imposition of this on human bodies.

The Institute of Plant Industry was guarded twenty-four hours a day. Abraham Kameraz and Olga Voskresenskaia had the choice to eat the thousands of collected seeds and specimens of potato, wheat, and rice, or to save them for the future. The list of over one million that died in the siege includes, “peanut specialist A. G. Stchukin died at his desk in the building on Saint Isaac Square, an uneaten package of peanuts in his hand. Dmitri Ivanov, who oversaw the rice collection at the seedbank, died of starvation at his post, surrounded by bags of rice. The keeper of the oat collection, Lillya Rodina, died, as did Gregori Krier, who managed the herb collection and both Abraham Kameraz and Olga Voskresenskaia, the potato saviors. All together, at least a dozen of the Institute’s scientists starved to death during the siege.”

And their work continues to this day, “the descendants of some seeds that survived the war were used to replenish seed stocks following drought in Ethiopia.” If planting a tree is a sign of hope, then saving seeds is making space for future. This becomes particularly important when navigating food crops in times of global warming and catastrophic change. (Green, 2018).

Travis was also working on a film, the demands of the PhD meant that I could not take as active a role in the making of it as I usually would. But I sometimes helped him film, as we often take turns filming and recording sound, to ensure we have the documentation needed. From this comes an image that haunts me still. We took the kids to get a puppy in Slavonia, a region near the border with Bosnia that was in great dispute during the civil war. We named him Jugo, after Yugoslavia, and the name for the wind that comes off the sea. On the way, we stopped to film Jasenovac:

Jasenovac is a wide open field, marked with a large brutalist monument, resembling both a flower and a flame, which is dedicated to the estimated 77,000 to 99,000 lives taken there, in WWII. It is a site of mass murder, a concentration camp. After Croatian partisans heroically expelled Mussolini’s troops, Croatian Ustaša attempted to seize their place. Allied with the Nazis, they began exercising Nazi tactics on their own land. Jasenovac still holds mounds of bodies, and as a precursor to the ethnic and religious violence in the ‘90s, more than half of those bodies are Serbian, the remainder are about equal numbers of Jewish, Roma, and political dissidents. There is a pond that is said to have become undrinkable from the rotten bodies and excrement that flooded in. In terms of history and place, the proximity to Srebrenica is inescapable. Nearby the monument there is an old train that used to bring

in prisoners in a fixed position on old tracks... It is impossible to walk this place without feeling its ghosts. One shot revisited me in my dreams. I was standing back on the edge of the field to film the monument and the train in the same shot. I let the camera run, to catch the movement of clouds, the wind blowing through branches, but also, Travis is walking with the children on the path, situated between the train and the monument surrounded by mounds. They are walking towards me, and in turn, the camera. I see this while I sleep...

I do not know where my grandfather was stationed in the war; beyond his involvement in attempting to colonize Russia as a soldier on the Eastern Front. Perhaps he stood too amongst these mounds. The image of my children between the train, and the monument that rises from a landscape of mounds of bodies. It haunts me still how this history may resurface in their own lives. It is a constant reminder to stand against the repetition of brutal histories and invasions. This is my penance for being born from bad blood.

...Blood writing is not just a rupture with ghosts, but also a rupture with generational trauma; conversations with a phantom limb.



[Wilkerson, T (2024) - still from *Through the Graves the Wind is Blowing*. Permission to reproduce image granted by the director]

“Popular West-is-best accounts of totalitarianism continue to ignore the acute descriptions of Nazism (by Jawaharlal Nehru and Aimé Césaire, among other imperial subjects) as the radical ‘twin’ of Western imperialism; they shy away from exploring the obvious connection between the imperial slaughter of natives in the colonies and the genocidal terrors perpetrated against the Jews inside Europe,” (Mishra, 2024, p, 5). Both of which are enacting monoculturalism. The danger in glazing over or valorizing brutal pasts, is it makes space for the repetition of such acts. “For most people outside the West, whose primordial experience of European civilization was to be brutally colonized by its representatives, the Shoah [or holocaust] did not appear as an unprecedented atrocity,” (Mishra, 2024, p, 5). And in times of economic peril and imposed austerity, the impulse towards restorative nostalgia expands. “One of the major reasons why ethno-nationalists and fascists draw such crowds today is that the systemic crisis of the capitalist world order as a rule throws us back to the root anthropological assumptions with which we assure ourselves and decide on the legitimation of a social order, and that there is an assumption that all people draw boundaries around themselves and define who is included and who is not,” (Franke et al, 2022, p. 151). This is evident in the symbols of genocide painted on the walls of Split.

The long and complex history of the region as residing within ever moving borders has meant there is diaspora from the former Yugoslavia spread globally. Croatia’s Eurovision 2024 finalists, Baby Lasagna, sing of how this continues now. “In many ways, [their song] ‘Rim Tim Tagi Dim’ offers a sardonic counterpoint to the Netherlands’ ‘Europapa.’ Where that song celebrates the freedom of travel within the EU, this one laments the loss of opportunity in Eastern Europe which is causing thousands of young people to leave their homes and migrate to the West,” (Weldon, 2024). The video for the song shows the singer saying goodbye to his family and village, and ends with him alone, waiting with a suitcase, at the seashore. There are traces of the former Yugoslavian diaspora that become easy to spot, if you know what to look for. Like the diner in Detroit where hashbrowns and eggs are served with *ayvar* (I-var), a paste of smoky peppers and sometimes eggplant. And in recognizing it, the owner grins ear to ear, as if you share an old friend. A sensation much like pressing your nose deep into the first flower of spring after a gray and cold winter, and taking a deep breath in. Those that left, and those that stayed, neither can escape the burden of navigating these open wounds.

A border is not impermeable. It can not impede all movement. Things always slip through the cracks. As Federici’s research on witch trials and the links to land privatization and capital accumulation expanded past Western Euro-centrism, so must this film. Southern Croatia is

the setting both visually and because of its particular history of shifting between colonial states. A space in the margins: both part of, and apart from, Europe.

It is said you can't make a better future without envisioning it first. I would insert that we also cannot make a better future without envisioning how each small local story is entangled with global health and wellbeing. Each comes with its own epigenetic inheritance. The problematics caused by ignoring this always bleed through. I can not say if we are more equipped to mend a wound or a haunting. Both are of our own making. My research on regional quandaries and histories, and exploring connections with the global, would continue through the process of making the film, and writing this thesis as questions arose. I had collected a base of research from both the archive and the practice of Deep Listening.

The title of the film, *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)*, is an homage to a charcoal from Redon's noir period of the same name, (1880), of a flower with the face both resembling a human and the man on the moon. It seemed befitting to name my film on the inseparability of these elements, as I wished the work to be a reminder of this sympoiesis. A reminder that humans are a microcosm of nature. A reminder that we are wild. On revisiting the image, I was struck by something I had not previously remembered. The bottom corner depicts a plant resembling *Plantago major* not yet bloomed, the plant Robin Wall Kimmerer names as white man's foot, the beneficial European plant that has spread throughout the Americas and Asia. I wish this film too to reside in this space that allows for the existence side by side of a commonly seen plant that signals benevolent migration and one that can only be imaged as an embodiment of multispecies entanglement. If seen in a landrace garden, the grouping of the two would be described as companion planting; establishing an intentional and collective reciprocity.



[Odilon Redon (1880) *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)*. In public domain]

Next would be the visual and sonic documentation. It was early spring, there were still a few months before tourists descended, allowing for shooting mostly empty landscapes, as opposed to dense crowds. It was time to begin working through how the research would emerge in the practice space.

Making Space for the Bodylandscape: Practices in Cosmology and Alchemical Reciprocity

“The absolute distinction between the natural and the human that is so central to Western ways of thinking leaves no room for the other-than-human beings to figure as protagonists in history and politics,” (Ghosh 2021, p. 58). This too applies to film. I intended to make a film that gives space to the more-than-human protagonist in resistance to the Capitalocene, in alliance with women working towards the same. The exiled Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish wrote, “if the Olive Trees knew the hands that planted them, their oil would become

tears,” (McNabb, 2011, p. 4). Why would we assume the trees do not remember? The question is now to represent this, as it is divergent from accepted ontologies, but also from film grammar. Dalmatia, the southern coastal region of Croatia is lined with olive groves. In Split, plants grow through the cracks in the old stones, wild flowers, caperberries, even fig trees. The roots of plants erode the mortar between stones. Western ontology sees this as a defeat. In architecture school, we were taught to build for an infinite future. Fortresses against the outside world. I see the plants rooting into human built spaces as a sign of hope, that nature can regenerate even after all the abuses we have forced on her. She is resilient. She is revolutionary. Subversive even.



[Wilkerson, E. (2024) [location test photograph] - olive grove on the edge of the city of Split, Croatia]

The story I wished to tell in this film emerged through the Deep Listening exercises undertaken in these landscapes. It is a search for the whispers of the living archive, for those left out of the current objective research on the region. It is an immersive inquiry as an entrance to uncovering tracing embedded in the land. Each tracing is a facet, each tells a story. It is moving with an openness for understanding secrets and markers of invasion and resistance. This marks the shift from the research phase, to field work. This is an expansion of the traditional scientific model of data collection rooted in observation wherein other forms

of sensory data are notated as well to attend to the parallax gap. Politics and ethics are always part of research and scientific work. They are made to seem separate by historical mythologies to encourage failure in seeing, knowing, and understanding. This is why it is so much more than fieldwork.

In Croatia, the search for markers of, and resistance to, invasion are everywhere. In the sanctioned murals and the graffiti, in the war bunkers dotting the coast line, the Roman ruins, the hundreds of old apartments in the Diocletian palace that now are solely rented to tourists, in the decaying brutalist buildings that were built to usher in a new utopia, in the boats of foreign militaries that dock on their way to and from the Black Sea, and the giant agaves on the hillsides which are indigenous to the hillsides I grew up on, in California. Most tourists and expatriates take time to see the palace and to walk the tight medieval paths in the surrounding stone old town, to have a gelato, to visit the sea, or to lounge on the islands, they do not take the time to engage in complex histories. It is a disservice to land, to not make the time to listen for its spirits.

This work takes into account the theoretical research undertaken alongside the histories of this place, conversations with new friends here, and after listening to the guidance of the more-than-human. As mentioned in the breakdown of the feral filmmaking methodology in the beginning of this chapter, filming did not begin with a script. This is in direct resistance to traditional film production, which insists filming can begin only after writing the script wherein the dialogue and locations are fixed in advance. Traditional film shoots are then organized around this pre-imposed trajectory. This method discounts the possibilities charted in Sullivan's triangulated practice-led research outlined in Chapter 4. He establishes that structure should be established through conceptual practices of interactions, exercises, and designs. In the spirit of the accompanying research in this thesis, the interactions must be understood as intra-actions. And furthermore, in his account of dialectical practices being encounters, dialogues, and narratives, these must be expanded beyond the human centered as well. As such, writing for practice work must leave an opening for listening to intuition, and for working through dissonance. As further inversion of the traditional model, I left the dialogue, the written word, to emerge last. And as homage to the consideration of Diops dual *Atlantiques*, the narrative would emerge as both voice over narration, as well as a narrative arch from playing with genre. As work in creative agitation, it must also experiment with approaches of resistance.

The journey to each place is as much tied to the process as the documentation of place itself. I work with compact and inexpensive gear, gear I can pack into a single backpack: a Fuji XT-3, an inexpensive and less conspicuous camera that appears to work in photography

rather than explicitly as video recorder even as it still shoots professional video, a lightweight tripod that folds down quite small, a small Zoom sound recorder, and a shotgun microphone. This was taught to me by Travis, as part of his method, which is a tribute to Third Cinema, and his mentor, Santaigo Alvarez. It is a methodology of free movement. Each site is approached on foot, by bus, or by metro. This is so I can work in solitude, so I can listen for what the land wishes to share with me. This is so documentation can also work as Deep Listening. This is intensified by recording my own sound. As described by Azoulay, the lens of a camera can be oriented to leave information out, but a microphone can not. It records all the noise. The microphone magnifies what is around you: laughter far away, a distant plane, an electrical hum, the chirping of birds, a couple fighting, the rhythm of the sea; all heard via headphones. It is sitting in the impossibility of silence. We usually tune these sounds out. This then becomes a practice for engaging with the dissonance that John Cage's work intends to share. It is work in searching for the sounds we don't observe; other registries, other scales. The wind flowing through the branches of an old tree, but also the oscillations of cells, or the sound of a flower moving its face to follow sunlight, or the mycelium working underground to carry messages between trees. Just as Dr. Konstantin Raudive believed a tape recorder will record the dead, sound recording magnifies the more-than-human. Film has the power to engage in what these voices are telling us. Within this methodology of engaging with the land, each filming excursion becomes continued work in Deep Listening.



[photo by Sunčica Fredelić (2024) - Erin Wilkerson filming in Marjan forest park, Split, Croatia]

As the work is meant to reunite the body with the land, I was in search of a woman to embody this witch. Someone who would embody both the loss of this severing, but also this desire to expand on alchemical reciprocity. I asked Sunčica and Gabi for ideas for who to play the witch and the character of a mother who needs the witch to heal her ill child. They had plenty of ideas of women to ask, but the more we talked, I realized this could not be a performative competition as that would impose a hierarchical structure. I wished to undermine the trope of culturally imposed female competition. I wished to make space for people I care for, where filming them would be about pulling from the depths of the internalized feelings we all share as women: the loss of our connection to communal land, our status as foraging and gossiping women working together, and the diminishment of our roles in society based on our gender. I knew then that these characters were meant for them, and luckily they agreed. The role of the child was given to my own daughter, Matilda Jane, per her request. A role that reminded me that how I address these legacies will be carried on by her.



[still from *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* (2024) - Sunčica Fredelić foraging medicinal plants in front of the military bunkers lining the hillsides along the Adriatic Sea in Split, Croatia]



[still from *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* (2024) - the witch, as played by Sunčica Fredelić, foraging plant medicine, in the forest park Marjan]

I began with the framing for the main character based on Croatia's complex history: a woman is depicted reunited with the land, free to roam, free to forage, though the fear of the violence associated with this, is meant to be felt throughout. She is based on historical research, but also on conversations with Croatians. This witch in the Federician sense, is named Mara, as Gabi told me that opposed to Italy, or Zagreb, there was just one woman burned in Split, a woman named Mara. She is seen moving throughout the land as she guides the audience through the Croatian countryside collecting plant medicine as a means to tell of colonial trajectories and the liminal space between medicine and poison. The film is intended as resistance to dominant ontology. As the archive of the more-than-human has been intentionally hidden to aid this domination, to return to Sylvia Wynter's call, being human must be a praxis, one that works alongside the bodylandscape. If we are tending to her. We must also tend to the wounds we have inflicted on her. This is the aim of the film, in direct resistance to the extractive methods undertaken by practices of the Capitalocene.

I had been making alters from items from the local green market: vintage treasures, fruit from the countryside, herbs, and items foraged from the nature parks and the sea. There were both spaces of ceremony to pay tribute to this work I was undertaking, and this place I wished to pay tribute to. A practice I began to document. This reference to ritual ties back to the alchemical reciprocity of feminist surrealists as discussed in Chapter 3, it is a space for

radical intimacy with collective culture, as reminders of what these words are meant to convey, to reroot with Earth. The altars are the gathering place for medicines and gifts from the Earth, alongside human items and were created as a form of Deep Listening, as offerings for guidance in working through grand aims. As such, some are in the film, and some were just for me. They are intended as ‘ceremonies of transition,’ as they reflect on the seasons. Though the writing would not emerge until later, it is still useful for understanding this process: “Gathering medicine is bowing to Earth. Sometimes I push my ear to the soil to hear her better,” (Wilkerson, 2024). Each altar is a reflection on what was present season to season. Spring is marked by the unctuous flesh of figs alongside the petals of roses and an old fashioned key. Summer is camomile, oranges, and a sea shell. Fall is mushrooms, a Fuji Instant Film photo of the transition between a hermitage cave and the outside world, highly toxic oleander flowers, and a faceted crystal. Winter is persimmons rotting, dried chrysanthemums, and a small ceramic dish that depicts bones.

The altars were imagined to be accompanied by folklore music of the Plana Group I found on an old vinyl record from the Sophia Region of Bulgaria. They are women's songs passed down from their foremothers to be sung communally to celebrate harvest, marriages, and funerals. Their choral chants are atonal, and therefore working in dissonance, a curious term for working in diffraction and (dis)orientation. Perhaps it can also unmask the strangeness in the non-harmonious ways of living and being that are so deeply ingrained in our culture; perhaps sonic dissonance depicted in relationship to ritual, can be a tool for reckoning with cognitive dissonance.

There is an additional altar when Mara is called to heal the sick child, and where it is revealed that due to the high level of toxins in this possible colonial future, children have become rare. In this altar, she places chamomile flowers one by one in a dish of water left in the moonlight. The reexamination of the human body as tied to Earth body requires the celebration of things taken for granted, time taken to hear and see. This scene shows that work in plant medicine is also work in mutual aid. It is social and it creates a bounty to be shared. This resonates with Federici’s work on land privatization as connected to accusations of witchcraft as a means to coerce the population into submission through the threat of substantial violence, but also to destabilize the bonds of the community. Much like what was described in the last chapter on the maligning of the term, ‘gossip,’ to destroy the bonds of women with each other, but also their bond with the land.





[Wilkerson, E. (2024) *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* - the alter to the pharmakon and liminal space]

Worship of the mushroom is of particular significance. Mycelium work with decay to aid in multispecies communication and entanglement. They break down dead materials into a scale that plants can process through their root systems. Animals then access these nutrients through eating plant parts. Mushrooms themselves, the fruiting body of the mycelium, classified as neither plant nor animal, are quite nutritious, assuming you know which ones to consume, and which to leave be. “Mushrooms are the ultimate pharmakon—traditionally associated with life and death, food and poison—matter with occult virtues,” (Barad 2017, p. 113). It is said that mushrooms are the first life to return after a nuclear accident. “Mushrooms were found not only in the immediate area surrounding the Chernobyl nuclear reactor after the accident in 1986 but also growing inside the reactor, on its walls...fungi that contain melanin actually thrive on radioactive emissions, using beta and gamma rays (ionizing radiation) as a digestive aid of sorts. ‘Radiotrophic’ fungi use melanin ionization rather than photosynthesis for ‘food,’” (Barad, 2017, p. 114). They also work in reciprocity and sympoiesis, facilitating in the communication of trees to warn others of pests and trading nutrients in return, (Ghosh, 2021, p. 197). Meaning that in the conversations we do not tend to perceive, there is possibility to discover tools for the remediation of landscapes destroyed by human negligence and error.



[still from *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* (2024) - Sunčica Fredelić as the witch, foraging plant medicine in the ruins of Salona]

The last Croatian landscape the witch is seen foraging in gives a sense of the weight of these histories of invasion in the region. It is the ruins of Empire, an area that is particularly flush with plant medicine, wild herbs descended from ancestors that were once cultivated with intention. The birthplace of Diocletian, the Venetian Emperor, for whom the palace was built, in Split. It is a whole city, only partially excavated in the 19th century, with churches, marketplace, aqueduct, and amphitheater, once fortified by tall walls. “A vibrant city and served as a base for Rome’s penetration inland for more than three centuries.” It is part of an empire long gone. “By A.D. 614, Salonae [old spelling variant] had fallen to the Avars, and its residents, fleeing their demolished city, became permanent refugees within the solid stone walls of the Palace,” (Violich, 1998, pp. 138-40). “‘The architectural ruin is an example of the indissoluble combination of spatial and temporal desires that trigger nostalgia.’ Ruin, then, is a medium of nostalgia, an urge to come back,” (Peraica, 2024, p. 2). As the palace has been lived in for the entirety, since its construction, the ruins, lives, histories, migrations are much more layered. Salona is a reminder that empires always fall, but also of the long regional history as an ecotone of both resisting, succumbing to, colonization. In the film, this landscape is intended as a reflective nostalgia, a space in which the past, present, and future seem uncertain. An illustrated map from 1570 shows Diocletian's Palace in relation to

the ruins of Salona in the very top of the illustration, as well as its dual harbors, which made it a favorable location to defend and expand invasions.

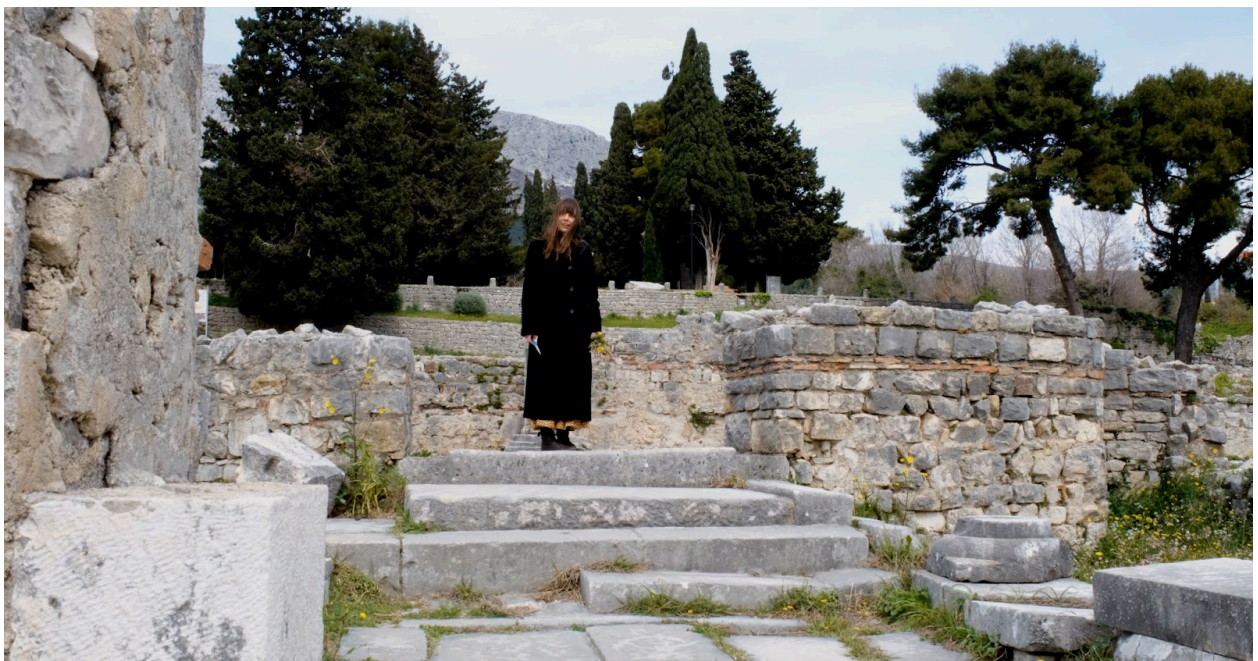


[Spalato: Noble city from the ancient land of Emperor Diocletian in Dalmatia on the Adriatic Sea under the Venetians (1570) in the collection of the Croatian Archeological Museum, Split. In public domain.]

The map originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is copyrighted material available for purchase from Maps More Shop on Etsy. It shows a vector of infrastructure as shades of gray, and water as blue. The map was altered so that both the ancient fortification boundaries of the Diocletian Palace and Salona are drawn in orange, as well as the position of my apartment there, in yellow. The unaltered map is available for purchase at <https://www.etsy.com/listing/1338972746/split-map-city-poster-croatia-karta>

[Altered vector map of Split, Croatia. Croatia: Maps More Shop.]

As seen from a current map of the regional infrastructure, the city of Split, has since expanded well beyond the palace walls. Marked by the orange square is Diocletian's palace, and in the north, the portions of Salona that have been uncovered. To provide a sense of scale, the yellow circle is where I lived for a year, minus the tourist season, was a twelve minute walk to the Palace, and an eight minute walk to the sea.



[still from *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* (2024) - Sunčica Fredelić as the witch, foraging plant medicine in the ruins of Salona]

In documenting a place layered in contested history, work in diffraction requires more than the depiction of landscape, and creative storytelling. The editing process, which is next to be discussed, is the prime place for intervention, when slices of history can be compiled over themselves, orientations overlaid, and redacted trajectories reinserted.

The Agential Cut: Experiments in Landrace Diffraction and Intra-Action

The editing phase began with a new personal (dis)orientation. I moved to China, a suburb of Shanghai the ancient city of Suzhou. I had to leave my beloved Croatia, with its messy and troubled history that peeks through the cracks and around the corner, and also I had to leave people I adore behind. What was once traditional villages and gardens along canals, rumored to be described by Marco Polo as, “the Venice of the East,” is now rapidly developing (Chin, 2021). The view out of my window is of construction cranes and the Xietang River. Producing silk for thousands of years, it is tied to the silk road, tea production, and early trade with Europe and Western Asia. Shanghai was colonized by both Britain and France as a spoil of the Opium Wars, as such it is only 200 years old. They claimed it as a port to move spice and silk. Today it is the largest port in the world. Suzhou has one as well, they are connected by both rail and boats that run along the Yangtze River, which is part of the Grand Canal, “the world's longest man-made waterway, which runs nearly 3,200 kilometers through 18 cities from Beijing to Hangzhou and is over 2,500 years old.” (Chin, 2021). Between the old villages are newly constructed modern malls and condos.





[Fuji Instant Film photos of Suzhou China, Wilkerson, E. (2024)]

In each place I migrate to, I come with the intention to be benevolent, to enrich where I am, to learn about the culture and not expect them to pivot for mine. To naturalize; to not invade. This feels all the more pressing here, as relations between China and the west are tense. I read the news carefully and cautiously. I feel a great weight to be a bridge between places, to work towards peace and prosperity of both. It is a new border to perform. I can feel my failures in this. First and foremost, my inability to speak or understand the language. It is the first move I have undertaken with such an inability to communicate. I cannot rush into delicate landscapes before taking the time to observe what they require, without asking questions, without taking the time to sit in them and listen deeply. How can I ask questions, without being able to even ask for basic directions?

As I begin to grapple with living on the east end of the silk road, my time on the western end in Croatia, my time in the spice region, and growing up on settled land, I am only just starting this journey towards understanding these trajectories, to feel these tracings on my skin. My body is in China. I would visit Croatia each day through a screen, piecing together a story of real histories and critical fabulation. I am embodying the (dis)orientation I argue for in my work, the intentional act of becoming lost to remake relationships with place. Some days the vertigo is painful. Some days I find joy in moving through distant spaces. Practicing Deep Listening has been the main tool for working through the blocks that emerge in working through this, as well as to search for the discomforts that need to be sat with, the precarious markers of invasion. The practice of care necessitates sitting with grief and agitation, this is what is intended in the call for ‘staying with the trouble.’

As I transitioned to the editing phase of practice production, wherein my documentations of place and Croatian plant medicine are reassembled to depict narratives, rearranged to

encourage understanding and metaphor, layered with sound of place and sounds of fiction, as well as archival materials. The footage must be reimagined as work of counter-archive and critical fabulation. The editing phase is when the methodology of diffraction fully comes into play where space can be made for the wild and faceted crystal-image. Each cut is an intervention in time and place, and if the specific aim is to produce agential cuts described in Chapter 4. Let's delve deeper with Barad's words on this phenomena, 'Agential cuts never sit still [...]. Inside/outside is undone. [...] An uncanny typology; no smooth surfaces, willies everywhere. Differences percolate through 'everything', reworking and being reworked through reiterative configuring of spacetime mattering [...] each being (re)threaded through the other.' The agential cut intends to (dis)orient, to work in dissonance, to provoke vertigo. The kind of breaking that leads to stronger growth. It is cutting together and cutting apart. It is the wholing of the objective with the subjective through the introduction of faceting as a means to enact diffraction of the singular/mono wherein it is opened up to show its inherent multiplicity. Film is a medium dedicated to representing human experience, and editing generally a form of assemblage of existing ideas. Perhaps the agential cut can help represent the animism of the natural world and the ideas of kinship ontology, within film grammar that has been developed to depict human experience.

For example, the affection image, as discussed with previous mention of the Kuleshov Effect, the close up of the main character, is intended to invoke a feeling of closeness and empathy for a fictional character. Conversely, if a character is shot in the distance, or with their back turned, it implies that they are being watched. This is a tactic I employed in filming. Also, if a close up is followed by the view of an object, other character, or place, it is generally inferred that this is a manifestation of the character's gaze, their point of view, from their perspective. If I attempt to use the same logic to create an affection image of expanded kinship, to show a flower, or the moon, to depict their point of view, based on current ontology, it would fall flat. Can the application of the agential cut expand the affection image of a flower therein causing a dynamic and complex reaction? What can be built upon to elicit a diffractive crystal image, to etch the fractals necessary to spark a shift in understanding, like the value shift that allowed the transmutation of pieces of gold into a treasure that moves like magic through the air. So the question turns to how to enact diffraction on footage of landscape. I had hours of raw material to sort through, and I struggled with how to give voice and narrative to the more-than-human, as well as work with radical care to create (dis)orientation while not falling into the nefarious trappings of *deja entendu*. My aim is to work in, and as, landscape diffraction, utilizing the methodology of film as anti-colonial apparatus, that reorients towards trajectories of multiplicity, of repair, and of future; a transmutation.





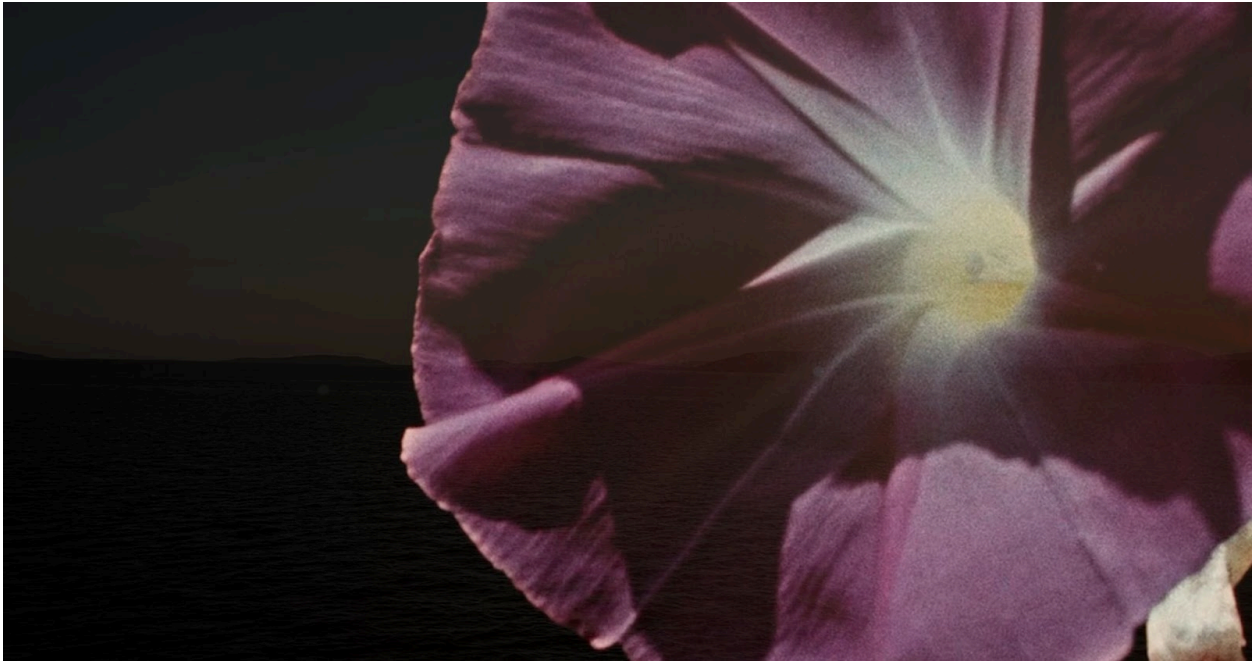
[Wilkerson, E. (2024) *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* - spring flowers shot on Super 8]

I began with Super 8 footage I shot last spring. This was the continuation of the impulse of using instant film photographs to bring the softness of other eras and past technologies into the film. It was also a direct homage to Rose Lowder, and how fractured asynchronous film leader presents can begin to describe the time signatures of other species; a temporal shift. In revisiting Barad's words further from Chapter 4 to search for clues on how to accomplish the intended work, "Diffractions are untimely. Time is out of joint; it is diffracted, broken apart in different directions, noncontemporaneous with itself. Each moment is an infinite multiplicity. 'Now' is not an infinitesimal slice but an infinitely rich condensed node in a changing field diffracted across spacetime in its ongoing iterative repatterning," (2014, p. 169). What emerges in explorations of the Lowderesque faceting when instead of remaining in a set time in a set field of flowers, brings in other times/places/futures/faces. I thought of Mark Bradford tearing through layers of history and Lydia Moyer's garden of police, and wondered what happens when these inspirations work together in different timescales. In this experiment, the agential cut is enacted as a form of montage as a means to understand connections made through sequencing. It seeks out the uncanny and dissonance to create noncontemporaneity that speaks to larger stories and the need for other ways of being, that conveys intra-action. The idea was to work with the materials shot in Croatia and to look towards the archives found while researching as well, to create moments of discord. I

wanted at least one to fulfill each of the following criteria as interventions on the landscape to provoke movement towards reciprocity with nature: to make space for the representation of more-than-human timescales, to speak to a possible future in a way that invokes solastalgia, to pull out the contested history of a physical place by interlacing imagery of its tracings, to find solace for restless ghosts, and to create impossible sequences that cannot be explained by current human knowledge.

To engage with possible futures, I began with the view of the sea at sunset, from the ferry from the island of Vis to Split, and I began intercutting in another landscape, the view from the train between Chicago to Detroit. This is a nod to the histories I bring with me in making this film. Just after passing the south end of Chicago, a predominantly black neighborhood wherein the poverty and histories of oppression are felt in its abandoned houses, cracked windows, missing siding, and chipped paint, is the border into Indiana, a border only noticed in the sudden shift from houses to factories and warehouses. Both sides of this border are man made disasters. The quick intercuts between these two landscapes, thousands of miles from each other, provide the sense that the beauty of the sea at sunset is fragile and can be easily destroyed; a premeditation of solastalgia. This overlay is introduced by a blue morning glory, as it is invasive in both the US and Croatia, seeding its beautiful blossoms in unwanted places, and choking out native plants. Examining histories of colonial expansion, it is clear that all places are vulnerable to extraction and exploitation, and to the toxins that accompany it. By overlaying these two landscapes, this precarity becomes a diffraction, a warning, but I hope also provides space for response-ability in preventing ghostly futures. In this, diffraction has the potential to layer in stories hidden, but also ones yet to unfold.





[film stills - Wilkerson, E. (2024) *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* - Lowderesque faceting of the view from the ferry between Vis and Split, superimposed with a morning glory flower and then the view from the train between Chicago and Detroit as foreshadowed solastalgia]

We may orient the discussion of distances in space along the visible light speeds and spectrums, momentum and interference, but intending to work in liminal space, in uncanny typologies, there is a need to also work in the impossible. As such, the film looks to Maya Deren's arret as a tool for with (dis)orientation, as an orange disappears from an altar. Arret depicts a spatial shift, the uncanny temporality. The depiction of an impossible moment within the laws of physics, is work in critical fabulation. As this work must acknowledge the global south, this film does too. I cannot speak for the orange, but I can tell a brief history of the migration of the orange and its cultivation. Much like Ja'Tovia Gary's object-oriented approach to working with cotton as a means for investigating her personal history, colonial history can be traced through the migration of the orange. The impossible disappearance of an orange is an ask to wade through its history.

In the engagement with the tracings that remain from the layered histories of place, and the discomfort of contested spaces, I chose Trg Franjo Tuđman, the square currently named for the man who was the Croatian leader immediately after the fall of Yugoslavia, though it has

had many names before this. It was told to me by a few people that this is the site of the only witch burning in Split. This is a curious detail I could not find written documentation of, meaning it becomes in this research cosmological folktale, rather than fact. The square holds the remains of an Italianate fountain. As a gesture that speaks to the many foreign interventions of the country, this old postcard names the fountain, and perhaps an old name for the square, for what appears to be two names. *Fontana* and *česma*, both mean fountain, the first being Italian, the second being Croatian. The names, Franje Josipa I and Francesco Giueseppe I, are actually for the same man, the Austro-Hungarian ruler 1848-1916. His Anglophile name is Franz Joseph I. (Otmar and Aretin, 2024). It is curious that his name is listed twice to be understood by both dialects and reinforces that the culture of Split, resides between worlds.



[postcard of the fountain that once resided in Trg Franjo Tuđman - date unknown, though the dual languages to name the fountain suggest pre-WWII when in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In public domain.]

After WWII, there was a campaign to erase connections to the fascist occupiers. The fountain, though treasured by Dalmatians, was intentionally bombed by the new regime.

Only its base remains. To reinsert these histories I filmed the landscape of the square in its present state. As I filmed it in winter, before the rush of tourists, the square is empty of people. The agential cut comes from the addition of quick images inspired by Lowder, archival photographs of fascist soldiers marching in the streets, and the image of the now dismantled fountain. The rapid movement between church steeple, the verticality of the fountain, and the marching of soldiers create a visual narrative, established through the persistence of vision, wherein the square becomes filled with its history, as a reminder that history is never left in the past.

The archival photographic image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it is copyrighted material. It shows the fountain just bombed, with smoke billowing from the remains of the base. The image was sourced from the blog of Robert Aronson and accessed here:

<https://viewfromtheriva.wordpress.com/2010/05/26/splits-glorious-fountain-may-once-again-grace-the-riva/>

[Aronson, (unknown), "Split, Croatia 'a view from the riva'. [blog] - photo of the fountain on Trg Franjo Tuđman is bombed and destroyed in 1947]





[Wilkerson, E. (2024) *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* [film stills] - diffraction of Trg Franjo Tuđman]

As solace for restless ghosts, again the aperture of visibility expands to a global scale to engage with Croatia's proximity to the western end of the Silk Road, and its history of invading colonizers desiring to control this entrance into Europe. In this instance, in a diffraction referencing the Sepoy Mutiny, and alters I filmed in Singapore. Both of which were British colonies. Both of which had British infrastructure built by forced Indian labor. The Sepoy Mutiny was the 1857-8 mutiny of Indians forced to work as mercenaries for the British owned East India Company. The British targeted India as it was once a country of great wealth. They forced the Sepoys to plunder their own country. "As a Researcher records, a particular British high ranking officer had as many as seven native mistresses, hunted eighty-four Asiatic lions and was recognized by the crown of England as a rare case of excellence and gallantry," (Das, 2007, p. 61). These officers were guarded by Sepoys. The ultimate catalyst in this rebellion was the use of sacred cow fat in British tactics of domination. "The real trouble began with the introduction of the new Enfield rifle which needed to be heavily greased and had to be beaten to open the end and release the powder," (Das, 2007, p. 61). The timing of this was also of cosmological significance, "1857, as the rumour went round, coincided with the completion of 100 years after the battle of plassey. The rumour, further, was enriched with a credential that the astrologers predicted that the English rule would last exactly a hundred years," (Das, 2007, p. 62). The rebellion

was squashed, and British colonial rule continued until 1947. Though perhaps it may have lasted longer if not for this flare up of armed resistance. This fragment of resistance is included in the film as a reminder that whenever there is injustice, there is also the will to rise against it.



[Wilkerson, E. (2024) *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* [film stills] - diffraction of an alter in SE Asia with imagery of the Sepoy Mutiny as anticolonial resistance]

As Lowder's work suggests more-than-human timescales, in its strangeness of movement and asynchronous time, I wondered if this allowed for the possibility for depiction of human and more-than, in collaborative resistance. This is experimented with to escalate the narrative and suggest that the resistance must face the disfigured colonizer entrapped by the moon. To convey the enormity of this struggle, tactics of agential cut are combined. Here the super 8 footage is from Kotex, a decaying brutalist building in Split. The archival imagery is of found news footage of Sarajevo in 1992, of men in uniform alongside plain clothed fighting the war that fractured Yugoslavia. His presence is accompanied by the Yardbirds *He's Always There* which flips a song meant as romantic serenade, to sounding like a threat. Again, Lowdereque faceting is expanded beyond the human registers of here and now, and as spurred by Nils Bubant, utilizes documentation of 'ghostly necropolitics,' to provide space for 'a politics informed by other kinds of spirits.' This time portions of it are also portions of the Georgian lost film, *Sapovnela* (1959), by Otar Losseliani, which translates to "the flower that nobody can find." Of gladiolas. One of the few flowers whose scientific name, *Gladiolus oppositiflorus*, and English name overlap, both of which refer to Roman gladiators. It is the word for small versions of their swords. It is past, and possible future, diffracted by intentional collective resistance; a radical intimacy.







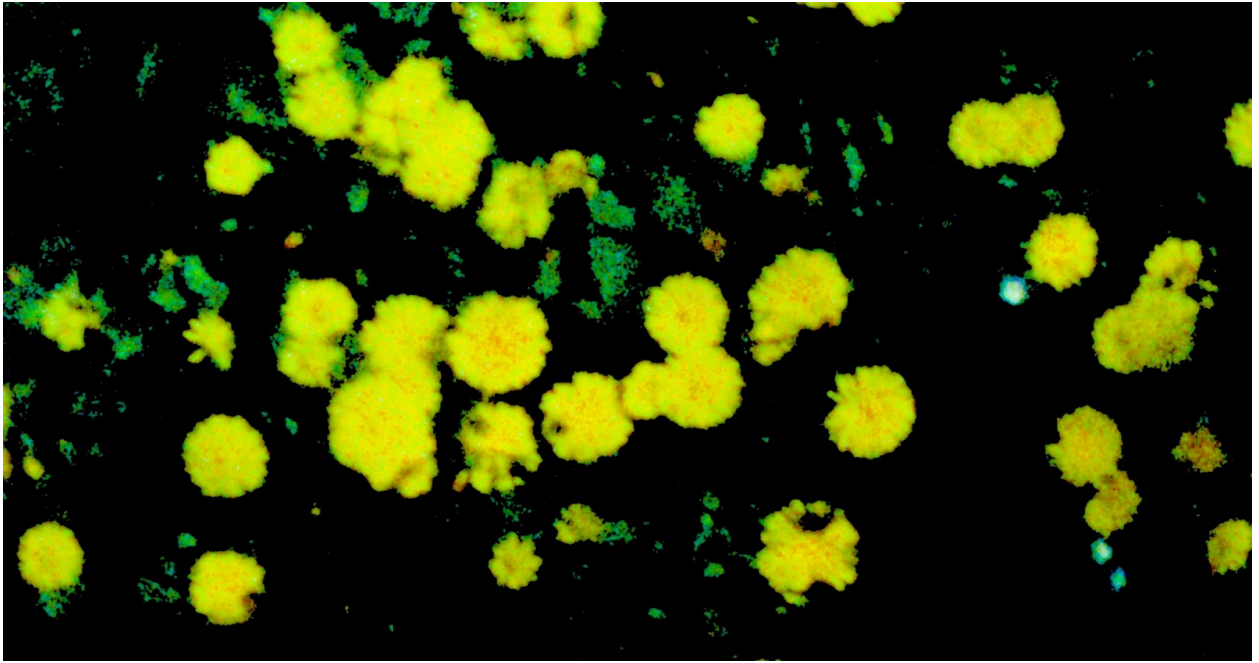
[Wilkerson, E. (2024) *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* [film stills] - archives of regional warfare]

To create the agential cut for the last act of resistance, I turned to my friend and collaborator, Mexican filmmaker Iliana Pichardo Urrutia, who was involved in the anti-femicide movement in Mexico City. We met a few years before when she participated in a workshop led by Travis, in Mexico City, on using the method of ‘film destroy’ to address the murder of hundreds of student protesters leading up to the 1968 Olympic Games. We immediately connected with our shared drive to make work towards justice, work that performs borders. It was an eye opening time for me, which we also talked through. I had recently moved from California to New York. Coming to Mexico felt like returning home, which of course, is a strange feeling to have in a foreign country. This distance allowed me to begin to understand Spanish colonialism and the legacies these places share in a new way. This experience shows the effectiveness of queer positionality and the desire to shift the parallax gap. We have since collaborated further. And when I told her I was looking for video documentation of female resistance, Iliana offered her footage of a 2020 protest for experimentation. This is the beauty of solidarity and collective collaboration; a re-wilding of ‘gossip’

In Mexico, femicide, a modern form of witch attack, is a growing problem. “On average, 10 women or girls are killed daily nationwide. Officials have recognized the femicide rate and violence against women as problematic for decades, yet little progress is evident in national data,” (Sanchez & Pesce, 2022). The murder rate in Mexico for all genders, is exceedingly high. The violence of colonial subjugation is recapitulated in this consistent loss of life. The

anti-femicide march passed through a large square where a 16th century Spanish church and government buildings were built on the site of Templo Mayor, an Aztec city. The towers of this church are seen in the film still below. Portions of Templo Mayor have been excavated adjacent to this site. It is a sacred place, in covering it, the invaders attempted to erase the grandeur of a thriving and intelligent society. (Atwood, 2014). Her footage flashes between my super 8 footage from spring flowers in Split, underexposed to convey an eerie quality and strange coloration, with the idea that the increase in black space would aid the eye in moving between these two spaces, distinct yet entangled. As the diffraction continues, found footage from the January 6, 2021 right-wing invasion of the White House and attempt to enact a coup, as well as footage of police attacking peaceful pro-Palestinian activists from May 2024. The rapid movement between them causes a (re)orientation, they read as working in unison, rather than separately. In western ontology, this collaboration is a sequence of impossibility. According to kinship ontology and Gaia Theory, this is work in collective reciprocity and radical care for a civilization of multiplicities.





[Wilkerson, E. (2024) *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* [film stills] - anti-femicide protest and super 8 of spring flowers intercut with police footage of the June 6th 2022 raid on the White House, and May 2024 raid on student pro-palestinian protestors]

The ledger of wounds must work in local and global scales, as they are inextricable. *Strange Flower* vacillates between the two. On a global scale, compiling an inclusive ledger would be a massive undertaking. The list of nuclear mining and processing areas on Navajo and Hopi land discussed in Chapter 1, for example, are in the hundreds alone, only a few of which have received the official superfund designation to mark it as necessitating government oversight and clean up. This does not even include the test sites, studies on the global movement of nuclear fallout, or the bodies marked with cancer from uranium exposure. To understand grand and urgent matters, sometimes they must be approached as something regional and small. For the film, I included a representative wasteland, to represent the work in repair that must be undertaken. Nils Bubant calls these 'haunted geologies,' (2017). It is documentation of the extent we have strayed from our reciprocal relationship with Earth as our home and as our mother. In this instance, Sidoarjo, Indonesia, of a village where there had been oil fracking, swallowed by a mud volcano, (Tsing et al, 2017). These are apocalyptic views of speculative violence. Imagery of the wounds inflicted by humans, entangled in personal trajectories. A recurring haunting.



[still from *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)* (2024) [film stills] - art installation in Sidoarjo, East Java, Indonesia, what was once a village is now a mud volcano caused by oil extraction]

Diffraction speaks to past cycles, and their future trajectories. It also provides space for resistance and the reimagination of allies. This methodology can be applied to any landscape where there is a need for ghosts to speak, be it those of the past, the present, or the future. It is particularly useful in contested spaces, where symbiosis and reciprocity are interrupted by histories of being at odds. Particularly in the space where humans forgot how much nature teaches us, and nurtures us, how she is our mother. The main requirement is the willingness to venture into the void and search for impossible images. It is work in performing the boundaries of what is seen and not, an active widening of the aperture of visibility that recognizes that the convergence of subjective and objective is a pathway towards new and open futures. As such it weaves between medicine and poison.

The last step to making a full draft of the film was to write and perform the voice over. As work in critical fabulation it needed to move between historical document and fiction. It needed to convey my deep love for this place and its people. It had to convey the loss of this severing with nature, and the precarity of life in an ecotone of friction. But especially, it needed to be an act of resistance, a weed intent to disperse and grow anew. Though the text was not written until the end, it is still helpful to understand the intention of each act. To acknowledge troubled histories it is said, "They used to burn us. They have been taking our land for themselves for many years now. They thought the threat of violence would be enough for us to quit. And it was, for some," (Wilkerson, 2024). To speak with these elements of living archive, provides a ledger of wounds to attend to.

Once I had a draft, I needed fresh eyes on it. It is intended as a global film, one that transcends regions. But I needed to ensure this was working. I needed it to be seen by a Croatian to ensure there were not clumsy details and that the work was respectful. I also wished to have people from other places to ensure that the specifically local information was translating in a way that made sense. I asked Sunčica Fredelić, as it was important she felt good about how she is portrayed in the work, as well as her country, and she has a brilliant mind for cinema. I made a trade with the queer Lebanese filmmaker Raed Rafei, as we have been trading editing consultations on new work since we banded together in the beginnings of covid lockdowns and began meeting with a collective of filmmakers and academics as support and solidarity when we named, Radical Quarantine Group. I helped with his beautiful portrait of hidden lives of queer resistance in his home city entitled, *Tripoli: a tale of three cities* (2024), and he helped me in return. Every time I hear of bombs being dropped in Lebanon, I think of the faces in his film. And as we always support each other in making work, both as muse and mentor, I also asked Travis. Their generous conversations and

questions were what pushed the nearly finished film, to one ready to screen. These kinds of collective practices are essential for anti-Hollywood film practices. It is a counter-network and intentional engagement with the Noosphere. The more this kind of solidarity can expand, the more feral filmmaking can spread.

This methodology of feral filmmaking is an imperfect experiment in diffracting monoculture. It speaks to an ontology not widely recognized, in the hope that increased familiarization with it, will increase its likelihood to take root. Some read more overtly than others. This is work in landrace, made for the place it is created in, while also arguing that local spaces are dependent on global wellbeing. It aims to present divergent histories, alternative notions of land use, ideas of the animism of the natural world as proposed in counter-science, and forms of resistance to monoculture. I had been considering three conclusions for the film. A future I wish for. A future I fear. And a future of justice alongside great loss. All are possible futures. The question of which to include was given clarity during the celebration of the lunar new year. It was the new moon. Fireworks were going off along the banks of the Xietong River, washing my apartment in colored light. I imagine how they look to the moon. I placed two oranges in the kitchen window, along with a shallow dish of water, and made my wish.

Chapter 6 - After-Word or How Life Emerges From Rot and Decay

Our garden is forlorn
Our garden is forlorn

All day from behind the door
come sounds of cuts and tears
sounds of blasts.

- Forugh Farrokhzad, Excerpt from *I Pity the Garden*

I tell you this
to break your heart,

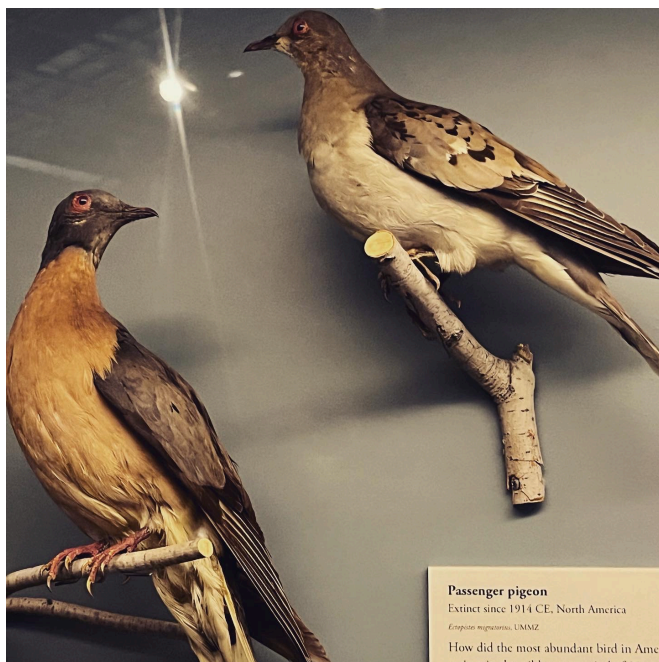
by which I mean only
that it break open and never close again
To the rest of the world.

- conclusion of the poem *Lead*, by Mary Oliver

I hope for a long life to make films and grow gardens with my hands and sweat, to do both as practice of permaculture. I find comfort in the thought of my films being watched, and fruit trees eaten from, after I am gone. But I also find comfort in the knowledge that I can then leave my body to nourish future growth. Perhaps we would see space differently without this obsession with a perceived end. I find immense beauty in the idea that I would become a multitude of traces nourishing a multitude of beings, an infinite continuum. A final permacultural act. So please, do not bury me in formaldehyde, I do not wish my body to be poison. Bury me in soil under a California live oak tree, with a morel mushroom, a paper copy of Adrienne Rich's *Diving into the Wreck*, ("I came to see the damage done and the treasures that prevail...the thing itself and not the myth...a book of myths in which our names do not appear."), and the seeds of the California poppy. Morels and oaks grow together symbiotically. The tree and my decay will help them fruit. Cook the morels in butter and garlic and fresh herbs and we will have a meal together still. And after the next spring rains, come watch me bloom, delicate and orange. Notice how I pull my petals together when night comes and the coyotes begin to howl, and reopen them in the morning to the squawks of a pandemonium of wild parrots flying overhead. And when all my petals fall, let my seeds spread, and I'll return to visit again. In this frame, the opposite of life is not death, the opposite of life, is more life, strong and beautiful, tied together in synchronicity; a dance between iterations of living. It is in this that I will finally be home. Please take my work as an imperfect ledger and fill in the gaps of what I left out. Interventions toward a reciprocal relationship with Earth demand seeing and understanding the hope and the beauty in shifting states.

This thesis has moved between fonts, one of objective knowledge, and one of the other being personal, and therein considered subjective. This begins as an apparatus to comply with academic structures of what is in keeping with acceptable subject matter for knowledge making. As this is expanded upon in the thesis, it intends to ask questions about why some phenomena are deemed suitable for inclusion in discourse and some are not. To ask why some things are acceptable for listening to and some are not; to perform the cosmological. This becomes an exercise in dialectics. It may be regarded as a moot point: for some opening up space for dialogue and listening, and for some quite the opposite. Even as I move exceptional distances time and time again, like Estes writes, I can only stretch out to mend the part of the world that is in my reach.

This work has been in service to providing passageways to the parallax gap. To attend to its visibility. These spaces that have culturally been attributed to nothing, are shown to be anything but. The idea of nothingness must be read as a lack of understanding, rather than material or tangible. Black holes are full of life. Mars has water. Chernobyl is home to radiation eating fungi and packs of wild dogs. Death too, is not nothing. These were always spaces full of life and being.



[Wilkerson, E. (2022) - [photograph] of taxidermy of the extinct Passenger Pigeons, Natural History Museum, University of Michigan]

I make practice-based interventions, rooted in research, listenings for disappeared and displaced worlds. As meditations on solastalgia, I wonder about which things I am documenting as last testaments, like the taxidermied passenger pigeons displayed at The Royal Ontario Museum. Once part of a large community, they are now two specimens, a male and a female, affixed almost like lovers, to a perch, silent and still, not so dissimilar to the sign for a disappeared glacier. I cannot break open every human heart. I cannot mend all the open wounds of Earth or her most marginalized inhabitants. But I am here. I am present. I bear witness. I sit with grief. I sit with discomfort and with dissonance. I move with the tracings of all the places I have been on my skin and carry pieces of their ghosts with me.

My films are cartographies of resistance, in search of routes towards empathy, where the only sea monster is the refusal to engage with the poisons of our own making.

As mentioned, I struggled with how to end the film to honor the research I have collected and sat with over these years, the wisdoms I have learned from Deep Listening and learning from the natural world, and to the people who have become dear to me, that collaborated with me on this work whether it be in conversations, participating on screen, to offering notes on cuts. What origin story needed to be told? After all, the aim of this work is to fragment colonial invasion. Posthumanism is work in decentering the human, in retreating from domination, in moving towards a model of reciprocity with the more-than-human. It is also contemplating our current path towards destruction. I portray a potential future in the hope that grief can spark care and the will to live differently. In hope that it will disperse more weeds.

As war ravaged Gaza and the news was filled with images of mothers cradling their dead children, it was difficult to muster the hope I wished for to conclude this thesis. Rebellion after all requires hope. At first, “anyone calling attention to the spectacle of Washington’s blind commitment to Israel [was] accused of antisemitism and ignoring the lessons of the Shoah,” (Mishra, 2024, p. 4). As previously discussed, a blind misuse of a word intended to describe the multicultural nature of the region, and a tactic of silencing. When the university students, barely past childhood themselves, began to protest, resistance encampments sprouted across the country. It marked a shift. It was in this setting that the performance of John Cage’s *4’33”* (1952) once again sparked an outrage. McWhorter Associate Professor at Columbia wrote an opinion piece in the *New York Times*, where he complained, “I had to tell the students we could not listen to that piece that afternoon because the surrounding noise would have been not birds or people walking by in the hallway but infuriated chanting from protesters outside the building,” (2024). I would imagine a professor to understand the intention of the piece to provide space for listening, rather than to search for an impossible silence. He contended that the piece would have allowed the chants outside to enter into the classroom, as if the classroom was intended as a border to keep out these kinds of things. “The idea of *4’33”* is to provide a frame for listening to the sounds of the world as a piece of music. Sometimes this means the sounds of nature, but most often it is the sounds of people,” (Oh, 2024). Which also means we must attend to the sounds of unrest and the parallax gap. What better entrance into the dialectics on peaceful protest, on returning to respectful debate, on sitting in the grief of long terrible histories and imagining better futures, of listening to each other? We can only imagine Cage’s response to his latest ruffling of

feathers. But as an artist who said, “dissonances and noises are welcome in this new music,” I imagine he would be pleased, (1961, p. 11).

The encampments coincided with Passover, a commemoration of when Jews were freed from enslavement. The students were holding seders from camps of resistance. “As evening fell over Columbia’s tent encampment on [Passover] Monday, about 100 students and faculty gathered in a circle around a blue tarp heaped with boxes of matzo and food they had prepared in a kosher kitchen. Some students wore kaffiyehs, the traditional Palestinian scarf, while others wore Jewish skullcaps [or yarmulke]. They distributed handmade Haggadahs — prayer books for the Passover holiday — and read prayers in Hebrew, keeping to the traditional order,” (Otterman et al, 2024). It is an old ceremony, and in a gesture of solidarity, the old ways shifted to reflect the urgent needs of this moment. “Like a watermelon on the Seder plate to represent the flag of Palestine. There were repeated references to the suffering of the Palestinian people and the need to ensure their liberation. There was grape juice instead of wine to respect the alcohol-free encampment,” (Otterman et al, 2024). It was an act of semitic solidarity. Just as a tiny seed can grow into a tree that feeds generations, this act of expanding ceremony makes space growing discourse and empathy; the cultivation of hope.

Just after the students left campus for summer, and I was to tie up the last details of this thesis, I was invited to join The Common Knowledge School, a residency composed of artists, curators, and researchers engaged in anti-fascist and decolonial work with particular interest in the Balkan region, organized by the L’Internationale. In a new (dis/re)orientation, I would return again to Croatia. I was to spend two weeks visiting archives in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and a monastery in the mountains between. Twenty eight of us, from all around the world gathered to talk through issues and share our work. I came in search of the last loose straws of my years of investigative research and practice, and to see what would come up from being back there after time away. I was surprised how much it still felt like home and how much I missed being around the familiar. When I could find some spare time in the long days, I made sure to practice Deep Listening, to make space for ‘other kinds of spirits.’

The following Deep Listening account came from the first day in a place that I had not been to since 2012, when Travis was invited to present a retrospective of his work at the Kinoteka Slovenska. It was in the late night theoretical discussions on film, art, politics, and partisans with local artists, where I realized I was an artist. It is an experience that changed the trajectory of my life. I began working on films with him soon after:

I write to the sound of church bells. I have not been here in twelve years. This place is what pushed me to be an artist. Where I first heard details of the Partisan resistance. I met Marianna Tsionki, a Greek art curator who lives in Manchester, during the residency. We were talking about our concerns of rising fascism. I told her that a few of the Croatians I spoke with described the cultural connection to fascism as being handed down from stories of WWII where partisans would knock on the door to the family home and take one brother to fight, and then later, the fascists would come and take the other. Resistance to either meant death. That there were stories handed down of betrayal from both sides, and that this ancestral trauma overrides theoretical alliance. She told me that when she was little, growing up in Greece, that her mother explained civil war as when some members of the family rise up against others. Now I am wondering, perhaps fascism is not running rampant because people are horrible, rather because they are filled with heartbreak, a kind that they were handed at birth. This is not to say resistance is not important, quite the opposite, but perhaps it needs to take the form of mending a broken heart, rather than punishing brokenness...

Perhaps, in my desire to work through this academic and theoretical investigation of invasive species as beginning with learning from plants, the intent has always been to mend impossible wounds.

I also met two women who work in feral landscapes Danica Sretenović and Gaja Mežnaric Osole who formed Krater Collective, and The School for Feral Grounds in an undeveloped plot of land in the north of Ljubljana. We formed an immediate kinship in this shared work. They make tea, paper, and cups from the invasive species that live throughout the property as a way to reclaim this space and rethink notions of invasion. It felt like the final permission to take this point of resistance. To argue for this reunion with wild. We spent late nights sipping slivovitz, a Slovenian type of rakija and sharing stories. Danica, in a gesture of shared cosmology, read my astrological chart, and exclaimed that because of the positionality of celestial bodies at the time of my birth, I will probably always be drawn to understanding 'home.' We are a long way from being able to translate the cosmos, but it was an interesting thing to say, as I had not spoken of how central that is to my work. Perhaps she felt, as a Serbian living in Slovenia, the effects of strange distances that we share, that this radiates out in unspoken ways. Perhaps her listening is more attuned to the more-than-human.

Strange Flower (little sister to the poor), as work in wilding as a consideration of other forms of cultivation. It is meant an embodiment of the methodology of feral filmmaking and homage to Third Cinema, including that in the making of the film I formed a deep bond with the land and melancholy for its history as the ecotonal south of Europe, and meaningful friendships and collaborative relationships too with the people I was lucky to meet there, which continue to this day. It is a post-humanist film to tend to the grief of this split between human and land

that has been re-enacted time and time again, as much as it hopes for a permacultural future, perhaps even one day a reunited Yugoslavia, as richly diverse as it once was. It is a focused investigation into diffracting a localized colonialization. Because of this, it attends to the initial aim of investigating invasive species to fragment colonial invasion through research and creative practice. It also takes on the stated aims: to research and name issues of monoculture documented in the archive and historical canon, to look for alternative ontologies in the counter-canon, to investigate methodologies of shifting towards counter ontologies by applying Sullivan's practice-led research methodology. And does so on micro and macro scales, as both local and global phenomena, as it moves between this written document and the practice space of the film.

This work has also attended to the research questions it set out to address. Firstly, regarding the issue that since this era of rampant monoculturalism began during the Enlightenment, and it is understood that culture and cultivation are socially imposed, what kinds of practices can shift culture and cultivation towards more sustainable models? To which the wilding of feral filmmaking offers a response and a means to engage in permaculture and not rely on the toxicity of colonial cultivation. Secondly, to address the question of how do we make suitable space for the massive loss, grief, and justice due this era, both Deep Listening as an embodied ceremony, and critical fabulation as an external space making practice for attending to justice and providing visibility. They attend to both the personal and political. And lastly, the question of how to address Hollywood's monocultural approach, including that perhaps film be utilized inversely as a medium to perform permaculture. The application of ferality and diffraction, by claiming the wilded crystal-image and the agential cut offers processes to do just that, by working to expand human understanding of being entangled in larger dynamic systems. But furthermore, as a practical application, by attending to issues of labor and enforced labor divisions, revising work flow so practice does not begin with imposed bias of word or camera, by treating location as living archive as opposed to a site of transference or extraction and people as precious rather than as observed and divided, and by opening this process to all through tactics of modest and democratic practice, it is no longer a medium for elites, and therein no longer needs to perform elitism. It lays out ways to make community, both with filmmakers, but also in place, where each contributes to the success of the other. It is no longer a source of division. I have been asked what kind of film this is. Is it documentary, is it fiction, is it genre, is it experimental? The answer is yes. It is also an elegy. One that refuses to remain contained in borders. An origin story for a wild future.

Though this thesis winds down, my work in the field, as both a researcher and a filmmaker will continue in search of honoring other kinds of spirits and new wounds to mend. Each project I finish raises more questions and reveals more to attend to. There are so many stories held in the parallax gap. I feel compelled to continue breaking with my personal ancestry; to make anti-colonial work. This means telling stories and showing faces and experiences redacted from the Western canon, finding stories in ledgers and folk tales, and pushing for different kinds of origin stories. I feel compelled to make collaborative work in the global south. I intend to learn more about China, in hopes that there is a possibility that I may one day understand how to thoughtfully and delicately approach making work that aims to heal the long standing divide between the East and the West, to engage in difference in manner that sparks empathy and builds trust. The West can learn from the East, but I have yet to learn how to share that. And lastly, as I too sometimes become tangled with nostalgia, what I wish most for is to return home and make work that shares what I see now through my (dis)orientation, what I have learned from distance, what I notice being someone who is both alienated and yet still bound to that place.

This written work and practical outcome intend to offer a model of resistance that can easily be applied to future research and film work, through the step by step guide proposed in chapter four, and applied in chapter five. One of intra-action, in that it is the antithesis of Hollywood monoculturalism, and adheres to the ethos of Third Cinema to make modest work that incites social and political engagement. A model that can be applied to any region, and by anyone willing to practice diffracting colonial strongholds in the search for better ways of being human and more-than through breaking of elitist barriers. As a means for breaking elitist barriers about who can make cinema, and what stories cinema can tell. It is a model for active-isms that spread like weeds. As the PhD is just an era of the work, rather than a culmination of it, to begin this post-PhD dispersal, this idea has already been presented in the form of a manifesto in Spanish entitled, "Feral Filmmaking: a wilding of cinema," along with a research screening of *Strange Flower* and accompanied by a film and manifesto by Trinh Minh-ha at the Center for Cinema and Creation, in collaboration with AricaDocs, in Santiago, Chile (October, 2024). Where it roots next remains to be seen.

Documents have been drafted to protect the rights of white men, it is time for the Rights for Future, to be practiced. It begins with two rights stated by Ariella Aïsha Azoulay which are directly connected to invasive species:

"The right not to be expelled from one's home and the right not to be a perpetrator."

To this I add:

The right to resistance through feral means.

The right to live in an entangled collaboration and reciprocity with nature and each other as the bodylandscape, and the right to work towards permaculture.

The right to cultivate clean water, fresh air, soil full of microbial life and the right to demand infrastructural aid in attaining that.

The right to sustainably cultivate wilderness for foraging and for communing with.

The right to learn and teach plant medicine as mutual aid and radical generosity.

The right to wander benevolently, unhindered by borders.

The right to not be imprisoned and the right to not be a warden.

The right to protect human and more-than-human kin and the right to be protected.

The right to have voice and be heard and the right to listen deeply, particularly to other kinds of spirits.

The right to not be invaded and the right to not invade.

The right to work towards mending impossible wounds.

Portfolio

to Accompany *Invasive Species*

Film as Practice Outcome: *Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)*

Trailer Link: <https://vimeo.com/982223512?share=copy>

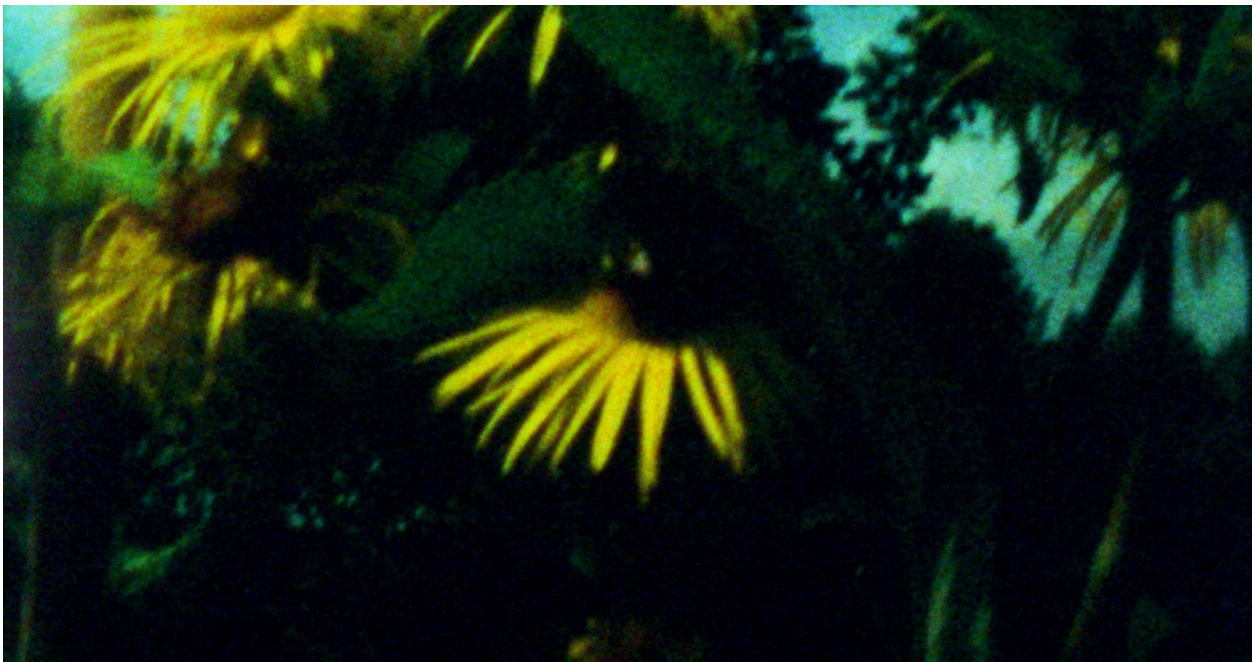
Film Link: <https://vimeo.com/903231491/26f0e4a267?share=copy>

Brief Synopsis:

After a failed attempt to colonize the moon, an army becomes entrapped by it. In fear of their return, witches have been preparing their resistance for generations. An experiment with Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation," as a means to engage in systemic gaps in the archive by incorporating speculative fiction into a historiographical investigation of human and more-than. A documentary of possible pasts and futures.

Film Stills:







Voice Over Text:

When I was a child, my mother would read me a story of an alchemist who tried to colonize the moon, and the woman who tried to stop him. She was an alchemist as well, but rather than obsessing over gold, she worked towards the creation of life. When she warned him, he told her to go back to working with her flowers. The moon waited for his treachery, and captured him instead. The man and his army have been plotting their return since. The women work, generation after

generation, to ensure they remain entrapped, and to rebel against the violence they still cast towards Earth.

They have been called by many names since their entrapment: colonizer, conquistador, fascist, pioneer, dictator, settler...

They used to burn us. They have been taking our land for themselves for many years now. They thought the threat of violence would be enough for us to quit. And it was, for some.

I come from a long history of resistance.

There are not many of us left. And fewer still that still know how to make medicine from the forest.

Earth has told us that if we cannot stop them, she will have to heat herself to reestablish balance, like body kills a virus.

If we fail, this is the only way.

Today the flowers whisper that he is watching me.

Sometimes I can see our rebellions in my dreams and in shimmers through our alters.

This was a port city, near the western end of the Silk Road.

A port that outsiders have long fought for control

We were able to unify ourselves against them,

for a while.

Jelka's mother called me. She was ill, she called me to help [Jelka means moon or torch - like a guiding light]

Children have become rare. The alchemist's toxins are much stronger than the medicines I can forage.

Earth is a body...Moon is a body (repeat)

This is a long fought over borderland.

Alliances here have shifted back and forth between East and West. Controlling this place also meant controlling spices sailing West.

I see traces of this in the land.

But I also see my mother. She died when I was young. I still find her in the first nettles of spring, when the waves calm after the southern wind passes, and in the ruins of war.

I still see her with I Gather medicine, when I bow to Earth.

Sometimes I push my ear to the soil to hear her better.

This is where they would burn us. A church tower casts its shadow over the square.

This is also a place of rebellion.

It was one of the few where the early fascist resistance was successful. There once stood a Italianate fountain between the square and the sea. After the fascists were defeated, it was destroyed. In its beauty, it was also a reminder of war.

After the war. The new borders cut off sisters and fathers. The state sold everything off. Even the sea I grew up on.

Mounds of red ferns grew over the bodies hidden just below the ground..

The alchemists discovered that if they could instigate fighting amongst ourselves they could distract us from their plunder.

In the screaming, in the grief, we have forgotten how to listen to each other. We have forgotten we all have the same enemy. We have forgotten we all have the same mother. Instead of nurturing resistance, we are close to losing it all.

The alchemists know if we are fighting amongst ourselves, we cannot unify against them.

The light of a dead star continues to travel outwards even after it is gone.

That shimmer of sea, right there, is telling the others what it was like to be part of an iceberg for 10,000 years.

I sometimes imagine what Earth would be like without humans.

The alchemist's army had learned how to feed from the radiation in a way that keeps them somewhere between alive and dead. They have been protected by men on earth who they've paid off in piles of gold in return for colonial plunder, for digging deep into the Earth's body. Making her weak for their return.

We have been waiting.

Preparing best we could.

But the alchemists have been as well. Searching for more fractures to instigate.

We must be careful what we take,

to learn what is medicine and what brings death.

To learn the difference between medicine and poison.

Foraging in the ruins of a city

is working with ghosts.

These medicines have returned every spring

for many years now.

I think of the hands,
though long gone,
that planted them.

Of a time before we were a small and fractured resistance.

The hum of the flowers has shifted.

They are telling me the alchemists have returned.

It all happened so quickly.

After the bombs made of mutilated moon rocks,
gray dust covered what was left on Earth.

Those that survived the bombing were soon taken by hunger.

The alchemists, in their greed, destroyed themselves
along with the last of the humans.
Turned to fossilized moonstone.

I leave with one final hope,
that the red ferns will spread come springtime
to mark that we were once here.
And to mark that we fought,
with everything we had,
against this.

Process Work: Deep Listening Exercises

Free Writing Accounts and Practice Sketches

Deep Listening exercises have become essential to my work as a means to move between practice and research, to facilitate the transition between the intuitive or subjective mind, and the academic or objective mind. This movement is essential for Sullivan's proposed methodology for practice-led research. The question of whether this division is culturally cultivated, or innate to human brain structures, is perhaps a thesis topic in and of itself. A prime problematization of this perceived division being the class division in access to higher education and resulting form of gatekeeping as to who is allowed access to academic objectivity. As such, it is a privilege to be able to engage in the subjective, as a response to objective learning and work processes. These specific Deep Listening exercises were completed under the instruction of Dr. Elena Marchevska. For more detail on the parameters for these process based exercises, please reference Chapter 2 of *Invasive Species*. The following accounts are written responses to Deep Listening exercises undertaken to aid in the transition between phases of filmmaking, as well as the metaphorical, and sometimes physical vertigo caused by my personal migrations over the course of this project. Citations were added after, to facilitate further investigation of subject matter.

Deep Listening Exercises I: to guide the development phase

Location: Split, Croatia

Experiential Account of a Deep Listening Exercise Performed September 2022.

The following is an excerpt from that writing:

It is a sunny warm day in Split. I don't know my way around yet. It's barely a month since we arrived. I am staying on the outskirts in Puljanka, until tourist season ends and I can afford a place in the center, near the old town. I walked past the fig tree still dripping in fruit. There was an old man gathering bags of fruit before getting in his car and driving off. Each time I walk by this tree, there is someone new partaking in its fruit. I picked a ripe one that I could reach from the sidewalk. It was juicy and sweet. I knew the direction of the sea as you can see it when you reach the main street, at the

base of the hill. You can look out to the islands. When I reached the main street, I headed down the hill, towards the water. Where the street starts to curve, I could have followed it, or headed towards the brutalist apartments called Split 3. These are paths I have never taken before. I chose the latter, entering the complex through a pine forest dotted with children playing in parks and exercise fields, emerging from the pines to walk past the crumbling facades of a new social way of living, of the promise of Yugoslavia, a relic. I kept going, walking towards the sea. The street again began to curve, I chose the route with less cars, walking around a concrete retaining wall covered in lizards running into the crevices and covers of plants. And coming to see a large garden of fruit trees and rows of crops. The side of the street opens to reveal a creek that is entombed in city infrastructure. Its last stretch allowed to flow in the open air, to reflect with sunlight. I walked by more old homes with similar gardens. And an olive orchard, the branches heavy with fruit. A bit of countryside in the middle of the city. The hill above holds the remains (or the incomplete beginnings of) concrete and rebar of a large building close to ruin. I followed the creek to where it spills into the Adriatic Sea. A small bay of small pebbles the color of bone, rounded from the sea rolling over them. I sat to watch the water. It moved like a story told as a repetition of stanzas. I realized I was positioned to look out towards Italy, and further towards the statue in Barcelona of Christopher Columbus, at the edge of La Rambla, pointing out to sea, and further still, towards America. I shifted so my body was oriented towards the Mediterranean and towards Africa. I felt an energetic buzz in my body from the long walk to get here. I was watching the water, listening for the stanzas of the sea. I read yesterday about the sinking of a migrant raft from Lebanon headed to Italy. A boat of Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians risking death for the possibility of escaping the hopeless that has filled their homelands. It was still warm like you would hope for at the end of summer. It would be perfect weather to arrive into a new place, to begin anew again. Children were amongst the lifeless bodies found. I imagined the kind of despair that must fill your body to bring your child with you on such a journey. I imagine the terror that body must have felt when the raft began to sink. I remembered the photograph from a few years back of two bodies found in the Rio Grande, discolored and face down in the water, a father with his son's body tucked in his shirt. He tried to swim the border between Mexico and the US and was carried by the current. I remembered the feeling a few months ago when my kids were playing hide and seek by the sea in Singapore and no one could find my son, the panic that the sea had taken him, and the privilege of finding him proud of his skillful hiding place. I stripped into my underwear and walked into the water. I swam out to a depth where I could float onto my back, staring up to the sky, to worlds beyond my own. The stanzas were holding my body. I moved with the gentle waves of the water, water that tastes just like tears. After some time, I swam back to shore. As I sat for a bit to dry off, I noticed small cylindrical stone structures on the hillside above me with small slit open air windows, like the slits for arrows and spears in old castles. They must be for watching the sea. For enforcing who is in this water and who is not. A bunker. I love the feeling of spending long enough in the water that your body can still feel its movement even after you've moved out of it; the stanzas stay

with you. On my long walk back, I went a different route back up the hill, a path lined by wild plants. I had woken up with a scratchy throat, so I gathered some medicines to make a tea: fennel flowers, wild oregano, mallow leaves. An old man came up to me with a giant smile, pointing at the plants. I did not understand much of what he said. But one word he was repeating, I knew, "rakija". He was telling me about medicine. Somehow, I made it back to the apartment, on paths I have never set foot on before. I made my tea and added some local honey, which always tastes most wonderful when collected by your own hands, gifted directly to you from nature, and then took a long rest. I dreamed of papers being pushed out to sea by the branches of a laurel tree, I dreamed this was meant to be just so.

Location: Split, Croatia

Experiential Account of a Deep Listening Exercise Performed November 2022.

The following is an excerpt from that writing:

I met a woman the other day at the butcher shop with a bag from the Rotterdam Film Festival. It is a small circle of filmmakers who would wear this bag. Marijana Gabrijela Perić, who goes by Gabi, and I became instant friends. She is working on a film with her partner about the photographs her aunt left her after she died, a collection of thousands from when she worked as a travel magazine photographer. We are neighbors. She also works at the library down the street where she runs their media department and a monthly book club and film screenings, in English, of work by Croats. She loves to talk about the history of Croatia and denounces tourists who visit to party while being disinterested in culture. Every summer she gets kicked out of her apartment so the landlord can rent to high paying visitors. Sitting outside on perhaps one of the last warm and sunny days of autumn, she told me that she was a baby when the war broke out and that her family fled from Split to Ljubljana. She told me of earlier histories of war, how after Croatia won independence from the fascists in Italy in WWII, they were then occupied by Nazi Germany. That Croatia was one of the rare instances of localized partisan victory. (cite) She told me that there was just one woman regionally tried and murdered as a witch in Split, though it was a practice quite common in Italy and in northern Croatia. She was burned in a square that has had many names, currently named after Franjo Tuđman, the first leader after the fall of Yugoslavia. It sits at the base of a hill named Marjan, left wild, where locals go to forage for food, herbs, and medicines for their teacups, dinner tables, and rakija bottles. The remnants of an old fountain remain between the square and the sea. Though now it is a simple spout, it was once a multitiered Italianate piece of art, from the time when the city was part of the Roman Empire. It was demolished after WWII in an attempt to forget the fascist domination of the city by Italy and then Germany. (cite this) The Italian influence there remains none the less, in the accent and

the food, in the architecture of limestone blocks and red tiled roofs, and in the use of ciao as a greeting and farewell.

Marijana tells me something interesting, though both considered Balkan, there is a curious regional quandary in relation to witch trials in Croatia when comparing Dalmatia, with Zagreb, the capital in the north which is in close proximity to the Alps and was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. This is reflected in their use of the word servus (ser-voos) as a greeting and a farewell, in the gothic and baroque architecture. And curiously, the city saw hundreds of witch trials, culminating in the burning of women in the square of St. Mark's Church, in the hilltop fortified city. Why was this era of violence so markedly violent in the north, but spared in the south? Was it a different connection to the land and to plant medicine? Were early capitalist enclosures and private property enforced differently as to avoid such violence? I was exploring a haven for plant medicine in a place of continuously shifted borders, some self-enforced and some imposed, straddling divisions between east and west.

Location: Split, Croatia

Experiential Account of a Deep Listening Exercise Performed December 2022.

The following is an excerpt from that writing:

*Today was hard on the heart. I took a holiday trip to the inland of Croatia with Travis and the children. We visited the Christmas market in Zagreb. I hoped in old town to visit the paving stones that still remain to hold the supports for the burning pyre in the square in front of St. Marks Church, which is also the base of the Croatian national government. It was blocked off, as St. Marks is being retrofitted after being damaged in the 2020 earthquake, which happened right after people began to quarantine. After visiting the Christmas Market, we drove parallel with the Bosnian border, to a place of greater death still. Jasenovac is a wide open field, marked with a large brutalist monument, resembling both a flower and a flame, which is dedicated to the estimated 77,000 to 99,000 lives taken there, in WWII. It is a site of mass murder, a concentration camp. After Croatian partisans heroically expelled Mussolini's troops, Croatian Ustaša attempted to seize their place. Allied with the Nazis, they began exercising Nazi tactics on their own land. Jasenovac still holds mounds of bodies, and as a precursor to the ethnic and religious violence in the '90s, more than half of those bodies are Serbian, the remainder are about equal numbers of Jewish, Roma, and political dissidents. There is a pond that is said to have become undrinkable from the rotten bodies and excrement that flooded in. In terms of history and place, the proximity to Srebrenica is inescapable. Nearby the monument there is an old train that used to bring in prisoners in a fixed position on old tracks. Covered in lichen, and tracks obscured by dirt and plants in some places, amongst them, *Plantago major*, white man's*

foot. Nature is reclaiming this place. I came to film with Travis, for his film, Through the Graves the Wind is Blowing (2024). We often collaborate, but for this film as my time is dedicated to the PhD, it is just to help film some shots, to introduce him to Gabi's husband, Ivan, who has become the main character of his film, and for years of playing him my favorite Leonard Cohen song, a cover from which his title comes. Travis was to stay and continue, while I took the kids on an excursion. I filmed first before leaving. It is impossible to walk this place without feeling its ghosts. One shot revisited me in my dreams. I was standing back on the edge of the field to film the monument and the train in the same shot. I let the camera run, to catch the movement of clouds, the wind blowing through branches, but also, Travis is walking with the children on the path, situated between the train and the monument surrounded by mounds. They are walking towards me, and in turn, the camera. I see this while I sleep.

How do you explain this place to a child? My son kept asking how people can kill people like that. I don't know how to give a satisfactory answer. I know it is important to be honest with these histories, to break these cycles. He wishes to be brave, in a way that makes me simultaneously proud and terrified. In the car says he would fight the Nazis, he would fight the Ustaša. The children were obviously shaken. I worried they were too young to learn these histories, even if there are the remains of children younger than them interned in the mounds. We left Travis behind to film, the next destination was an agricultural village in Slavonia, where we picked up a puppy from a kind family who offered candies to the kids. A little round and wiggly jack russell terrier we named Jugo, to mark a time dedicated to working through fractured history and land, but also it is the name of the southern wind. I don't know if this is a fair trade, a puppy, for terrible knowledge, but they love this sweet, rascally bit of fur. Back in Split, I walked him down a tree lined street near our apartment that heads towards the sea. There is a statue of the partisan Rade Končar who was murdered by the Ustaša. Recently a man tried to vandalize it. The statue proceeded to topple on his legs, smashing his bones. The headline in the local press read, "Rade Končar, Still Beating Fascists".

Deep Listening Exercises II: as part of filming methodology

Location: Split, Croatia

Experiential Account of a Deep Listening Exercises Performed March 2023 as Written Just After:

Filming began with the first blooms of spring. After storing their energy all winter, the first blooms are most vibrant. Bursting open with the first warm days. I walked along the seaside near the apartment, to Bačvice and Firule, and then further to the eastern marina. I was thinking about how Rose Lowder's quick imagery of flowers, in jolting positions within the frame, depicted a kind of animism, not usually attributed to plants by layering alternating images from the same landscape, sometimes filmed at the same distance, sometimes not. A play with multiplicities of scale, creating faceting that depicts how space is felt, rather than seen. In the marina, men were hard at work cleaning, patching, and painting boats, summer was coming and the landscape was about to be packed again with tourists. I was running out of time. I took a break at a seaside coffee shop overlooking the water. Looking out, the boats out near Vis appeared to be floating in the air, rather than the water; a fata morgana. While knowing the practical explanation for this phenomenon tied to temperature inversions and light distortion, I was also overjoyed in the sorcery of my eyes showing me the impossible, of being witness to a mirage. I just finished reading Lana Bastašić's Catch the Rabbit for Gabi's book club, about a woman revisiting her childhood home and memories of warfare in Bosnia, for the first time since she left as a teenager. It begins part way through a sentence, and ends with its accompanying fragment. To finish the sentence, you must return to the beginning. Like any real war story, it never ends, much like a fata morgana, in a way that is simultaneously impossible, but also has a practical explanation tied to how we process trauma.

In this ritual of spring wandering, I was listening for the wisdom held in spring flowers, contemplating how to convey their time signature and accompanying volition. We must slow down and pay close attention to observe their movement, their reactions to their space and environment, how they shift with the light over the day, how they respond to toxins and pollutants, how they wilt or stand tall as their relationship to water changes, and how their blooms unfold. What are the conversations between petals? How do they see our movements and hear our words? And how do we respond to them, rather than always asking them to work within the human? With acknowledgment of their timescale? Instead of asking them to respond to us? It works in more-than-human registers. It must be measured as such. I am inspired by Rose Lowder, but like Mark Bradford, I intend to only use abstraction as a means to engage in impossible images, to give them the space to ask questions. How does Lowderesque faceting shift when imagery of the past or possible futures is introduced, when it is pushed into ghostly realms? I am in search of techniques to evoke response-ability. After all, the refusal to engage in these histories is also a political act. It upholds the violence. It covers for the trauma enacted on land and peoples. One cannot be apolitical. The question is if your politics favor the oppressor, or the oppressed.

Location: Split, Croatia

Experiential Account of a Deep Listening Exercises Performed March 2023 as Written Just After:

I was shooting local landscapes around Split. Quite traditional compositions, reminiscent of landscape paintings, but with the addition of duration. The war bunkers dotting the coastline, some of old stones, some of concrete. And the Kotex brutalist building, built for the Mediterranean games, a symbol for the great hope of Yugoslavia to live better, stronger, more ethically, in collaboration, which is falling into ruin and only partially used now. Out of the steps, Atropa belladonna, deadly nightshade grows. The marina, full of fisherman's boats, tourist boats, ferries, and cruise ships. Past traces of warfare. I wanted to film the hillside above where the ferries leave for the islands, but it was enclosed with police tape. Two large naval vessels, one with the flag of Canada and the other of France, were docked, on their way to the Black Sea, bringing supplies to the Ukraine, a country named the Slavic word for 'borderland'. Croatia has long been the entrance point to Europe from the east. And as such, it has been fought over repeatedly. Croatia is decidedly Balkan, but there are traces here of multitudes of fallen empires, Venetian, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, Greek, and Axis Forces. These invasions are seen in the food, in the architecture, in the pronunciation of words. It is just over 100 km from the Croatia border, along the coast, is Durrës, Albania, the western end of the silk road. The food there is quite similar, but church bells are replaced by the call to prayer. Both Split and Durrës have the remains of Roman amphitheaters and aqueducts. I was there in 2017, on my way to Prizren, Kosovo. A city where churches are guarded twenty-four hours a day and lined in barbed wire. Where NATO soldiers police the streets. My son was three months old and Travis was worried I would get attacked for breastfeeding him in public. There are rumors that old war wounds are resurfacing, provoked by the precarity of Covid times, that in Kosovo they will force anyone with Serbian ancestry to attach markers to their license plates that acknowledge they are 'strangers.' Thirty years is not long, in the collective memory of warfare.

Location: Split, Croatia

Experiential Account of a Deep Listening Exercises Performed April 2023 as Written Just After:

This listening exercise, in breaking with the methodological directive, was completed with a companion.

I began shooting the critical fabulation scenes of Strange Flower in a site of ruin, the crumbling 3rd century Roman remains at Salona; in the ruins of empire, on a cold and windy day. It was a fortified town, with a marketplace, amphitheater, chapel, a still functioning aqueduct. The witch is played by the Croatian filmmaker, film preservationist, and artist, Sunčica Fredelić. I met her at the Split Kino Klub, which she brought back to life some years back after it had folded, at a photography exhibition of landscapes from classic films exhibited next to the stills that inspired their capture. We bonded over a shared respect for Jonas Mekas's "Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania," and ideas of how memories are held within the body to be revisited through movement. Behind every scene of her in the film, are dozens of coffees sipped together overlooking the sea and walks through town. I filmed her exploring the landscape, much as I had done in Nuclear Family, but this was her land, her personal history, her family's blood in the soil. When she was a child, it was called Yugoslavia. She was also beginning work on her own film, about her mother, who took her own life after the fall of Yugoslavia, after participating in the Croatian Spring. Her father is a painter, he depicts the sea as a field of repeating small vibrant colored brush strokes. Empires always fall. Doomed by their own greed, or the greed of others. The ground we walked on was buried for many years, and excavated recently. It was destroyed by the Slavs and the Avars in the 7th century. I was thinking about Kumjana Novakova's film on the burial mounds in Srebrenica from the 1990s, filled with Bosnian bodies, and how they are marked by the growth of red ferns, and the ones in Jasenovac, from WWII, filled with Serbian bodies. Cycles of vengeance held in the land (cite film). Young fennel was beginning to sprout. I pulled some fresh leaves for us to eat later with some goat cheese from the Island of Pag.

Arriving back in Split, I noticed the neighborhood had been tagged in swastikas, repeatedly marking every building. History was falling in on itself. And now is the time to share the story of my family that was only discussed in whispers; the blood writing I have avoided. My mother's side was always discussed as 'heroes' and the 'pioneers,' and I have written much on the violence enacted through this mythology. The story of my father is of a different kind of invasion, one that has only been told as explicitly reprehensible, and rightly so. He was born in 1941, in Germany, in an industrial city in the Rhine Valley. His father disappeared on the Russian front as a Nazi soldier; when my father was two. My father's home was destroyed in an Allied bombing campaign. His mother moved him and his sister to the countryside. The loss of a father and a home seems quite small when compared to whole blood-lines lost in gas chambers. He does not like to talk about these times and though this is no way for a child to live, I do not tell this story to make light of the horror of German fascism, rather to share how oppressors are also marked by their actions, of how the oppressors and oppressed are then linked, like tentacles sutured together. There was an opera singer in Russia, with the same name as his

father, Herman Leverkuis, and he fantasized for years that this was indeed his father, somehow escaped. He never got the courage to contact him. Or perhaps it was that any answer would have felt unbearable. That man is long dead, and soon after he died, my grandfather was recently given an official death date from the German government, without notice of how this information was discovered, perhaps related to Russia giving Germany a Red Cross ledger of POW deaths from the war, in 1992. His death is now listed: 3rd of March, 1944, in Ingaly, Omsk Oblast, Russia, a small village in western Siberia, from what I can gather, a prison camp. This time marks my father still. He saves rotten food from the trash. He will not leave food on a plate. He cannot leave waste. He hides valuables in secret spots in the house. He hides in work and projects, a disassociation from his own life and relationships with others. He allows no space for idle thoughts. When he speaks, his topic of choice is apocalypse. He has waited his whole life for war to return. He imagines a single trajectory, one he can never be present in. He taught me how to grow a garden, to save seeds, that growing your own food is how to stave off starvation. I grew up in a Jewish neighborhood. One year around Purim, when visiting a friend's grandmother, sitting on a sofa covered in plastic, she offered me hamantaschen fresh from her oven, a three cornered cookie filled with the seeds of poppy flowers, the flower of armistice. Purim is a celebration of the Jews surviving genocide in the fifth century. The numbers scarred on her arm, visible as she stretched out her hand, a document of the atrocity of my ancestry. My father is now eightytwo, he has lived to be decades older than either of his parents, and decades after the German barbarism and death brigades. He has developed a condition where excess fluid gathers around his brain. He never complains about losing his memory, rather, of losing his intelligence. Some people witness genocide and decide to never allow it again, some people witness genocide and decide to ensure it comes for anyone but them, and some people witness genocide and feel it around every corner. This legacy is why I was filled with dread seeing my son walking between the mounds of genocided bodies and the train that brought them there, in Jasenovac. And today I return to Split to see the city also scarred with that violence. My entire body feels ill. I feel like I can't breathe.

Blood writing is not just a rupture with ghosts, but also a rupture with generational trauma; conversations with a phantom limb.

Location: Vis, Croatia

Experiential Account of a Deep Listening Exercises Performed June 2023 as Written Just After:

I finally met Dr. Elena Marchevska face to face, after hours upon hours of conversations between screens. She invited me to meet her on the island of Vis, an old military base now open to the public, including a submarine dock and the cave where Tito was rumored to have hid from the Nazis while presiding over the partisan army. His boat now sits on a pad of concrete in the maritime museum in Split, residing in an old fortress. It is the island that had appeared to hover in the sky in the fata morgana a few months back. The place where Srećko Horvat was stuck when the ferries stopped running in the shut down of 2020, where he wrote on solastalgia and his fears of becoming extinct for After the Apocalypse. I took a ferry from Split. I filmed the view of sailing along the Adriatic. Elena met me at the ferry port. In town I bought some pickled Crithmum maritimum, rock samphire, a plant that grows along the sea, to enjoy later with fish. She pointed out a caper plant growing off a stone wall. This was my favorite plant in Croatia, always hanging off a high vertical plane, with a flower that reminded me of eucalyptus. I did not know this was the caper plant, though I pass by them regularly. She had been coming here since she was a child. She knows the region in a way I never will have the privilege to. She took me to her house on the other side of the island, past the old army barracks, past where they used to farm palm trees to plant on the mainland. The house next door, not just empty, but stripped of all its components, the shell of a building, tagged with graffiti, dobro došli, meaning welcome. She tells me the story of the house, of how it belonged to a Serbian family and how even all these years after the war, they would still not feel safe returning. I had just read in Gabi's book club short stories in Slavenka Drakulić's, Invisible Women and Other Stories, the one that stayed with me was of a woman who had moved to the US as a child to avoid the war as her grandfather was Serbian though the rest of the family was from Croatia, meaning it unsafe to live there during the war that fractured Yugoslavia. The story recounts her first visit back. Her mother and her journey to an island off Croatia, to see her grandparents' cottage. They find the cottage boarded up, and begin to air it out and let in light. The interior is filled with broken and scattered remnants of a life that at first seems hastily abandoned, but is quickly understood as destroyed, culminating in two empty chairs in the kitchen, the walls and the floor stained with blood. They board the windows back up, returning the history the cottage was witness to packed tightly inside it, never to return again. After lunch we walked to the sea, past a giant datura in full bloom. Moonflower is a member of the nightshade family, whose ingestion is deadly, and some say even its scent causes hallucinations. The people of Zuni Pueblo, from what is now the southwestern US, carefully consume this plant as a gateway to speak with the dead. (Inkwright, F. 2021, p. 217). After swimming in the sea, when back on land, the sensation of being in water stayed with me. I wondered about water having memory, about what kinds of memories it would hold on to, what would it recognize as significant. I wondered if it felt the sea remain with me because it meant to share a memory with me. Perhaps it knew I was working with the intent to listen for more-than-human registers. Perhaps I had remained too long admiring the

moonflowers. I had been filming a witch story with the intent of depicting an unbreakable community of women and flowers, but encountering tracings of fracture and loss everywhere. Of welcomes revoked. It seems this conundrum is part of the story I need to tell. I took the ferry back to Split at sunset, again filming the journey, and just like the daylight, my time in Croatia was also nearing an end.

Deep Listening Exercises III: as an intuitive approach to editing

Location: Suzhou, China

Experiential Account of a Deep Listening Exercises Performed October 2023 as Written Just After:

Today's Deep Listening was not a successful endeavor. Just as when this PhD journey began in 2021 and moving from the position of working as an artist, in the subjective, the emotive, the flawed, and the incomplete, to the rigor of the academic was quite a difficult and strange shift for me, now the opposite was true. I was stuck in the pages of thesis, forgetting how to piece together a film. Forgetting how to move from the written to felt and lived space. The construction around me means I am working in constant noise. I play music to drown it out, opening the work up to unintended influence from what I am hearing day to day. I devised a plan for a wander in a place I don't know how to navigate yet, where I don't know the language, where I am seen as a strange and exotic creature. I try to ignore people staring at me, but for my daughter, who is ten years old and just beginning to reckon with new forms of gaze directed at her, this result of 'strangeness,' is at times unbearable. My plan was to walk along the Xietang River and then around Lake Jinji. I would use the water to orient my journey, just like in Split. There is a path down the Xietang, where people come to practice instruments. Mostly traditional ones I do not know the name of. Mostly quite skillfully. I wonder about the significance of playing to the water and to the willows weeping over it. There are places to picnic, manicured gardens, citrus groves, and areas of maintained wild. I passed people fishing next to "Do not fish" signs. I also passed dead fish floating along the surface. I wondered why there were so many of them. The air today smells strongly with the perfume of osmanthus blooming, which I have only known before from dried petals in tea. They began blooming for the Harvest Festival, which is the celebration of a giant and spectacular full moon, done with a harvest feast eaten in moonlight, the eating of mooncakes, and lighting of lanterns. I have felt a closeness to the moon for many years, leaving a dish of water out in the light of a full moon, placed with a wish for want, or a burned offering for something I wish to leave behind. It is mindful work. I've been seeing large toads

all week. They sit next to me for a bit, then they hop off. It has been years since I have spent this much time with toads. There was one who used to sit with me while I worked in the garden, when I had one last. I don't know what to make of this. Closer to the lake, some of the platforms off the path are underwater, perhaps related to typhoon season. Perhaps this is what the toads wish me to know. Where the river spills into the lake, there is a walking bridge over part of the large body of water. It connects to a series of islands with old traditional villages, modernized, with shops and restaurants, connected by old fashioned bridges. After crossing the last bridge to the other side of the lake, the construction resumed. Becoming worse and worse. After three hours of walking, the construction prevented me from being alongside the water. The noise was hurting my head. My thoughts move between what I am seeing in front of me, and Croatia, and family back home. Is there a danger of disorienting too far; of just becoming lost rather than finding a new path; of permanent vertigo? In engaging in academic writing, I could hide from this, in the ideas of others. As witnessed in my family, acting from behind the words of others can be treacherous work, whether in the forests of Europe, or the plains of America. In practice work when I need to reach inside my body, work internally to search for discomforts to amplify and work through, I can not hide.

I need to orient myself in a place so far from everything I know. I need to be grounded. To touch dirt. To put my ear to the soil and listen for all the creatures doing their important work under the surface. To be radical, as in rooted.

Deep Listening Exercises IV: as an intuitive approach to writing the narration

Location: Suzhou, China

Experiential Account of a Deep Listening Exercises Performed January 2023 as Written Just After:

I had been feeling quite lost. This time of year the air is consistently quite bad. There have been days I can barely see the buildings on the other side of the river. It is dangerous to spend much time moving around outdoors. Indoors, we have to run special air purifying machines. I have collected plants that help improve air quality, Sansevieria Trifasciata, also known as snake plant, Chlorophytum comosum, or spider plant, Ficus elastica, or rubber plant, and an ornamental ginger, which I grew to love for its giant leaves and buds while living in Singapore. As I could not wander, I moved to Deep Listening through the intentionally slow movements and meditations of yoga. I do this alone, in my living room, looking out into the haze. It reminded me of an exercise led by the natural photo process artist, Fenia

Kotsopoulou, for a TransArt intensive summer of 2022. She led a group of us through a visualization exercise where we lied down, eyes closed, and moved through internal responses to her prompts. We then arose and documented our experience through free writing. From the free writing, we circled three words. From the three words we assigned three movements, which we repeated at increasingly slow intervals. It ended with extreme slowness, shaky muscles, and a deep understanding of the meaning behind those chosen words, which had long since abstracted into a state of emotive fire, and become much larger and intense in the process. I think to my own movements over the past years. Some days it feels like I am present in all these places, and in none of them. The (dis)orientations I advocate for in the thesis, are not just abstract. I have lived them. After my yoga, staring at poisoned air, I turn to my computer screen, to video of the fresh skies of Croatia, women that I grew to truly bond with, to a place that left me genuinely afraid of a coming resurgence of fascism. It has been a while since I felt the presence of the sea moving my body. Though this sensation would strangely come back to me for months after I had left the Adriatic behind. I collected botanicals from my time there, dried and pressed, and carried with me in my suitcase. There is one in particular, that I peek in to visit with care, as a dried specimen is quite fragile, plantago major, white man's foot, this small plant that naturalized the world as medicine, rather than an invasion.

Deep Listening Exercises V: as an embodied approach to finishing

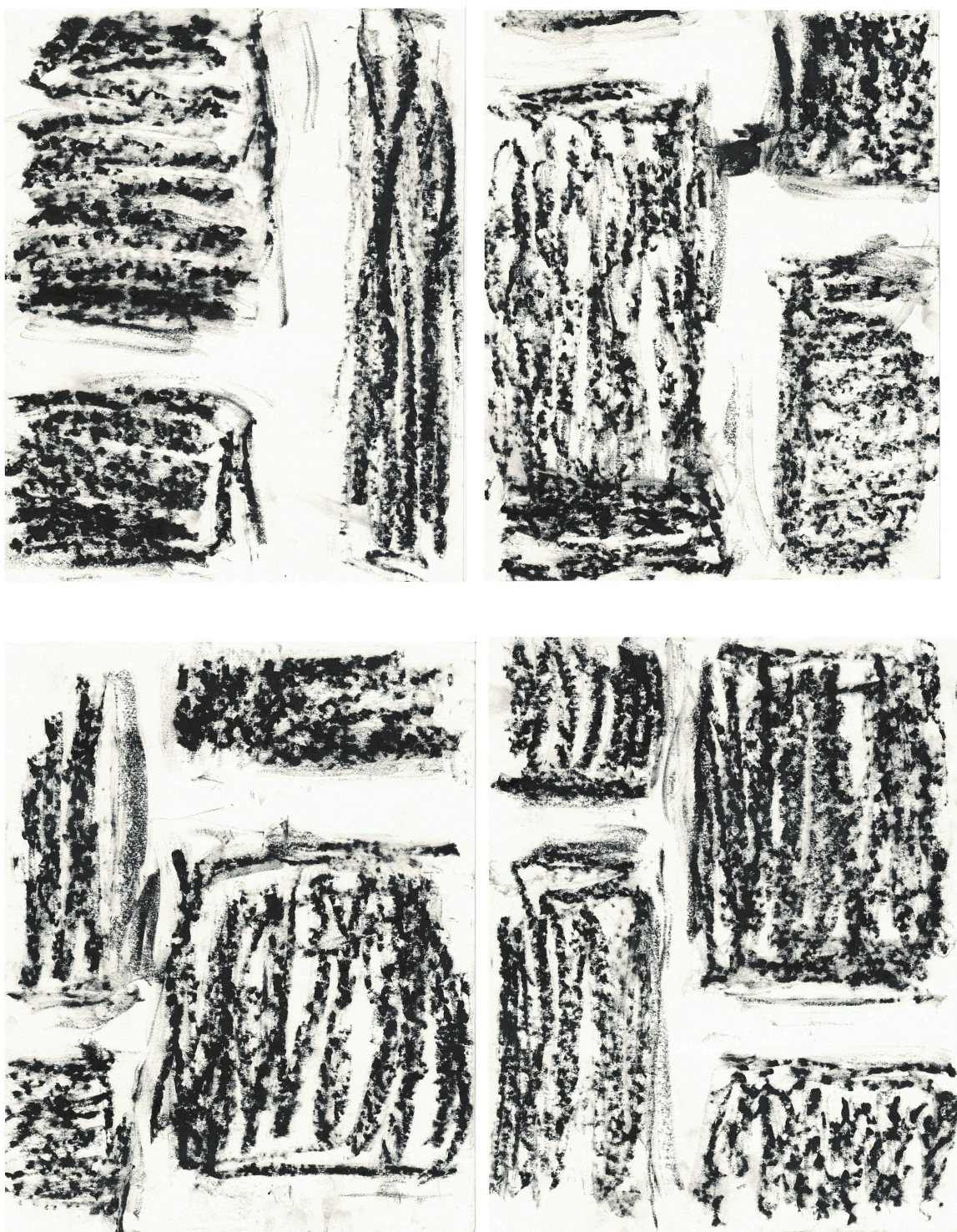
I was invited to join The Common Knowledge School, a L'Internationale residency composed of artists, curators, and researchers engaged in anti-fascist and decolonial work, with particular interest in the Balkan region. We were to spend two weeks visiting archives in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and a monastery in the mountains between. Twenty eight of us, from all around the world gathered to talk through issues. I came in search of the last loose straws of my years of investigative research and practice, and to see what would come up from being back there after time away. The following Deep Listening accounts are from this residency. In a shift of approach to make the most of this gifted time to revisit this site of both research and deep personal meaning, as I moved through these familiar spaces, I felt a need to expand this work to include brief creative practice exercises, which are also included. These are not intended as finished work, but as an embodied approach to each place, work to draw out other 'kinds of spirits' and to provide clarity for finishing this writing on invasive species, and the accompanying film.

Location: Zagreb, Croatia

Experiential Account of a Deep Listening Exercises Performed May 2024 as Written Just After:

I got a tiny flat in Zagreb right near Park Zrinjevac. Travis is watching the kids back in China so they do not miss school. I see memories of my children and Travis in all the corners of the city. Playing in the park. In the little white flowers that grow in the grass that my son would pick as gifts for me. In the squat peaches that are my daughter's favorite and would not be allowed through Chinese customs. I have spent ten months looking at Croatia via a screen and now I am back. I am here to look for missing pieces. The (dis/re)orientation is hitting me strongly, but I intend to channel this towards finding clarity. I can still order at a cafe or fruit from the green market in Croatian. It is only after a few lines exchanged do they notice I am a stranger and the few moments before this happens, I have gravely missed. I bought the lunch Travis and I had many times: pear, Paški Sir cheese from the island of Pag, and Madirazza plavac mali, and I bought him a tie pin of Tito. For my children, some traditional Christmas ornaments, of red and white decorated cookies, and scarves with the Croatian flag. I bought a book of old postcards of Croatia from a man. He asked me where I am from. I was at a loss for words for the answer. Part of me felt back home. Part of me felt further away than ever.

I walked through the bunker tunnels through the hillside of the old city that were built by the Ustaše in WWII. I imagined the laborers that made this feat of engineering in war time. And of the Bombed Out Church in Liverpool, which would have lost its roof before they began tunneling into the Earth in Zagreb. They now house art installations. Declarations that trauma will be engaged with, alongside beauty, but also that these spaces will remain cared for if their original use is required. Unlike Split, there are no swastikas or stylized 'U's on the walls. There are some tourists, but not so many that you can barely walk the streets, like the coastal cities. I walked up to St. Marks Square, to visit the stones to support the witches pyre still remain. Every time I visit, I ask to photograph the stones. Every time I am denied. Instead, in channeling Azoulay, I traced over the stones on the edges with chalk on paper, a frottage, like is done to record old graves. To listen for the spirits stuck there.



I arranged to meet a few friends during this brief visit. Sunčica took a bus from Split to come stay with me. We had a quiet dinner that felt like no time had passed since we sat face to face. I visited Tanja Vrvilo and watched her doing a live sound performance of text and noise from constructed metal objects and industrial machines. Igor Grubić was working out of town, so I visited his “East Side Story” at the Zagreb Museum of Contemporary Art. It is a double film projection, one side a

documentation of far-right extremists attacking participants in a gay pride march, the other a dance collective reclaiming these public spaces. Each person, and each work, is an inspiration. Fuel for finishing work.



I walked back down the hill and paused at the Manduševac fountain to watch the movement of the water. And then back through the park I felt I could almost still hear my children playing in. Echoes of laughter from a time past. I picked the little white flowers in the grass and carefully pressed them between the pages of the old book of postcards, along with the tie pin, and some trashed shards of china.

Location: Ljubljana, Slovenia

Experiential Account of a Deep Listening Exercises Performed May 2024 as Written Just After:

I write to the sound of church bells. I have not been here in twelve years. This place is what pushed me to be an artist. Where I first heard details of the Partisan resistance. I met Marianna Tsionski, a Greek art curator who lives in Manchester, during the residency. We were talking about our concerns of rising fascism. I told her that a few of the Croatians I spoke with described the cultural connection to fascism as being handed down from stories of WWII where Partisans would knock on the door to the family home and take one brother to fight, and then later, the fascists would come and take the other. Resistance meant death. That there were stories handed down of betrayal from both sides, and that this ancestral trauma overrides theoretical alliance. She told me that when she was little, growing up in Greece, that her mother explained civil war as when some members of the family rise up against others. Now I am wondering, perhaps fascism is not running rampant because people are horrible, rather because they are filled with heartbreak, a kind that they were handed at birth. This is not to say resistance is not important, quite the opposite, but perhaps it needs to take the form of mending a broken heart, rather than punishing brokenness.

We visited Krater, an art space run by three women landscape architects. They too faced similar concerns with the field as I have, on land use, on appropriation and privatization of public space. My response was to turn to art, theirs was to claim an unused construction site in the north of Ljubljana and create a public garden. There is a strong history of this in the city. I visited another claimed public food garden on the other side of town the last time I visited. And there is Metelkova, which was an army barracks and is now an autonomous zone, partially converted into museums, and partially into a public art space. Part of Krater farmed, part of it is utilized for educational programs and to develop artistic interventions on the land. And they work in an interesting tandem with my research, in their approach to invasive plants. A large portion of their grounds are kept wild and overrun with kudzu, the 'vine that ate the south' in the United States, is also eating Europe. Their approach, rather than to work to eradicate it, is to harvest it and utilize this abundance. It is processed into paper for printing art posters and information pamphlets, into tea, into cocktails, into pesto, and into fritters. It is interesting to ponder what an industrial scale harvest of this plant from the hinterlands would do to address the proliferation of this plant. They present benevolent approaches to addressing invasion.

The main square in Ljubljana is filled with Chinese tourists today. I imagine how they feel in this place that is so different from their home. I wonder what they are looking for here.

I went to the cemetery where the partisans are memorialized with rows of cubed gravemarkers, and large monuments. Some abstract, some not. One of them, a towering metal sculpture, features the faces of fighters, one of which is just a boy. I do frottage of these monuments, to sit with these partisan ghosts as well as the hands that paid homage to them. To listen for their secrets, their hopes. I imagine what they think of this present moment. Next to it is a memorial for lost babies. Their small toys placed on the stones. There is a little fire truck just like one my son used to have. I see him in this small toy and I see him in the face of the boy in the monument. Both are heavy on my heart.



















On my way back to my apartment, near Metelkova, I realize the building entrance is marked with two metal plaques embedded in the ground. It names two partisans captured here during the war. They are dotted around the city. I imagine I am sleeping with their ghosts. I imagine what they would say about this moment.

Perhaps, in my desire to work through this academic and theoretical investigation of invasive species as beginning with learning from plants, the intent has always been to mend impossible wounds.



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