

ENLICHENMENT: FIELD NOTES

by

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ABSTRACT

The following paper is written support for the *Enlichenment* exhibition on display at Special Projects Gallery at York University from April 18th to April 22, 2016. Stemming from a mourning of sensorial experiences, my thesis examines my close relationship to a family owned island in Eastern Ontario, the sense of place it holds for me and its ecology. I have a particular fascination with the lichens in this place. I find in these organisms a particular essence to which I am deeply drawn. I am further intrigued by their relational sense of scale, becoming for me a metaphor for the miniaturization of human life within the vast phenomenal world. My exhibition is presented as a sensory based installation that isolates specific senses through photography, ceramics, olfaction and sound. I am interested in the possibilities by which isolating the senses can transport viewers to a particular memory of place and time, whether situated within the present, past or speculative future.

To Elyse and Duncan,
for enduring those *slow* hikes as I observed and collected lichens.

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For those of us who care for an earth not encompassed by machines, a world of textures, tastes and sounds other than those that we have engineered, there can be no question of simply abandoning literacy, of turning away from all writing. Our task, rather, is that of taking up the written word, with all of its potency, and patiently, carefully, writing language back into the land. Our craft is that of releasing the budded, earthly intelligence of our words, freeing them to respond to the speech of the things themselves...Planting words, like seeds, under rocks and fallen logs – letting language take root, once again, in the earthen silence of shadow and bone and leaf.

-David Abrams 1996, 273

PREFACE | THE RABBIT HOLE

To [know something] is to leave the place where you live with your names for things and your sense of centrality. It is to go into darkness and to feel small.

- Tim Lilburn, 47



Figure 1 | View of a July moon from the island

In *Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design* (2004), Carole Gray and Julian Malins describe practice-based research as a fantastical rabbit hole like that of *Alice in Wonderland*. This metaphor emphasizes for me the magical and intuitive nature of artmaking. Even as I compose this paper, new ideas and formulations start to emerge. The many theories, artists, materials and subject matter I converse with are constantly unfolding and expanding, leaving me entangled in the threads of all my interests. I hop from one inquiry to the next and down the rabbit hole I go. Grabbing at mere fragments at times, I continuously descend into the depths of various modes of thinking and making. As I explore my practice within a diverse history of art and philosophy I recognize a level of pushing and pulling upon thoughts that inspire interconnected notions of being-in-the-world. In the following chapters I examine *Enlivenment* within this ‘rabbit hole’ methodology. Furthermore, I actively search for ways to describe things without perpetuating conventional anthropocentric “nature” writing. With this providing motivation I see my thesis paper as an opportunity to weave together personal narrative and theoretical research. I outline how place, walking, observation, collecting, and the art and writing of others, converge in my material practice to drive this series in a dialogic and transformative way.

INTRODUCTION | LICHENS

“Lichens are queer things, and human individuals are indeed all lichens; we are all queer multispecies consortia, always already involved in countless and unpredictable constitutive relationship at all scales.”

- David Griffiths, 43



Figure 2 | *1000 Islands #1* from *Enlichenment*. Archival Inkjet Photograph (2013) 30" x 24"

Lichen are a symbiotic organism formed through a relationship between fungi and a photosynthetic partner of algae or cyanobacteria. They are tiny slow growing organisms that take various colours and forms, growing like hard crusts, bushy shrubs or mounds of stringy hair. They are extremely tolerant things that are able to withstand drastic temperature shifts on both ends of the spectrum including the -270 degrees Celsius of outer space. During times of drought they become so fragile they turn to dust when impacted but quickly soften come rainfall, so much so that they act as a welcoming carpet beneath the feet. Furthermore, lichens are excellent bioindicators of air pollution; thriving in areas with fresh air, diminishing in those that do not. Historically they have been used for an assortment of things including medicines, fibres, dyes, and perfumes.

All in all they are complex and peculiar miniature ecosystems that are often overlooked within our surrounding environments. Yet, they fantastically cascade the surfaces of trees and rocks, erupt from decaying matter, and sprawl across the earth upon which we walk.

In my recent research I have come across a strain of ethical thought that I find revelatory in relation to my fascination with lichens: *the symbiotic view of life*. Symbiosis is a contemporary principle of biology that is slowly gaining traction. According to an article in *The Quarterly Review of Biology* (2012) co-authored by Scott Gilbert, Jan Sapp and Alfred Tauber, this view questions notions of the autonomous individual that has structured prevailing understandings of evolution as merely gradual genetic mutation.¹ The symbiotic view of life is an acceptance of the interactive relations between things within all categorizations and kingdoms, revealing the world as “complex and intermingled relationships— not only among microbes, but also between microscopic and macroscopic life” (Gilbert 326). It recognizes a life within a life at varying scales, hailing interconnectivity and blurring the boundaries between things. In the conclusion of their article the authors claim that, “We are all lichens” (Ibid 336). With this thought my work and inquiry into these organisms has come to find cohesion through a grand metaphor. Lichens are emblematic of the “queer phenomena that make up life and *nature*” (Griffiths 43), which, as I will outline throughout this paper, is the main discourse I investigate in my thesis exhibition *Enlichenment*.

¹ See Gilbert, 326

CHAPTER ONE | EXHIBITION WALKTHROUGH



Figures 3-5 | These works from *Enlichenment* illustrate three lichen growth habitats (left to right: fruticose, foliose, crustose)

Through open doors I enter a room where the walls are partially masked in rich black paint, the others a bright white. The contrast beckons assumptions of light and shadow, stimulating a visual dichotomy of the visible and invisible. On my left just past a window that looks out into the bustling university hallway is an aerial map orienting the viewer toward a specific geographical location. However, the lines on the map are only discernible from certain angles as it is printed black on black, establishing an ambiguity of the place; a red pin marks the spot. To the right of the map is a tiny self-portrait delicately affixed to the wall with entomology pins. My figure and face are cloaked in a vibrant red coat, summoning memories of childhood stories of young girls lost in the woods. I am depicted in the photograph carefully severing lichen from the pine covered ground. A basket set beside me is filled to the brim with similar findings, evidence of my enthusiasm. Beside the portrait sits a small glass vessel perched upon a shelf at chest height containing a green liquid substance. I bring my nose to the small circular opening of the glass and inhale. A whirl of earthy, algae tones reaches into my depths and I am transported to a mossy shoreline, a land of earth and stones. Through the active slowing of my breath I am simultaneously made aware of my body in the present, my senses enlivened. I take another whiff, pull away, and deeply exhale. Together these initial works act to set the stage for a larger narrative. They further provoke a zeroing in on a place, preparing for a perceptual shift from the macro to the micro.

Just beyond this first group of work the black walls bring emphasis to an enlarged photograph of an isolated lichen set against a black background. The photograph hangs low on the wall and is roughly my height. Surrounded by blackness my peripheral vision is dampened and I am absorbed into a void, “the place

where things are reborn, where they begin” (Strayed 127). Magnified many times its actual size I am confronted with the lichens similarity to the human body. The striking curvature of its fruiting form resembling an arching back, its red cap recalling the intricate tissues of the brain, all quite sensual in relation. As I peer closer the texture of its form seems to vibrate, keeping me held in my contemplation of the thing.

I round the corner to my right where the wall transitions from black to white. Here hangs a constellation of shadowboxed images showcasing other lichen varieties, this time more contained, protected. Inset within the frame, there is an inversion of depth that differs their presence from the larger lichen photograph. At more intimate scales these images become less about the body and more about representations of a fantastical landscape.

Camouflaged on the adjacent wall there is a large collection of sculpted foliose lichens that cascades to the floor. The form seems to be reaching for light at both ends. These hand formed porcelain works are enlarged representations of a selection of lichens. Drained of colour these sculptures reduce the things to form, accentuating the beauty of their simplicity. Upon close inspection fingerprints mark their porous surfaces, revealing the artist's presence in the making of the thing. In the centre of the room stands a white plinth with a set of three sculpted trumpet lichen perched on its corner. As I gravitate towards them I notice their centers are hollowed. With an ear placed low I can hear sounds intermittently surging from their depths, a curious vibration, a humming. The sound fades away then hits a piercing note. A few meters away sits another, shorter plinth housing an array of live lichens. My hand explores their pliable bodies and again faint shouts spring from the trumpet forms at a distance. A discovery is made.

To my right is the last installment of the exhibition, which consists of a large ambiguous monochrome mural. It is the result of an experimentation with cyanotype printing, a historical photographic process that results in rich blue imagery through exposure to ultraviolet light. The photograph presents the reaching thallus of crustose lichen; their bodies dispersing in irregular, maplike ways across rock, abstracted through scale.

I linger the gallery a while longer before contemplatively exiting, enlivened.

July 24 |

The car trails along the Canadian shield for thirty minutes north of Kingston, Ontario. As we sail deeper and deeper into the rural landscape our route becomes defined by geology, reminding me this once was mountain and valley. Precambrian rocks start to envelop the car and my thoughts. I imagine ice sweeping across this land, scouring and scraping the earth; leaving exposed a portion of the earth's crust that remains hidden elsewhere. Looking out the open window we continue to rush past their greyish pink walls and I am reminded of its expanse. Geologists estimate these rocks are more than four billion years old, making them the oldest on the planet. My insignificance begins to wash over me.

Humbling me.

At a small, barely visible marking we turn off the main road onto a bumpy gravel path. We slow to ensure the car doesn't nick its belly on jutting rocks. This road is well travelled but not so well maintained. We enter a thick forest of white pine, birch, and cedar and promptly roll down the windows, welcoming the sap scented air and the season's pesky insects. The car rides up and down the hilly path until, at last, we spot the blue-green waters at a short distance. Anticipation spikes and releases as the car comes to a rolling halt. Feelings of contentment surge through my body as I slip off my shoes and step out onto the earth.

*With a deep inhale and a heavy exhale,
the first leg of the journey is marked complete.*

We slide the wide canoe off the sloping rocks and into the water. Loaded with food, clothing, and my many cameras we gracefully hop into its bow and stern. Its bared metal ribs remind me of a prehistoric skeleton and I imagine I'm cradled by bones. My paddle dips smoothly into the water, cutting it with each stroke and leaving a small vortex in its path. I think of the long travels indigenous peoples have ingeniously pursued this way as we glide along, passing steep rock faces and empty creaking docks. The lake is familiarly quiet, uncommon for most cottage country, and the benefit of a lake that is partially surrounded by provincial park. Shadows are thrown across the lake from the towering trees on the mainland, dancing among soft waves, while the call of birds is borne on the breeze. I skim my fingers along the mirrored surface of the water. Softened by the warmth of the sun it has me longing for my first swim. After trailing along the shoreline for roughly ten minutes we steer the canoe in a Northeast direction, towards two long islands whose appearances seem to playfully mimic each other. This place is Twin Island and it is our home away from home.

CHAPTER TWO |
GEOGRAPHICAL ATTUNEMENT

“Space defines landscape, where space combined with memory defines place. The spatial experience of a landscape can be impressive because it evokes a known place or, on the other hand, because it is so totally unfamiliar”

- Lippard, 9



Figure 7 | View of the cabin from the Lake, 1976



Figure 8 | The Cabin newly built, 1976

The islands have been in my family for four decades and are the site of a small stone cabin built by my parents as newlyweds. The journey up there each spring, summer and fall is a nostalgic one and is an experience that has shaped my identity as a Canadian female artist. The sense of wonder that leaps up from within me every time we visit stems from a desire to revert to a simpler way of living, one that is more attuned and engaged in the phenomenal world. The cabin is off-grid and only as of recently uses two solar powered lights. An old propane stove makes up the modest yet sufficient outdoor kitchen. Buckets are brought up from the lake for dishes and hand washing, while the outhouse is a short trail away. There are few furnishings indoors as the majority of time is spent outside, walking the pine covered ground, or bathing in the cool lake water. Coming from the heart of a city the island is a drastic and welcomed change. It has

become important to me, not only to visit and work, but as a place by which I orientate myself. It calls for a distancing from modern distractions and allows me to physically and mentally detach from hectic ways of being in city life. I shall note here that I discuss detachment and isolation as a distinct distancing from hyperculture and not a rejection of the livelihood of things. In the words of philosopher David Abram, I regard detachment as a “practice of realignment with reality” (272). I recognize the effects of the modern world that displace me and find solace in this type of withdrawal.

Transfixed by our technologies, we short-circuit the sensorial reciprocity between our breathing bodies and the bodily terrain. Human awareness folds in upon itself, and the senses – once the crucial site of our engagement with the wild and animate earth – become mere adjuncts of an isolate and abstract mind bent on overcoming an organic reality that now seems disturbingly aloof and arbitrary

- David Abram 1996, 267

Within my art practice societal detachment plays a large role in the conjuring of both concepts and process. According to art critic and philosopher Boris Groys, this state is commonly sought by creators when they are in the midst of making something new. He argues that creative quests require artists to distance themselves from social contact, suggesting that isolation is imperative to creative thinking.² I have noticed through my own experiences with the island, that conceptual thoughts have greater opportunity to materialize when the distractions associated with urban, social experiences are minimized. There is a renewed sensory engagement I experience in this place that stimulates contemplation and a kind of creativity that I do not often feel in the city. Retreating from urban life allows for a heightening of receptivity, not only to *thoughts* but also to *things*. There is an opening up between myself and the organic world that allows me to more fully acknowledge the complex workings of the land and my place within it. I become aware of all the other vibratory bodies that also occupy the place in which I am situated, chattering *around* and *with* me. This belief in awakening through engagement with the expressive world is one that exists cross-culturally and has been explored in great lengths by many writers, philosophers and artists including the following whom have provided me with great inspiration: philosophers David Abram and Tim Ingold, writers Gretel Ehrlich and Rebecca Solnit, and artists Elina Brotherus, Hamish Fulton, and Marlene Creates. I look to their work for the ways in which they individually explore a sense of place and detachment through active engagement with their surrounding ecologies.

Elina Brotherus’s *Der Wanderer* photographs from the series *The New Painting* is particularly evocative for me of this detachment both physically and conceptually. Resembling *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* by German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, these self-portraits portray the artist standing alone within vast landscapes. Her images illustrate how isolation, contemplation and slowness are integral when engaging

² See Groys, 73



Figure 9 | Elina Brotherus. *The New Painting: Der Wanderer 2*, 2003. Photograph (80cm x 10cm)

with the world, and demonstrate how they are connected to concepts of the sublime.³ Although Brotherus' work is a visual reference to a Romantic aesthetic, one that sought to transcend the sensuous body and provoked a godly presence, she describes her work as more attuned to the wild. When questioned about her connections to the Romantic sublime she states: "Rather than speaking about quotes, I prefer to think about quotes, I prefer to think that it's about an atmosphere, a subject matter, a certain kind of lighting or surface texture or a geometry that interest me, as they have interested artists throughout history" (See Brotherus 2005). She is aware of the textures and rhythms that structure the earth, and how they affect her aesthetic. This articulates how her use of self as artist and subject emphasize her methods and concept as contemplative practices of attunement. "Solitude is something we have to accept. We have to embrace it. Solitude is often good for working, some amount of it is even indispensable. Solitude *sensitizes*" (See Brotherus 2006). Brotherus implies that this state is inescapable, supporting Groys' claim that artists operate most effectively in social isolation, and refers to a sharpening of the senses provoked in this way of being. I am further drawn to

³ I further discuss the sublime in chapter six

this particular body of work in the way that the artist describes her images as “pictures of psychological or emotional ‘decisive moments’” (Ibid), which I interpret as alluding to bodily intuition and suggesting an inherent link between detachment and enlightenment. Like myself, Brotherus is attuned to the affective qualities inherent in the animate earth that can be more fully experienced when detached from urban distractions. Solitude for me is not an experience of loneliness, but rather an opportunity and state of being that acknowledges my body as part of a greater whole. It is an awakening to the sensual world.

August 26 |

As I canoe back to the island after saying goodbye to my weekend companion the wind picks up from the south, quickening my pace. My heart begins to race at the thought of my lonesome week ahead, an experience I've never had before. I slow my paddle and tame my heart. I must not forget that I'm not as alone as I fear. I recline on my calves, letting the boat drift it's own course. I am left with no car, no reception, no city sounds, no ticking clocks. What I have is much richer; the scent of algae drifting off water, the air wrapping my body and filling my lungs, the smooth grip around my paddle, the strength of my muscles and the wind at my back.

*I am in the now,
present with wild others.*

*Attuned to all
the ways of being.*

August 27 |

I step outside. A slight breeze tousles the hair on my shoulders. I walk towards the morning light landing strongly on the rocks by the shore, uninhibited by trees that cast cool shadows in the afternoon. The lake moves from the south with the intention of bringing new weather. Water licks at the emerging rockbed that forms this land. Sitting on its edge my slumberous body begins to warm as evening dreams dissipate. There is a black snake whose morning routine is similar to my own. Harmoniously we bask on these Eastern rocks, taking in rising warmth. Admittedly, I fear these creatures when in water but at times like these, they are a welcomed companion. Feeling enlivened I decide to hike the islands before breakfast.

I sit on the cabin stoop and tie up the laces to my hiking boots, caked with dried mud from a previous adventure. I have my 35mm Yashica Spotmatic slung across my shoulder, fully loaded with a fresh roll of colour film. I stuff an extra roll in my pocket just in case the 36 exposures does not suffice for the trip. I have walked from tip to tip of these islands countless times, but the path is never the same. I head towards the North-Western tip of the island. The dry pine that coats the granite ground crunches beneath my feet. I part branches as if opening doorways. This place allows my entry, shrouding me as I hop over fallen trees, sidestep small boulders and enter a trance like dance. The world as I know it starts to fall away as the beautiful chaos of things unfolds before me. My thoughts begin to align with each step and I become attuned to minor details that I pass by. To my right a tree has given way to the lake over winter, creating new shelter for fish. A few steps away I bear witness to the slow decay of rocks to shale, a budding new maple, a dying young pine. Suddenly my ambulant body and wandering gaze is caught by the tiniest colony of trumpet lichen, standing erect in a decaying tree stump. I'm excited as I gravitate towards its strangeness. I've seen lichens before of course, but there is something about that moment and that specific patch that demands my close attention. The beauty of the organism, its colours, its form, the lighting and its miniaturization are what keep me there, crouched in admiration. I remove the lens cap from my camera and carefully orchestrate a photograph to commemorate the moment.

CHAPTER THREE | THE PULL OF PLACE & THINGS

“The way of the craftsman...is to allow knowledge to grow from the crucible of our practical and observational engagements with the beings and things around us.”

- Tim Ingold, 6



Figure 10 | Myself on a walking journey at the cabin

Many speak of walking as a practice inextricably linked to attunement. To quote Rebecca Solnit in *Wanderlust*, “the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts... And so one aspect of the history of walking is the history of thinking made concrete—for the motions of the mind cannot be traced, but those of the feet can” (Solnit 2000: 6). It was this very thought on the history of walking that allowed me to reflect on my own journeys and to establish ambulation as both a practice and a form of research. I employ it as a meditative method but also as a form of play that aims to discover new ways of engaging with the world around me. My ambulatory experiences on the island are slightly parasitic in the way that I feed off my surroundings as I wander through it. I am an observer of its form, but am simultaneously of it and hold an intimate relationship with all that I see among it. My walks amount to fragmented motions where I am intermittently drawn towards certain things, loitering with them in contemplation before moving on to the next thing that calls my attention.

a coral mushroom/ a freckled stone/ a heron’s nest/ fluttering wings/ a mound of

excrement/ rising air/ bending pines/ webs reflecting sunlight/ abandoned blue eggs/
sloping rocks/ the call of loons/ dripping sap/ creaking beech/ peeling birch

In the words of Solnit, “it’s not about being lost but about trying to lose yourself [in the world]” (Solnit 2005, 19). During my walks it is my intent to surrender to the pull of things and render my body and mind as part of a larger whole rather than seeing it as distinct from it.

There is a level of observation paired with walking that often places such journeys in relation to the photographic medium. According to writer Susan Sontag “The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising... Adept to the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy” (Sontag 55). Sontag speaks of the practice of looking and the act of photography as confluent with walking, which provides a history I can relate to my desire to participate in both as method and medium. As a photographer, I am trained in the ways of seeing and in aesthetics and am therefore naturally always on the lookout for captivating things to photograph.

texture/ form/ colour/ life/ movement/ essence/ thingness/
rhythm/ sound/ emotion/ feeling/ vibration/ sensation

To quote Solnit, “photographers [leave] us not their walks, as poets do, but the fruits of those walks” (Solnit 2000, 190). While my hikes along the island function as a survey of site and memory, the photographic documents taken on my hikes become more than the mere fruit of experience. Instead they act as visual research that stimulated the next stage in the development of *Enlivenment*. Through the intimate conversation between observer and observed, questions of my significance within the world began to arise. I was propelled to further investigate these microcosmic forms that had so strongly lured my attention. Aboriginal botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer speaks of a similar journey through the woods, and shares advice on the magical beauty of seeing in her book *Gathering Moss*. She writes,

A Cheyenne elder of my acquaintance once told me that the best way to find something is not to go looking for it. This is a hard concept for a scientist. But he said to watch out of the corner of your eye, open to possibility, and what you seek will be revealed. The revelation of suddenly seeing what I was blind to only moments before is a sublime experience for me. I can revisit those moments and still feel the surge of expansion. The boundaries between my world and the world of another being get pushed back with sudden clarity, an experience both humbling and joyful (9).

Kimmerer speaks of the excitement that emerges in a moment of true awareness and notes the pull of things. Her mention of the sublime also presents the act of walking and observing as an enriching experience of a mystical nature. Upon seeing something for the first time, *really* seeing something, there is a refocusing of attention that brings on a powerful force that surges through your body. Once something grabs you and makes itself known to you, you begin to see the thing in all you do. Even when I am within the heart of the city where lichens are less abundant, I catch their colourful bodies cascading down the surfaces of trees, and notice tiny clusters inching in the cracks between pavement. Seeing these mini ecosystems within the

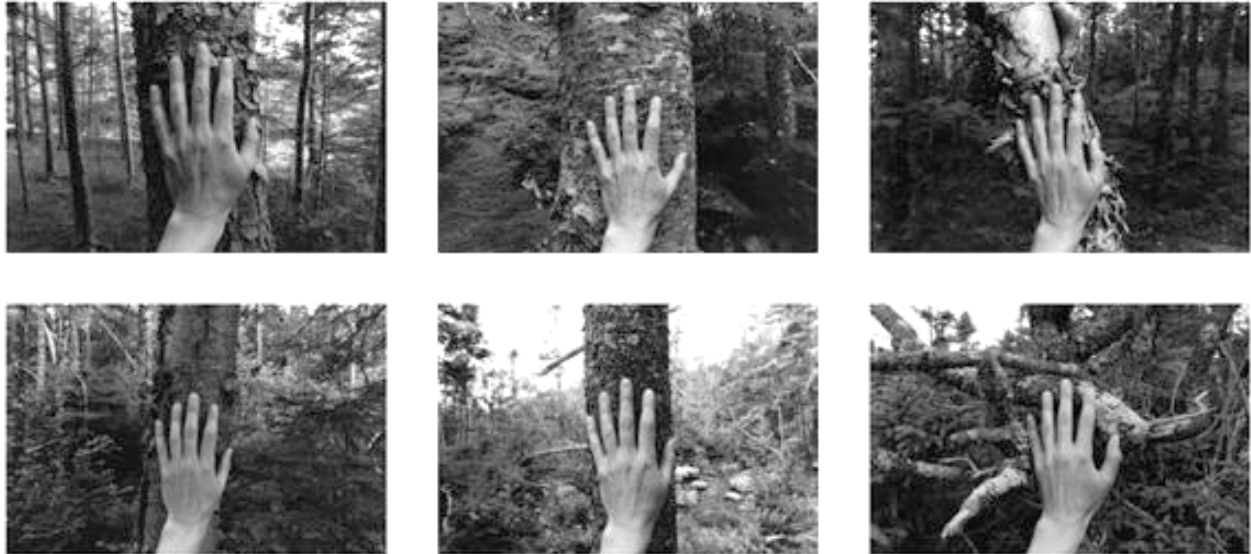


Figure 11 | Marlene Creates, *Larch, Spruce, Fir, Birch, Hand, Blast Hole Pond Road*. 2007-ongoing. Photograph. (10.5x15.5 in)

ever expanding concrete jungle both excites and pains me. Reminding me of what lies beneath all this pavement, they leave me longing for the island soil between my toes.

I look to the work of Canadian environmental artist Marlene Creates in relation to these intertwining connections, in particular her series *Larch, Spruce, Fir, Birch, Hand, Blast Hole Pond Road* (2007-ongoing). This work consists of six black and white photographs of the artist's hand gracefully touching the trunks of different trees native to her hometown. Through spending time with the land, Creates seeks societal detachment and experiences acute receptivity in the process. In her *Landworks 1979-1991* catalogue Creates describes her intimate encounters with the forest stating, "I'm slowly tuning my body and my reflexes to its details. I'm coming to know this habitat by engaging with it in various ways: corporally, emotionally, intellectually, instinctively, linguistically, and in astonishment" (See Creates). She speaks of an awareness to the multiple dimensions of which attuned bodies operate. Within the scope of a much larger practice, Creates focuses on the specificity of place and it's effect on her identity and inevitably her solitary practice as concept and process. She portrays a heavy attachment to her native homeland in Eastern Canada which I relate to. Her adoration for the landscape is evident not only in her consistent exploration but in her poetic aesthetic. Within my thesis exhibition I aim to evoke similar feelings of adoration for a place that I have a particular attachment to. Although it may not be directly recognizable as a factual location given the lack of specificity of the exhibition map (see figure 6), I enjoy the ambiguity of the work's geography. My hope is that this allows others to imagine their own landscapes, stimulating memories of places past, present and future. This subjective quality to the work is one that I find most exciting. I am interested in how something so personal can be felt and recreated in the minds and memories of others, and how this might be accentuated through a multisensory exhibition. The processes of association and how the mind visualizes such sensory experiences is what the work continually investigates.

August 28 |

As the sun rises it throws streams of deep orange across the cabin walls, warming me slowly. The birds begin to sing their morning tune, peacefully waking me from a deep sleep. Sitting up and glancing out the window I notice how the ground glistens in the bursting sunlight. The dewy morning promises soft, vibrant lichens scattered across earth and rock. With that exciting thought I hop out of bed and climb down the loft ladder. I grab a basket and out the door I go. I wildly scavenge the moist earth for these captivating forms. The colours of lichen when damp are of the most gorgeous tones of mint green, deep red, mustard yellow and rusted orange. They are things of my desire and things to evaluate myself by.

CHAPTER FOUR | COLLECTING MEMORIES

"I stop at a place or pick up material because I feel that there is something to be discovered. Here is where I can learn."

- Andy Goldsworthy



Figure 12 | Anna Snyder. *Lichenologist* from *Enlichenment*, 2015. Archival inkjet photograph (1.5x1in)

Collecting seems to be a familial habit that is summoned when on the island. As children my mother encouraged scavenger hunt activities that amounted to an assortment of baskets filled with pine cones, acorns, feathers and stones, some which still sit resting indoors⁴. Collecting lichens has been my most important working method in *Enlichenment*. I quickly developed a fascination with the materiality of these organic forms and for the metaphors they possess. New Materialist Jane Bennett describes this relationship between artist and material in a speech on hoarding. She says, "the things with which [hoarders] live and that live with them in close proximity are less possessions... than pieces of self" (See Bennett 2011). This acknowledges what she describes as the "slip-slide"⁵, or blurring between humans and things. Although I consider myself a collector and not a hoarder, I similarly see the organisms that I gather as an extension of

⁴ There are often affiliations made between childhood memories and collecting, one that I address in *Lichenologist* (Figure 12). This connection between youth and fantasy is further considered in chapter six.

⁵ Bennett 2009, 4

self, of my experience, and as a metaphor for the significance of human life. However, my intrigue goes beyond pure metaphor of the microscopic and enters into a discussion on *thingness*, which Bennett further discusses in her book *Vibrant Matter* (2009)⁶. *Thingness* is defined as a the constant but invisible exchange that takes place between humans, objects and the environment⁷. Through photographing, sculpturally recreating lichens, and animating scent and sounds, I become absorbed by the desire to understand the thing. But what does it mean to know a thing? Is it to:

love/ admire/ contemplate/ dwell within/ feel/ touch/ smell/ hear/ listen

According to Tim Ingold: "...the only way to know things- that is, from the inside of one's being- is through a process of self discovery. To know things you have to grow into them, and let them grow in you, so that they become a part of who you are" (1). To dwell *with* and *in* things is to awaken your sensible body and animal senses to the beautiful chaos that is of this earth; to acknowledge the intermingling bodies dancing *around*, *in* and *with* you.

There is a vital activation of multi-sensorial memory that occurs through direct interaction with things. This connection between observer and observed aligns with phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of participation. This is a process of active interplay between bodies and things that perceive it. With this theory all non-human objects, whether animate or inanimate, are regarded as having vitality and agency akin to a person. Environmental land artist Andy Goldsworthy expresses this tactile research method through his interaction with natural materials. He states, "as with all my work, whether it's a leaf on a rock or ice on a rock, I'm trying to get beneath the surface appearance of things. Working the surface of a stone is an attempt to understand the internal energy of the stone" (See Goldsworthy). This alludes to the thing-power of objects and supports theories of the strong hold that material agency has on humans and the reciprocal nature of things. It is not just the artist who affects and manipulates its subject, the material simultaneously acts upon the artist. It suggests that the artist is an open source, one that can tap into ideas and materials but can also be altered by them. This view is similar to the idea of the wild as described by Henry David Thoreau in his novel *Walden* (1854), which documents his experience of living "alone" in the woods for two years. Bennett touches upon this analogy, articulating how for Thoreau wildness was "a not-quite-human force that added and altered human and other bodies. It named an irreducibly strange dimension of matter, an out-side" (Bennett 2009, 2). Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson also speaks of an "occult relation"⁸ between humans and things. In his essay *Nature* and in reference to his encounters with wild others, he states: "I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them" (8). Collectively these theories are part of a lineage that challenges the human centered view by seeking to give voice to vitality intrinsic to all things, bringing awareness to the complexities of ecologies and our participation in them. From my own perspective

⁶ In this publication Bennett advocates for a more responsible, ecological and ethical understanding of the relationship between people and things other.

⁷ See Lütticken 2010

⁸ See Emerson, 8

I see these theories as a potential and fruitful opening to a type of mystical engagement that can be elicited through human participation with the organic world. Within *Enlichenment* it is through both the experience of collecting and working with organic matter as a subject and medium that I aim to explore the revelatory nature of *being with* things.

I am further interested in the aforementioned philosophies in relation to practices of Canadian indigenous cultures and their honouring of an interconnected universe, which I also acknowledge as part of a posthumanist genealogy. First Nations of Canada believe all things on earth have a purpose, a meaning and a place. “Memory is what is kept within the human conscience but it may also be what is stored in the world, in the cosmos, on earth, in the natural world or in cities. Each particle of space, each atom has a memory and tells a story” (Besson 2). To many of Canada’s aboriginal peoples, collective memory is anchored in the animate earth. Not only do earthly things have agency but they also contain an internal memory. I think of the sounds that emanate from sea shells when pressed to the ear. It is simultaneously a whisper of the thing and a reimagining of rolling waves on a distant shoreline. It is a colliding of a memory of a place and the essence of a thing. This notion of internal memory establishes land as a mnemonic container, one that has the capacity to transfer memory among things through interaction. In contemporary city life it can be hard to allow the body to become porous enough to receive all non-human bodies, all matter, all things and memories. And so it is my hope, through my use of multisensory representations of lichen, to assist viewers in expanding their perceptual parameters in relation to things but also diverse concepts of space, memory and time in relation to the artist, the viewer and the lichen.

The auditory sculpture in my exhibition is perhaps the most articulate of my discussion of the interconnected interaction between things. With this work I have turned a collection of lichens into capacitance sensors that detect the conductivity of interaction between the lichen and participants who choose to tacitly engage. The data from these interactions is translated in real time into vibratory sounds which emanate from a separate sculpture. The sounds flutter depending on the level and force of contact applied. The work aims to highlight the invisible activities that are constantly occurring in our daily engagements with the world and the intricate participatory nature of all things.

August 30 |

Clocks have no place here. I am reminded of the day when my mother taught me to determine the hour by the passing of the sun across this land.

I have a full day ahead but I do not ponder what I will do, where I shall go. Life just unravels as it pleases. Time is of no essence.

Shut eyes

Inhale

Exhale

*Wide eyed
All's anew*

CHAPTER FIVE | SLOW SENSING & MIMETIC MAKING

“There is a secret bond between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting...the degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory; the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting”

- Kundera, 39



Figure 13 | A snail going about its life on a decaying tree stump near the shoreline of the island

Within *Enlivenment* lies an inherent relationship between the slowness of making and being of things.

The average growth rate of lichens ranges from less than 1mm to 4mm a year and can take several years to establish growth in new locations/ Collecting lichens is a slow, excitable process that results in a constant pausing and pondering of things/ One of my digital photographs takes over 8 continuous hours of shooting and editing to complete/ It took over 48 hours of sitting and moulding to realize my sculptural works/ The electronic prototyping platform used for the sound sculpture, is an ongoing journey/ Two ounces of the tincture used in the olfactory artwork takes two weeks to distill/ Whether acknowledged or not, perception involves constant participation/ My quest to understand lichens is assumably endless/ Memories continue to accrue over the span of a lifetime

There is interconnectedness between all of these elements of slow time. Firstly, I experience slowness in the act of making. According to Sociologist Richard Sennett, “slow craft time...enables the work of reflection and imagination- which the push for quick results cannot” (295). My laborious exploratory processes and desire for accuracy have allowed me to contemplate the specificity of the things to which I am drawn and my

relationship to them. I freely work my body in an attempt to satisfy my desire to know the things. According to writer Marcus Boon, this process of mimesis provides makers a closer relationship to things through sharp inspection.⁹ Photography as a mimetic method allows me to critically re-examine objects through a secondary lens. The macro lens that I use, allows me to see beyond what is visible to my unaided eye. Held still in the click of a shutter, tiny details of lichen are accentuated and I begin to grasp a better understanding of their varying forms. I again experience the process of mimesis through sculptural methods. In these works I physically labour over the organisms' forms and details in an attempt to heighten my awareness and knowledge of their *thisness*.

"[Making] is a process of correspondence; not the imposition of preconceived form on raw material substance, but the drawing out or bringing forth of potentials immanent in the world of becoming. In the phenomenal world, every material is such a becoming, one path or trajectory through a maze of trajectories."

-Ingold, 31

My first encounter with porcelain, a material I had never previously worked with, was a frustrated one. I was unsure of how to work it into the forms I desired. With time my body and mind seemed to have given way to the materials potentials. My fingers began to fluidly shape something more organic than I had thought possible. Similarly to engaging with wild others on the island, I entered into a trance like state of mind in the making. I was called and calmed by the malleable material. In the shaping of these pieces I used my hands as the template for their scale, moulding the clay in the palm of my hand. I used the impress of my fingertips to form apothecia, pulled the material across flat surfaces with my thumb to form thalli, rolled slabs between my palms to create podetia. Working through these embodied processes of mimicry creates a personal awareness of the intricacies of these miniature forms, and in a sense animates them. It is a coming together of things (human and other), a growth process activated through movements of my body and the materials. Despite this intimate process, extensive engagement has brought me closer and closer to the realization that I will never truly understand the complex internal world of an *other*. This realization softens the affair and I am able to proceed with more ease, for slow craft time humbles me.

In *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary*, author Lutz Koepnick states that, "slowness demonstrates a special receptivity to the copresence of various memories and anticipations, narratives and untold stories, beats and rhythms in our temporally and spatially expanded moment" (6). In light of this thought, slowness establishes a porosity that weaves among people, things, and experience. I explore slowness in this way, by coaxing viewer's awareness of their sensorium through isolated multisensory artworks. Through these subtle interactive elements, such as the glass vessel that holds the extracted scent of the lichen and the sound sculpture, *Enlichenment* aims to encourage viewers to ebb their motions and sensorially explore their surroundings, something our contemporary culture of speed rarely inspires us to do.

⁹ See Boon, 10

Branching out into multisensory dimensions provided a large conceptual shift in the development of my art practice, and are elements essential in a call for slowness. It brings awareness to the ways in which we prioritize our sensorial capabilities. It is seemingly hard to break the mould in which we are trained, to look then listen, to neglect smell and fear touch (especially within a gallery environment). This recalls a recent visit to Home Depot. In the process of searching for materials for an initial attempt at an olfactory container, I took a stroll through the lumber yard. In search of a wood that would not overpower the scent of lichen, I bent down to breathe in the different stacks of lumber. After my fifth inhale I realized I had gathered quite an audience of inquisitive eyes and was approached moments later by an employee who assumed I needed assistance. In that moment I realized that there is a level of queerness applied to olfactory tendencies and the intimacy of such encounters which is curious to me, considering my appreciation for the diverse sappy scents of wood. On the island no one questions:

the butting of my nose against a rigid oak/ my back pressing up against a lichen covered
boulder/ my fingers running along the empty skin of snake/ my toes breaking the surface of
still water/ my calves brushing against juniper/ the removal of my shoes to walk freely and
slowly across the pine covered ground

It is evident that there is hesitancy and a numbing of the senses that occurs in modern metropolitan dwelling. And so, my biggest challenge with *Enlichenment* became how to tempt an art viewer to give in to their sensorial instincts; how to excite the nostrils, the ears, the skin, and confuse the eyes.

August 1 |

As I gaze across the lake to the Eastern mainland I take notice of the scale in which fellow cottagers become at a distance. I am reminded that we are all but a drop of water.

My bare skin upon the rocky granite shoreline grounds me. The stone set in direct sunlight warms me as I dangle my legs over the edge and into the lake. As I slowly descend into water I am consumed by the grandeur of its liquid body.

*Liquified,
baptised.*

August 2 |

Looking down upon a patch of lichen, I become aware of the strain I muster as I squint to distinguish their fruiting bodies. They are smaller-than-I creatures, indiscernible to many. As I kneel into the earth I bring a magnifying glass to my eye and lean into the things. They pull me in closer and closer until at last their details come into focus. Texture, shape and colours scream out in view. My eye and neck, tired from the intense downward gaze sink back into my shoulders and rest upon my upper back. Treetops masking blue sky stoop high above me; I am small to thee.

CHAPTER SIX | MINIATURE MYSTICISM

“The world of things can open itself to reveal a secret life- indeed, to reveal a set of actions and hence a narrativity and history outside the given field of perception- is a constant daydream that the miniature presents. This is the daydream of the microscope: the daydream of life inside life, of significance multiplied infinitely within significant”

- Susan Stewart, 54



Figure 14 | Towering treetops, a view from the ground

One of my initial intrigues with lichen was their relational sense of scale, becoming for me a metaphor for the miniaturization of human life in the vast phenomenal world of things. Poet Susan Stewart speaks of this relationship between the gigantic and the miniature in her book *On Longing*. She says:

Our most fundamental relation to the gigantic is articulated in our relation to landscape, our immediate and lived relation to nature as it ‘surrounds’ us. Our position here is the antithesis of our position in relation to the miniature; we are enveloped by the gigantic, surrounded by it, enclosed within its shadow. Whereas we know the miniature as a spatial whole or as temporal parts, we know the gigantic only partially. We move through the landscape; it does not move through us. (71)

Enlichenment aims to blur these distinctions and notions of scale. Indeed our sense of scale is determined by our bodily relationship to things, but the notion of the gigantic as a *container* and miniature as *contained* privileges an anthropocentric worldview. It is here that I re-enter a discussion of the sublime. Although quite a complicated and diverse term, it is one that I am interested in redefining with my exhibition. As commonly described in reference to Romanticism, it is rhetoric of fear and the gigantic. Images of vast, dramatic

landscapes like in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich often come to mind upon mention of this sublime. In *Enlichenment* I aim to invert the notion of the gigantic, and propose it as the miniature. If the idea of the miniature is merely a cultural construction, how are earthly microcosmic forms not as awe-inspiring or sublime in the Romantic sense of the term? Upon sizing up tiny lichens in multisensory ways, I present a familiar yet alien landscape. My preoccupation with ostranenie aims to evoke a sense of wonder and amazement of these miniature ecosystems that may offer a different version of the sublime.

Throughout history and literature there has been a fascination with this juxtaposition of the macro and the micro. Most recognizable is perhaps the connection to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), which I will note was never an outright intention of mine in the making of *Enlichenment*. However, I recognize that the red coat worn in *Lichenologist* (see figure 12) further summons these connotations of storytelling. I embrace this in reflection when thinking of the aptitude children have for engaging with the world in more intimate tactile ways than most adults, who have a tendency to travel by abstraction.¹⁰ I encourage an enlarged way of seeing- to look more carefully at the other, 'smaller' lives that surround us, and to understand them as extraordinary and ordinary, perplexingly beautiful in their difference.

"The botanist's magnifying glass is youth recaptured. It gives him back the enlarging gaze of a child"
- Gaston Bachelard, 155.

There is a level of mysticism within the miniature that I explore through my exhibition in the way that many of the works oscillate between facts and fictions. I believe magic is imperative to our understandings of the world. I could make a point of reading dozens of philosophical theories and still have no better insight into the purpose of things; theory is all but speculation. Instead I choose to immerse myself within the world and seek understanding of others through engagement and contemplation. Canadian poet Tim Lilburn discusses this 'contemplative knowing' in *Living in the World as if it Were Home* (1999). He describes this form of inquiry as "the resolute taking of a stance before the world, a positioning of oneself in desire-filled *unknowing*" (18). He goes on to expand:

Contemplative knowing does not seek the same epistemological mastery as reason, does not imagine that a thing known is one that rests easily in the palm of the mind, caught in description, known in its rough similarity to other things. Contemplation lets fall names, eschews power, to clear the ground for astonishment; it revels in eccentricity. It does not wish to subdue the world but to dwell in it (Ibid, 31)

With this in mind it becomes ever clearer that complete knowledge of an other is essentially impossible. To determine that you thoroughly know something demystifies the chaos that makes the world so intriguing.

Passion and fascination for place and things are two terms that best summarize my experience in developing *Enlichenment*. Ever since I was a child, trips up to the island were a time for getting lost, for

¹⁰ See Solnit: 2005, 39

exploring and discovering. These experiences have become instinctual habits that arise each time I step onto the land. They continue to inform who I am and what I do. According to Gray and Malins,

Without [this] passion, without a very real hunger for knowledge and discovery, research cannot happen. We [artists] are driven by our sense of wonder, to ask questions and seek their answers...If we lose that sense of wonder – that relentless search for truth and beauty-then the whole enterprise becomes pointless (Gray, x).

In my practice I perpetually seek to explore my many philosophical questions. It is through methods of solitude, walking, observing, collecting, and making, alongside entangled theoretical research that I study such inquires. I am interested in how a convergence of experiential and fieldwork methodologies can become a platform for storytelling, speculation and fantasy.

August 3 |

As the sun sets it casts a blindingly warm stream across the width of the island. Like every night, I park my chair on the west ridge to watch it inch lower and lower. Fish bounce on the surface of the lake, grabbing for dinner and catching a glimpse before sinking deeper into evening water. Along the horizon of pine trees the sun begins to fall out of view, leaving me bathed in a pink, orange haze.

GLOSSARY

Apothecium \ə-pə-'thē-shē-əm\ the fruiting body of a lichen which are often cup like in form but in some cases are small slits or globulus tips.

Crustose \'krəs-,tōs\ are a crusty form of lichen that is tightly attached to their substrates, most commonly rock and bark.

Enlichenment /in-'likən'mənt/ Enlichenment acts as a portmanteau that blends together enlightenment and lichen. Together they create a hybridized word that speaks to the way in which my interaction with lichens have allowed me a kind of insight into their *thisness* and have provided me with a better understanding of my place within the world.

Foliose \'fō-lē-,ōs\ are lichen with a leaf-like appearance that are composed of lobes. They anchor their bodies to their substrates by means of hairlike growths known as rhizines.

Fruticose \'frū-ti-,kōs\ are a form of lichen fungi that is characterized by a shrubby or bushy growth structure.

Objects \'əbjəkt\ the way things appear to a subject

Podetium \pə-dē'shē-əm\ the stalk like growth of certain lichen thalli.

Sublime \sə-'blīm\ of perplexing awe-inspiring complexity that assists one in an awakening to things
Synonyms: bewilder, majestic, magnificent, mystical, superb, wonderful, marvelous, splendid, terrific

Squamulose \'skwā-myə-,lōs\ are lichens with overlapping scale-like lobes.

Thallus \'thə-ləs\ the simple vegetative main body of the lichen, formed by the mycobiont and the photobiont.

Thisness \'θɪsnəs\ the discrete qualities, properties or characteristics of a thing that give it an essence of intrigue.

Things \'θɪŋ\ in the words of W.J.T Mitchell things “signal the moment when the object becomes the Other...when the subject experiences the object as uncanny” (156)

Wildness \'wɪldnəs\ in the words of philosopher/ecologist/artist David Abram “wildness is the earthy, untamed, undomesticated state of things - open-ended, improvisational, moving according to its own boisterous logic. That which is wild is not really out of control; it is simply out of our control. Wildness is not a state of disorder, but a condition whose order is not imposed from outside” (Abram, *The Alliance for Wild Ethics*)

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APPENDIX A |
INSTALLATION IMAGES



Figure 15 | Installation View #1 (Photographs, sound sculpture)



Figure 16 | Installation View #2 (Map detail, portrait, olfaction vessel, ceramics, large lichen photograph)



Figure 17 | Installation View #3 (Photographs, ceramics, cyanotype)



Figure 18 | Installation View #4 (Cyanotype, ceramics)



Figure 19 | Engaging with the sound sculpture that is activated by touch



Figure 20-21 | Sound Sculpture details (lichen)



Figure 22 | Engaging with the sound sculpture that is amplified through a ceramic sculpture



Figure 23-24 | Sound Sculpture details (hand formed porcelain body)



Figure 25-26 | Foliose lichen sculpture & detail (hand formed porcelain body)



Figure 27-28 | Floor details (hand formed porcelain body)



Figure 29-30 | Engaging with the olfaction vessel