

Becoming Imperceptible:
Relating to marine worlds through performing a multispecies autoethnography

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Abstract:

This paper explores the use of theatre and performance to work towards ethical relations with more-than-human worlds. The focus is on examining the theories and experiences that led to the creation and performance of my one-woman show *Imperceptible* (the full script of which is included in this paper). This play was developed from time spent in the Pacific North West at the Indigenous land defence camp on Lelu Island. The resistance is led by the hereditary leaders of the territory in opposition to a Liquefied Natural Gas company looking to build an export terminal there. The performance combines personal autoethnographic storytelling with fictional characters in order to look at relations between settlers living in inland cities and the coastal communities and marine ecosystems that we all rely on for oxygen and sustenance.

I begin the paper by questioning what we have to remember in order to imagine ethical futures in light of Margaret Kovach's argument that to re-member is to locate oneself within her own history and community (this also follows the through line of personal storytelling in my play). I then look at the fictional and non-fictional characters in the play through Deleuze and Guattari's theory of becoming-animal (and becoming-imperceptible) and Una Chaudhuri's theories on human/animal relations in performance. I end by looking at Environmental Justice in the play through Rob Nixon's theory of slow and unseen violence and Stefan Helmreich's anthropological accounts of human/ocean relations. Combining theories of performance studies, human/animal studies, Indigenous allyship, and land education, my project discusses how theatre can explore decolonial ways of re-imagining of our relationship to the marine more-than-human world.

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I would like to thank all the more-than-human Beings (including the land/water/air) that teach and sustain me: the land I grew up on, which I only now know to be the traditional territory of the Algonquin; the land that I study and live on, which is and has been the territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, the Anishnabek Nation, the Huron-Wendat, and the Métis; and the land/ocean on the west coast that is cared for and protected by the hereditary leaders of the Gitwilgyoots Tribe of the Lax Kw'alaams First Nation and all their allies and supporters. I am also grateful to Tasha, my childhood dog who passed away shortly before I finished my major performance project. She was one of my first teachers on interspecies care and compassion and she was truly one of a kind.

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Foreword:

My major project for my Masters in Environmental Studies (MES) was the creation and performance of a one-woman show entitled *Imperceptible*, which evolved out of two years of research and a month spent volunteering with the Indigenous land defence camp on Lelu Island. *Imperceptible* was first performed as a work-in-development at the Helen Gardiner Playhouse May 25-26, 2017, created and performed by myself and directed by Alexandra Simpson. It was the first public presentation of Animacy Theatre Collective, formed by Alexandra and myself this year (www.animacytheatrecollective.com). This paper questions, theorizes, and critically reflects on the creation, performance and reception of this play.

My Area of Concentration for my MES is entitled Theatre as Environmental Education for Social Change. This has been further broken down into three research components: 1) Theatre for Social Change, 2) Environmental Justice and Decolonization, and 3) Multispecies Relationships. I am particularly looking at how theatre can instigate a reimagining of more-than-human worlds and how this reimagining can create more ethical interspecies relations. Coming from a background in performance (my undergrad was a BFA in Acting that was almost exclusively studio-based), this research comes from a very limited time in the academic world of theory. There are key theorists (especially in the field of animal studies, feminist theory or environmental philosophy) that are underrepresented in this paper but I look forward to continuing to read and learn from them in my doctoral studies, which are set to begin shortly after the completion of my Masters' degree.

This project follows a life long fascination with ocean life – which has largely taken place in my imagination, due to the fact that I have always lived in Ontario and did not travel very much as a child. As an adult that fascination is coupled with a desire to find ethical ways of co-existing with the land/air/water that support me. Since I am not proposing a monolithic approach to this, my research examines what ethical relations might mean from the particular position of a settler living on stolen land far from the ocean.

My research looks at new ways of learning by engaging our curiosity and thus our imagination through theatre and the arts in order to create radical, anti-colonial and anti-oppressive interspecies relations, which are foundational for creating an egalitarian and sustainable world.

Table of Contents:

Introduction: *Towards a Multispecies Autoethnography*.....7
Chapter 1: *'Imperceptible' (full script)*.....18
Chapter 2: *Sea of Memory*.....30
Chapter 3: *Becoming Imperceptible*.....42
Chapter 4: *Ocean Relations*.....64
Conclusion: *To the Unseen*.....74
Works cited.....81

List of figures:

- Fig. 1: Lelu Island and the Pacific Coast.
- Fig. 2: Inverness Passage and Lelu Island.
- Fig. 3: Juvenile Salmon.
- Fig. 4: Lelu Island on a Whale's Back.
- Fig. 5: Native Land.
- Fig. 6: In Rehearsal as Microscopic Child.
- Fig. 7: Larval Masks.
- Fig. 8: In Rehearsal as Scientist Woman.
- Fig. 9: Mask making.
- Fig. 10: Lelu Island Proposed Project.
- Fig. 11: Underwater Methane.
- Fig. 12: Cetachuman™ Project Logo.

*Introduction:
Towards a Multispecies Autoethnography*



This paper critically reflects on the research-creation process of *Imperceptible*, examining the theories that informed it and the ways in which theory, experience, and artistic practice are co-constitutive. Through integrating personal experience/history, theory and artistic practice, my research questions how humans can relate ethically to marine more-than-human worlds, particularly when our co-existence is not easily visible. Throughout this paper I use the term ‘more-than-human’ (see David Abram, 1996) instead of ‘animal’ or ‘non-human’ in keeping with the notion that, “the human is not a constitutional pole to be opposed to that of the nonhuman. The two expressions ‘humans’ and ‘nonhumans’ are belated results that no longer suffice to designate the other dimension” (Latour 137). Specifically, my research focuses on the ways in which resources relied upon by many are often protected by so few (in this case and many others that would be Indigenous frontline communities fighting against environmental injustice) and what the responsibilities and relations of inland city dwellers (particularly settlers, as this is the position from which I write) should be to ocean ecosystems and coastal communities.

Imperceptible is a multi-media and mask solo performance piece that looks at inland city dwellers’ relationships to marine ecosystems, and how these relationships can open conversations about Environmental Justice¹ and

¹ Environmental Justice (EJ) as a movement has its roots in America, where pollutive industry and the associated waste disposal are purposefully placed in areas whose population is largely composed of low income people of colour. (See Gosine and Teelucksingh or Agyeman et al.) In Canada we see the same thing has occurred and/or is occurring in places like Grassy Narrows First Nation, Aamjiwnaang First Nation, the Nova Scotia community of

decolonization². Developed from time spent volunteering for the Indigenous land defence camp on Lelu Island (on the north west coast of so-called Canada³), *Imperceptible* combines autoethnographic storytelling with dystopic fictional characters to speak to the colonial, patriarchal and capitalist ideals that inform so much of dominant Western culture's relationship to more-than-human worlds. We meet a variety of characters along the way: there is Scientist Woman, who is the leader of the Cetachuman™ Project, a project designed to bring the entire audience into the ocean to evolve into a new species and therefore escape the impending environmental catastrophe; there is Microscopic Child whose eyes have the power of a microscope, letting her see all microbial life forms and causing her to understand herself as a multispecies assemblage not an individual subject; and there is the Playwright who considers her own positionality as an artist, activist, academic and settler on the stolen land now referred to as Toronto. This play asks us how, in a visual-oriented society, we can foster ethical relations when the full impacts of our actions (whether geographically or temporally) are rarely visible to us? As a settler of mixed European ancestry who lives in Ontario and has only stayed on Lelu Island for a month, I did not want to create a theatre piece that exclusively documented the situation at Lelu Island, as I don't feel that my voice is the

Africville, Kashechewan First Nation, and, I would argue, Lelu Island. I also follow Dr. Deborah McGregor's definition in this paper, which argues that Environmental Justice must include justice for the more than human world as well as for the humans that exist within it (27).

² In this paper I attempt to follow Tuck and Yang (2012) in discussing decolonization as the repatriation of Indigenous land, not merely as a metaphor for attempting to right general injustices undergone by Indigenous peoples.

³ I preface the term 'Canada' this way to recognize that the settler nation of Canada does not define this land but rather has been placed on top of Indigenous lands, largely without their consent.

appropriate one to be telling that story. Instead, I wanted to question how theatre can move us towards a re-imagining of our relationship to the marine more-than-human world in decolonial and non-hierarchical ways.

In the summer of 2016 I spent a month volunteering at Lelu Island, or Lax U'u'la.⁴ Lelu Island is the traditional territory of the Gitwilgyoots tribe of the Lax Kw'alaams First Nation, and the site of a proposed Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) export terminal just outside of Prince Rupert, British Columbia (see Fig. 1). The Malaysian-owned company Petronas has proposed construction of a pipeline that would bring fracked natural gas from Treaty 8 territory (Northern BC) to the Pacific North West coast for export via tanker traffics to markets in Asia. In May 2015 Petronas asked the Lax Kw'alaams First Nation to vote on whether or not to approve this project (offering \$1.15 billion if they voted yes). The vote was a unanimous refusal of the project (Horne).



Fig. 1: Lelu Island and the Pacific Coast. Photo credit the Canadian Press.

⁴ Leaders of the camp explained to me that Lax U'u'la is the traditional Tsimshian name for the island, and Lelu Island is the name that came from the Chinook trading language. Lelu Island is the term most often used by the community leaders for public purposes (media, fundraising, etc) and so I will follow suite in this paper.

Lelu Island is a small piece of land next to a sandy bed of eelgrass called Flora Banks. The nearby Skeena River is the second most important river for salmon and it has been estimated that 88% of Skeena salmon rely on Flora Banks (Faggetter 15). Migrating juvenile salmon will swim down the Skeena River and along Inverness Passage to seek shelter in the unique ecosystem of Flora Banks eelgrass while they transition from freshwater to saltwater (see Fig. 2). The Lax Kw'alaams conducted research on the area (independent of the research Petronas commissioned, which produced very different results) and determined that the area would negatively impact the salmon, which are a keystone species for west coast ecosystems and peoples, relied upon by many First Nations and settler communities for sustenance.

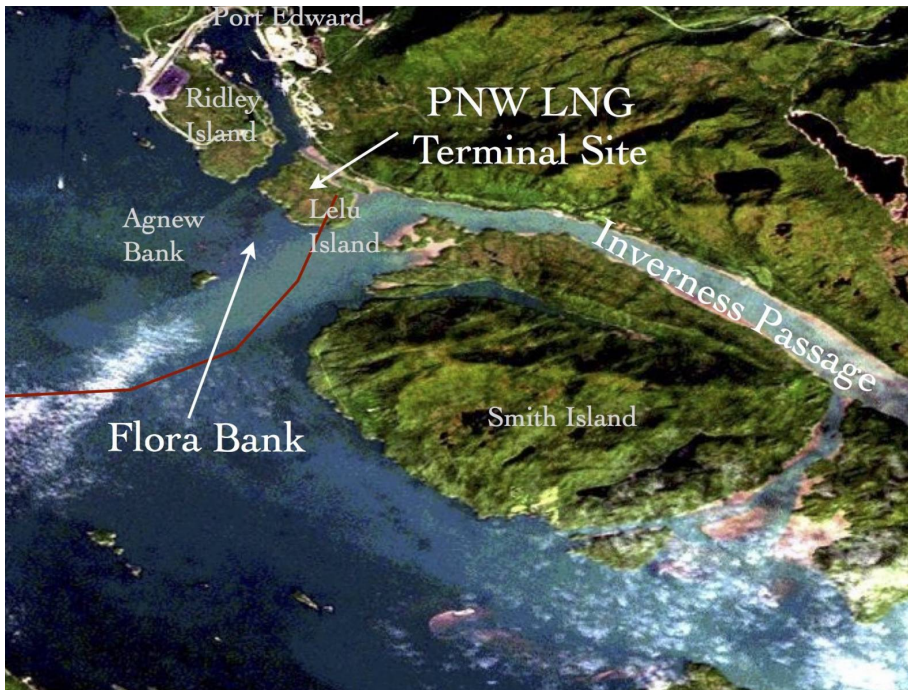


Fig. 2: Inverness Passage and Lelu Island. Inverness passage leads directly to the mouth of the Skeena River. Photo credit Greg Horne.

In August of 2015 the hereditary leader of the Gitwilgyoots Tribe, Sm'ooget Yahaan (Don Wesley), and the house leader of the territory, Gwishawaal (Ken Lawson), led a re-occupation of the territory in opposition to Petronas' LNG project (which has continued to go ahead in the process despite the community's unanimous vote). Answering a callout for supporters to help out at the camp, I came to volunteer at the island in the summer of 2016. The LNG project has since received provincial and federal approval for construction and the camp continues to occupy Lelu Island.



Fig. 3: *Juvenile Salmon*. Salmon swim amidst the eelgrass in the shallow waters of Flora Banks, with Lelu Island in the background. Photo credit Brian Huntington.

Chapter 1 consists of the full script of *Imperceptible* in its current draft. There is also a link provided to watch the recorded performance online. In Chapter 2, I discuss my process and methodology in more detail, outlining theories of allyship and solidarity work and thinking about the role of memory and history within them. In Chapter 3 I look at Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's writing on the concept of becoming-animal and the ways that this relates to theatre in general and my performance piece specifically. I also discuss the politics of a vision-oriented society and how this creates a hierarchy of knowledge production that obfuscates certain violences and highlights others. Lastly, Chapter 4 focuses on human/ocean relations and the ways in which different knowledge is produced about marine life.

The writing of scholars, such as Una Chaudhuri, have been foundational in thinking of ways to create theatre that speaks to ethical relations with the more-than-human world. She writes that,

Animals show us how much we still need to know, not only about them but also about ourselves. At the same time, they show us how very hard it is going to be to attain that knowledge, especially if we cling to our old habits of inquiry, our old reliance on 'ocular proof' and disembodied ideas. Much of the new knowledge gained through animal acts comes from going way past the limits of logic and book learning, and accepting instruction, instead, from the life of bodies...[theatre's] reliance on physicality, materiality, and embodiment makes it especially useful for venturing into areas where language is absent. (*Animal Acts* 10)

My play uses documentary and personal narrative along with fictional worlds and characters that push at the boundaries of what it means to be human, specifically by questioning what we think of as 'ocular proof.'

I also take inspiration in my art from the Multispecies Salon, described by Kirksey and Helmreich as a site where "[a]rt serve[s] as a companion and catalyst

practice for thinking through and against nature-culture dichotomies” (546). The Multispecies Salon was held at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association and used art, panels, and events to discuss the new field of multispecies ethnographies. This field has been growing among anthropologists looking at the blurred lines between nature and culture, and how humans and more-than-human worlds can co-exist, creating “mutual ecologies and coproduced niches” (Kirksey and Helmreich 546). Multispecies ethnographies seek to move away from anthropocentric narratives that speak only of nonhuman life as ‘naturally’ occurring and convenient for human use but devoid of cultural, economic, social, or political systems⁵.

As my play also makes use of autobiographical and autoethnographical devices, especially ones that pertain to the more-than-human in my life, I think of this work as a multispecies autoethnography. This term not only combines methodological processes of positionality with theories of more-than-human worlds, it also serves as a framework for avoiding the potential trap of “reduc[ing] the unknown subjectivity of an ‘other’ being to the limited range of our own experiences” (Fawcett 140). A multispecies autoethnography would see my own history not as an individualized story but as it relates to economic, social, political, *and* more-than-human influences. This is done in order to prioritize personal narrative over fact-based research in light of Margaret Kovach’s argument for the decolonizing potential of using the methodology of story within research (103). The

⁵ I want to also acknowledge the work of many writers in the fields of animal studies and feminist environmental philosophy who have made foundational contributions to this area of research, which multispecies ethnographies and many other writings draw on (such as Val Plumwood, Donna Haraway, and Stacy Alaimo, to name just a few).

specific way in which I hope this research works toward decolonization is to gain support for the hereditary leaders of the Gitwilgyoots Tribe in their right to sovereignty over their territory, which has never been ceded to the government of Canada. By extension it is also a call to support Indigenous leaders across Turtle Island who are demanding the right to provide or deny industry access to their territories.

A multispecies autoethnography would also see my own self as a multispecies assemblage. This then becomes a form of land education as it obfuscates any hierarchized divide between my self and land/water/air/life forms, viscerally reminding me of my connection to my surroundings. As Manulani Aluli-Myer writes of land education from an Indigenous Hawaiian perspective:

Land is our mother. *This is not a metaphor.* For the Native Hawaiians speaking of knowledge, land was the central theme that drew forth all others. You came from a place. You grew in a place and you had a relationship with that place. *This is an epistemological idea.* Because of the high mobility of Americans and billboards as childhood scenery, many find this idea difficult to comprehend. Land/ocean shapes my thinking, my way of being, and my priorities of what is of value. Remember, if knowledge is imbued with spirit, how much more is the land where we are inspired in this knowledge making? One does not simply learn about land, we learn best *from* land. This knowing makes you *intelligent* to my people. How you are on land or in the ocean tells us something about you. *Absolutely.* It opens doors to the specificity of what it means to exist in a space and how that existing extends into how best to interact in it. (219, emphasis in original)

This ethic of relating to land is explored in my performance through the character of Microscopic Child, a yet-to-be-defined Being who permanently sees the entire world as if through a microscope. She therefore sees her microbial self as an assemblage of many Beings, rather than a singular individual. Microorganisms play a significant role in the play, again pushing the boundaries between the seen and unseen. Stefen

Helmreich describes how microbes are for the twenty-first century what bottlenose dolphins were for the previous century, and large whales for the century before that. He writes that microbiology “is increasingly described as *microbial oceanography*, a phrasing that makes mapping microbial life coincident with mapping the sea itself, that suggests that microbes are not just *in* the sea but, in an important sense, *are* the sea” (2). Microbes are increasingly being harnessed for human innovation, particularly for pharmaceutical companies, which provides the parallel for the play’s character Scientist Woman and the Cetachuman™ Project’s ‘scientifically engineered evolution’ using marine microorganisms. As I will elaborate in Chapter 4, the sea is increasingly perceived as a new frontier of resources for human exploitation and capitalist gain⁶, the rhetoric forming a startling parallel to early colonial expansion into the Americas. Through the contrasts and similarities between Scientist Woman’s Cetachuman™ Project, Microscopic Child’s existential crisis, and the Playwright’s discussion of the proposed industry at Lelu Island, the play follows Helmreich’s question when he asks: “How does the microorganismic, microcosmic sea reinforce or upend interpretations of the ocean as an extraterritorial space across which public, private, or national interested might be projected?” (4)

All three of these characters in the show are intended to be performed by the same actor, which is not merely a practical or economic decision, although these are always factors in the current era of theatre where funding is scarce. More importantly, it is an artistic choice that demonstrates the continued presence of these versatile characters within myself, as the actor/writer, and, perhaps, within

⁶ This idea follows the work of many of the scholars in the Ocean Frontiers Workshop, held at York University in May 2017, for which I worked as a Research Assistant.

many of the audience members. Anthony Weston's discussions of ethics ring true for me in this regard when he says that,

Ethics is no longer constituted by a merely abstract respect, but demands something far more embodied: a willingness and ability to make the space, not just conceptually, but in one's own person and in the design and structure of personal and human spaces, for the emergence of more-than-human others in relationship. (31)

In my first reading of the play, a colleague of mine who was reading for *Microscopic Child* commented that she felt we all had a bit of each of these characters within ourselves. My hope is that *Microscopic Child*'s presence sparks the idea of the self as a multispecies assemblage, and that this encourages embodied ethical relations between humans and the more-than-human worlds we are a part of (see Fig. 4 depicting the many Beings of Lelu Island).



Fig. 4: *Lelu Island on a Whale's Back*. This is a painting by the artist Fanny Aishaa, created during her stay at Lelu Island this past year and included in this paper with her permission.

Chapter 1: 'Imperceptible'



This chapter consists entirely of the full written script of *Imperceptible*. Video footage of the May 26th performance of the play can be found following this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHPEL9SQKG0&feature=youtu.be>

IMPERCEPTIBLE

By Morgan Johnson

SCENE 1

Stage is bare except for a table centre stage.

Actor (PLAYWRIGHT) comes onstage. Addresses the audience.

PLAYWRIGHT

Hi everyone, thank you so much for coming out tonight. My name is Morgan and I'm finishing a Masters in Environmental Studies degree right now, trying to fuse activism, theatre, environmental justice and relationships with the more-than-human world. Are people familiar with the Liquefied Natural Gas projects being proposed for BC right now? There are about 20 LNG projects proposed along the west coast right now, the one farthest along in development is proposed for Lelu Island and Flora Banks. Last year there was a callout for supporters to come to an Indigenous land defense camp that was set up on the island in opposition to the project. So on June 16th 2016, I took a plane to Prince Rupert BC. Two women come to pick me up and before heading over to the island we had to swing by a hardware store to buy a toilet seat, presumably they had been going without up until this point. While getting in the boat I asked, 'How many people are staying at the camp right now?' They smiled, started the engine and gave the same strategically vague answer I had gotten over the phone, which is 'under a hundred.' I meet the 'under a hundred' once everyone comes to the cabin for dinner and shortly after I fall asleep on a little bunk bed next to a window overlooking the island.

During this last sentence PLAYWRIGHT takes a large travelers backpack out from behind the table. She pulls out a sleeping bag and sets it up as her bed onstage. House lights slowly dim and video projection slowly comes up: a woman swims across the screen underwater, surrounded by phytoplankton. Soundscape of underwater breathing. Both video and soundscape continue throughout the next V/O while PLAYWRIGHT unpacks the backpack. She pulls out two masks, high heels, a GoPro, and a book titled 'Encyclopedia of Everything' and sets them up on the stage.

MICROSCOPIC CHILD V/O

Once upon a time. Upon *this* very time. This time, *this* time is a time for new stories. New stories, yes, to say who we are. Once, or twice, or always, upon all the times that ever were, all the times that have been to make this moment, this time. Story time.

By the end of the voiceover the stage is set up and PLAYWRIGHT addresses the audience again.

PLAYWRIGHT

The next morning we get up at 6am for patrol. One of the woman from last night advises me on getting ready. "You're going to need a warm hat. But yeah that's it. Oh, and do you want to mask up?"

"...Sorry? Mask up?"

"You don't have to, some people just like to cover their face so it's harder for the surveyors to know who everyone is, how many people are here and everything. And bring your camera."

June can be pretty cold this far north so masking up has several purposes.

She masks up and climbs in the boat. Starts filming. Projection: Boating on Lelu Island.

As we get in the boat the people who have been on the island longest describe how to recognize the Liquefied Natural Gas company's boats which is actually difficult because it's not like they have 'LNG' written across them and right now all the fishing boats look the same to me. This land defence camp for Lelu Island and Flora Banks has been going strong for almost a year now on the unceded territory of the Gitwilgyoots tribe of the Lax Kw'alaams First Nation. The camp was started by the hereditary leaders of the territory when their refusal to let LNG companies build an export terminal here was ignored. It doesn't help that the Canadian government approved the company's request to build here, despite the fact that this land has never even been subject to treaties or given to Canada in any way.

At first the ocean almost looks like a small lake in the Kawarthas. It's not till we turn the corner of the island away from the mainland that I feel how differently this water breathes, the taste of salinity in the air, the smell of fish bodies. And there's the fact that I know at some point orca and humpback whales swim through here. This fact wakes up every nerve in my body. My eyes become magnets to the surface of the water in case a dorsal fin breaks through, blending the two worlds that seem so disparate for an inland city dweller. The choppy surfaces tantalize me every second – what is happening right next to me under water that I can't see? The GoPro I borrowed from a friend back in Toronto extends the ability of my eyes by a little.

She lowers a GoPro underwater. Projection: Underwater GoPro footage from Flora Banks, which fades to video of a beach as actor changes to Microscopic Child. Music.

SCENE 2

MICROSCOPIC CHILD

Running in with a book titled Encyclopedia of Everything.

WAIIT!!!! WAAAAAAIIIIIT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Stops. Realizes she is too late. She slowly takes in the audience.

Ocean?! Wha- uhh...No...no you can't be the- 'cus you don't look right at all! No, no you can't be, because we read that you should look more like this (*Opens her book and takes out drawings of microbes to show the audience*) and this (*shows more*) and this (*another*) and this and this and this and so many more. But. Umm...you all look like so much of the same. And like no ones we've ever seen before, have we? No...no we don't think we have. But aren't we, well, aren't humans, supposed to be made up of the same things as you? Wasn't that the whole idea behind her stupid project? How can *you* be the ocean she went into? Uuuunless...ok, unless we are like we thought: an evolutionary fluke, not like you, ocean, at all. It's like...if you and us are made of such different parts then maybe our mother was wrong with her science of our body. Ha, just like we thought all along!! The thing is, she does believe quite surely that we came from her uterus. But looking at you we are becoming more sure that we came from particles of light directed through pieces of glass. 'Cus, when we take a breath in or a sip of water or touch the subway walls, or when we shower or blink or sleep or dream or wake up we see billions of you. Billions of you becoming us. Billions of interactions and they continue throughout our body so we are always shifting around into something just a little bit different than the moment before.

Beat.

Hey. If no one can see with our eyes can anyone see us?

Beat.

Once upon a time somebody left the ocean and once upon a time they tried to get back in.

Music. Actor changes back to PLAYWRIGHT and pulls GoPro out of the water

SCENE 3

PLAYWRIGHT

The water is freezing so I can't hold the camera under very long but the GoPro lets me see what human eyes can't – the dance of the eelgrass on Flora Bank.

Pause.

I then find out that this underwater film session of mine was almost the exact same process that had been used in this exact same spot by the LNG company's scientists to prove that, since no life forms were visible to their underwater cameras, the area would be minimally affected if an 11 billion dollar Liquefied Natural Gas export terminal were to be constructed on top of it.

Pause.

It sometimes feels like I'm playing pretend out here, using raincoats, boats and life jackets to try and temporarily defy my human vulnerability to the water. It's like the elements are mockingly pointing out my terrestrial status that cetaceans, like the orcas and humpbacks that frequent this area, gave up millions of years ago. Looking over the edge of the boat into the greeny-blue mysterious space, I think about what it might have been like for a potential cetacean ancestor leaving the land and going back into the water and I wonder if we should all just try that. Dip into the ocean and see what 20 million years could do with us.

Music. Actor transitions to Scientist Woman.

SCENE 4

SCIENTIST WOMAN

Thank you, thank you all so much. Welcome, to the first official day of The Cetachuman™ Project. After decades of research, years of recruitment and months of training, our revolutionary day has finally arrived. Please take out your Evolusuit as we will begin momentarily.

We will all start our aquatic immersion in the area behind me. This, of course, is Flora Banks, where millions of juvenile salmon migrate every year – remember that these salmon will be crucial for your transition from terrestrial to aquatic feeding habits. The island behind it, of course, is the Liquefied Natural Gas export terminal, which receives vessels of natural gas daily. Therefore it is integral that by tomorrow afternoon we are each well on our way to the open ocean, not only to establish our aquatic territory as soon as possible but also in order to avoid this high concentration of tanker traffic.

Cetachuman Project Participants, I invite you to take a deep breath and remember that it is perfectly natural to feel fear right now. There are many creatures out there, such as the ocean's current top predators, whom we are unaccustomed to coexisting with. And furthermore, although fellow mammals are among the most *visible* new neighbours, there are in fact billions of microscopic life forms in there that will take some time for our senses to evolve and detect. Again, none of these creatures can harm us from within our Evolusuit, however much our imaginations might be triggered to indicate otherwise.

For out in these depths there are no borders, no fences - in fact, no species living in any one contained area. A new commons for those who can master it, an unexplored frontier waiting for us – through colonizing the oceans the Cetachuman™ Project will allow a new human species to flourish with a kind of glory not yet witnessed on this planet!!

SCENE 5

PLAYWRIGHT

By the end of the day my eyes are exhausted from staring at the water, waiting for surveyors or whales. By the end of the week I have seen neither. Every log or whitecap begins to look like a potential dorsal fin and I wish I could close my eyes but still see everything all at once. I wish I had the eyes of my binoculars, my camera, or perhaps even something stronger.

That night I have this dream that I'm in a boat going over enormous waves somewhere in the ocean. The boat capsizes and I see my capsized boat as if from an aerial perspective and I'm thinking I have no hope of surviving because how could anyone find a small human in such a vast expanse of water? Then the orca whales arrive and I am brought out of my aerial view and am right in the water again.

Projection: Close-up of a choppy surface of water. A dorsal fin rises out of the water briefly. The camera goes underwater and slowly we see the body of an orca whale swim through. The orca is an animation, the water is video footage from a GoPro.

The whales are so enormous that I never see a full body at once. I wrap my body around the end of an orca's tale and hold on. I want to show appreciation as the orca carries me along so I gently rub her side but then am unsure if this human demonstration translates to cetaceans – if you're not used to beings that have hands this may not feel comforting at all so I stop.

I wake up from the dream still surrounded by salty ocean-like water – I don't remember ever feeling scared while dreaming but my sleeping bag is a cocoon of salty sweat that seems to be exuding from every single pore in my body.

Music. Actor transitions to MICROSCOPIC CHILD.

SCENE 6

MICROSCOPIC CHILD

Continuing from where her last monologue left off.

And once upon a time somebody said that an ocean body and a human body are so similar they are almost not different at all. If that's so then we *definitely* know by looking at you that we never came from a human. Okay, but first let's do an experiment to see if this hypothesis is true.

She conducts an experiment: the next segment is demonstrated with a balloon filled with water and a marker to draw features on it.

Once upon a time this balloon lived in the ocean. Then one day it came out on land and then it grew ears and then it grew a nose and then eyes and then it started moving around, but it was still a balloon filled with seawater. It might eventually grow some organs or orifices but, like, why wouldn't it keep using the salty fluids already inside of it? Yes, yes it would definitely keep that salty fluid full of trillions of little lives or else it would just die from loneliness. Then slowly the balloon learns how to create its own ocean. It carries it around inside all the time, it creates little splashes of ocean whenever it is sad and misses its home but eventually it only sees these as splashes of itself. It can't even see the ocean layered over its pupils. It filters through the seeing and forgets what its body of water is made of.

(beat)

If you just see the world THROUGH your eyes without seeing everything that IS your eyes we think you would be devastatingly lonely.

(beat)

Hey – if a group of humans evolve at 1600 times their regular rate, when are they and when are they not humans?

Music. Actor transitions to SCIENTIST WOMAN

SCENE 7

SCIENTIST WOMAN (*She discovers Microscopic Child with the Evolusuit. We witness SCIENTIST WOMAN's side of the conversation*)

Don't touch that!!! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!? How on earth did you get in here, this room is locked at all times.

I'm not yelling. How is it that you know what these are?!

You're not a microscope. This has gone on long enough.

You want attention so you look through microscopes and pretend you have some sort of ocular power. It's pathetic. You are old enough to stop playing make believe. Or do you want to stay cooped up here forever? How did you find out about the project?

What? That's impossible. There's no way you can tell what microbes were used in the Evolusuits.

You cannot *meet* a microbe, you can't even *see* a microbe without – I don't have time for this! I have to finish getting ready.

Beat.

Why? You want to know *why* we're doing this?! Terrestrial resources are depleting every day, the Cetachuman Project is for the very survival of the human species. Or does that not really concern you?

Oh, I am *not* having this conversation with you anymore. That is *not* what I meant. This isn't a story, it is scientifically engineered evolution, you can't just turn into a-

Pause.

Why do you care? Why do you care if the project 'works' or not? Don't tell me you're concerned for my safety, it's not as though you'd miss my company. I can't even imagine what you do in here all day - And I don't want to imagine. Leave me alone so I can get ready.

You can't come because you're not a - (*she stops herself just in time*)

Stop saying 'we' you are a singular body. No, we've been over this, that's not what I was going to say. No. You are. Of course you are, you can think, you can talk, what else could you possibly be. Now go.

She slams the door and locks it. Actor transitions to PLAYWRIGHT.

SCENE 8

PLAYWRIGHT

The next morning I sit at the cabin with Spencer, a friend of a friend who is visiting Lelu for the day. He tells me how, for his nation as well as many other Indigenous peoples along the coast, the whale is a representation of the political body. "When we look at whales we don't look at them as a separate entity," he says. "We look at them as a teacher." I ask if that's how Tsimshian matrilineal societies developed, as orcas and many other whales are matrilineal. He shares a word in his language that means a spiritual and unexplainable being that we learn from. This being sometimes takes the form of an orca whale. Sometimes while we talk he smiles and then is silent for a while, a shadow of a story rippling across his face before politely declining to tell it. He says, "I want to tell you this, but this one is not my story to tell." We both silently acknowledge that in such a short conversation, in such a relatively short visit I won't really understand anyway and perhaps it's not always my place to.

PLAYWRIGHT *gets into her sleeping bag and pulls out a journal and a pen. Projection: as PLAYWRIGHT draws in her journal during the next monologue, her drawings are shown on a projection of her journal behind her.*

By the end of the day we are all so exhausted that we head to bed around 9. Which leaves lots of reading and writing time. Tonight I draw a map of how I got here and it keeps getting longer and longer and more abstract. First, it's just from Toronto

to Edmonton to Prince Rupert to Lelu. Then it's years earlier from Ottawa to Toronto. Then it's from my early childhood, as I copied the hero of my favourite movie and finally learnt to put my head underwater and swim to the concrete bottom of a chlorinated pool.

Then it's from the Atlantic ocean, which carried my maternal Polish grandmother and English grandfather 4,000km to North America after surviving the war. Before that it's from the same ocean bringing over my paternal great great grandmother who was one of 100,000 orphaned or impoverished children living in England, sent as cheap labour for European families settling the new country of Canada. You can follow the Atlantic ocean 300km inland and it becomes the Ottawa River, you can get off at a beach in the settler state's national capital region, and walk to the apartment where I was born on Canada day, in three inches of bathwater while the midwife ran out to move her car.

Then it's from 400 million years earlier, when perhaps an aquatic being left its ocean habitat, slowly exploring the vast expanses of terrestrial landscape. Unlike my human relations, when these aquatic ancestors arrived there was no one else was already living on the land. After 350 million years of terrestrial life some beings of this lineage went back into the ocean. And if you look inside the pectoral fin of an orca whale today there are five little bones, dormant fingers passed down faithfully through generations though unused for millions of years.

Actor transitions to MICROSCOPIC CHILD.

SCENE 9

MICROSCOPIC CHILD (*discovering the Evolusuits*)

And who are you?? Oohhhh yes you are so beautiful. Wow just look at all the things you can do working together like this! We want to-

She gasps and steps back from the Evolusuit quickly as she notices SCIENTIST WOMAN who has just entered. We witness MICROSCOPIC CHILD's side of the argument.

Stop yelling at us. There was a spare key in your room.

You know how we know. We've shown you and shown you and shown you but your eyes are so determined you won't even look!

Uh, yes, actually, we are a microscope.

We want to meet the ocean before you put on these suits and go into it. We found out from the other microbes. We found out from the other microbes in all these slippery black suits of yours. You can test us with your book if you don't believe us!

Ok we *really* need to see the ocean before you put on these suits and go in it. If we meet the other microbes that live there–If we meet the other microbes we can ask if your project will work!

Beat.

Why are you doing this?

Um, do *you* think the survival of the human species should concern us?

What? You're going to the ocean *now*? No. No, no, no you can't go, 'cus we still haven't finished our story, we need you to bring us to meet the other microbes in the ocean, they could tell us if you're going to turn into a whale, or a log, or a plastic lump, or a jellyfish-

You're wrong, it is a story.

What we do all day? We draw stories of all the little lives around us. But we haven't finished our own yet and we need you to help us -

Pause.

Why aren't we coming with you?

We're not a what? What were you going to say? Not a what? Not a person? Not a human?

We don't believe you. There's a better story about us out there, but we need to meet the ocean before you go and try to-

The door slams. Sound of a clicking lock.

MOM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Music. Actor transitions to PLAYWRIGHT.

SCENE 10

PLAYWRIGHT

Later that day a new supporter comes to visit the island.

Projection: animated graphic designs of the proposed project on Lelu Island interspersed with clips from old commercials for LNG.

He makes activist graphic designs about energy projects. He makes a model of what an LNG spill would look like at Lelu Island. Apparently it would mostly consist of

huge amounts of methane released into the area, which the companies love because it doesn't create the same disturbing visual of an oil spill – much harder to rally resistance around something you can't even see. Of course if the spill is big enough and the weather conditions are right there *will* be a very visible result. But the struggle isn't really about methane. The real problem is even more invasive, and, for many people, even more imperceptible.

Actor transitions to SCIENTIST WOMAN.

SCENE 11

SCIENTIST WOMAN

Fellow Cetachuman Project participants, it is finally time. Please take out your Evolusuit. Engineered from carefully selected genes taken from thousands of microorganisms, the Evolusuit will ensure your survival. As soon as you have the suit fully on and are completely immersed, remember that one hour will become equivalent to 67 years; one month, 50,000 years. As we know from cetacean evolutionary history, 12 million years will be sufficient for you to have adequately adapted as a fully aquatic top predator of your marine environment. After this time there will be no distinction between yourself and the Evolusuit as every aspect of it will have entered your corporeal being. Therefore you must merge it with your body *very* carefully. Begin with your feet now – slowly! – allow each part of your body to become acquainted with it before you move on. NO – no, leave the arms and head for last - yes that's right. Keep following my lead and I will show you.

Music. Scientist Woman immerses herself in the water. Projection: Underwater shot as a body slowly jumps in wearing loose flowing clothing. As her body appears we see the white gaseous spill of methane. Actor transitions to PLAYWRIGHT as the projection ends.

SCENE 12

PLAYWRIGHT

That night I dream again that I'm on a boat in the water. In dream-like fashion the ocean is simultaneously a lake in Ontario where my uncle has a cottage. Somehow I know there are humpback whales in the water but they aren't surfacing. And it's driving me crazy. I take a plastic container and scoop up water with it. I upload some humpback whale songs from the internet into the container of water. Then I pour the water back into the ocean so the whales can hear the songs.

Projection: underwater camera slowly moves through the water.

I repeat the process and soon the whales surface. I think they are immediately intrigued as they keep surfacing near me. More and more of them join and one of them stretches her head right up close over the edge of the boat and that's when I realize they are angry. Their heads suddenly look like enormous toads rising out of

the water. They want to know where the sounds came from and they begin to chase the boat as I try to explain which website I downloaded them from.

I don't actually remember what happened next – maybe I stumbled to the dry safety of shore, wondering how that happened, why I downloaded those sounds into the water, and how much my other senses are lacking if this is how blind my desire to see makes me.

Music. Actor transitions to MICROSCOPIC CHILD.

SCENE 13

MICROSCOPIC CHILD

(holding a deflated balloon and the Encyclopedia of Everything)

Well. We guess that's our final proof, since our body of water looks so different from the ocean's. We suppose we didn't come from humans.

Pause.

Unless *you* came from humans. Unless this white and still and breathless water isn't what the ocean that humans *came from* looks like...maybe this is what the ocean that humans left looks like. If you're not just the ocean than who are you? *(Flips through Encyclopedia of Everything then pulls out microbe drawing)*

Hmm hmmm. Oh! Oh, oh, oh oh, here you are! Yes. METH-ANO-TROPH. Wait, you're *all* called methanotroph? It says you eat up methane like we eat up oxygen – and here we guess you're having a feast in the ocean today. We didn't see anyones like you in our mother's suits – does she know that ocean bodies can hold so much methane? Maybe we could join you and maybe we could go find her, maybe some of us would be able to eat the methane too! But, um, we actually have no idea still because we...we...we are not listed in this book. And we still cannot see what the ocean looks like. So...

Pause. She empties the book of microbe drawings and then discards it.

Once upon a time. Upon *this* very time. This time, *this* time is a time for new stories. New stories, yes, to say who we are. Once, or twice, or always, upon all the times that ever were, all the times that have been to make this moment, this time. Story time.

Blackout. Projection: microscopic phytoplankton move across the screen. A cacophony of underwater noise, humpback whale songs, orca clicks and vocalizations, bubbles. Breathing.

END

Chapter 2: Sea of Memory



To communicate with the sea of memory is to cultivate an awareness that the past itself is 'current' and alive

- Janine MacLeod, 2013 (55)

If research is about learning, so as to enhance the well-being of the earth's inhabitants, then story is research.

- Margaret Kovach, 2009 (102)

Throughout this process of research-creation, many different people influenced my ethics and methodologies. I want to recognize that there are many different ways of coming to knowledge (learning from the land, family, friends). Due to the context in which I am currently writing, the academic theorists and texts will be the stronger focus of discussion in this chapter, yet this is by no means an attempt to hierarchize different ways of knowing.

One of the main guiding texts for my research process is Margaret Kovach's *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*. Kovach discusses ethical considerations and methods for working with communities, particularly for Indigenous researchers or researchers working with Indigenous peoples. The foundational principle from Kovach (as well as many others; see also Castellano; Simpson; Tuck and Yang) that oriented my work in the past year and a half is for research to be addressing a community need, not just a need of the researcher. This way the lure of getting published, getting a degree, receiving funding or a job offer doesn't dictate the way that research is done with a community who may not benefit from any of these. This principle is also outlined by Lynn Gehl, whose *Ally Bill of Responsibilities* is a text I have referred back to frequently throughout the process. Number 12 reads: "Ensure that [potential allies] are supporting a leader's, group of leaders', or a movement's efforts that serve the

needs of the people.” Kovach’s recommendation is similar when she argues that “giving back involves knowing what ‘useful’ means, and so having a relationship with the community, so that the community can identify what is relevant, is key” (82). If that relationship doesn’t exist it could become too easy for a researcher to convince herself that she is acting in the interest of the community she is working with, with no way to ensure that this is actually the case.

I began following the land defense camp at Lelu Island shortly after it began, which coincided with the first semester of my Masters program where I was starting to explore theories of human/ocean relations and more-than-human worlds, environmental and social justice, and Indigenous politics and solidarity. I stayed updated through the Facebook page *Stop Pacific NorthWest/LNG on Lelu Island*, and the idea to physically go to the camp came from callouts from this page asking for supporters to come stay there. I was in a very privileged position where my program would allow for me to travel, and since the camp aligned so precisely with my research I could even get some of the funds to travel covered by travel grants and so was able to address the expressed need of bodies at the island.

Although learning from theories of community-based research was significant to my ethics, my project never focused on *researching* a community. Furthermore, it is important to note that this community is not comprised of one nation but rather is led by the hereditary leaders of the Gitwilgyoots Tribe of the Lax Kw’alaams First Nation and made up of many Indigenous peoples from different nations and settler allies from across the country. The needs expressed by the leaders of the camp were both to have bodies that could stay and help at the camp in

a respectful way and also to help raise awareness and funds for the camp. There was never an express need (or intent on my part) to research the community or to help the community engage in research. Instead, I hoped my research interests in inland cities' relations and responsibilities to marine and coastal ecosystems/communities around issues of environmental justice could have practical use by bringing the specific case of Lelu Island into conversations across a larger geographical distance. This is not to dilute the importance of local decision making and engagement in local issues but rather to understand the burden that is placed on small frontline communities who are often protecting resources whose benefits are shared among many. Before leaving the island I discussed the idea of my performance piece with the house leader's wife, Patty, (who is one of the leaders of the camp) while I was staying with her. She agreed that this would be a great use for my Masters project and we discussed the play in more depth on the phone this spring during the development of the performance.

Along with Kovach and Gehl, whom I have already mentioned, Kathy Absolon and Cam Willett argue for the importance of researchers transparently positioning themselves in their work. They write that,

Identifying, at the outset, the location from which the voice of the researcher emanates is an Aboriginal way of ensuring that those who study, write, and participate in knowledge creation are accountable for their own positionality. We are of the opinion that neutrality and objectivity do not exist in research, since all research is conducted and observed through human epistemological lenses. (97)

They also elaborate on the meaning of location, specifying that "location is about relationship to land, language, spiritual, cosmological, political, economical, environmental, and social elements in one's life" (98). Creating an autobiographical

narrative as the throughline of my piece allowed me to share my location with the audience and I tried to incorporate the different elements of location mentioned above. This way, I was speaking for no one but myself and thus hopefully negating the possibility that my research could be read as the kind of rationalist ‘neutral’ truth that Absolon and Willet warn against. While I agree that objectivity as discussed above does not exist in research, I am also interested in following Donna Haraway in discussing the ways in which we might rethink objectivity as inherently part of our positionality. She argues that,

All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see. (*Situated* 583)

This process of positioning myself in my work is ongoing and adaptive rather than formulaic, and often starts with the complex process of remembering. Kovach describes the word ‘remember’ as a process of realizing and attending to your membership within a community (111).

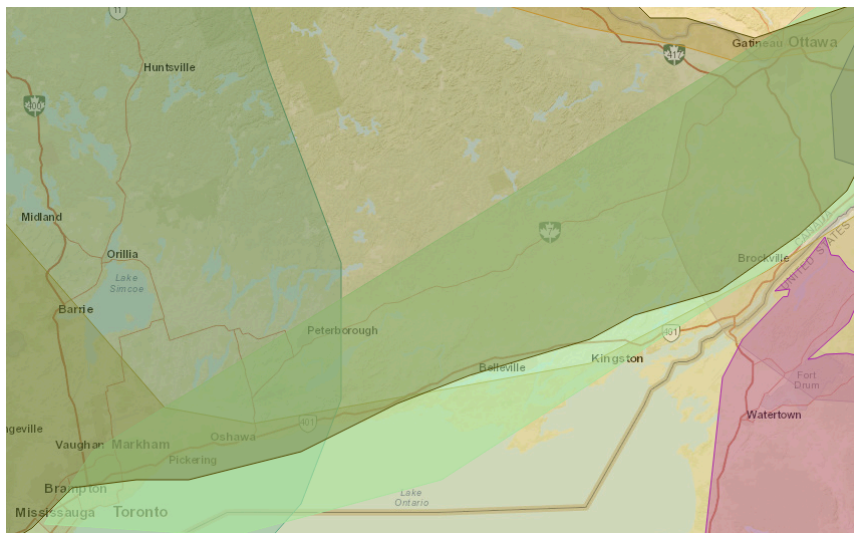


Fig. 5: Native Land. A map of the Ottawa and Toronto regions by the website Native-land.ca, which shows Indigenous territories in shaded colours throughout North America. The overlapping territories shown here are those of the Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, Anishnabek, Mohawk, and Algonquin.

To (re)member, then, is to position ourselves to where it is we have come from (geographically, spiritually, politically, economically, etc). As a settler, for me this usually starts with relationship to land – both envisioning what role or responsibility settlers have in caring for land that has been and continues to be violently stolen from Indigenous peoples *and* trying to remember and learn about the many different lands (which I have never been to) that my ancestors have come from. It can be difficult to re-member myself to these histories as my family tree is spread over many areas with few stories lasting through the generations and even fewer being communicated today. For example, just last year at a family dinner my ninety-three year old grandmother began sharing a few stories of her escape from Vienna during World War II – such a rare occurrence that my mother began recording the audio of our dinner conversation on her phone. My grandmother and her mother escaped the Russian invasion by foot and walked for a month to the Italian border. I’m not sure anyone in the family has heard a thorough start-to-end version of this story but we piece together details from our collective memory each time she offers them up. This time she was remarking on the durability of her footwear, explaining that she wore her ski boots for the entire journey and continued to use them after the war. Both my mother and aunt began to realize that these are the very ski boots that they had each worn for several winters in their teenage years, never having any idea of the history of that material.

Janine MacLeod, drawing on Victoria Freeman’s work *Distant Relations: How My Ancestors Colonized North America*, calls the difficulty of researching settler ancestry the “amnesia of mobility” (44). She quotes Freeman discussing how much

our memory is affected by losing connection with the physical landmarks we come from (MacLeod 44). In the case of my grandmother and her daughters, the actual material that enabled their mobility (this one pair of ski boots) was a tangible connection to where they came from. Yet, presumably because of the trauma that came with this mobility, the amnesia effect still applied, as the story of that connection was never passed on. I desperately wanted to find the boots but my grandmother couldn't remember what happened to them. For her, their practical value far outweighed their sentimental one; she couldn't see what use I would have for boots that wouldn't even fit me. How to trace stories and histories in order to understand your positionality when any tangible links are long gone, replaced with synthetic boots that only last a few seasons instead of generations? MacLeod reminds us that "the erasure of the past by the commodity form itself is actually illusory. The subdivision is not 'new at all - its vinyl siding was once fossilized carbon and chlorinated salt" (MacLeod 44).

This idea encouraged me to think of tangible links in a much less narrow way. Through writers like MacLeod, Stacy Alaimo and Karin Amimoto Ingersoll, I am brought back to water pathways and ocean bodies. Each of my relations who were the first to come to so-called Canada came here by boat on the Atlantic Ocean. Once I started reading and writing about the ocean as an adult I realized most ocean writers grew up in close proximity to an ocean body. In contrast, I was fascinated by the ocean from a very early age but grew up in Ottawa and had been near the ocean only twice. It was only while writing my play that I realized the Ottawa River, which I grew up playing in every summer just down the street from my mom's house, is a

tributary of the St. Lawrence River, which opens onto the Atlantic Ocean, which in turn directly connected my ancestors from several different countries to North America.

While this weaves a very personal connection, Janine MacLeod broadens these watery connections to a larger history when she writes: “Aside from occasional supplements brought in on comets, the water we drink and touch is the same water that erupted as steam in the origins of the earth. All of the moments of the past have had this same water as their witness” (48). With this in mind I playfully traced the tangible connections of my water history even farther back than human ancestors, back millions of years to aquatic Beings exploring terrestrial life for the first time. For me the point of including aquatic ancestors from millions of years ago in my positionality narrative is for the imaginative potential it offers. I have no background in evolutionary biology nor am I suggesting any monolithic origin story that necessitates excluding any others. Instead I follow Brian Massumi when he writes in the forward to Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*: “The question is not: is it true? But: does it work? What new thoughts does it make possible to think? What new emotions does it make it possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?” (xv).

This exemplifies some of the explorations between memory and imagination that my performance piece facilitated for me. Throughout my process I tried to think of sharing memories and history as an active engagement that, like performing versus reciting lines, is kept alive and unique to each moment of the telling. The

autobiographical elements of my creative work try to keep in mind Sarah King's thoughts on history when she writes:

The past is not a neutral, atemporal set of facts...History is a practice of constructing self and community, the way in which the present negotiates itself into the future...Confronting the colonial past in the settled present doesn't just challenge the facts of history as a field of study; it challenges the settlers' visions of themselves as peaceable Canadians, their sense of their own legitimacy and identity. (54)

The format of my play purposefully fuses documentary-style storytelling (narrating my time at Lelu Island or my personal history) with a fantastical world where humans can evolve into a new aquatic species of their own design and both the hierarchy and division between microbe and human is debatable. This is communicated not only through subject matter but also through the theatrical device of mask; the first world is without mask and the second world uses both character and larval mask (which I will elaborate on in Chapter 3). However, I also tried to suggest the presence of a mask in the documentary sections without breaking the style of the world. Each section in which I speak as myself I take off whatever character mask I am using and replace it with a thick headband which can also be pulled down into a light neck warmer. This article of clothing is introduced as my mask because I used it while at Lelu Island whenever we needed to 'mask up' – that is, cover our faces so that the surveyors hired by Petronas couldn't keep tabs on who was on the island at any time. The headband was used to represent the switch to my 'Playwright' character but it also pointed out the specific point of view that this story is told from. I felt that to be completely mask-less as the Playwright might suggest that I am the neutral or 'realistic' aspect of the play, constructing a dichotomy between the real and the not-real that would be counter-productive. I felt

this would create a hierarchy between the characters in terms of whom the audience felt compelled to take seriously. I hoped the introduction of the headband as a mask would subtly subvert any simple categorizations of what is real as well as recognize my own narrative as situated knowledge and not stagnant facts.

In her book *Autobiography and Performance*, Deirdre Heddon discusses personal narrative as a feminist theatre form that I see as working towards understanding knowledge creation as situated and specific. In her chapter on history and performance she cautions, in a similar vein as King, how discussions of history can run the risk of concretizing the past and ignoring its active relation with the present. This often takes the form of highlighting atrocities in history to suggest that the present is free of such violence. Heddon suggests that theatre has a unique ability to avoid this trap, arguing that, "...it is precisely the ephemeral nature of performance that proposes it to be an appropriate and alternative mode of memorialising since to be realised it requires the active agent, or embodied agency, of both performer and spectator" (77). By performing memories in a live event we are implicating ourselves in a past, present and future that is specific, alive, and situated.

In her chapter 'Witnessing Subjects: A Fool's Help' Julie Salverson draws on theatre theorists such as Jacques Lecoq and Augusto Boal to argue that: "If we do not bring who we are, including our skills and our vulnerabilities, to the encounter with others, then we are not truly available" (154). She discusses the difficulties of personal narrative in stories that are not necessarily your own and how to navigate the difficulties of (mis)representation. This was a challenge I encountered very early

in the process of creation. I wanted to talk about Lelu Island and human/ocean relations and I had encouragement to do so from leaders of the community but imagining how to do this from the perspective of a settler from an inland city was difficult. I wanted to be transparent about how my personal perspective will influence the story but I didn't want to make the story just about my experience. Salverson writes, "A dangerous tension many will find familiar between the desire to help and the desire to respect the integrity of the Other. There is a fine balance to be negotiated between putting ourselves in the picture and making the picture about ourselves" (150-151).

One method to negotiate this balance was to share perspectives from supporters at the island during the Playwright sections. This way, although all the content was still filtered through my specific person, I wasn't only sharing my opinions or experiences. Were I to make this show into a longer piece I would like to do a much better job at getting to know more people from the large community of supporters at Lelu. I was limited in time and resources (with only a month and no car) so it was difficult to interview anyone not on the island. Furthermore, particularly as it was my first visit, I was wary of another item on Gehl's Ally Bill which cautions against (accidentally or on purpose) taking up the community's resources, which I felt I would be doing by asking people to help me find interviewees instead of seeking out tasks that needed to be done on the island. Therefore, to me, being an available body to help out at the camp was more important to my visit than conducting interviews. In order to negotiate this balance a crucial part of my research became journaling (which then became a brief

theatrical device in my play). I only found out a few months later how important this was for my research while reading Kovach. She describes how keeping a personal journal was part of her methodology as a replacement for 'field notes', which are a more rationalist fact-based method (50). My journal writings contained reflections on daily life on the island or conversations I had with interviewees as well as descriptions of whale dreams and ideas of fictional characters and stories. Following Deirdre Heddon's work, I sought to have my performance "exist precisely and precariously on the intersection between imagination and memory" (64). By playfully jumping between personal memory, interviews, dreams and fiction, perhaps that very divide between imagination and memory becomes a little more fluid.

Chapter 3: Becoming Imperceptible



But what happens when we are unsighted, when what extends before us—in the space and time that we most deeply inhabit—remains invisible? How, indeed, are we to act ethically toward human and biotic communities that lie beyond our sensory ken? What then, in the fullest sense of the phrase, is the place of seeing in the world that we now inhabit?

- Rob Nixon, 2013 (14)

In her writing on Research Theatre, Theatre and Animal Studies scholar Una Chaudhuri discusses the process behind a research-creation project she was involved in called The Animal Project. One of the group's core ideas was to create a piece of theatre around the concept of becoming-animal, a much-debated theory of Human Animal studies put forth by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. I will discuss becoming-animal in this chapter and the various ways it has influenced my performance piece. I will also explore how my process of creating the character Microscopic Child⁷ parallels Chaudhuri's group's process in the trials of theatrically discussing the concept of becoming-animal.

Deleuze and Guattari describe an assemblage as a “territorial ‘whole,’” while acknowledging that a whole can be anything, not necessarily a human form. As elements or traits of that whole come and go, the whole is deterritorialized. Leonard Lawlor describes this process through the parallel of a poem; functions of a poem,

⁷ The name ‘Microscopic Child’ for this character came to me a long time ago and to me it alludes to the playful merging of the magical and the realistic that many superheroes embody (Catwoman, Batman, Spiderman, etc). Many of these names also indicate a human/animal fusion – probably not Deleuze and Guattari’s process of becoming-animal but perhaps the process of becoming *an* animal. These superheroes usually exist within somewhat ‘realistic’ worlds (or worlds that resemble the reality of the viewer’s world) but with magical qualities, making us question what is possible and what is human. Microscopic Child playfully parallels this concept, with her superpower being the ability to see microorganisms with the naked eye. It is important to note while reading the play, however, that no character within her world calls her by this name; it is merely how I refer to her. This is largely because (as has been pointed out to me by several readers) the title ‘Microscopic Child’ does not make one think of a child with the eyes of a microscope, but rather a minutely small child.

such as verses or punctuation, may be removed, reordered, or altered, thus changing the 'whole' assemblage of the poem (176). This change is the process of becoming. Delueze and Guattari discuss many different becomings: becoming-animal, becoming-woman, becoming-child, or, the ultimate becoming: becoming-imperceptible. Lawlor determines how the need for becomings in our current era of mass inequality and climate change is demonstrated by looking at the effects of restrictive boundaries (such as self/other, human/animal, nature/culture). For Lawlor, these boundaries construct the world as a closed-off globe (what he defines as globalization) so that one species may contain and dominate all the others. This species thinks they have a right to do this because they believe themselves to be uniquely autonomous and of "pure self-presence" (169). The process of becoming, then, contains an unbecoming of the human form, insofar as a human is defined by human exceptionalism.

When I see Microscopic Child in my mind the edges of her Being are blurry. The blur is a reminder of what she can see but I can't: a festival of microscopic life forms leaving and joining, forming and reforming her body. In this sense, Microscopic Child experiences living as a constant process of becoming, of deterritorializing and reterritorializing the assemblage that is her body. Perhaps this is another way in which she searches for kinship with the ocean, as "it is the chaotic movement and reformation of matter, which is seen most clearly in the churning of the ocean, that both enables and disrupts (or reterritorialises and deterritorialises) earthly striations." (Steinberg and Peters 255)

In many ways, the character Microscopic Child is a playful embodiment of the concept of becoming-imperceptible. I will elaborate on the ways in which this may be problematic later on, yet I still stand by the idea for its value as a creative form of knowledge mobilization for theories that are largely inaccessible outside of the academy (such as the anfractuous work of Deleuze and Guattari).



Fig. 6: *In Rehearsal as Microscopic Child*. Photo by Alexandra Simpson.

'Who are you?' we might find ourselves asking Microscopic Child again and again throughout the play, and each time we may think of a different response. I suspect that my discussion of her character may be very different from that of any given member of the audience. She is purposefully undefined so as to bring the audience into her process of becoming through their conception of who she might be. Who she is is constantly being formed and reformed by interpretation. She may truly be a biological offspring of Scientist Woman whose name, like Spiderman or Catwoman, articulates her true superpower of microscopic vision. Or perhaps she just has a mother whose eyes are so fixed on the top rung of the corporate ladder that she can barely see her child waiting below. Perhaps that mother spends all day in a lab with a microscope seeking out a breakthrough invention, so that soon the child longs to be a cyborg microscope just to compete for attention. This last idea was inspired by my time working as a nanny, where I began to glimpse the complex ways children will react when they realize they are losing a competition for their parents' time (particularly when their competitor is a salary figure and the stand-in parent – aka the ever-rotating nanny – is paid hourly to be there). Or perhaps Microscopic Child is no form at all but is interpreted as a metaphor for all the microorganisms humans cannot see. One audience member said that she interpreted her as a microbe in a test tube in Scientist Woman's laboratory. This is an intriguing parallel to a relationship between two characters in Indra Sinha's novel *Animal's People*, which follows a teenaged boy in India whose body has become bent over (giving him the name and self-identification of Animal) after surviving an industrial catastrophe that closely parallels the Bhopal disaster. He

discovers a tiny, unborn fetus from the night of the disaster, which has been preserved in a glass jar of formaldehyde in a doctor's office for almost two decades. This "ghostly figure of the biochemical undead" (Johnston 136), presumably kept for scientific testing, speaks to Animal, asking for release from the confines of the glass. Animal develops a special relationship with Kha-in-the-Jar (as he has named it), despite it's constant plea to be released.

Perhaps Microscopic Child is a specimen from an experiment that Scientist Woman (like the doctors in Sinha's novel with the Kha-in-the-Jar) can't bring herself to get rid of. Or she may be a figment of Scientist Woman's imagination, a manifestation of her terror of the unknown, the irrational, the unexplainable, the magical. Or perhaps she is Scientist Woman herself all along. Perhaps she is Scientist Woman's becoming-child, not an offspring or a memory but rather the hidden child within her adult self. Or she is Scientist Woman's becoming-animal, a concept so thoroughly banished from Scientist Woman's person that it needs to find a completely different form to inhabit. Or perhaps Microscopic Child is a Cetachuman™ Project participant 20 years in the future (maybe even Scientist Woman post "(r)evolution"), the only surviving specimen - part human, whale, microbe and all the unknown that these forms were meant to become - of a disastrous experiment. A ghost of human exceptionalism's last experiment? Perhaps there is an ethereal presence to Microscopic Child throughout all of these interpretations. If it's true that "As long as there is form, there is still reterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari 6) then Microscopic Child indicates a deterritorialization, a becoming.

This brings me to the masks. The type of mask I decided to create for Microscopic Child is called a larval mask, a style of mask developed by physical theatre artist and theorist Jacques Lecoq (see Fig. 7). The word larval denotes larvae, many small Beings that are not yet formed, with the Latin root of the word meaning ghost or spirit (Wright 78). The idea for a larval mask (thanks to my collaborator, Alexandra Simpson) came in the early stages of developing this character, and consequently knowledge of the mask form influenced my writing. The larval masks of Lecoq's school originate from the Carnival of Basel, an annual 72 hour carnival in Switzerland featuring large masks (called *larve*) and colourful costumes. Scientist Woman, comparatively, is in a half character mask, slightly more relatable to a human face but with such heightened features that she is still decidedly other (see Fig. 8).



Fig. 7: Larval Masks. The mask on the left was the inspiration for Microscopic Child. Masks and photograph by Jonathan Becker of Theatre-masks.com.



Fig. 8: *In Rehearsal as Scientist Woman*. Photo by Alexandra Simpson

In theatre school we made many different kinds of masks but no matter the style we were always taught to respect the life of the mask. This was usually manifested in certain protocols: don't lay the mask face down on the floor, don't pick it up by sticking your fingers through the eyeholes, and don't talk as yourself while wearing the mask. All these protocols encouraged an awareness of the personness of the mask; sticking your fingers through the eyeholes sends a subconscious message to yourself that this mask is an inanimate object, not a character. These protocols have been ingrained in me and shape the way I care for and perform with masks. This makes the process of creating masks also a process of understanding

the character.

Larval masks from a professional mask maker will usually be made out of neoprene. An inversion of the face is carved into clay and then neoprene is poured over top so that you have a lightweight, flexible and solid mask. This process requires equipment and materials that are quite expensive (as are the masks available for purchase). Instead I constructed this mask out of wood glue, old paper bags and an assortment of found objects to mold shapes off of. I used onions to mold the eyes of the mask, for example. The outer layer of the onion stuck to the paper maché as I pulled them apart, giving the startling appearance of a translucent jellyfish (Fig. 9). This is a very tactile way to relate to the character/mask which compliments the sometimes more cerebral process of writing.



Fig. 9: *Mask making.* “Existing in the depths yet seemingly without their own ‘depth’ of secreted interiority, gelata, ever so gently, question the humanist desire for solid demarcations.”- Stacy Alaimo, ‘Jellyfish Science, Jellyfish Aesthetics: Posthuman Reconfigurations of the Sensible.’ p. 154

Strangely, even though I am literally molding a face with my hands, I feel less in control of who the character will be in creating the mask than I do in writing the words. For me, a mask will never look exactly as I picture it will, so I have stopped trying to fully control the process. As shapes form and reform and play off each other the expressions that come from these relationships invite me to improvise with them. To create the shapes and contours, I use layers of very small pieces of paper, which work as a mosaic to create the forms. Although I will never see the world as a swarm of microorganisms like *Microscopic Child* does, I tangibly experience the ways that hundreds of small pieces relate and interact within a territorial whole through the physical process of building the mask.

The vague features of a larval mask, the plain white paint and the large head, are signifying features of this style that are meant to suggest “a face whose features are just about to come into being” (Wright 78). It was this concept that drew me towards the idea of having *Microscopic Child* portrayed through mask. The mask’s still unformed Being expresses her refusal to be categorized into any species or taxonomical definition. ‘What is she?’ the audience might innocently but insistently wonder, until *Microscopic Child* internalizes their wondering and begins to ask that question herself. *Microscopic Child* experiences her body as porous and I, as the actor, experience mine as a clear outline. Yet having this contrast portrayed within one perceived form asks the audience to question the role of sight in how we understand our bodies in relation to the world around us. If we had *Microscopic Child*’s eyes, how might we see divisions differently? Between nature and culture? Between our bodies and not-our-bodies? Since we will most likely never have

Microscopic Child's eyes, what can we learn from creating or witnessing her as a character?

One difficulty of conceptualizing Microscopic Child as an embodiment of becoming-imperceptible or becoming-animal is that this essentially kills the process of becoming by putting it into a form. In grappling with this idea Chaudhuri asks, "How does one turn an on-going process, without beginning or end, into a 'show'? How does one rehearse what must be ever-new, emergent, and spontaneous?" (Chaudhuri and Enelow 15). Perhaps this is impossible; perhaps a true becoming-animal cannot be rehearsed and repeated. I would instead say that the *concept* of Microscopic Child (that is, a Being who sees herself as an assemblage of constantly changing living entities not a singular subject) was born from imagining how to theatrically communicate what elusively has no body – that is, the process of becoming. I wanted her to be vaguely represented by a human form (the actor) in order to make connections between her body and the human audience's bodies (we all, of course, have microorganisms, oxygen, and carbon dioxide coming and going from our bodies). As Una Chaudhuri speculates, "[w]hen animals enter into autobiography...[t]heir appearance seems to invite the autobiographical self to *rethink itself beyond singularity*, to seek more pluralistic modes of self-knowledge." (*Stage Lives* 127, emphasis in original)

When the audience witnesses the form of the character onstage they are not definitively witnessing becoming-animal (and are definitely not witnessing animal-become – aka the transformation into an animal form); however, a crucial peculiarity of Microscopic Child is that the audience never does see her 'form.' They

see the form of an actor playing a character but this form is not how Microscopic Child sees herself; through her microscope eyes, forms are always changing. Perhaps, to her, the world is always in a place of becoming as she sees millions of organisms shifting (in) the space around her, blurring the lines between forms. Perhaps, then, instead of witnessing becoming-animal we witness someone who can experience becomings in a way we never will.

Another difficulty is the idea that I, as the actor, am undergoing a process of becoming whenever I am Microscopic Child during the play. To define this process as a Deleuze and Guattari becoming would be an oversimplification, but I would argue that it is not completely false. Deleuze and Guattari are clear that becoming is not imitating a form or directed towards being a form, yet Microscopic Child's 'form' exists only as I play her; I cannot watch how she moves or expresses herself as I might a dog, a fish, or a human so to what extent am I imitating a form? And if within her mask I am never being fully myself and I am obviously never physically *not* myself, what form am I being? I agree that imitation in itself is not becoming but I would add that through the art of imitating becoming can occur. Deleuze and Guattari, although very clear on the imitation rule, theorize possible roles of the artist within becomings when they argue that,

[n]o art is imitative, no art can be imitative or figurative. Suppose a painter 'represents' a bird; this is in fact a becoming-bird that can occur only to the extent that the bird itself is in the process of becoming something else, a pure line and pure colour. Thus imitation self-destructs, since the imitator unknowingly enters into a becoming that conjugates with the unknowing becoming of that which he or she imitates. (304-5)

As is often the case, I find a parallel here with my experience as an actor and my experiences of childhood 'make-believe' which, in the style of Microscopic Child

herself, tangentially brings me to a story.

My childhood friend and I had a game that offered endless joy called 'Everything Anything.' The game was simply to play together but the only difference was we didn't have to be humans; we could be anything and everything. In fifteen-minute free time at swimming lessons we would be dolphins. His favourite stuffed toy at the time was a hand puppet orca whale and mine was a keychain grey dolphin. Since we were small enough that merely swimming was a feat, to the casual observer this game probably looked very similar to swimming as humans. In our imaginations, however, we *were* dolphins swimming. As performance theorist Jane C. Desmond points out in her reflections on pretending she was a horse as a child,

My 'becoming horse' is emphatically not the same as the 'becoming animal' theorized by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. While these writers explicitly distance their concept from mimesis and metaphor, pointing instead toward a relation of disjunction and displacement, my kinaesthetic enactment of 'horseness' was specifically and joyously mimetic. (Chaudhuri and Hughes 138)

Like Desmond, my experience was also, in a way, imitating an animal. Yet within the process of imitating there seem to be many hints of becoming. For example: since I never actually became a dolphin, but I also didn't feel like just a human, it could be said I was operating 'other-than-in-identity,' that it was a process of 'unselfing' filled with 'desire' (to be a cetacean), and it was definitely an "imaginative rethinking of the body" (Deleuze and Guattari 262). Deleuze and Guattari discuss these four concepts as key aspects of becoming. I posit that these aspects should not be disregarded as becomings whenever they *coincide* with acts of imitation. To form the shape of a dog with my body is a mimetic act and not a becoming-dog, but a mimetic act is not all that happens as an actor or as a child. The imaginative,

emotional, spiritual, social or psychological processes that *may* accompany mimetic acts seem very much like a becoming. As Anthony Kubiak notes, “simple mimicry or false becomings are not false simply because they are mythic or imaginative but, rather, because they privilege being-animal in favour of becoming-animal” (53). My becoming-dolphin, as with Desmond’s becoming-horse, is not disqualified as a becoming because of its mimesis, it is disqualified if imitation of form is *all* that happens.

When I jump into the water I jump into waves of conscious and unconscious memory and imitation. Memories of a womb, of the bath I was born in, of chlorinated swimming pools and freshwater lakes. Imitations of a whale, dolphin or fish moving through water (or is this in the memory category?), of a girl from a movie who almost drowns, of a bubble that faithfully and weightlessly floats upwards. Do these have hints of becoming-child, becoming-molecular, becoming-cetacean, or becoming-woman? Deleuze and Guattari define becoming as an anti-memory; becoming-child is to become the child that exists within the adult, not to pretend to be the child we once were (294). Yet isn’t there crossover between these two different forms of child? Perhaps when I jump in the water my becoming might be aided, rather than defined, by the simultaneous experiences of memory and imitation.

There are many different becomings in this play; there is the actor becoming many characters (as I have briefly touched upon), there is the audience being changed through their role as witnesses to the performance (which I will discuss further in this chapter), and there are unique processes of becoming for each of the

characters themselves. Microscopic Child, of course, is a complex embodiment of the concept of becoming. The Playwright also changes throughout the play through dreams, living at the camp and reflecting on personal history and relationships. This much more subtle becoming contrasts and parallels Microscopic Child's journey. Then there is the very literal becoming presented in the play, which is the project of becoming-'Cetachuman' led by Scientist Woman. This transformation serves as an antithesis to Deleuze and Guattari's becoming: there is a specific endpoint, the focus is completely on a new form to become (the process of change is merely a means to an end), and it is ironically done as the ultimate demonstration of humanness – creating technology that will transform us in whatever way we chose. Scientist Woman is the antithesis to Donna Haraway's argument that, "[t]he codes of the world are not still, waiting only to be read. The world is not a raw material for humanization..." (*Situated* 593). Unlike Microscopic Child, Scientist Woman's idea of becoming is anything but imperceptible. If Scientist Woman seeks deterritorialization it is only as a brief step in the process of forming a new whole.

Chaudhuri discusses how deterritorialization was a pillar in her group's performance of becoming-animal, particularly for the set and lighting designers, functioning as a "potential undoing of the stage and its signifying claims" (Chaudhuri and Enelow 15). Similarly, for my performance, when choosing a location we eventually decided to turn down the only theatre venue we had considered, which had lights, sound, a stage, a booth, seating, and other such 'signifying claims.' We wanted to experiment with a space that might not trigger preconceived roles of passive audience and active performer. We thought the signifiers of a theatre venue

would encourage a fourth wall (separating onstage from audience), which we wanted to minimize. I know it has happened to me on many occasions as an audience member; I take my seat, stare up at the raised stage and leave my active body as I prepare to be entertained. We wanted to avoid this theatrical trap in order to implicate ourselves and the audience in the reality of the world we created. We found a rehearsal studio space where we could set up chairs and create video projections on the wall which we hoped would create a more immersive, informal shared experience (particularly as we were presenting a 'works-in-progress'). It is already too easy to resolutely respond in the negative to Chaudhuri's question, "*is it possible for a performed becoming to become real?*" (Chaudhuri and Enelow 15). We wanted to leave open the possibility for 'real' becoming, that is, the actual process of becoming for audience or actors, instead of just theatrically alluding to the concept of it but leaving ourselves unchanged. It is difficult to quantifiably measure what impact a performance has had on an audience in order to know if this occurred or not. One of the recurring pieces of feedback I received was that people have told me they continue to think about the performance afterwards, which I might interpret as a sign that its impact continues after the audience leaves the theatre. In a personal sense I think it also shapes aspects of my relationship with my mother and sisters (who came to see the performance) as they saw some of their family history through my eyes and in context with my research. I also wanted the audience to be implicated to some degree in the becomings that the characters go through on stage. Scientist Woman certainly involves the audience by framing them as the participants about to take part in the Cetachuman™ Project and I hope that through

Microscopic Child and the Playwright they were reminded of their own multispecies autoethnographies.

Although the terms 'becoming-microorganism' or even Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming-molecular' appear more appropriate for the character of Microscopic Child, the concept of the animal in becoming-animal doesn't necessarily exclude the plethora of single-celled organisms (which some would argue are not animals) in our bodies. This is because, for Deleuze and Guattari, becoming-animal is not focussed on an animal form:

What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. Becoming can and should be qualified as becoming-animal even in the absence of a term that would be the animal become. The becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not. (238)

The molecular nature of Microscopic Child, as she sees herself, has no molar form, whether human or animal, to begin as or end up as. Although she has never related to the idea of being human (as human is defined by the world around her as an individual, singular static form), her human mother and the human society around her demand she finds a category for herself and much of her journey through the play is attempting that process of self-categorization. She is unsuccessful, of course, (as she can find no single categorization for an assemblage of Beings that are constantly forming and reforming through their relationships to each other) but her journey complicates any easily explainable categories the audience might find themselves trying to put her in. She hopes the ocean will explain these categories for her: if humans originated from the ocean and that history is still contained within their bodies, then her microscopic vision of the ocean and of her own body should

inform her of her humanness or lack thereof. The natural-cultural ocean body, however, is also not so simply categorized. The extreme amounts of methane leaking into the water from a Liquefied Natural Gas tanker accident produce a reordering of all types of marine microbial life to the extent that the ocean is virtually unrecognizable to Microscopic Child as relating in any way to the human body.

The need to categorize life into contained and static forms is the problem that becoming-animal seeks to address, as it can lead to restrictive 'self' and 'other' dichotomies. Becoming-molecular, then, must understand boundaries between forms as porous, which then calls into question the existence of a pure form in the first place. A becoming can also never be becoming-human; it is always, as Deleuze and Guattari call it, 'becoming-minoritarian.' For example, there could be becoming-woman or becoming-child but never becoming-man since man is "majoritarian par excellence" (291). The notion of the imperceptible, then, is, for Deleuze and Guattari, what all becomings are "rushing toward" (279). Becoming-imperceptible is the ultimate undoing of the individualized, autonomous subject. As Tamsin Lorraine describes it, "we are no one self with an interior and exterior but are ourselves inventions of assemblages that in turn invent" (192).

Pairing these theories with those of Jakob von Uexküll we can see all Beings as porous, interdependent, shifting assemblages while simultaneously recognizing their unique ways of understanding the world – what von Uexküll terms an *umwelt*. He demonstrates the idea of an *umwelt* by imaginatively describing how a female tick intakes the world around her. For example, she has no vision and no sense of

taste; she decides her meal based on its smell and temperature. Her sense of time passing is vastly different than a human's; she spends much of her life waiting, still and patient, for a warm-blooded mammal to attach to (321).

Understanding the unique perceptual worlds of all Beings (or at least recognizing the *presence* of these worlds, while simultaneously respecting their unknowability to myself as a human) is a theme I have been exploring throughout this creation process, particularly in the ways that it informs my understanding of Environmental Justice. In his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon describes a new kind of violence that humans are vastly overlooking – largely because by its very nature we can't really look at it. Violence is often thought of as a very immediate and visible act that we witness and then find a just solution to. If this visibility is no longer a defining factor of violence then we can begin to recognize a kind of violence that takes place over long periods of time, which has seeped into our lives so slowly we no longer see it. Wary of simplistic, sensationalist renderings of violence, I wanted to try and communicate the dangers of slow violence through my play. The most obvious case is the LNG project itself, whose long-term effects on the human and more-than-human communities and ecosystems are impossible to predict. As is pointed out in the script, LNG itself is an almost invisible substance (to human eyes, that is). There is also the slow violence of ongoing colonialism, which allows projects like this one to get so far along in the process in the first place. This violence is so ingrained it can become invisible to many people, particularly settlers who are more likely to benefit from it and therefore not understand it as violence.

Discussing slow violence through the vision-oriented medium of theatre proved conceptually difficult – throughout the process of creation I kept finding myself falling into the trap of relying on a methane explosion from an LNG vessel as a climax to the narrative. I kept coming back to texts like Nixon’s and would be reminded that to focus on an explosion would be almost to suggest that the violence of LNG projects would be diminished if only we had a 100% leak-proof guarantee. That is, I wanted to try as best I could to avoid reducing the complex issues of justice at a land defence camp to the dangers of an oil or gas spill. What I wanted to do instead was engage with the idea of slow violence and how we might engage ethically with the imperceptible, or, at least, with what our individual umvelts might not easily render perceptible.

The need to understand violence as a slow process is part of a need to challenge a very vision-oriented culture (which the form of theatre itself is a clear example of). In writing on Edward Albee’s play *The Goat, Or Who Is Sylvia?*, Una Chaudhuri describes how we are introduced to the nonhuman character in the play, writing

Sylvia is initially experienced as a smell. This sensory challenge to the ocularcentric medium of theater acutely deploys Freud’s sensory etiology of civilization, his account of the derogation of the ‘lower senses’ (touch and smell), and the privileging of sight in the human evolution from quadruped to biped, from rooting about in the dirt to scanning the skies (*Stage Lives* 15).

In debating how to challenge ocularcentricism within an ocularcentric medium I came up with various performance installation ideas where taste, smell, and touch tell a story while sight stays out of the way as much as possible. In the end, however, I decided to stay with the more conventional theatrical form but draw attention to

the privileging of sight by creating a character whose whole Being is shaped by the unique ability of her eyes. If Freud looked to a privileging of sight to define human, then Microscopic Child refuses the label of human largely due to the limited ability of human sight (as well as the fact that her eyes constantly remind her of the arbitrariness of the boundaries created by words like 'human'). Through her unique way of knowing the world and her determination to avoid human/nonhuman classification, Microscopic Child continually reminds us that what is imperceptible to one Being is not necessarily objectively imperceptible.

Ironically, the experience of playing a character with ocular powers was extremely limiting to my vision. Most mask work challenges the way that the actor takes in the world around them, and with a mask of this size this was an extreme example. The eyes are so small and so far from my face that I can only see two small circles straight ahead of me. My hearing is very diminished (to the extent that it caused much confusion between my director and I as I wouldn't know she had been giving me notes during a scene and she wouldn't know that I couldn't hear her) and of course I can only smell or taste a vague mixture of sweat, paint, and glue. I oriented myself mostly through touch, feeling where props or set pieces were whenever I couldn't find them. My *umwelt* while playing Microscopic Child is completely unique from my own *umwelt* as a human and it is also completely unique from what I imagine Microscopic Child's *umwelt* would be.

In my imagination (having never had the visual experience she does), Microscopic Child can notice certain types of slow violence in a way many cannot. She can see the microscopic changes around us that take time for us to realize. She

could see microbes in our bodies, in the water or in the soil reacting to toxins and pollutants before their affects are visible. (A superpower she does not have, however, is to see minute changes on a large temporal scale). Her ocular abilities, however, are dismissed by human society (represented by Scientist Woman) because they are not rational; they suggest a sort of human-microbe-microscope cyborg that defies explanation. As scholars such as Nixon and Haraway have pointed out, this demonstrates that for humans it is not just vision that is privileged but vision from certain perspectives: “Who gets to see, and from where?” (Nixon 15).

My play attempts to incite others to take seriously the plethora of unique perceptual worlds surrounding us, and to then consider violence as an occurrence that is less temporally or geographically bound. Through doing so I hope to work towards making “slow violence visible yet also challeng[ing] the privileging of the visible” (Nixon 15). Perhaps, to do so is to make more perceptible the act of becoming-imperceptible.

Chapter 4: Ocean Relations



I doubt that the last, final mysteries of the sea will ever be resolved. In fact, I cherish a very unscientific hope that they will not be.

- Rachel Carson, 2011 (80).

There is an important sense in which practices of knowing cannot fully be claimed as human practices, not simply because we use nonhuman elements in our practices but because knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part. Practices of knowing and being are not isolatable; they are mutually implicated. We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are *of* the world.

- Karen Barad, 2006 (185).

Although we carry the ocean within ourselves, in our blood and in our eyes, so that we essentially see through seawater, we appear blind to its fate.

- Julia Whitty, 2006.

The concept of the oceans as alien is both fruitful and problematic. As Stacy Alaimo suggests, "The ocean as alien alienates humans but also suggests an unknowability" (*Trans-corporeality* 477). Perhaps the idea of an alien ocean offers a humbling reminder that although we may swim, boat, surf, fish, dive, or submerge ourselves, we are still terrestrially reliant creatures, and a fully aquatic lifestyle *is* 'alien' to us. This humility might foster respect for the oceans as it indicates that humans, due to our tangibly different experiences, will never grasp the type of oceanic knowledge that fish, whales, and phytoplankton have. Yet perhaps it is naïve to think that humans, particularly privileged humans in the Western world (such as the capitalist entrepreneur Scientist Woman, or even a graduate student who seeks out information as a full time job), would be humbled by lack of knowledge. It is even possible that the notion of the alien has historically made humans *more* inclined to pursue discovery and innovation, almost as if not knowing something is a challenge to our humanness and thus the unknowable needs to be conquered. I would posit that examples of this can be seen in the space race of the mid 20th century, or more

recently MarsOne, a project that plans to create permanent human settlement on Mars. Humans spend more resources learning about space than we do about the oceans on this planet⁸, so perhaps the more alien something is, the more we want to ‘discover’ it. Are oceans too alien for humans or not alien enough? Stefen Helmreich describes the term alien ocean as being

sceptical of any simple identification with the sea, pessimistic about whether scientific knowledge alone about the ocean is enough for making sense of it (let alone protecting it), and insistent that all accounts of the sea are partial and that therefore there can be no such self-evident category as ‘our oceans.’ (17)

Yet for myself I find that the term ‘alien ocean’ complicates more than aids the exploration of ethical ocean/human relations. This is particularly true given the tensions between the meaning of the term for people like Scientist Woman or for people from coastal communities. Scientist Woman would be invigorated by the challenge to uncover that which is alien; she would extract all possible information on a subject, as if, as Julie Cruikshank describes it, “truthful knowledge can somehow be ‘captured’” (73). In her book *Waves of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology*, Karin Amimoto Ingersoll looks at relations with the ocean for Indigenous peoples in Hawaii. She examines European notions of the sea as an uncivilised space that can be controlled in order to travel across it in contrast to Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) relations with the ocean, saying “Kānaka Maoli have always perceived ke kai [*the sea*] as a place of genealogical significance, and thus travel across it never took them far from their own being. Moana was not to be controlled but connected to” (38). I imagine that Kānaka Maoli and many other coastal communities would

⁸ Michael Conathan quotes the 2013 exploration budgets of NASA – \$3.8 billion and NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) – \$23.7 million.

dismiss the idea of an alien ocean, since, as Ingersoll points out, many coastal ways of life are determined by relations with the ocean, and in the case of many Indigenous nations, this has been true for thousands of years or more.

In one of my interviews on Lelu Island we talked about ocean conservation. My interviewee, who was from a coastal nation south of Lelu, described how he felt many Western conservation institutions, while often doing great work, still do partake in a process of other-ing between humans and more-than-human worlds. When discussing whale conservation and the idea of humans 'saving' whales, (while simultaneously acknowledging the necessary work many such organizations do), he commented,

That's a piece of colonization. That, 'oh we're not a part of it, our job is to protect it and other it'....not incorporate it by digesting it, not incorporate it while singing to it while you digest it...that's something that really frustrates me about a lot of the whale stuff that happens in our territory.

To me this exemplifies Billy Ray Belcourt's argument that, in order to be fully realized, decolonization must dismantle anthropocentrism as a form of settler-colonialism. He posits that, "those spaces for animal activism that center whiteness thus further impossibilize decolonization and leave in tact *the* power relation that makes speciesism possible" (4). I suggest that the idea of an alien ocean strengthens a human/nonhuman dichotomy more than it fosters humility for the unknowable, further entrenching a settler-colonial anthropocentrism. This notion of the alien as frontier was explored through the character of Scientist Woman and her Cetachuman™ Project.

Some of the human characters in the performance who never make an appearance are employees or owners of the LNG company. Instead, the character of Scientist Woman stands in as a fictionalized parallel for the ongoing colonization of Turtle Island through industry. It is a purposefully absurd notion that we would colonize the oceans by speeding up evolution so we can become aquatic Beings, yet the philosophy behind her project is not fictional at all. The company Petronas' proposed Pacific NorthWest LNG project is a direct form of present day colonization of the ocean in a very similar way to the Cetachuman™ Project, but instead of human bodies taking over the water as Cetachumans, it is ships, pollution, noise, light and oil and gas spills (see Fig 10). Through projections and text I try to suggest that the fictional Scientist Woman in her Evolusuit is a metaphor for Liquefied Natural Gas itself (and all the industry that accompanies it) seeping into the water and dominating all other life forms (see Fig. 11)

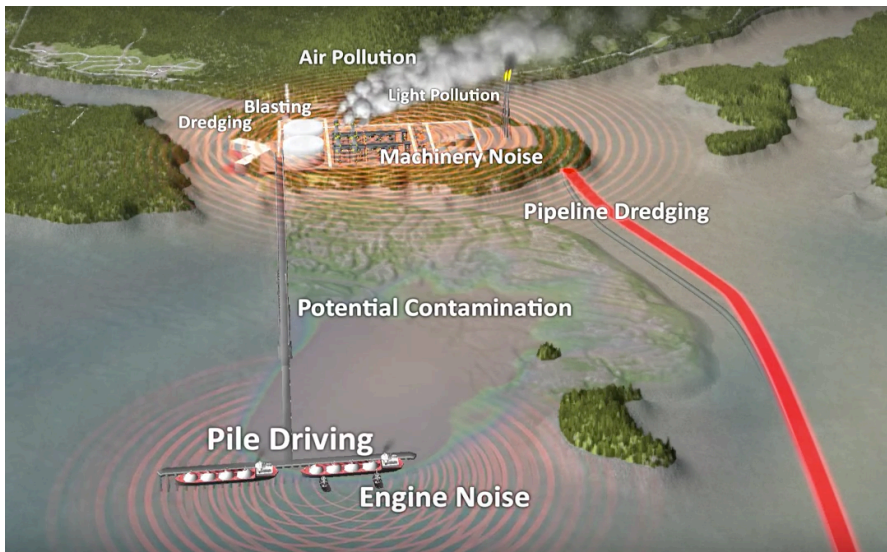


Fig. 10: Lelu Island Proposed Project. The effects on Lelu Island (the island in the centre) and Flora Banks (the large green area in the ocean next to Lelu) from construction and operation of the LNG export terminal and pipeline. Photo credit to Colton Hash of Grassroots Rendering.



Fig. 11: *Underwater Methane*. A projection used near the end of the performance. As Scientist Woman jumps into the water to transition to an aquatic Being, a projection appears on the wall behind the actor showing a woman jumping into the water with a white gaseous substance surrounding her.

Perhaps a better archetypal name for The Scientist Woman would be The Entrepreneur, as her defining feature is not one who practices science but rather one who pursues scientific knowledge for capital gain and social prestige, no matter the casualties incurred along the way. Yet the name Scientist Woman is the title she would have chosen for herself, as her passion for rationalist truth through scientific experimentation obfuscates, even to herself, ambition for prestige and capital. She is also not an archetype for female-identified persons practicing science; her gender is something I automatically included in her name, uncovering my own ingrained assumptions that scientists are thought to be male unless indicated otherwise. I decided to keep this mistake in her name but to be transparent about the process. She would also more accurately be called Western Entrepreneurial Scientist

Woman, as the science she practices does not define all science, but again, the title reflects her perspective, as she would not feel the need to make that delineation. As Margaret Kovach notes, “Traditional Western science, based on a rationalist, secular paradigm, discounts the possibility that knowledge arises from happenings that cannot be explained through reductionist means” (Kovach 78). Scientist Woman, however, would see her version of science as *the* definition of science.

The seed of the idea for the Cetachuman™ (Cetacean-human) Project came to me while sitting on a boat in the ocean and remarking on my still-shivering body that relies on sweaters, life jacket, rain jacket, splash pants, rubber boots, and a steel boat in order to stay on top of the water for short periods of time and contrasting this with the idea that some forms of life adapted to land and then successfully adapted back into the water⁹. With this contrast the absurd thought popped into my head: what if other creatures did that now? What if humans did? Due to the theatrical difficulties of representing millions of years within a play, and due to the somewhat absurd nature of the idea already, I created the science fiction character of Scientist Woman and her project for human evolution into aquatic Beings within a 20-year timeline.

Although the Cetachuman Project™ is entirely fictional, the concept takes inspiration from several organizations that do exist. San Diego-based biotech corporation Diversa (now called Verenum after merging with another company), is one of them. In his book *Alien Ocean*, Stefen Helmreich describes how Diversa was

⁹Here, as in the script, I want to make space in my language for multiplicities of truths and knowledge that is situated in my own background and experience. My discussion of the cetacean evolutionary history that I have read does not seek to diminish or regulate to the realm of fiction other understandings of creation.

recombining a variety of genes to create new products. He quotes Diversa’s Eric Mathur at a conference stating that, “Nature...has produced diversity we can fine tune” (110). Diversa has sequenced an entire microbe genome sequence called *Streptomyces diversa*[™]. They have evidently trademarked this genome sequence and own the exclusive rights to use it, demonstrating Haraway’s claim that “type has become brand” (*Modest*, 75). Although Scientist Woman does not explicitly discuss the ways in which she has benefitted from this project, the trademarked symbol in the title (which in the performance was displayed on her lab coat, see Fig. 12) suggests the privatization of a project that supposedly will save the human species, yet evidently can along take an elite few.



Fig. 12: *Cetachuman*[™] Project Logo. Design by Morgan Johnson.

Mars One, which I have already briefly mentioned, is a project launched in 2011 that aims to establish permanent human settlement on Mars. According to the Mars One website, the project received over 200,000 applicants and by 2015 they had chosen 100 candidates for round three of the selection process. In an interview with TV news channel RT America, candidate Josh Richards describes how he first heard about the project because he wrote a comedy skit on the idea of humans colonizing Mars. Thinking it would be great if this really happened, a quick Internet search showed him the newly created Mars One project, to which he immediately applied. Upon hearing this parallel to my own situation (minus the enthusiasm for participation) I quickly searched for a real project that mirrors the Cetachuman Project™. I found nothing, thankfully. Yet for the first time I had a pinch of doubt as to whether or not this idea is quite as absurd as I originally thought.

This doubt resurfaced while reading about conference presentations at the Fourth Asia-Pacific Marine Biotechnology Conference in Hemlreich's *Alien Ocean*. The scientists and bioengineers that Helmreich writes on were a source of inspiration in developing Scientist Woman. Harnessing microbial ocean life for human innovation, they offer a real life parallel to Scientist Woman. Helmreich quotes biochemical engineer Patrick Takahashi's lecture to the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, during which he stated that,

The next frontier is the open ocean. Largely not owned by any nation, nutrient-rich fluids at 4° Celsius are available 1,000 meters below the 20 degree latitude band surface. Just in this natural solar collector region, if only one part in ten thousand of the insolation can be converted to useful energy, the needs of society would be satisfied...Picture, then, a grazing plantship...supporting a marine biomass plantation with next generation ocean ranches...Then consider several hundred, no thousands of these productive platforms. Current international law dictates that each, under

certain circumstances, can legally become a nation. Imagine the United Nations in the 22nd century...European seafaring nations might again consider colonization, this time in the open ocean, where there are no obvious downsides, such as the sociological problems that came with the era after Columbus. One cannot guess what Greenpeace might do, but there are no native populations, not even whales, as permanent residents in the middle of the ocean. (115)

This rhetoric seems to suggest that the ethical and philosophical reasoning for colonizing the Americas was not an issue; the only problem was the unfortunate outcome (as if the former can be separated from the latter). We need not change the philosophy; we need only mitigate any sociological conflicts. Furthermore, the implications are that we can accurately compare Western human land use to more-than-human coexistence with the ocean, as is evidenced by the belief that the lack of permanent residence in an oceanic area disqualifies a whale's right to continue using it. In fact, this directly mirrors the European reasoning, through the *terra nullius* doctrine, that Indigenous peoples in North America had no legal claims to the land they had been living on for millennia (Alfred 45). While Takahashi's rhetoric is by no means comparable to the genocide and ongoing violence towards Indigenous peoples that colonization brings, it invites the question posed by Billy Ray Belcourt: "what imaginaries and subjectivities are foreclosed when our politics of decolonization is always already anthropocentric?" (9)

Conclusion: To the Unseen



It is difficult—scientifically and imaginatively—to trace how terrestrial human bodies are accountable to and interconnected with as yet unknown creatures at the bottom of the sea.

- Stacy Alaimo "*New Materialisms, Old humanisms, or, following the submersible*" p. 283

[O]f all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities.

- Maxine Greene *Releasing the Imagination* p. 3

Although it is my hope that *Imperceptible* is only in the beginning stages of its life, as of right now there is no concrete plan for next steps – but there are many ideas. To wrap up I will share some future changes I would like to make given more time, resources, and the experience of the works-in-development performances I have already done.

Technological limitations of low/no budget performances will usually be a setback, and our situation was no different, particularly as I was using many projections during the performance. The space we were using could unfortunately not be blacked out completely, and the light leaking in from the windows caused many of the projections to be washed out, despite much time spent tinkering with it. With a higher quality projector and a theatre space with no unwanted light the images would have added much more to the performance than they were able to do. These circumstances were anticipated given our lack of funding, which will hopefully change in future productions.

In any future grants I apply for with this project I will also include a fund for dramaturgical support. Although I was intentionally not writing a show *about* Lelu Island, I would have loved to pay one or two leaders from the camp to provide dramaturgical feedback on the parts of the show that directly or indirectly speak to

the situation at Lelu. I discussed the concept, format and content of the play with Patty on the phone and she fully approved of everything, but unfortunately she was too busy to read the play when I offered (understandably so - being one of the leaders of the camp she is constantly overbooked). To take up time from the people at the camp also did not feel right without compensation as they are already busy volunteering their time to keep the camp running.

One of the overarching difficulties in creating this piece was the problem of representing the more-than-human on stage. I don't believe there is a cookie cutter method of doing this ethically – or if there is I will need a few more years of research to find it. I attempted instead to transparently share the messy process of finding ethical relations with the more-than-human world through personal storytelling and fictional characters. Una Chaudhuri notes that in Western theatre, animals are mainly discussed by humans or used as metaphors, but their actual Beings are rarely seen onstage. She marks this invisibilizing as a “hallmark of the dominant tradition of Western theater, a tradition that is obsessively anthropocentric...” (*Stage Lives* 113). She contrasts this with exceptions such as Eugene Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros*, where the animal body is fully present, with human characters transforming into rhinoceros on stage and stage directions reading “*crossing the orchestra pit move a large number of rhinoceros heads in a line*” (*Stage Lives* 126). In this case, no matter what the metaphors are that go along with it, the audience is viscerally reminded of the animals' “real existence, their actual being as members of a biological species with a specific morphology, geography, and history” (Chaudhuri and Hughes 5).

I debated for some time on whether or not animal footage/images/theatrical representation would be shown during the play. At first, I theorized (contrary to Chaudhuri) that the best way *was* to withhold actual images and allow the audience to create their own in their imaginations. This is largely due to the particular animals that appear in my play: whales and dolphins are, in my opinion, overly romanticized in (Western) images and videos to the extent that even their real bodies shown onstage might appear a metaphor for environmental stewardship or ocean conservation rather than a reminder of their unique “morphology, geography, and history.” What was more anthropocentric, I asked myself, to have human actors discussing whales and human audiences actively imagining their existence, or to have human actors act out, theatrically recreate, or show real footage of whales and let the audiences experience these interpretations? I found it very interesting to keep track of the diverse assumptions people would make when I explained my research as ‘creating theatre that discusses whale/human or human/ocean relations and environmental justice.’ Responses ranged from, “well, how are you going to act out being a whale?” to “so you’ll be performing on a boat for whales?” In both cases these responses followed Chaudhuri, although perhaps instinctively or unwittingly, in keeping the animal body in the picture. Jane C. Desmond’s discussion on interspecies communication and representation is pertinent here when she writes,

[A]s scholars, or as performers, we must bring the animal’s modes of being in the world into the text, onto the stage, or into the scholarly analysis. Obviously, this can only be an approximate translation; ultimately we are doomed to fail, but we are, I believe, morally and intellectually obligated to try. Otherwise whatever we write, or perform, will only really be about us – the human animals. The nonhuman animals...will be but a means to the end of telling our own story...[A]nother way of telling our story...is based in relationships (Chaudhuri and Hughes 136).

With this in mind I decided to start from a place that recognizes that any representation that tries to demonstrate the unique perceptual world of a whale will be wonderfully and necessarily doomed to failure. The goal is instead about translation and relationships across species. Desmond further elaborates on the fear that representation could actually further anthropocentric values, arguing that “understanding the world through a human lens, is, after all, all that we can really do. To know otherwise is impossible. But to *imagine* otherwise is not” (Chaudhuri and Hughes 137).

I tried to both bring animal bodies onto the stage and avoid romantic portrayals of humpback tail silhouettes, orcas spyhopping or dolphins leaping. The only time a full whale body is shown onstage is during one of the dream scenes in which a projection shows an orca body that I drew using animation software. The other time a whale makes an appearance (also in a dream) the projection is underwater footage of the ocean that is meant to look as if it is taken from a whale’s perspective, but we don’t actually see the whale. Lastly, there is the cetachuman transition at the end of the play, which alludes to a whale/human fusion body with my body moving in a blue sleeping bag.

Whales are, of course, not the only more-than-human Beings brought into the play. Marine microbes are shown through projections and imaginatively portrayed through Microscopic Child’s drawings. Given the concept of slow violence and relating ethically to the unseen, I wanted to invert the predominant way we perceive

certain Beings. Cetaceans, who we are inundated with visuals of¹⁰, were only shown through representation, filtered through my imagination (as someone who has never encountered a whale apart from dreams this also seemed fitting). To contrast this, marine microbes, which we can only see using microscopes, were scattered along the stage with projected footage or hand drawings. Given more time and resources this would have been amplified even more than it was in the performance, with hundreds of microbe drawings hanging, falling, or lying around the space by the end of the performance and glowing in the dark during the final blackout.

I hope that this combination of animal representation onstage allowed for animal subjects to be present, while also relying on audience and actor imaginations in order to both bring animal bodies to the forefront and to accept the anthropocentric lens that we will always unavoidably understand them through. As Maxine Greene writes,

Not always but oftentimes, the extent to which we grasp another's world depends on our existing ability to make poetic use of our imagination, to bring into being the 'as if' worlds created by writers, painters, sculptors, filmmakers, choreographers, and composers. (4)

I believe theatre can draw our attention in to the most overlooked details, like a microscope does on a drop of seawater. Perhaps those details can start a process of (re)membering and a practice of understanding our connection to that which we

¹⁰The most telling anecdote of this I heard from my supervisor, Dr. Leesa Fawcett. While giving a talk on the oceans to a group of teenagers, she asked them how many people had seen a whale and almost every single person put their hand up. She was initially astonished, as the talk was at York University – far from coastal access. She then found out that by 'seen' the students were automatically including videos and television images. Seemingly visuals of whales are so abundant that they can subconsciously replace a live encounter.

don't directly experience. Our becoming-imperceptible is then about recognizing and honouring the unique perceptual worlds, or *umwelts*, of all things.

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