Matter and Mind:
on embodied ethics, education, and the environmental imaginary

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Report of a Major Project submitted to the Faculty of Environmental Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Environmental Studies

York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
July 31st, 2019

Signature of Student _____

Signature of Supervisor_____

Image 1. Mattermind

Abstract

This major research project is the culmination of a visual autoethnographical exploration and experimentation with relationality and environ-mental education in an urban setting. Charting a metamorphosed research process, these pages unravel the theory and practice of ethical contemplation in daily city life, and the affective dimensions that this sort of environmental learning can evoke. Unpacking the experiential grounds of relational philosophy, art is used to illustrate my process as it revealed itself to me.* The project included five interviews with environmental scholar-educators and the story-data that emerged from those conversations inhabits the work. Lived environmental ethics and the general tendency towards an urban blind spot in environmental education informed the artistic process of making sense of subjective embodiments in the city. A creative embodiment of subjectivity in the city is the reoccurring original character and image of Loona. Acknowledging response-abilities and gathering around shared environmental and ethical sensibilities, with notions of difference held firmly in hand, offer ways for us all to share this only Earth. A practice of thinking differently about and with the world, nature and our human place in each and both is a beginning. Complicating and multiplying our multi-species relationality is part of this praxis. The arts of living with where we are, enacting an ethics of hope and practicing thinking-making are results of this major research project. Worry, celebration and narrating hope, while being always accountable to the affective dimensions of our environmental work matter.

** All artwork and photographs are original creations by the author.*

York University acknowledges its presence on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations. The area known as Tkaronto has been care taken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Huron-Wendat and the Métis Nation. It is now home to many Indigenous Peoples. This territory is subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region. I acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation.

Foreword

As I reflect back from the other side, I am struck by the extent to which this learning process, boundless as it feels, fulfills the core aims of my MES plan. Based in relational theory, and an experiential-phenomenological application, this project is in fact a complete braiding of *all three* Components of my POS; deepened engagement with (C1) environmental (relational) philosophies, (C2) alternative/environmental education, and (C3) arts-based practice.

Although these components have always been linked (it was initially very difficult for me to pull my learning goals apart into separate sections), this project has given me the opportunity to experience, in reverse, the fullness of their varied connections. And, in a way, perhaps it is exactly this exercise—the initial isolation and mapping, and subsequent reflection—that has been the most significant part of my MES growth.

Revisiting one of my most preliminary questions, "*How do I ('researcher') actualize or embody the ethical environmental theory that I engage?*" (See 'Area of Concentration,' p. 2), I see now the way this project emerges as exactly that: a commitment to the doing and observing of environmental thought-in-practice—or what might be better understood as an experiment in field philosophy. Equally so, in seeking to pin down the un-pinnable notion of embodiment, I see the way the boundaries of my questions have been made to change. There is no set resolve to the relationship between theory and (embodied) practice, there is only an observance of our moment-to-moment *experience* of it. Perhaps it is not about *how we 'embody'* the things we think, but rather how the process of thinking embodies us.

And so, this is where this paper-project begins: in the culmination of an at once philosophical and practice-based project. It is inherently and explicitly relational; it is a convergence of words and worlds; it is arts-based and critically (eco)feminist; it is a mess of digital photography, illustration, found objects, paint, and puppets; it attends to material and multispecies vitality; it has been abandoned and lived in; it is a product of chronic dis-order; it is nonlinear and emergent; it is rooted in my experience with, and critique of, environmental education; it is concerned with the way ecological problems are communicated and perceived; it is informed by many strands; it is ongoing and in-the-making. Above all, it has allowed me to radically, and methodically, experience and experiment with a collection of concepts that I find to be full of pedagogical and affective possibility.

For Dylan.

Acknowledgements

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To Wally and Lupita: Thank you for being my unrelenting walking and thinking and writing companions. You, above all, have taught me what it means to attend.

To Tracy and Philip and Harry: Thank you for being my riverbed, and for supporting me so steadily at every depth. For your constant companionship, unending patience and support, this belongs to you.

To Leesa: Thank you for your Trust; for showing up for me in the most profound and caring of ways; for teaching me about the art and practice of compassion; for always finding laughter and curiosity. For being a true mentor and friend.

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Contents

Surfacing

> *This passage forced itself on me while I was trying to write other things. It serves as an introduction of sorts, but it is also a re-emergence, a preface, a foreground, a self-vindication. I am not the same person I was when I first started this process. I have changed, and so has the outcome. I attempted to write around the change, but have had to write through it instead.*

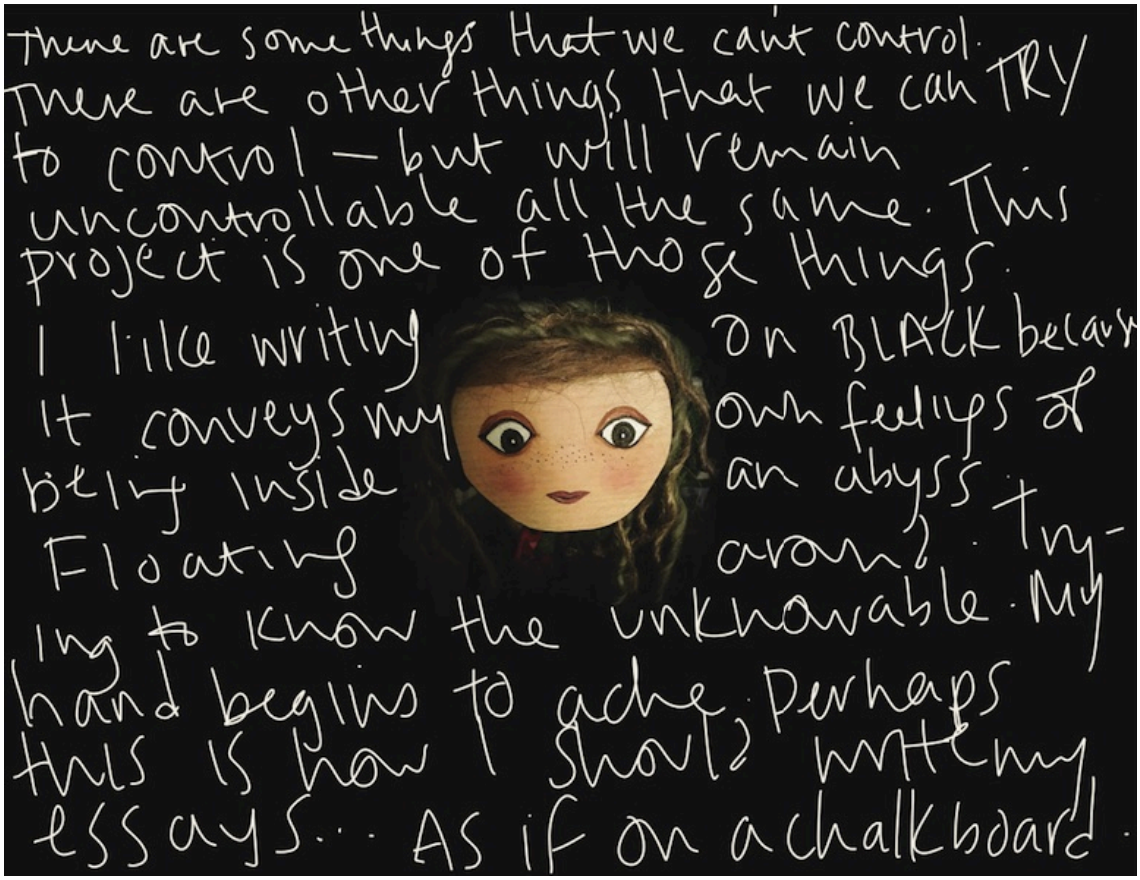

Image 2. Writing while floating, October 2017

From the beginning, this project has been about an exploration of theory-in-practice. The initial plan was threefold, and seemed simple enough: an experiential consideration of embodied (environmental) ethics, with and through art, and in the context of daily city life. I would gather story-data via semi-structured interviews about how different people (with requisite environmental education) embody (experience, inhabit, live-with) their own distinct conceptions of environmental ethics in the landscape of the everyday. And, using art as a method of inquiry *and* mode of expression, I would distill these stories/experiences in the creation of an illustrated

text. Motivated by the long-standing (and still pertinent) 'urban blind spot' in environmental education (EE) research and practice (Light, 2003; McClaren, 2009), the project would offer an alternative, visual depiction of ethical natureculture relations (Haraway, 2003) in city space. It would challenge the prevailing anti-urban assumptions of 'nature'-based EE, and therefore probe what counts as ethically transformative, or environmentally relevant, learning activity.

But - What's that saying about best laid plans?

Over the summer of 2017, I completed five in-depth interviews, with five scholar-educators who generously shared their insights.[1] Because my questions required prerequisite theoretical and/or post-secondary experience, it felt necessary that I use a kind of purposive method of selection. In the end, the group as a whole was a little less diverse than I had hoped (all of us being white, and of settler backgrounds) and I wondered, on repeat, about ethics of participation. *When we researchers aim for a certain level of diversity among subject-participation—in my case, the important inclusion of an Indigenous perspective—but receive a narrow scope—Is diversity for the sake of diversity, or the seeking of 'other' subjects, really ethical at all?* I decided that any implicit bias would be acceptable so long as it was given critical consideration. And in fact, from where I am now, I see that it was important for me to situate this project from within the specificity of the settler perspective—the only perspective from which I can speak.

From here, I attempted to interpret these conversations visually, and cast them into the shape of a story. I began experimenting with how to bring such a wealth of 'data' to life. But for all my efforts to transform word worlds into visual worlds, I couldn't fathom how to represent both the process (where the centre of gravity seemed to be me and my relations) *and* the product (where the centre of gravity was other people and their relations to their worlds) in a way that felt cohesive, or right. I tried every way I knew how to creatively story my way towards a solution—

[1] The interview 'data' is not explicitly included here, but it has not gone unused or unexpressed. While the conversations have not been formally analyzed, they have certainly influenced and informed my creative work. Due to the scope of this paper, I have had to leave some of the interview data aside. Importantly, however, this is not to say that my original idea (a book of illustrated philosophy rooted within the interview conversations) will not be revisited down the road.

through different character forms, using water colours, pastels, comics, collage—all in an attempt to make the kind of research creation *I thought I needed to achieve*.

Despite a background in feminist research, I became fixated on an 'objective' ideal.[2] I could see the contours of the book, the meaning that needed to be made, but couldn't find suited representation—characters, through line, narrative voice. I soon realized (*counter to who I am and the kinds of stories that I value and trust*) that I was trying to create something from a perspective that didn't exist; I was trying to tell a story in which my own involvement (as listener-thinker-researcher-interviewer-creator) had been erased. Given that I have never before been able to write or make art from an impersonal place, I'm not sure why I so suddenly felt the need to eliminate all traces of my subjectivity, or why I couldn't put the many voices of this research into conversation.

Image 3. Wayfinding, a collage

[2] A feminist research ethic must involve (among other things) attention to the subjectivity of the researcher and/or participants, and how "the research process itself both instantiates and conditions relations of subjectivity that inevitably bear [on the work]" (Ackerly & True, 2010, p. 23).

Though I couldn't fully see it at the time, there was (and still is) something else going on.

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For the past two years, I have been traveling through a protracted and often debilitating cognitive 'flare'; a comorbidity of things with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) at its root. I have been coping and not coping with neuro-diversity // mental dis-order for a very long time—but these words hardly begin to describe their experiential weight. Though the diagnostic labeling of these things can serve great purpose—and *has,* in many ways, helped me to better understand my self over the years—I still cringe at the way I can and can't define what happens. The labelling, the mislabeling, the becoming-statistic, the clinical constructedness of it all—the stigmas that inevitably arise. <•> [3] It is what it is though. I'm simply too tired to write around it. Too worn out by it to try to conceal how it maps itself onto my work. My fixations, my compulsions, my obsessions, my fascinations, my slowness, my stickiness, my fuzziness, my attentiveness—the ways I get stuck, the way I misplace time, the way I get lost, the way I forget, the way I lose sight, the way I live-with-in the big questions— are all parts of how I learn, and can all at once limit and deepen my ability to do so. They are how I 'do' re/search, and how I come to know the world.

As it happens, my fixation with objectivity was perhaps an indication; an emergence tangled up in the event of the flare. During the peak of it, I lost the ability to see or hear the value of my own thoughts—my own voice. It only made sense to reject it. I couldn't access rationality (even in its most basic pragmatic form). I had trouble with my short term memory. I sometimes couldn't distinguish thought from actuality. It was/is, in many ways, a dissolution of Self—but not the kind that Buddhists or Deep Ecologists seek. Unable to organize analytical thoughts, I could only record what I was feeling.

[3] Sometimes I find that the spaces between thoughts needs to be punctuated, but that normative punctuation is itself too limiting to reflect the feeling of the transition, so I experiment with symbols instead. Others have found that text need no punctuation, to more fully express the fluidity of writing and thoughts. See Longley et. al. (2013) for an example of writing without space.

Image 4. Affected

From the middle of the flare, sometime last year:

> *As I concede to this moment, in pursuit of what feels like an impossibly de-forming task,*[4] *I am struck. Something like worry, heavy but without a name, floods the space between my eyebrows, and, wrapping itself around the base of my neck, deposits its abject weight in excess at the top of my spine. In this moment, I only have words for this feeling—all the others have gone. There is a tightening across the length of my chest and over my heart; a relentless churning deep in my gut; a narrowing at the back of my throat. Each of my molars presses into the groove of another and my jaw slowly cinches shut. I am hopeful? that my other thoughts continue to travel from that same space between my eyebrows, through to the tips of my fingers and onto the keys below—but am prohibitively aware that my human body-machine has a different pace of exertion in mind. My eyes strain, and th e le t te rs b eg i n t o bl u r th en d iss ol ve, th e n d isa pp ea r.*
> *The world in front of me goes spotty, and then dark. I am temporarily visionless, but not just in my eyes. My conceptual sight is obscured too.*
> *After some time, the heaviness, like a thick oppressive smoke—lifts, and a great fatigue washes over. I am forced to accept. To submit. To slow down.*

Of course, being forced to accept something (even by oneself) isn't really acceptance at all, and within this vicious loop I vanished.[5] At some point, however, I realized that clarity and motivation are things afforded to a body that is not in constant distress.

While my experience of distress is certainly very different from other, more externally produced or visible, forms—where the response to fight or flee may be clear—I have to remind myself that both are real. While the mind-body dualism has historically kept the "unfolding of biological sequences" (Braidotti, 2003, p. 209) well away from the 'self-controlled' space of the human mind, our bodies are in fact much more of an "in-between contested zone" (p. 209): "a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces" (p. 206); always affecting and affected, and always in

[4] *De-forming* because mental lucidity was absent, and my ability to track thoughts beyond a description of my mental state was entirely impaired.
[5] Depression is different for everyone, but this is what happens to me. When I'm in it, just as when I'm *not* in it, I can't make sense or remember the feelings of the other side, or whether it was real. It's like double amnesia.

flux.[6] Still, the 'myth of body-less-ness' wields immense power (Myers, 2005), obscuring the agency of our sensations.[7]

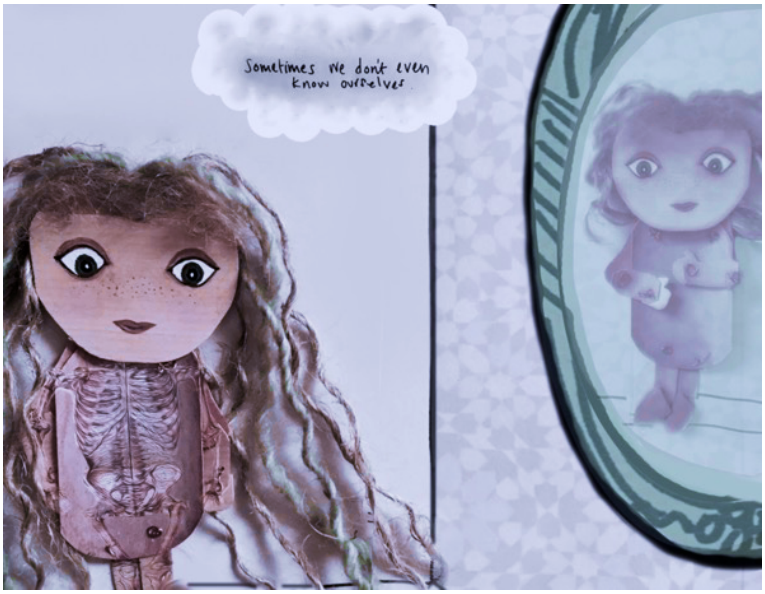

Image 5. Bodymatters

I mention all this because this is a project about embodied knowledge, and *this* is the embodied truth I have been living-with. It is a big part of my history within spaces of education, and it is a big part of the achievement of this 'end.' The two are entirely entwined. As Renee Lertzman's work (2015) suggests,

> "Separating psychological dimensions from environmental advocacy severely cripples our capacities for coherent and integrative environmental engagement and restorative practices. To maintain such a separation is to participate in a fantasy that we can somehow evacuate the messy realms of human subjectivity from how we engage with ecological contexts" (p. 6).

[6] I draw mainly on the Spinozist notion of affect, as does Jane Bennett (2010), "which refers broadly to the capacity of any body for activity and responsiveness" (p. xii). And I too, "equate affect with materiality, rather than posit a separate [life or spiritual] force that can enter and animate a physical body" (p. xiii).
[7] Myers (2005) attributes Donna Haraway (1988; 1991) for the 'myth of body-less-ness' (See p. 256).

Although this happening—the current of the flare—has been largely occasioned by a complex layering of events, I also *know* that it is not separate from the stories of ecological loss and crisis that I engage in. I am by no means immune. It's *all* part of this story; and this passage, this report, is a small step towards the undoing of such separation.

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Unable to elude the experience of *myself*, however partial or situated,[8] I eventually had to let this process take me over; to outgrow its design and expand into something new—something less bound. As Rishma Dunlop (2002) notes, there is no "proper voice" of research (p. 24); "at the root of scholarship is eros, a passionate desire to connect with others and with the natural world [*sic*], a desire to deepen our understandings of ourselves and others, the passion to transform or preserve the world as we understand it" (p. 37).

Image 6. Body as first environment

As it sits now, this work is perhaps best described as a *visual autoethnographical experiment*; a form (and frame) that has come to better house the wingspan of this pursuit and its multi-layered unfolding. With a depth of observation not often invited into the stride of daily life, autoethnography urges us to learn as much from what and how we feel, as from what we observe (Ellis, 2004).[9] Using both art and narrative as methods of inquiry *and* means of expression, the following is an attempt at tracing the edges of a necessarily nomadic, circuitous, and yet wholly transformative path. With Leesa Fawcett (2009), I understand nomadic thought through Deleuze and Guattari's (2002) concept of the rhizome, which is about "connection, and at the same time heterogeneity where multiplicities associate, extend or form []" (Fawcett, p. 229). Like a map, the rhizome is "entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real" (Deleuze & Guattari, p. 12).

[8] See Haraway (1988) on 'situated knowledge' and 'feminist objectivity.'
[9] Autoethnography is inherently about finding knowledge in 'other' ways (see Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011).

Through Liz Newbery (2012), I am reminded once again that "when affect arises in contexts of learning, it might better be viewed as a tell, as a volatile or unpredictable beacon pointing at an insight to explore, rather than as something to chase away or smooth over" (p. 40-41).[10] As it happens, my beacon of exploration emerged in the affective dimension of *my own* negotiation with 'embodied [environmental] ethics,' and in the processes of learning that were revealed along the way. Though it/this is not *the* 'finished' product I initially had in mind, it nevertheless represents the kind of rigorous commitment to praxis that this moment (and perhaps the broader environmental moment) requires. If, as Dunlop (2002) writes, scholarship is about a "flowering or opening of the heart" (p. 37), and if, as so many suggest, all learning has the potential to transform our environments,[11] then this project arrives exactly where it needs to be.

Loona, a note: on-the-making

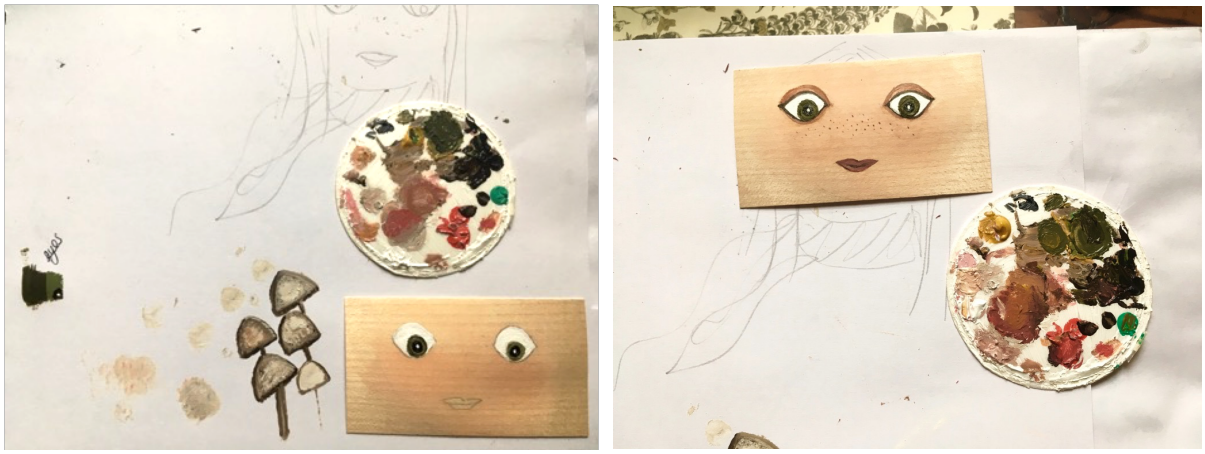


Image 7. Paint your Process

Somehow, in the puzzling of my aesthetic direction (see Image 3), there came a moment when the research stepped back, and my hands told me 'what needed doing'—and I did my best to 'do' it (LeGuin, 2004). As Ursula Le Guin notes (2004), during creative processes, aesthetic decisions are not rational, but instead made "on a level that doesn't coincide with rational consciousness"

[10] Newbery's (2012) discussion of the affective dimensions of learning is centred around the "traumatic traces lingering in a nation born through colonization" (p. 30), as "imperative in the endeavour of living together ethically in this nation of great difference" (p. 32). While this particular dimension of affect is distinct, and requires a separate conversation (beyond the scope of this paper), that is not to say that this paper (my story) is separate from it.
[11] See, for instance, Weston (2004), *What if Teaching Went Wild?*

(p. 225). And so, drawing on Natasha Myers (2018) potent incantation, I gathered all could to "refuse the aesthetics of ruin porn" (p. 62) (*in more ways than one*), and summoned my capacity to make art "like my life depend[ed] on disrupting with dissensus the colonial common sense that would leave us all to die in the Anthropocene" (p. 62-63). The method was necessarily reckless and untidy, but eventually allowed me to slow down and "pay attention to what is right in front [of me]" (Hurren, 2017, p. 31): that is, the immediacy of my own embodied complexity; the hybrid city-natures I live in-relation to. With found objects, paint, and even some of my own hair, 'Loona' came to be (See Image 8 below).

Image 8. Me and Not me

As Le Guin (2004) explains in reference to writing, but extended here to include other art forms, "during the actual composition it seems to be best if conscious intellectual control is relaxed. An insistent consciousness of the *intention*…may interfere with the *process*" (p. 225). In other words, your work binds you when you're attached to the result; or, the hands know what the mind does not. With this, one might wonder: Is it even possible to 'relax intellectual control' in the context of research-based art (or any methodology that relies on creativity)? As I sit here at the (necessary, but not absolute) conclusion of this creative pursuit, I'm still unsure.

The thing I seem always to tussle with is the tension between art (rooted in research) and aesthetics—that is, creative works based in the arena of academic thought (and not the other way around).[12] For me, art (*honest* art) is ***not*** about analytical thinking. It's about getting out of the way so that my body can work. Art that comes from a place of critique and deconstructive thought just feels contradictory, or paradoxical. And yet somehow that is what I have often strived to achieve; to start with an analysis and work my way—methodically, rationally—towards a prematurely defined creation. Perhaps if I weren't so attached to the concept of 'artistic rigor,' I may have been able to work along this premeditated line. But the learnings may not have been so rhizomatic after all. Indeed there is a lot lost, artistically *and* aesthetically, when we are too tightly wound to an instructive or analytical ideal. And at the same time, there is loss of substance when we are too rigidly bound to a heightened aesthetic goal. And still, for me, when aesthetics go out the window (in favour of research that claims to be art, but lacks the necessary artistic discipline or skill), it is the integrity of art itself that loses out.

As outlined above, it was important that this creative process find a different path. Happily, I stumbled upon this: *Research-creation*, as defined by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (n.d.),

> "Is an approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression,

[12] *Arts-based research* is about the making of artistic expressions so as to understand and examine research (including the researchers and subjects themselves), as opposed to related forms that use art-making activities to collect data from participants (See Knowles and Cole, 2008).

> scholarly investigation, and experimentation. The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media (art forms)" (SSHRC Definition of terms).

And with that, it seems when process is honoured a relationship between research and art (honest art) *can* be achieved. I think I've found this fleeting sense of balance MAYBE once or twice. But it takes an immense degree of mental discipline and, for me, trance-like visualization. *And the body weighs in again: It is crucial that my nervous system remains intact, that I am well fed and well exercised—so that a 'parasympathetic groovy state' (as a friend of mine would say) can arise.* In this flow state, I have learned that under each layer of grief or strain or doubt (and the venomous uncertainty that it provokes) there remains an unconscious pull towards humour or lightness (credit: my parents), and a playful (childish) sort of aesthetic hope—which is perhaps self-evident in the way Loona has come to land in the world and on the page.

Image 9. Becoming, a collage

That is not to say, however, that art is always (or even ever) innocent or 'pure,' or that these depictions (or the depictions yet to arrive) somehow escape the re-production of hegemonic relations. As dian marino (1997) notes, "artistic work can merely mirror prevailing structures, or it can reflect and re:frame how we see our experiences" (p. 58). Loona is *me* and *not me* and *others*, and without context or story to ground her, her appearance as a white girl 'in nature' does nothing to challenge the most dominant frames of our collective environmental imagination. Still, the way this tiny character became a tool for shifting my sense of reality—shifting my modes of attention; finding hope along the dark edges; helping me "develop an appreciation for what [I] see in [my] everyday worlds" (Hurren, 2017, p. 31)—is perhaps the key.

So, much like field notes recorded along a trail, the images you see were made with and through a struggle for knowledge, hope, and embodied clarity. They were created alongside my seeking of narrative, subjectivity, and impossible simplicity. They are the product of this seeking, this thinking and living-with, this process of experimentation in my own and others words. They are not representative of an ethically transformed city-world, but rather of how the process of thinking about ethical transformation can look and feel—and how this thinking and feeling has in turn transformed me. And! They can be viewed in different ways: as one assemblage of aesthetic contemplation, or, as illustrative companions situated at particular nodes within the text. While Loona's future, and the possible futures she *could* tell, are not defined, her purpose for now is to listen and create reverberations.

Thinking-With Narrative Complexity

Allow me now to go back, and 'worry' some ideas, some stories and theories,[13]"until they start to seem strange" (Bennett, 2010, p. vii). Echoing Chessa Adsit-Morris's prompt (2017), I have been "lugging this heavy bag of [stories]" (p. 2), for what seems like a bit too long. Stories, like theories, need to breathe, and through this wordy unravelling so begins a turning of 'lines into webs' (Haraway, 2004, p. 1); a practice of thinking differently about and with 'the world,' 'nature,' and my human place among the two.

[13] As Dunlop (2002) suggests, there is a false dichotomy between stories and theories.

And now for those stories…

Image 10. Holding space for complexity is work

It's no secret that we are living-in a complex moment; of widespread species' loss, ecological degradation, and accelerated planetary change. Challenged by past choices made; by the ways we are *all* historically, materially, and biomechanically contingent; by the ways our family histories hang together; by temporal frictions (rapid velocity of change and awareness at one end, and an extreme slowness of response at the other[16]); by the concepts we rely on to story our worlds——The environmental problematic is vast, and our work as environmental-ists of all sorts is always incomplete.[17]

Thinking-with such immense complexity, such an 'unprecedentedness' of circumstance, for years on end, is a bit of an experiment in itself; so much so that it can become difficult to keep

[16] See Bastian (2012), *Fatally Confused: Telling the Time in the Midst of Ecological Crises*.
[17] Despite the taboo of *environmentalism*—its history of colonial, racist, patriarchal, classist exclusion; its cooption, commodification, and reliance on constructed ideals (wilderness, nature, human)—for me, its value currently overrides its limitation. I use the hyphen to indicate this, to suggest critical use, and to indicate its multiplicity.

track of where or how to begin.[20] I like Haraway's (2016) suggestion that "to say 'unprecedented' in view of the realities of the last centuries is to say something almost unimaginable…[particularly] when every fiber of our being is interlaced, even complicit, in the webs of processes that must somehow be engaged and repatterned" (p. 35).

Image 11. Drowning in plastics

Indeed, I've had to learn that my entry point is, and is allowed to be, as mutable as anything else. It's an obvious point, but *Ecological Crisis*, monolithic though it may seem, is not a single-issue story. Nor is it productive (or healthy) to approach 'it' this way. But with the help of mass media oversimplification and 'crisis comms,' it can, and does, come to bear on the psyche this way. Without the comfort of a clear resolve (a direct line from problem to solution, from ethics to behaviour), it's often easier to cling to the habitual idealism of a dualistic response than to untangle possible threads of multiplicity.

As Anthony Weston (2009) suggests, when everything—'the world,' 'nature,' *all* our relations to *all* of 'it,' our very modes of thinking itself—is understood to be broken, it becomes easy to believe that "*everything* must be rethought" (p. 109, emphasis added).

> "We have been under the influence of too narrow a view of things, we are told—too human-centered or 'anthropocentric' a vision of how the world goes and what matters in

[20] On the complication of *beginning*, see Thorpe (2016), *It matters where you begin: A (continuing) journey towards decolonizing research*.

> it. A philosophical response naturally follows: we are offered a variety of theories of 'nonanthropocentrism' in which the claim is to transcend anthropocentrism in thought, reconnecting with ancient and native worldviews, perhaps, or drawing on the most modern developments in ecology and even physics, to reinstall humans within a larger world. This we could call *philosophy de-anthropocentrizing itself*' (p. 110-111).

But it doesn't work because, as Weston suggests, there is an implicit limitation when we attempt to attend to the world through the (entirely humanized) world of (human) thought alone. It doesn't seem to deter our enthusiasm, however, as the call to 're-think' or 're-imagine' the human-nature dichotomy rings clear in almost every direction throughout the story of environmental education (and my experience of it).

Image 12. Sense making

On the contrary, it's important to stress that any *re-thinking of thinking* must be rooted in relationships and experience. As Weston (2009) aptly suggests, a more valid philosophical occupation might be "to undertake the reconstruction of *thought* through the reconstruction of *experience* through the reconstruction of the immediate world of experience itself" (p. 117). In a

way, Weston's words are a perfect summation of my preliminary intent. And, in returning to my original line of questioning:

> *— of the 'spaces' between theory and practice*
> *(what I now understand to be more of dance)*
> *— of the perceived tensions between the theoretical site of speculative environmental philosophies (revolutionary and yet still very much peripheral to the status quo) and the material practicability of 'embodying' these sites within the context of daily city life;*

I am able to see myself, and this project, through Weston's contemplation.

That said, while I was drawn to the concept of 'embodied ethics' (perhaps even enchanted by it) for its poetic pedagogical appeal, and for the literal merging of (ethical) theory and (bodily) practice that it evokes—I can see now that it was never about the conceptual utility of ethics or embodiment alone. Following Cheney and Weston's (1999) ethics-based epistemology, wherein "ethical action is first and foremost an attempt to open up possibilities, to enrich the world" (p. 117), the measuring of this work was never about "respond[ing] to the world as already known" (p. 118). It was never about defining, explaining, translating or pinning down any ethical ideal (embodied or otherwise). Nor was it about conjuring a 'more accessible' path from principles to physical deeds.

Rather it *is* about complicating the production of ethically relevant knowledge itself. It's about challenging our narratives of environmental learning and activity, and *staying with the trouble* of ethical complexity (Haraway, 2016). As mentioned above, it's about experiencing *my own* relationship with ethics as inherently embodied and relational, as well as emotional and aesthetic, and attuning to this experience in an attentive, reflexive, and multiplicitous way. It's about allowing myself to worry, out loud, and with others, about the affective dimensions of my own

and others' work.[21] Lastly and perhaps most significantly, I very recently realized that it is *and has always been* about a more complex understanding of *hope* as the critical and crucial grounds of ethical possibility.

Image 13. Ethical openings

What are ethics if not simply the stories (theories) we live-with
in order to make sense of our worlds?

While thinking 'differently' is, most often (and by its very philosophical founding), assumed to take place in an abstracted realm, there is nothing abstract about it. These concepts—namely, those stemming from connectivity and embodiment, and the turn towards a 'new' material mode of thought—have been so thoroughly turned over in my mind that they are now embedded in my neural pathways and upon my tongue. (Not to say I fully understand them, but just that the re-patterning has begun). Before me, they lived with and through others (Donna Haraway for one)—and now they live with me—or, I live with them. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest, I am "several," and I am "already quite a crowd" (p. 3).

[21] As a comparative example of this kind of work, see Russel & Oakley (2016), *Engaging the Emotional Dimensions of Environmental Education*.

Image 14. Vital materialities

These frameworks I have come to think-with are many; a diverse confluence of 'new' materialisms, relational ontologies, human-animal studies, human-plant studies, and multispecies ethnography. While each has its own foundational specificities, they all share the assumption of *relationality*: which, in more definitive terms, "highlights how human identity and agency emerge in the context of systems, communities, and 'actants'… that include nonhuman species…from microbes and plant cultivars to animals, and in some theories also objects, physical processes, and social structures" (Heise, 2017, p. 4). As Adsit-Morris (2017) notes, "in this new materialist research praxis, thinking is doing and doing is thinking, and both are experimental world-making practices" (p. 7). Importantly, however, new material and relational ontologies are not really 'new' at all. As Zoe Todd (2016) notes, Indigenous philosophy has always assumed the existence of "sentient environments…[and] cosmologies that enmesh people [and] *all relations* into complex relationships" (p. 6).

Thinking-with others (both human and multispecies) has a long and lively history (Van Dooren, 2018), and is an actively embodied and fleshy thing. It is one of the ways I am always in-relation, and a crucial part of transforming ethically. Understanding mattering bodies (my own and others) as the companions I think-with, the relationship 'between' theory and practice

becomes just so: one in the same. <•> And, thinking-with (and sharing the fruits of our thinking through dialogue and story) becomes a legitimate form of activism. <•>

Image 15. Ontological kaleidoscope

As one who shies away from physical groups of people, the idea that I might participate in another way has been an important learning for me. Amid all the urgencies and emergencies of environmental change, there is a lot of pull towards involvement in the larger community of active resistance and response, and, while I have been variously involved over the years, my current disposition has made it difficult to sustain. <•> If thinking is mattering and mattering is thinking, thinking itself becomes an active response.

Relationally, this is a powerful thing. Thinking in collaboration (and sharing thoughts in dialogue and story) as a 'legitimate' form of activism, is something I've really had to internally grapple with in order to become more fully present, and accepting, to the kinds of contributions I am able to make and sustain. [22] As several of my interviewees noted (in different ways), perhaps activism is about finding and sharing your gifts. Perhaps our capacity to make and interpret meaning—to

[22] I credit this learning—thinking and writing as legitimate forms of activism—in part, to the conversations had with my five interviewees.

think-in-relation—and to discern where and how we place our attention, is as vital as anything else. And it is through this sort of thinking-with that an ontological shift grows.

City Natures

> *"Admiring one landscape and its biological entanglements often entails forgetting many others. Forgetting, in itself, remakes landscapes as we privilege some assemblages over others"*
> *- Gan, Tsing, Swanson & Bubandt, (2017, p. 6).*

Image 16. Nature here nor there

These challenging complexities—the heaviness of our narratives of ecological crisis, the affectivity of narrative complexity—are, for me, made more complicated by the realities of urban dwelling, and something I'll call hope-and-despair: an unsteady oscillation between the version of environmental-ism that I think-with (a many-stranded, fairly radical, plant and creature centric, arty, anti-oppressive, multispecies lens), and the versions of environmental-ism (if you could call it that) imposed by the wider culture and pace of Toronto life. (That is, the sub-

cultures that I personally come into contact with most regularly in the context of my daily rhythms). Spurred on, albeit unconsciously at first, by questions of home and belonging (arguably inherent to any sort of 'ecological' contemplation[23]), this unruly struggle with ethics is situated in the thickness of my immediate contact zone[24]—in my body, in my house, in my family business down the road, in my neighbourhood—and in the navigation of my dually constructed rural-urban sensibility.

On my gloomier days the city is a sense-less performance of excessively-developed late-capitalist ruins;[25] it's relentlessly humanized design, "providing an environment antithetical to [multispecies] life" (Okulicz-Kozaryn & Valente, 2018, p. 14). Once, on a pilgrimage to Bob Marley's childhood home in a rural and mountainous part of Jamaica, my Rastafarian guide put it like this: "Bob came back here later in life to write music and meditate because, you know, *in the city - everything's shitty*." And sometimes, this description fits.

Putting aside the sociopolitical implications of why and how certain people desire or are able to 'leave' to enjoy the 'true' natures that exist elsewhere, the fact remains: our city life (the one that occupies the majority of our existence) becomes something we "periodically have to get away from" (Weston, 2012, p. 85), where 'nature' is reduced to "a place to play now and then" (p. 85) when we 'need' to *escape.*

This knowing precipitates many questions:

> *If I, like so many others, am so completely invested in a wide-reaching reconceptualization of nature—and a revaluing of the nonhuman bodies and worlds with whom we share this earth—why is it still so difficult for me to reconcile my relationship*

[23] The word Ecology (in Greek: *Oïkos* + *-logia* or *-logy*) is akin to the study or theory of home (Dunlop, 2009). As Philip Payne (2009) notes, "discursive sources [of *Oïkos*] can be traced to the modern bourgeois longings for authenticity and social happiness" (p. 313). In a traditional sense, our understanding of home is tethered to the ways we can belong. My discussion follows Dunlop and Payne, but also Clive Cazeaux (2017), whose discussion of ecology as aesthetics suggests a "range of meanings [for ecology]: environment, relationships between organism and environment, thinking, and being as interconnection, coexistence and belonging" (p. 155).
[24] 'Contact zone' is another Harawaian term (See Haraway, 2008).
[25] Anna Tsing (2015) must be credited for the notion of living in capitalist 'ruins.'

> *with 'nature' (or lack thereof?) in city space? Why do I long to get away, and how might I reconfigure this expectation? Do I have to?*

As Milton McClaren (2009) writes,

> "Although environmental educators often argue for the importance of reconnecting humans with nature, the sort of natural places they describe appear to exclude that peculiarly human construction known as the city, even though growing numbers of the students of environmental education—not to mention environmental educators themselves—live most of their lives in urban settings. Many environmental educators feel a deep connection with other species and the places they inhabit, having life stories grounded in rich experiences in environments outside human influence []. This love of so-called natural or wild places and of other species often motivates them to pursue careers in environmental education and related fields, and to find personal restoration and recreation in nonurban settings. Such experiences are part of a deeply situated knowledge—so deeply situated that…it is difficult to see what is always there" (p. 303-304).

Growing up on an island (two islands really, one big and one small), the majority of my formative education was through the teachings of other (nonhuman) multispecies creatures and worlds; learnings measured against my body and my bare feet, in wafts of cedar and seaweed, in unseen entanglements etched in the sand. But, echoing Erin Robinsong (2017)—whose poetry mirrors my experience in a way that stuns—"it wasn't until I moved to the city [grade eight for me, university for Erin] that I really started to become aware of 'nature.'[26] It's hard to describe, but I remember feeling the pull of the earth through the floorboards of my third floor apartment" (n.p.). And I still feel this pull today—like my body is constantly searching for all the earth-matter that has been dug up and relocated; grieving the relentless excavation of this place.

Perhaps in part due to these very same formative experiences, I have since forged a strong affiliation (perhaps even attachment) to the environmental parts of my identity. I have been at the

[26] Nature is a problematic term, I agree with Rose & Robin (2004) however, that "in its problematic, provocative, and violent history, [it] continues to challenge us, and for that reason, especially, I continue to use it" (n.p.).

receiving end of *a lot* of environmental education (EE); diverse in form, but overlapping in their shared reliance on an often unreliable conception of 'nature,'[27] and a relative assumption that human-nature reconnection can be briskly imparted.[28]

Although there are of course different segments of EE that take up the urban and suburban as integral sites of consideration (restoration, renewal, sustainable development, urban agriculture etc.) the cityscape (and the city-body) as the *site* of transformative human-nature relations—including all those *daily* places we inhabit, including the workplace and the home—is seldom taken up.[29]

Image 17. Everyday natures

In its most prevalent forms, EE takes us *away*. If not directly to the 'wilderness,'[30] then it takes us to the park, to the school yard, or, here in Toronto, into the ravine. And somehow I've always felt apart from these organized of experiential pursuits. On group excursions I feel rushed or crowded—that it's inevitably most often about human time and some sort of organized 'doing' or 'going,' more than a process of connection (two-sided relationship building) beyond ourselves. (Other beings, and the relationships we might form with them, don't often operate on our schedules.) And while it is certainly not my intent to diminish the value of these places and

[27] The demystification of the term 'nature' is foundational to this work, but is also beyond the scope of this paper. For a good overview, see Castree (2016).
[28] For an inspired discussion on EE and time, and the case for 'slow pedagogy,' see Payne & Wattchow (2009).
[29] Of course, there are exceptions. See Traci Warkentin (2011), for example.
[30] The 'trouble' with 'wilderness,' is a discussion in itself (See Cronon, 1995).

excursions—I *do* believe scales of 'nature' and 'wildness' exist,[31] and I myself go to the ravine almost every morning—I am interested in (and have great personal stake in) nourishing more complex understandings of the 'natures' that exist "right next to us, and all of the time" (Weston, 2012, p. 85).

Image 18. Inside-outside

As a case for the importance of our everyday natures from the perspective of an aesthetic sensibility, Yuriko Saito (2007) notes,

> "This dominance of wilderness aesthetics [and I would add romanticism] … consequently eclipses the equally, or even more, crucial significance of our aesthetic reactions to our backyard as well as to everyday objects and activities, which generally do not provide memorable experiences or occasions for reflection. We thus tend to overlook their unexpectedly significant role in affecting, and sometimes determining, our ecological awareness, attitude and ultimately actions, thus literally transforming the world. They appear trivial, innocent, and insignificant, when in fact they are not" (p. 57).

[31] I believe there is nature in the city, but I also believe there is an important distinction between the wildness of 'wilderness,' and the exclusionary (to 'other' bodies) spaces of cities. See Derby, Piersol, & Blenkinsop (2015).

Indeed the upholding of dichotomies (for instance, a romanticized conception of 'wilderness' that is absent of people and technology) does nothing for environmental education because all people use technology of some sort (Haraway, 2016).

For me, the importance of the city as a site of relevance and exploration cannot, and *should not,* be misjudged. As McLaren notes,

> "Any hope for a sustainable future lies [*in part*] in the personal choices and actions of millions of people all over the world, most of whom live in cities and towns, and their understandings and senses of place will play important roles in the choices they make or believe they can or should make" (McClaren, p. 305).

While I'm not sure whether the individualization of responsibility is in fact an effective approach to enhance or prompt change (people are not all equally responsible), I do feel that the way I experience nonhuman bodies as compared with, for instance, some of my neighbours, is not leading us in the direction of transformation. I don't think I even need to say that the decisions made by people in cities have huge implications elsewhere. As Tim Leduc (2016) writes, "Beyond the lights that can be seen are the greenhouse gases of an urban metabolism that intimately connects my ways of living in a city like Toronto with today's climate changes" (p. 5-6).

Yet a huge amount of us city-dwellers don't seem to make these connections; can't or don't want to acknowledge their complicity.[32] We are hard-pressed to use a reusable coffee mug, turn off our vehicles when idle (let alone give up our vehicles!), or even sort waste properly. This may be the skepticism talking, but, in my experience—in particular, of operating a small food business on a busy throughway, which gives a window into how the public operates on a day to day basis—I don't think we're anywhere near a wide reaching shift in thinking about our

[32] I am cognizant of the sweeping generalizations I am making here. Obviously there are issues of inequality that complicate things economically and socio-politically—but these are my own personal observations of a particular class of people, who have all the *means* they need to implicate themselves within ecological complexity.

environment and the ethical implications of the choices we make. And yet, my attachment and belief in the city as an ultimately vibrant environment, full of opportunities for connection to place and land, remains intact. If we can shift to paper straws, maybe we can do anything.

In contrast to Derby, Piersol and Blenkinsop's (2015) view—that cities are wholly anthropocentric and colonized, and ultimately too bound up in neoliberal ideals to foster any semblance of 'nature'—I see the city and the relations that exist here, as having great potential to challenge our most widespread assumptions. Against the common EE assumption that meaningful experience 'in nature' only happens when we remove ourselves from daily life, or in designated environments 'wild' enough to reignite a more 'authentic' human-nature connection[33]—What happens when we assume that a brilliant 'reconnection with nature' can exist right here—in our bodies and homes, and in our same old patterns of work and school life? Perhaps not in the wilderness ideal we all hope for, but in the hybrid and cyborg natures in which we commonly dwell.

Image 19. I am the city too

[33] As Milton McLaren (2009) notes, "when educators present so-called natural environments as models of how reality should be arranged, we present implicit messages devaluing the urban environments in which students live" (p. 304). Until very recently, as Traci Warkentin (2011) explains, EE research and programing has largely privileged suburban and rural settings and the importance of taking students away to the 'wilderness' or dedicated 'green' space. See also, Andrew Light 2001 on the 'blind spot' in environmental ethics, and James Sheppard 2006 on the 'paradox of urban environmentalism.'

A Note on Difference

> *But who is this 'we?' Here I'll take a positional pause.*

That we humans might choose to form grounds of connectivity (at multiple scales) before asserting our differentiation is perhaps now more important than ever before. While I am aware of the implicit linguistic assumptions 'we' are prone to rely on to explain our points of view, I am also conscious of the extent to which this aware-ness can do more harm than good—catapulting me into a space of overzealous obsessive analysis, and halting any possibility of theoretical movement or flow. Though necessary from time to time, my penchant for inadvertently lumping the whole world into a two-letter signifier [We] is perhaps the most troublesome of these reductions. To this, I offer the following addendum.

Image 20. Relating

Of course 'we' are not all the same. It is not my intent to negate the diverse experiences of those differentially impacted by environmental change or injustice broadly, nor to diminish the inequalities that exist materially and as part of this conversation. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, the decolonization of environmental research and writing is part of this work. I am white, and of settler descent, but rather than adopting a politics of exclusion or romanticism (whether it be towards those like or unlike myself) I am inclined to gather together towards a politics of inclusion or coalition instead. That is, to be inclusive in my writing of 'others' immeasurably different and differently located, yet who might share with me the partial sensibility of an environmental (education) interest or inclination; all those who refuse antagonism, and invite or initiate humour; all those who might have had similar feelings or

experiences; all those who live-with dual subjectivities; all those who are at once different and alike; who are comfortable listening and not knowing. In short, those who can relate.
For me, this kind of critical gathering becomes part of an ethic of response-ability; propagating hope in the construction of spaces for dialogic exchange. It is not about false humanization, but rather the both/and of how we are indeed so inevitably knotted up together, albeit in the specificity of place and our relations. While it has been (and still is!) necessary to write our divisions, at this current juncture I'd like to suggest that the practice of gathering first around shared sensibilities, followed by notions of difference, is perhaps an ethic worth holding onto—lest we divide ourselves so completely that a kind of reckless narcissistic individualism takes control (Has it already? See: twitter).

With bell hooks (1994) in mind, perhaps shared sensibilities might be engaged as "fertile ground for [the] construction of empathy…[or the] recognition of common commitments" (p. 217).[34] Perhaps hooks' conception of a 'positive politics of difference' has a place in the work of decolonization (and thus environmental research and education). It's possible, however, that my desire to create a 'positive' politics indicates the limits of my own partiality: the relative privilege of having a settler-body that has never directly experienced the negative impacts of colonization. Nevertheless, as this conversation meanders into the importance of 'different' ways of thinking and being in the world, I hope that *we*, You and I—who at a very basic level and a very broad scale do inevitably share a sphere of physical matter, upon this ball of earth—might be reminded that there is no other earth to speak of. So, if nothing else, we do share that.

Ethical Landings

> *"There are many names for our current condition—Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene, White-supremacy-cene, and the list goes on—but whatever it is called, what it seems to demand are detailed practices of attentiveness to the complex ways that we, all of us, become in consequential relationship with others" - van Dooren, Kirksey, & Munster (2016, p. 4)*

[34] It must be noted that, while hooks' words resonate in me, they also speak from a precise moment of black feminist coalition politics.

While it remains wholly important that we continue unsettling the rigidity of our most oppressive ideological inventions (anthropocentrism, colonialism, humanism etc.), it also feels like the right time to begin humming a different tune. For many, the task now, or at least *today,* is about being "constructively involved in helping to shape better possibilities in these dark times" (Rose et al, 2012, p. 3); a task that, for me, involves what Anna Tsing (2010) calls the 'arts of living on a damaged planet.'[35] As Jane Bennett (2010) reminds, while critique is necessary in processes of reform, "a relentless approach toward demystification works against the possibility of positive formulations" (p. xv). Perhaps our obligation (as thinkers and scholars) to the current material conditions of ecological crisis demands that we stretch the limits of our philosophical imaginations beyond the dissociative heights of academic work and into the fabric of everyday life (van Dooren, 2018)—into the body, the neighbourhood, the land It's one thing to think and talk about ontologies of relationality and connectivity—to think the world otherwise through creative conceptual innovations — but quite another to habitually alter our bodies so that they might become open to the *experience* of an other-worldly point of view.

In Haraway's words (2014), it matters now how we continue to think the world into being, [and] that we continue to destabilize all that which is "normally held still" (n.p.). Equally, however, it also matters that we take response-ability, and nurture conscious openings for the "flourishing yet to come" (2016, p. 114). For Haraway, this means pushing back against the "all-too-ordinary urgencies of onrushing multispecies extinctions, genocides, immiserations, and exterminations" (2016, p. 37); that we engage the immense suffering wrapped up in the complexity of our multispecies co-constitutions, but, instead of hopelessness and despair, strive for "partial recuperation and getting on together" instead (p. 10). It means shifting into 'other' onto-epistemological versions of what it means to be a participant in life on Earth (Barad, 2007). It means being accountable to our shared ecological embeddedness and the sociality of multispecies lives (Fawcett, 2013). It means attending and attuning to our inescapable relational entanglements with 'others,' and to the co-constitution of matter, objects, bodies, and minds.[36] Through this lens, feats of environmental education become less about seeking an elusive nature, or solutions and stories for the future, and more about our thickly knotted *present* and the

[35] See Tsing, Bubandt, Gan & Swanson (2017).
[36] See, for instance, Alaimo (2010); Bennet (2010); Haraway (2003).

transformative possibilities that arise with-in the messy, ongoing, negotiations of the tangled multispecies relations that always exist (Weston, 2012).

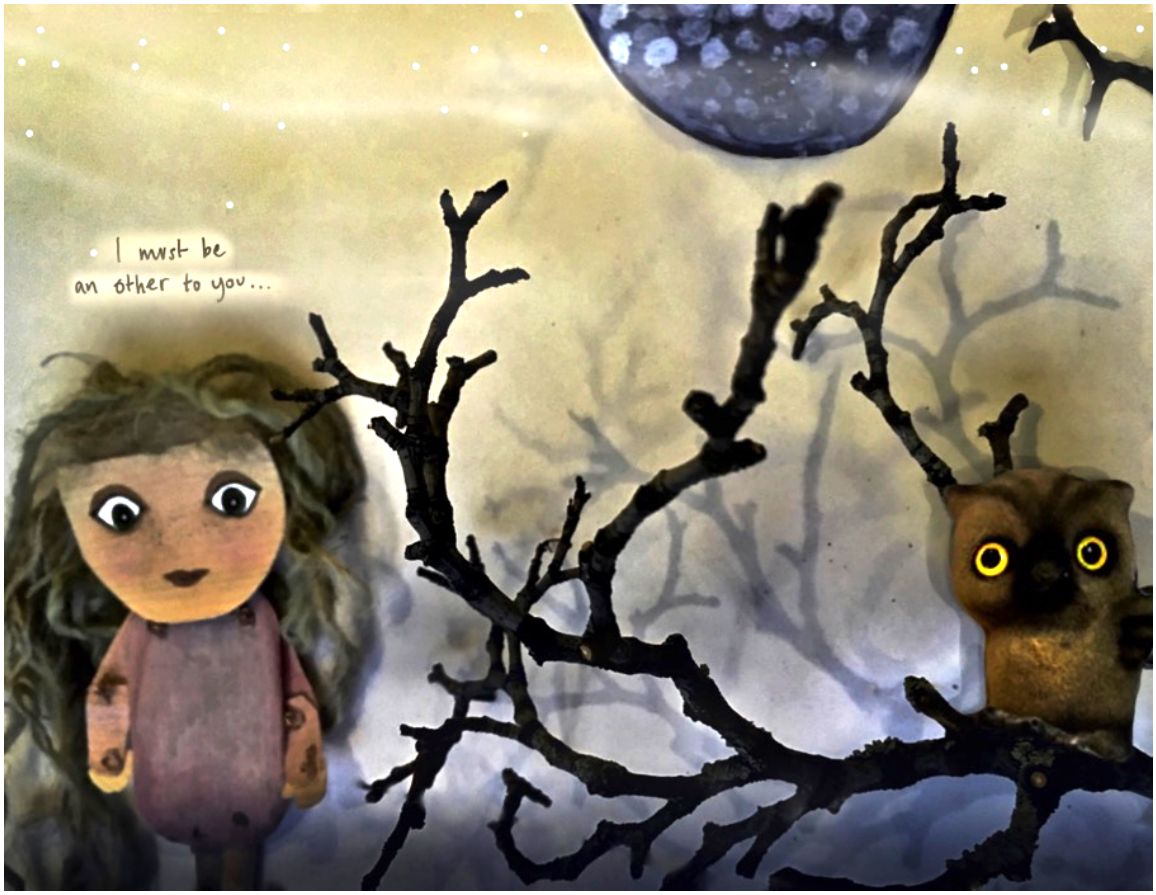


Image 21. Or rather, 'Am I an other to you?'

Equally, this kind of environmental work is about stories. Stories that breathe—in an acknowledgement of crisis and suffering—and are grounded in the transformative possibilities that can and do *already* exist (Haraway, 2016; Myers, 2018; Tsing, 2015). Stories that "enact connectivity," that "have the capacity to reach beyond the abstractions," that "enliven moral imagination, drawing us into deeper understandings of responsibilities, reparative possibilities, and alternative futures" (Rose & Fincher, 2015, p. ii). Stories that think through and with the debris of human/nature dualism, but choose multispecies re-wor(l)ding instead (Haraway, 2016; Adsit-Morris, 2017).

Looking at stories like this, and the ethics they tell us about, the notion of *staying with the trouble* of critical complex hope becomes part of my ethical sway. But this is not the kind of

hope that sits passively in yearning or faith. This hope is critical.[37] It manifests in grief, accountability, and responsibility. It is active and vital and inconvenient. It is a radical commitment towards what Donna Haraway (2008; 2016) calls *staying with the trouble*. It is about telling (and listening to!) stories that help us carry on as best we can—from the thick mud of the present, not only for the gaze of the future—and with responsibility towards the entanglements of enmeshed multispecies lives. It is about the cultivation of what Anthony Weston (2012) calls *celebratory environmentalism*, and what I (and many others) might call *narrative hope*.

Image 22. Hopeful re-visions

Paying Attention and Not Knowing

About two years ago, I sat in a café and watched an interaction between a very young child, maybe 3 years old, and his father (gendered assumptions aside). The child was sitting bolt upright, but still wobbly, balancing his head on his spine just the way toddlers do. I watched him as his eyes and limbs tracked a tiny insect, perhaps a fruit fly, as it looped between his hands. After a short while, the father clapped abruptly, aggressively, and the insect fell softly to the

[37] About 'critical hope,' see Paulo Freire (1992).

ground. The child, noticeably startled (perhaps even a bit upset), stared at the motionless speck on the table and then asked: *Why did you do that?* The father, noticeably pleased, replied: *Because We Hate Bugs*. And then smiled at me. I was so struck by the obligatory nature of the act that I had to look away. Not just the killing of the innocent fly (something I too am quite guilty of), but by the manner in which the killing occurred; the self-satisfaction, the affectivity, the education of it all. I remember thinking: *That's how it happens*. *That's how violence is passed on, how oppression is learned*. Despite the child's expression of delight, his proclivity to notice, his ability to attend in-relation to an other creature (abilities we all have at first) — there was no opportunity to break from the myth of the anthropocentric ideal. After a moment of shock, the child mirrored his father's expression—self-assurance—and adopted, for the moment, the position as his own: 'bugs' are valueless and exterminable. \/\/\/\/\

Just now, there was a bee—a honey bee or native pollinator bee—trapped between two panes of sliding glass inside my room. At first I noticed the sound, a buzzing, then looked up to see it moving in what I read as an agitated, or perhaps just frustrated, sort of way. I got up from my desk and very slowly slid one of the glass doors. I took care not to crush or pull its wings. It quickly caught the fresh air, maneuvered between the panes, and slipped out. It was gone in a matter of milliseconds. Had I not been around, or too fully absorbed in my humanness, I'm not sure it would have flown free. With the way things are going with the bees (see Image 23), I find myself noting their aliveness, altering my human path in support of them, with more and more regularity. For me, it's not a question of when or whether, but how.

Image 23. Attending to loss

Openings for Praxis

"If we think we already know what is out there, we will almost surely miss much of it."
- Jane Bennett (2010, p. xv)

Image 24. Abundance

What does it feel like to open up and expand into the notion of a (post-binary) multispecies world? To live-with and embody ethical (environmental) theory in daily life? What does it feel like to habitually shift our modes of attention, and attune to the world[s] around us in a different way? To cultivate different scales and paces and tempos of relating—here and now, and all of the time? To truly de-center our human-ness, our anthropocentric ideals in favour of a radically broadened plane of multispecies coexistence; embeddedness; co-constitution? And what of my western euro-centric language that at once limits and defines?

I can't recall all the ways I have learned to shift my view; or the precise learnings that have arrived along the way. I can't define the corporeal sensibilities that have been honed and deepened, or the subtle ways I find myself able to attune, *daily*. Just that it is so. And that this process—the stories I have brushed up against, and the conversations with others (ongoing)—has transformed the way I physically move through the world. Though most of these embodied learnings are beyond my wordiness at this time (almost to a comical degree), and I have yet to assemble them into a more coherent version of this story, what I *can* offer is an illustrated map of how I spend my day; a lexicon for praxis.[38] This praxis is not really very profound, and has never required a complex methodology. But it is mine. Perhaps it might serve as a starting point for others too.

•<:>•

First, I walk.
And I wonder along the way.

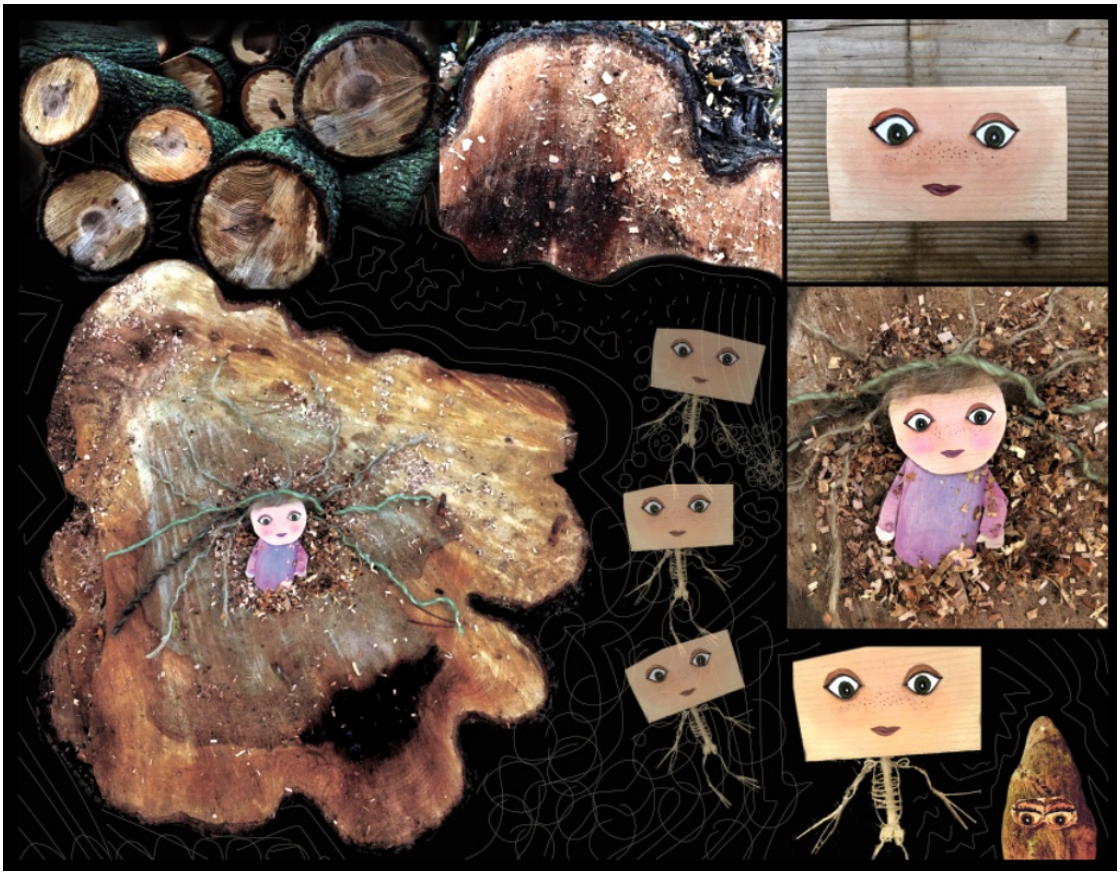
I think about the way the trees inhabit my neighbourhood more than many of my human neighbours do. I think about what it might look like from their perspective.

[38] The images in this section are purposefully not captioned or numbered because they are part of the lexicon.

I get drawn into plant worlds.

I look again to the trees. I mourn the loss of many elders in my neighbourhood.

I think about all they do for us.



And how we might begin to do more, in turn, for them.

I walk so I can process these thoughts, but I also walk because my dogs (one has cat-like sensibilities) have swayed me.

I follow the pace they set as they lead me along our path.

I attend.

I observe.

I attune.

I adjust.

I listen.

Walking with and for and through them has taught me as much as I know. Haraway (2003) writes, “Dogs are about the inescapable, contradictory story of relationships—co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners pre-exist the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all. Historical specificity and contingent mutability rule all the way down, into nature and culture, into naturecultures” (p. 12).

Each day, over the past year, I have invited my thoughts out into the world as I walk; allowing my worries, my stories, my ethical contemplations, to ‘travel’ as I move. In a way, my practice of mindful walking (much like my yoga practice) has allowed me to adjust my stride, giving me space where others may have none. In Rebecca Solnit’s words (2001), “I like walking because it is slow, and I suspect that the mind, like the feet, works at about three miles an hour. If this is so, then modern life is moving faster than the speed of thought, or thoughtfulness” (p. 10). It’s hard to believe—given the pace of city life, or really any life today in 2019—that Solnit wrote this 18 years ago. With Solnit I find,

> “The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an

> odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it. A new thought often seems like a feature of the landscape that was there all along, as though thinking were traveling rather than making. And so one aspect of the history of walking is the history of thinking made concrete—for the motions of the mind cannot be traced, but those of the feet can" (Solnit, 2001, p. 5-6).

The bulk of my praxis, for now, has come through walking and listening, attending to multispecies companions, and being drawn in by plants. It is always a dance of thinking-walking-wording-sensing-relating; on repeat but never the same. But there are other parts too. When I feel like the Land speaks, for instance, I record it. I try to be respectful—as respectful as I can be in my humanness—and remember that I am often a visitor in others worlds.

I try to remember that what is unknown to me, is likely known to someone else.

I reflect and engage in mindful activity along multiple lines…

Walking - bodily adjustment, movement

Listening - sound walks, music, all species languages and stories

Observing - witnessing, noticing, attuning, attending, sensing

Thinking-making - creative attentiveness

Searching - continual questioning, partiality, patterns

Slowing-Making Space - comes with sense adjustment

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I live at tree level. Up in the flight path of a lively soaring community. At my desk, my attention lifts to the group of birds sitting in the tree. Purposeful articulation, perhaps play, or guarding, or storytelling, or sharing, or gathering. I don't know what's happening, and I don't think I ever will. I don't try to impose my understanding. I listen. I sense their rhythmic gestures. As I get up out of my chair to marvel at the stillness of their bodies against the dull sky, I see another body that dwarfs their little black silhouettes. Perched on another branch is what looks like a plump red railed hawk. They all sit and wait, and hold their places longer than I am able to observe. Watching from my perch, in the middle of a grey November afternoon, gives me a sense of calm. I am happy to see you Hawk. I am glad that you are here. Alongside a grief for all those suffering

or displaced, part of my ethical imagining is about being glad for the bodies that are. That continue to be.

~.~

As I have learned, the embodied re-patterning of oneself towards worlds otherwise (Haraway, 2016) is a constant negotiation; a continual practice not only of attending and attuning, on repeat, but of *remembering* to slow (human) time enough that I might begin to notice the others with whom I share my place. It is, undoubtedly, a *praxis*. It lives in the things we include and exclude from our days, and in the ways we tell and *listen to* stories about our worlds. It is a dance of bodily aware-ness. It is about habitually experimenting with modes of attention, gradually committing ourselves to an awareness of other paces and tempos and scales (Myers, 2017).[39] It is about opening to something unlike ourselves without presuming to claim or know it first. Perhaps above all, it is about becoming witness to the sensuous fabric of our experiences and the specificity of our many interrelations.

[39] All interviewees discussed ethical transformation as a process of embodied negotiation, and as rooted in daily practice.

Thinking-making: an in-conclusion

> *"There is no 'I' that exists outside of the diffraction pattern, observing it, telling its story. In an important sense, this story in its ongoing (re)patterning is (re)(con)figuring me. 'I' am neither outside nor inside; 'I' am of the diffraction pattern. Or rather, this 'I' that is not 'me' alone and never was, that is always already multiply dispersed and diffracted throughout spacetime (mattering), including in this paper, in its ongoing being-becoming..." - Karen Barad (2014, p. 181-182)*

Image 25. Thinking-making

How interesting that upon thinking to myself about 'best laid plans' (see p. 8), I was prompted to visit the poem from which this sentiment draws. The poem, by Robbie Burns, is called *To a Mouse, on Turning Her Up in Her Nest With the Plough* (*November, 1785).* The story goes that Burns wrote the poem immediately following the literal 'turning up' of a mouse's nest with a plough, which the mouse needed in order to survive the winter. Apparently, he penned it from start to finish with plough still in hand. The poem reads, in part:

> *…I'm truly sorry man's dominion / Has broken Nature's social union, / And justifies that ill opinion / Which makes you startle / At me, your poor, earth-born companion / And fellow mortal! …Now you are turned out,/ for all your trouble,/ Without house or holding,/ To endure the winter's sleety dribble, / And hoar-frost cold./ But Mouse, you are not alone, / In proving foresight may be vain: / The best laid schemes of mice and men / Go often askew, / And leave us nothing but grief and pain, / For promised joy! / Still you are blessed, compared with me! / The present only touches you: / But oh! I backward cast my eye, / On prospects dreary! / And forward, though I cannot see, / I guess and fear!* (Burns, 1785).

A perfect instance of negotiating ethics through art. In the dark of hopelessness, how easy it is to think that 'no one' has ever expressed multispecies ethics in art, or that ethical multispecies imaginings are somehow rare. Yet this is a poem from 1785! And just like that I am given hope in the form of a story shared; and reminded that there have always been (and will always be) people attuning to their relational connections in the world.

<•>

As my response to the trouble of messy ethical worlds, this creative process has served as a conduit for my "challenge of vision and sensibility… [perhaps sparking] new ways of conceiving, engaging, and expressing the felt impasses of the present" (Howe & Pandian, 2016, n.p.). Thinking creatively, imaginatively, with photography and art, I collected rich narrative data that perhaps"[goes] beyond a narrow focus on discourse into the realm of perception, experience, and spatial and embodied ways of knowing" (Gubrium & Harper, 2013, p. 71). While the form that environmental art can take (a term I use loosely) is broad, and the definitions thin, this project serves only as a shallow and narrow description of its latent potentiality.

Thinking and making—tinkering with matter of the mind and that of the more physical stuff—are entirely bound up together, but it is the thinking, for me, that can (and did) get in the way.

As I write this paper, the images become touchstones for my thoughts. When the words on the page blur together, the images break up the physical space, once again, allowing the thoughts to breathe. And perhaps that's part of my impulse as well: the simple de-uniform-ization of academic texts. Indeed I sometimes think that those of us who have lived some form of mental, cognitive, or physical dis/order, are perhaps more inclined to wonder about how our bodily configurations can and do rearrange ours and others' experiences in the world(s). Perhaps my flare, my cognitive difference, is part of my ability to attend. Perhaps the rules of engagement have always been different for me.

And still, my mind—this paper—co-exists within a much broader, body-world force (Barad, 2007). And it's not just *my* body that's involved. As Karen Barad (2003) notes, "'humans' are part of the world-body space in its dynamic structuration" (p. 829); with the bodies of others, overlapping, expressing their own bodily relatings; how our bodies and worlds hang together—how they extend themselves into a perceptual vision of the world, how they themselves co-create worlds of their own, and then co-constitute the worlds of which I am a part (and not apart). These relations—our embodied state of relationality—is not something *to be learned*, but rather something to be noticed; for it is *always already experienced and embodied*, whether we notice it or not.

If we are to learn to live well with our multispecies communities—to shift our ethical orientations to incorporate their value—perhaps the key is just to show up with what we have, and bear witness to the relations that are enduring, that are here. Perhaps it is this kind of 'arts of living-with' that is, in fact, my ethic of hope.

An End.
But definitely not The end.

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