

Simple Gifts:
Performing Place in Suburbia

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ABSTRACT

Political theorist Jane Bennett, renowned for her work on ethics and the environment, brings our gaze from the human experience of things to things themselves. In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett theorizes an inherent vitality of materiality and promotes a non-binary approach between animal and human, organic and inorganic, matter and life, in favour of the vibrancy of matter. The thesis addresses these concepts through material distinction, performance, and preference of stage. The work is situated on a suburban front lawn and consist of foraged organic and inorganic materials that are incorporated with worms and open to the elements. My thesis examines the performance of staged sculptures on a suburban front lawn. Through creative investigation and multidisciplinary research in installation art, twentieth-century Western theatre development, and philosophy, I intend to illustrate how art can arise from place and address current artistic and environmental thought.

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METHODOLOGY

Throughout my Master of Fine Art at York University, I learned about the complex and dynamic nature of performance, art, and design. Through courses in sustainable design and contemporary theatre, my approach to design and art making have changed dramatically. It has shifted from traditional, ornate set designs to a critical approach that breaks down all elements of staging and questions what is to be staged. I now view myself entangled in the roles of artist, designer, and performance facilitator. I realize and embrace the hybridity of art installation, performance, and landscape architecture.

I chose to create a thesis project that combined the concepts of Non-Human Performance, Post Dramatic and Regenerative Theatre praxis, theories of Vibrant Matter, New Materialism, and Ecoscenography. Also, I have incorporated my own thoughts around creating art from place. Guided by these principles, my initial research began with a general overview of the arc of twentieth-century Western Theatre. To ground myself in current theatrical thought, it seemed necessary to understand contemporary theatre and its recent history. I began to research the work of turn of the century realist playwrights, most notably, Chekov. I then moved to Brecht and his contemporaries who were working against Realism towards more expressionistic work and who acknowledged the audience as active participants. Finally, I looked at the Post Dramatic work of Romeo Castellucci's theatre of ruination and a movement towards Relational and Regenerative work.

In Chapter 1: *Realism/Ruination and Regeneration*, I examine the shift from drama as the driver of theatre work to a focus on character development and the exploration of human

psychology and emotion, to a more self-conscious breakdown of all elements of theatre, including staging and design and, finally, a Post Dramatic Theatre of ruination.

At this point in my research, I saw the greatest potential for myself as an artist. Out of the theatre of ruination lies the potential for regenerative work. This potential was coupled with the discovery of the levelling of all elements of theatre and the merging of art installation and performance. Through this investigation it became clear to me that my work as a designer could be more than designing ornate, traditional sets. I began to see myself as an artist entangled in the worlds of performance, design, art installation, and philosophy. I wanted to explore Non-Human Performance and stage ecosystems.

Following my research into theories of Western theatre, I explored how contemporary artists have worked to express ecosystems. In Chapter Two: *Non-Human Performance: Staging Ecosystems*, I researched artists who were staging ecosystems conceptually. Having situated myself in a contemporary theatre context, and buoyed by a multidisciplinary approach, I was drawn to research artists who are considered early eco-artists and conceptual artists embedded in material art and design. I embarked upon this research for two reasons. First, to merge the thesis' theoretical framework and the work of modern and contemporary artists in order to explore how other artists approach their materials, concepts, and philosophy. My second reason was to insert myself as an artist in the continuum of contemporary art practice and create work that is informed, relevant, and non-derivative.

Moving from research that focused on artists' conceptualization of ecosystems, I look at why artists *should* explore ecosystems. In Chapter Three: Polity/ Spiritual/Unsentimental, I examine the moral and spiritual aspects of art and performance. I discuss the theories of Barbara Brown Taylor, Joseph Beuys, Jonathan Rowson, and Jane Bennet and how their ideas shaped

aspects of the thesis. In particular, I look at the need for ritual, how it enriches artwork, and how it aids in the acknowledgement of our environmental crisis.

Poised to materialize the research, and with knowledge gained through experimentation, my focus turned towards creating *The Vessels*. In Chapter Four: *The Vessels*, my process of creating *The Vessels* is examined. I discuss my practice of process-driven work married with long-term research, my consultation with professors and contemporaries, time, and the necessity of staying home during the pandemic.

After *The Vessels* were installed, I returned to research and observation. I was curious about the sense of time the piece invokes because of its potential of producing oak seedlings and, ideally, oak trees. I began to think about time from a non-human perspective and was curious about the life span of *The Vessels* themselves. I explore the concept of the work and its materials having their own agency. In Chapter Five: *Plant Time*, I delve into plant time and plant expression versus aesthetic representation, which confirms the relevance of Non-Human Performance. Also, I explicate current theories around performance and the environment.

In the final section of my thesis document, *Epilogue: Reflection*, I consider the performance of *The Vessels* on the lawn and how working over a long period of time allowed research and time to drive my work. I have become comfortable with *The Vessels* endlessness and have come to appreciate their exterior decay as emergence. They evoke my own curiosity as well as the curiosity of my family, my neighbors, and even city workers. They spark discussion and bemusement.

OBJECTIVES

My objectives are to connect the abstract concepts around Non-Human Performance, Vibrant Matter, Post Dramatic Theatre, and New Materialism with the practical implementation of those concepts in a performance of staged sculptures on a suburban front lawn. Below are the objectives I sought to achieve for my process and the performance.

The objectives for my thesis project are:

- (1) Challenge my usual creative approach of early conceptualization and process-driven work and allow research, contemplation, time, and reflection to drive my work.
- (2) Discover a variety of theories, methods, and forms that manifest the hybridity between installation art and theatre.
- (3) Expand my knowledge of contemporary art, performance and practice, and, to apply that knowledge to the thesis.
- (4) Create work that embraces metamorphosis and a sense of time over a long span.
- (5) Develop both a vocabulary to express ideas, and a theoretical and practical framework to structure the thesis.

Chapter 1: *Realism/Ruin/Regeneration*

It is when a house is burning, that one can see its structure, the reason for its standing. ~Romeo Castellucci

In my analysis of staged ecosystems, I found similarities in the trajectories of twentieth-century Western theatre and the development of the theories of Vibrant Matter and New Materialism. Also, I saw a similar evolution with installation art, staged sculpture, and a broader, more inclusive theatre. Through a broad inquiry into the evolution of Western theatre in the twentieth century, I became aware of the supposed death of character and a re-evaluation of *all* elements of staged theatre. It shattered my sentimental notions of theatre and my love of ‘realism’. The concept of a non-hierarchical approach to all elements on stage, including the dramaturgy and the scenography, was a revelation. The scales fell from my eyes. Not only did it change my whole way of thinking about theatre and scenography, but it also encouraged me to entangle my role as artist, designer, and facilitator of staged sculptures and Non-Human Performance in a clear, unsentimental way. The theatre of realism and the primacy of character moved toward a less character-focused approach. My thesis reflects this approach because it eschews a human-centric performance for a non-human, material expression. The thesis is influenced by the trajectory of twentieth century theatre development and artists interested in staging ecosystems. It helped me envision new potentials for performance and installation art, and my roles as artist, designer, and performer.

My initial inquiry came out of the character-driven work of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century and led me to ask some questions: Can character-driven theatre survive beyond the death of character-driven work? Has character survived? I explored how writers like Chekhov portrayed character in new ways, using understatement, complexity, and contradiction. Moreover, I looked at the distancing effects of Brechtian Epic Theatre and how Post Dramatic

Theatre further decoupled plot and character from the theatrical event. Finally, I show how contemporary installation and theatre work offers the opportunity to rehabilitate character in the theatre by abolishing it entirely, making both the observer and the vitality of the materials characters. It is from this point of ruination and regeneration that I find the most potential for relevant contemporary work. Through ruination we can begin to regenerate the stage by staging ecosystems.

Through an examination of the trajectory of theatre from character-driven realism to the theatre of ruination, I found a theatre of regeneration and the potential for broader engagement. It offered a wider scope of materials and a sense of engagement beyond traditional Western theatres and art galleries towards a non-hierarchical, non-human centred theatre of discovery, at place, at home, on the front lawn.

The innovative work of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries mined the depth of character. Anton Chekhov is one such writer who, “[rewrote] the aesthetic of theatrical realism through a drama of understatement, indirection and psychological nuance...His major plays [offered] a new vision of the relationship between theater and everyday life.” (Gainor, 345) There is a purity about the unselfconsciousness of the writing and the delicacy with which the characters are compassionately portrayed.

The writing of this era is striking in its rawness and in the vulnerability of the characters. The way in which the revelation of character drives the plot requires the audience to pay attention to the character, to empathize, and to see their human complexity. According to Michael Manheim in *Vital Contradictions*,

“[r]ather than emphasizing plot and intrigue, [these playwrights] emphasized the contradictory ways in which their people think and behave, particularly in stressful situations. Their major characters are often inconsistent because that is the way people are. And rather than taking away from these figures, these inconsistencies add to their

convincing qualities. One might say these playwrights reinvent the human...[and that a] multiplicity of contradictory motives strengthened their characters as dramatic figures and deepened the plays in which the characters appear.” (Manheim, 15)

The work is less about the action of the play and more about revealing complex characters from a psychological, political, and personal point of view. It still adheres to the Aristotelian rules of theatre but plays with the rules of classic theatre by placing the emphasis on character rather than plot. Aristotle said that “... there could not be a tragedy without action, but there could be one without character.” (Aristotle, *Poetics*) Chekhov broke with the classical rules of theatre and allowed character to drive the narrative.

The complexity of Chekov’s characters is apparent from their interactions with one another and from the clear lack of moral judgement by the author. They are portrayed honestly and their reactions to situations and one another is often unflattering. The characters are seen as hypocritical, cruel, and, in turn, generous -- much like the way people really are. Chekhov wrote:

“The demand is made that the hero and heroine should be dramatically effective. But in life people do not shoot themselves, or hang themselves, or fall in love, or deliver themselves of clever sayings every minute. They spend most of their time eating, drinking, running after women or men, talking nonsense. It is therefore necessary that this should be shown on the stage. A play ought to be written in which the people should come and go, dine, talk of the weather, or play cards, not because the author wants it but because that is what happens in real life. Life on the stage should be as it really is, and the people, too, should be as they are and not on stilts.” (Gainor, 347)

The work asks that we enter the nuanced and understated world of these characters. Chekhov’s realism allows one to be swept up into the world of the characters and their inner workings. He largely rejected the melodrama of his time in favor of a non-moralistic work that plunges the depths of human psychology. His work has a confidence and unselfconsciousness, unlike post-realism work, which becomes conscious of itself as a medium with its tendency to deconstruct the play. Here I find another similarity between the trajectory of twentieth-century Western

theatre and the thesis. Like Chekov, scientist and artist Natalie Jeremijenko, academic and artist Tanya Beer, and theorist Jane Bennett (who I will discuss) reject the melodramatic, moralistic work of some eco-artists, and instead ask “what can one do?” Only by an honest, objective approach that incorporates all materials can we come to terms with the current environmental crisis and an understanding of contemporary approaches to materials. It is a form of realism akin to Chekov’s unflinching character portrayal. Their work is honest about our current situation, and they directly reflect the abject reality through their choice of material and preference of stage, among other choices.

The Cherry Orchard, by Anton Chekhov is filled with complex, fragile, and vulnerable characters. Their personalities are so deeply investigated that one feels an attachment to and familiarity with them. We empathize with the characters as we witness their humanity. In that way, they carry the play and give resonance to the work. I wanted to tap into this empathy of character and extend it to the materials I chose for *The Vessels*.

One character that exemplifies Chekov’s understated realism is Liubov Ranyevskaya. In Act III of the *Cherry Orchard*, the protagonist, is at a dance on the estate awaiting news about whether or not the cherry orchard has been sold. She pleads with Petya Trofimov, a graduate student and her son’s former tutor, to not tease her adopted daughter, Varya, who wishes she had money so she could give it all away and live in a nunnery. Petya mocks her with, “What bliss!” Liubov says, “[s]ave me, Petya: say something to me.” He responds and gently chastises her, claiming she must look truth straight in the face. She responds by attacking his youth and idealism and appeals to his sense of generosity. The dynamics shift rapidly as Liubov jumps from defending her daughter, to appealing for help, and then to attacking Petya’s lack of life experience. As in real life, it reveals the motivations and sharper edges of personality.

“What truth?”, asks Liubov Ranyevskaya, “[y]ou can see what’s truth, and what’s untruth, but I seem to have lost the power of vision; I see nothing. You settle every important question so boldly; but tell me, Petya, isn’t that because you’re young, because you have never solved any question of your own as yet by suffering?... You are bolder, honester, deeper than we are, but reflect, show me just a finger’s breadth of consideration, take pity on me...I love this house; without the cherry orchard my life has no meaning for me...My little boy drown here [crying] Be gentle with me, dear, kind Petya.” (Gainor, 376)

She asks Petya to go beyond his idealism and youth to look beyond himself and empathize, appealing to his better self, to empathize beyond his own moral outlook and see her perspective and her suffering, and to try and understand her impassioned stance. Liubov Ranyevskaya, requires Petya to think beyond a dualistic mindset of us-and-them/right-and-wrong and urges him to see the emotional ties and social traditions that surround the cherry orchard. She speaks in terms of an ecology of the cherry orchard and how it ties her family and the people of the village to place - psychologically, politically, and personally.

On playing the role of Liubov Ranyevskaya, Judi Dench said,

“I found Ranevskaya to be much more feckless, much more vain, much sharper, unkind, than I'd ever seen before. We've been criticized for a lack of sentiment, but that's much more what Chekhov is writing about. I think you should feel a twinge for the characters, but in actual fact feel as if it's going to be a clean sweep: this was, remember, written 17 years before the Revolution.” (Wolf, 5)

The people are psychologically tied to their place in a dying social order, clinging to a way of life that is crumbling around them -- not unlike our current climate crisis and the democratization of matter. Just as Chekov mined the depth of character, I wanted to extend this empathy to all materials and the process of decomposition. I want to allow the materials to decompose, regenerate, metamorphosize, and express themselves. Historically, biological plant material has been viewed from a purely aesthetic and a binary (human to plant) position. My work aspires to present and elevate the expression of the materials over the aesthetic representation. *The Vessels* exist on a horizontal scale with all matter across species and across

materials. Like Brecht and his distancing effect (which will be discussed in more detail later) all elements are equal.

The compassion with which Chekhov writes these characters speaks to his generosity. While he unsentimentally portrays this slice of humanity, he exhibits empathy for the human condition. He holds a mirror up to the fragility and complexity of the human personality and asks the audience to bear witness to the characters humanity, and their behaviour under duress.

Chekhov and his contemporaries challenged the traditional structures of theatre by emphasizing character over plot, abandoning a moral outlook, rejecting melodrama and romanticism, and moving away from the dominance of sentiment. Eventually these devices led to a further deconstruction of traditional theatre. These changes in theatre were happening alongside huge social and political upheaval in the western world and may be seen as a reflection of the burgeoning sense of self, of the individual and their relationship to their society.

Chekov's shift to character as the driver of plot, and his sympathetic portrayal of land and its people, affected my work in ways I couldn't comprehend at the time. His emphasis on interdependence and entanglement helped me to see how theatre is a dynamic organism and that it must evolve in order to remain relevant.

Within the first decades of the twentieth century, World War I occurred, and theatre evolved into an expressionist and Deconstructionist/Epic Theatre movement with the works of Bertolt Brecht and his contemporaries. When the social, economic, and political order is collapsing, it makes sense that art and, in this case, theatre, reflect this change. Bertold Brecht appeals to the audience's intellect and rejects the notion that the spectator is a passive emotional receptor. Epic Theatre asks that the theatre audience shift from simply having an experience to gaining knowledge. It asserts that rather than merely holding up a mirror to society, art can

change society. As Brecht states, “[a]rt is not a mirror to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.” (Brecht, 1964) This shift is achieved by the devices of *Verfremdungseffekt* (Defamiliarization Effect): making strange and distancing. “Brecht’s theory of estrangement, of course, denied the audience a comforting ‘fix’ on the characters, and he insisted that the actor, like a spectator to his own performance, see himself representing a social type, rather than becoming absorbed in a character.” (Homan, 78) The Brechtian technique known as *Gestus*,

“... is a clear character gesture or movement used by the actor that captures a moment or attitude rather than delving into emotion. So, every gesture was important... Could the audience tell by the actor’s gestures alone what was happening in the scene? Brecht didn’t want the actors to be the character onstage, only to show them as a type of person.” (Spass and Gestus, 2021)

Gestus forced the audience to separate the characters from the actors and to observe rather than experience.

In this way, Brecht attempts to redefine the social function of theatre. He believes theatre can change the world. Despite the distancing effect and the observational attempts of the *gest*, the persistence of character remains.

“...[A]s soon as the spectator sees Mother Courage on stage, he models her mind in his own mind in order to enter the world of war Brecht has depicted. ...Having modeled Mother Courage’s mind, the audience immediately identifies with her unconsciously, with the character of Mother Courage not with the actress who plays her role. That is what Brecht does not wish to happen! (Ladani and Parandeh, 4310)

We recognize ourselves in Mother Courage. She is complex and hypocritical. We know people like her. She is sympathetic in her weakness and contradictions. There remains an emotional attachment to the play and the characters, not in spite of the objectivity espoused by Brecht but because of it. The experience is felt, and knowledge is gained.

Brecht’s Epic Theatre is an evolution in Western theatre. Chekhov and his contemporaries began to play with the classic structures of theatre while Epic Theatre began to

deconstruct Western Theatre, and yet, character persists. As the twentieth century moves into the second half, there is a synthesis of the elements of the earlier century into the Post Dramatic.

The Post Dramatic, as described by Lehmann, is a world no longer represented as “a surveyable whole.” (Lehmann, 23) Post Dramatic acknowledges the drifting apart of drama from theatre, where all elements on stage are equal and narrative does not dominate. It is a self-conscious form of theatre. Unlike the work of the realists who remained mainly uncritical or unconscious of the form of theatre, but who were not entirely as didactic as Brecht, it represents a break from drama. While it does not totally abandon drama, as character and plot may still appear, it is equal to all the other elements.

This further attempt to abandon character as a main theatrical element reinforced my growing sense of the relevance of Non-Human Performance and staging ecosystems. However, character persisted. I wanted to explore what a character could be, how it could be staged, and where it could be staged.

One may look to the work of Romeo Castellucci for an example of the Post Dramatic. He directs, writes, stages, and designs his productions. His work furthers the deconstruction of Brecht’s Epic Theatre in that what is on stage appears decayed and is often grotesque. It is a deconstruction to the point of ruins, but beautiful in its ruination. There is a sumptuousness in the staging of the ruination and primacy of the body that is painterly and composed.

“The aesthetic universe that the company [Societas Raffaello Sanzio (SRS)] and its leading director Romeo Castellucci have been developing from the 1980s onwards is indeed marked by an unrelenting attempt to shatter the boundaries of theatrical representation, inaugurating what can be considered a genuine theatre of ruins. Less noted, however, is that Castellucci exploits ruination not only as a gesture of destruction but also as an act of creation.” (Laet, Cassiers, 18)



Figure 1: Romeo Castellucci's *Oresteia*

It is from this point of ruination, with its regenerative possibilities, that I find the most potential for relevant contemporary work.

Out of the ruination of the work of SRS, we can begin to regenerate the stage by staging ecosystems. We can engage with the global environmental crisis and create work that is relevant to our time and place. We can turn the lens of the theatre onto ecosystems, such as a suburban neighbourhood. We can incorporate the expanding definition of theatre to encompass all matter. We can begin to question and explore whether non-human forms can be characters. For example, we can ask questions like: “can a tree be a character on stage?” Building on the work of Brecht and his audience engagement, we ask the audience to come on stage and into the forest; to become part of the play and to engage with the forest. Like Liubov Ranevskaya, who asks us to widen our scope of empathy, we can ask the audience to recognize themselves as part of the ecosystem. The audience both experiences interdependence and comes away with a more intimate knowledge of it. The Post Dramatic posits that the stage cannot be a surveyable whole, but we can widen the scope of what we do stage.

As drama and theatre continue to live in somewhat independent spheres, it's possible to merge the world of Postmodern art installation and Post Dramatic Theatre. My work builds on

the theories of early Post Dramatic Theatre theorists like artist Robert Wilson, who was heavily influenced by Gertrude Stein's theories of Landscape Theatre, who created work "...that thinks of theatre, stage and text rather like a landscape". (Lehmann, 62). It is here that I see myself as a theatre artist. I am aware of the distinction made between drama and theatre and see the world of theatre and installation art merging. Drama, Lehmann argues, "...is characterized by narrative, by dialectics." Post Dramatic theatre, in contrast, occurs "...when the progression of a story with its internal logic no longer forms the centre, when composition is no longer experienced as an organizing quality but as an artificially imposed 'manufacture'". (Haydon, 2008)

In Post Dramatic theatre art, there is a non-hierarchical approach to all elements of the stage, a de-emphasizing of drama and words, and an approach to the work as a landscape, where actors are elements of sculpture and come together to create a landscape. My research into the theatre movement was revelatory. It allows all elements of theatre to be equal. This finding runs parallel to research of artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries turning towards a new materialist approach to their work where all matter is considered valid for artmaking.

The de-emphasis on actors confirmed the idea that character was not quite dead but just de-emphasized, and that what can be considered a character has broadened. In this way, I felt emboldened to explore staging trees or forests. It was also at this point that I began to see a type of hybridity between Post Dramatic Theatre and art installation. Like Robert Wilson whose, "Non-Hierarchical structure, aural and visual elements, stress on experience, physical characterization and use of continuous present...Wilson approached his space architecturally, using light and actors to sculpt his stage, transforming his stage space into a landscape. (Gaddam, 2019) Enlightened and challenged by the ideas of Post Dramatic Theatre theory and the work coming out of the Theatre of Ruins, I continued to research artists working within the

trajectory of contemporary theatre. Partly out of personal interest, and in a chronological way, I explored artists working with the ideas of regeneration and relation.

From the point of ruination comes the act of regeneration. The work of Rirkrit Tiravanija exemplifies the idea of Relational art. His works are acts of theatre wherein the audience members become the characters. They are asked to both engage socially with the piece and to be in relation with one another.

“Tiravanija has aligned his artistic production with an ethic of social engagement, often inviting viewers to inhabit and activate his work. In one of his best-known series, begun with *pad thai* (1990) at the Paula Allen Gallery in New York, Tiravanija rejected traditional art objects altogether and instead cooked and served food for exhibition visitors. For his second solo exhibition in New York, held at 303 Gallery in 1992, Tiravanija filled the white rooms with stacks of cultural cast-offs, rendering the space into what seemed like a storage facility, demoting the primacy of the revered art object.” (Guggenheim, 2021)

It is the idea of being in relation with one another where I see the possibility of regeneration. At this point in my research, I committed to stage an ecosystem, one where we recognize our interdependence. What that system would be was still unclear, but I wanted to be working from a non-hierarchical approach to staging, seeing myself as the artist and designer, and deemphasizing words, drama, and the idea that characters must be human. It was the beginning of my idea to stage ecosystems and Non-Human Performances.

I started to think about where the audience members, as characters, were situated in a staged ecosystem. I imagined audience members who are actively participating. For example, they could be responsible to keep pedaling a bicycle to generate enough power to keep the stage lights on and to keep a staged forest alive. In this scenario, the audience is asked to water the forest, interact with, or even converse with the biology. In this way, we create a drama in the sense that the “play” takes place as audience members participate in the maintenance and care of the forest and by relating with the work and each other. By rejecting elaborate stage design, and

thereby reducing theatre's carbon footprint, we create relevant work that can be experienced and observed. Like Tiravanija, we can explore the idea of the "revered object" by eliminating traditional staging and making the work accessible and part of the critique of the late-capitalist, consumerist, disposable society.

From the humanity of character in Chekov, to the self-consciousness of Brechtian Epic Theatre and the Post Dramatic, with its equalization of character, plot, and of all staged elements, we move into relational and regenerative work. We can create a relevant evolution of theatre and recognize our interdependence with our fragile ecosystems. We can move beyond the distancing and defamiliarizing of contemporary work into a relational and socially responsible work that acknowledges both our own and our environment's interdependence and vulnerability.

Chapter 2: Non-Human Performance - Staging Ecosystems

The forest is alive and asks us to participate. ~Eno and Burns

As my interest in Non-Human Performance and staging ecosystems grew, I experimented with materials found within my own yard and neighbourhood. I looked seriously and carefully at the forest behind my house -- a small, protected forest of mostly oaks. Through my research, I learned that the staging of a forest was done recently on a football pitch in Germany by the artist Klaus Littman.



Figure 2: Klaus Littmann's *For Forest*

It was heartening to know that this concept and these materials were regarded as valid materials for art and performance. As the idea of staging a forest or ecosystem was impractical, not to mention unsustainable and disruptive, I looked to materials at hand. I was also encouraged by my advisors to find my own voice and imagery. I decided to not disturb nature or attempt to stage a simulation. Considering the climate crisis, is it ethical to stage a large-scale performance? I asked, “What is already performing right in front of me?” Also, in terms of

materials, they were available, freely given and there for examination, valid and worthy of art and performance.

At the same time, I am interested in the notion of staging nothing or *Nothingness*. I suppose this was also an exercise in narrowing my focus and discerning what to stage, if anything. Is it a valid exercise to stage nothing? When attempting to stage nothing, are we not staging an absence on a stage and thereby giving the absence a presence? Is it a reactionary response to the excesses of installation art and staged performances? Can we move beyond our subjectivity and stage a void? Jacques Lacan, in a critique of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*, argues that the raven represents the lost object "attached to whatever is open, lacking, or gaping at the center of our desire." (Kelly, 2016) Because, according to Lacan, this concept names the void around which human subjectivity forms, and all subsequent desire turns -- art functions, in essence, to "[create] the void and thereby [introduces] the possibility of filling it." (Kelly, 2016) Rather than being reactionary or risking nihilism, I abandoned the idea of staging nothing. I remain intrigued by this concept and hope to explore it in the future. Even though I set aside the idea of staging nothing, it nonetheless informs my thesis in terms of deliberation, distillation, questioning human subjectivity, and through examination of "filling the void".

Having worked as a scenic artist for 15 years in theatre, I witnessed the enormous material consumption of most set designs, as well as the considerable waste at the end of a production. For my method, I wanted to adopt an ethos of harm reduction. In a media environment that offers a sea of choice and visual overload, and amidst an environmental crisis, do we need elaborate sets or mass material art installations? How little material can be used in the production of the work? Is the choice of minimalism an aesthetic choice as well as a choice that reinforces the ideas behind the piece? Can the work itself be an inquiry into the process?

I considered focusing on a portion of the forest by framing it with a red-string, three-dimensional frame to narrow focus and observe the performance of the forest, birds, squirrels, wild turkeys, and the changing of the seasons. The red string concept came from the idea of framing nothing, where the string represents the human subjectivity and egoistic intention of framing a space. The aesthetics of a red-string, three-dimensional rectangular prism, contrasted by the humbleness of the material, highlighted the futility of trying to frame a portion of the forest.

I am interested in the primacy of soil. Through model building and digital editing, I attempted to model a staged ecosystem of soil stratification. I planted grass seed and added worm. I wanted the root structure, worms, and grass seed to perform and to explore the effect of narrowing the focus with the red string framing device.

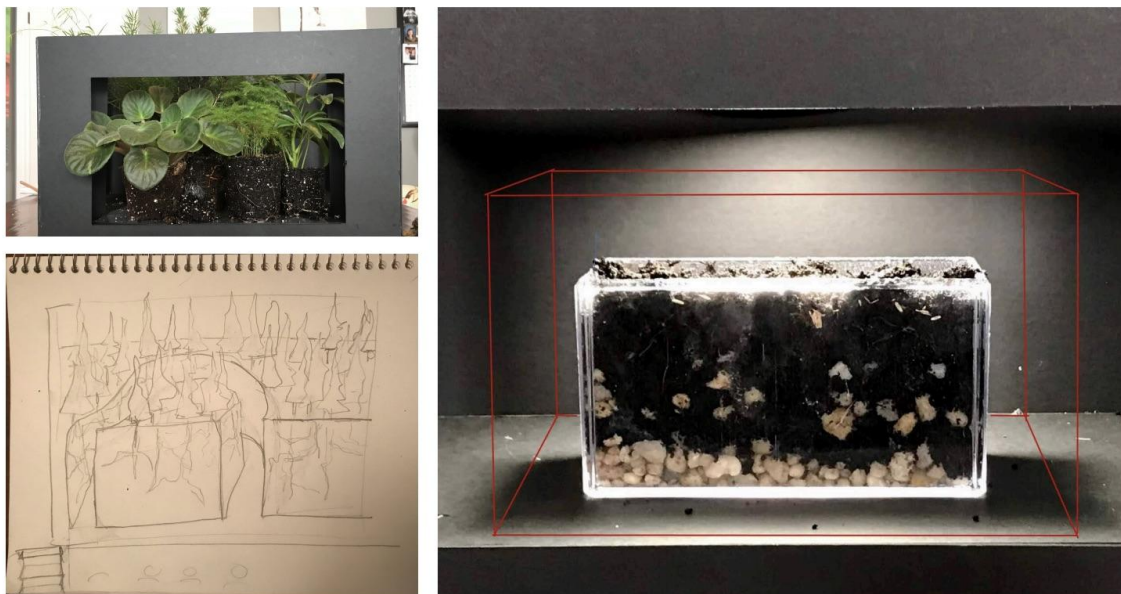


Figure 3: *Early Exploration of Non-Human Performance*

Eventually, I pulled back from this idea as my inquiry has been a deliberate attempt to counter human inclination to have an idea and then to find the evidence to justify the idea. Instead of following this approach, I abandoned the idea to allow my continuing research, rumination, and process to reveal the work that eventually manifested.

Another attempt to manifest the concept of staging ecosystems was a proposed installation at York university. The concept for this art installation is the elevation of soil, in our perception and our consideration.

Staged Ecosystems: Bedrock, is a conceptual work that holds the aesthetic and sacredness of soil up to the public. It lifts the soil out of the ground and allows the audience to see the dynamic nature of soil, its fragility, and the essential role that it plays in the existence of life on earth. The soil is offered up as foundational. The soil is encased in pillars of five various heights. Soil stratification would be visible and will reflect as much as possible the soil composition of the geographical region in which the installation takes place. Each pillar has a cluster of native species such as oak, pine, and maple seedlings. The soil comprises roughly three quarters of the pillar, and the seedlings the remaining quarter. The pillars are constructed out of plastic water bottles that are slightly altered to form a cylindrical shape, with a rebar frame for stability. An altar bench sits among the pillars and serves as a prop for contemplation, reflection, and stories of soil. The altar bench is constructed out of plastic water bottles. All water bottles are sourced on campus from recycling and garbage bins. A call out to the community of York University will be made to help amass the water bottles needed. If members of the community chose to participate in amassing the materials (plastic bottles) the work will become a collaborative work. The work is both a nominal participation and directed participation installation. Audience

members can simply observe the installation from a standing or seated position or sit among the pillars on the plastic bottle altar bench and contemplate or share stories.

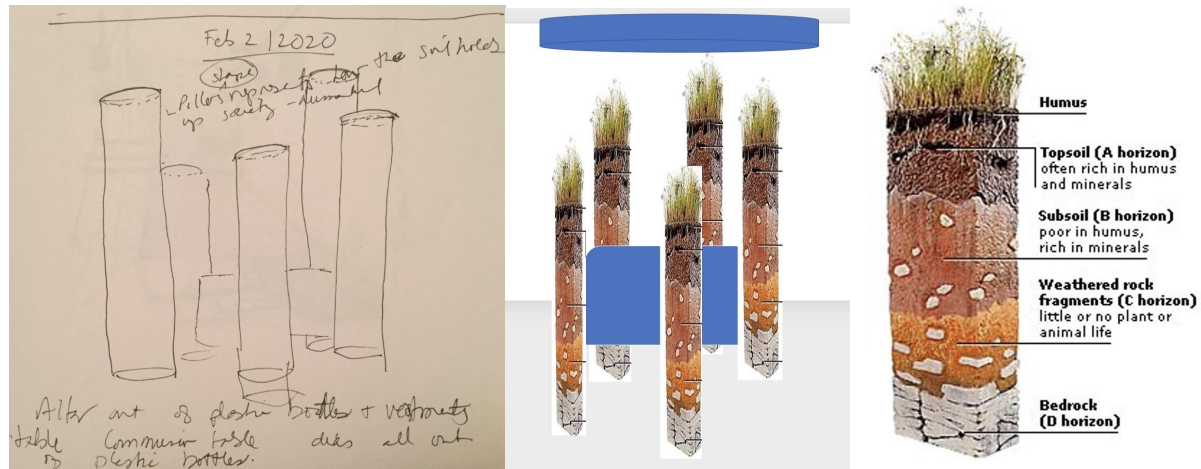


Figure 4: Sketches and Digital Renderings of Staged Eco-Systems Bedrock

Also, I researched artists who work with materials to address environmental problems. Collectively, they are known as New Materialists and Eco-Material artists. “Eco-Material artists are determined to avert the collapse of threatened ecosystems. Their shared approach is to reassert the primacy of materiality, which has been displaced by contemporary technologies and manufacturing protocols. They honour the sensory, ethical and pragmatic benefits of material interactions.” (Weintraub, xii). By asserting the primacy of materials, the artists deconstruct the disconnect between society and the environment. This disconnection has become a point of interest for my work. I wanted to address this disconnect by introducing a ritual aspect to my work. I think that ritual is required in order to accept and acknowledge the current state of the environment. The ritual element manifests itself in my work through stacking, an aesthetic of simple materials stacked to give them value and volume, similar to the felt sculptures of Joseph Beuys. The ritual stacking encourages an acknowledgement of degradation. This ritual element is further explored in the theories of Jonathan Rowson and Jane Bennett.



Figure 5: Joseph Beuys, *Brasilienfond (Brazilian Fond)*, 1979

I am inspired by the work of Helen and Newton Harrison's '*Survival Pieces*' from the early 1970's. One work, in particular, resonates with me: '*Hog Pasture*', 1971. Our detachment from the physical world, combined with human supremacy is reflected in the state of our environment. That is, the current ecological collapse is a consequence of our growing detachment from the physical and material world coupled with an anthropocentric worldview. We live in sterile, temperature-controlled environments in physical contact with manufactured and synthetic material that have little meaningful connection to anything or anyone beyond ourselves.



Figure 6: Helen and Newton Harrison's *Hog Pasture* 1971

It is this sense of detachment from the environment that Helen and Newton Harrison express in '*Hog Pasture*'. '*Survival Pieces*' established them as 'eco art' pioneers. While they ultimately rejected their early work because they felt it oversimplified ecosystems, their stark reduction of ecosystems created rich symbolic value in a striking and dynamic way. They pioneered the use of soil and biofunction, like waste, as valid materials and processes in art.

In '*Hog Pasture*', the Harrison's created an abstract farm ecosystem by constructing a rectangular wooden box with a light source hung above it. The soil used in the piece was made during a previous work entitled '*Earth Making Ritual*'. They regenerated degraded soil and planted grass that grew roughly half an inch per day. Unfortunately, the gallery in Miami did not allow the hog to participate in the original performance. However, in 2012, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles recreated the piece with the inclusion of Wilma the pig.



Figure 7: Hog Pasture Including Wilma the Pig

This piece was successful in distilling an ecosystem down to its essence. It was staged in a plain, stark way, and allowed for fresh perspectives. Something common, like soil, is seen as valuable and worthy of contemplation. Humans are not performing in the work itself, only participating as viewers. Instead, it is the performance of the soil (reclaimed and regenerated), the grass growing and feeding the pig, the process of photosynthesis, the pig contributing to the fertility of the soil through its waste, and a demonstration of how topsoil is stabilized by ruminants grazing.

By narrowing our view to a model scale of a pig farm, the viewer observes the interrelationship between light and the biology of the grass, the dependence of the pig on the grass for nourishment, and the contribution of the pig to the fertility of the soil. As viewers, we recognize our dependence on this system. Humans, with their usual attitude of superiority over the natural world, are reduced to observers. We recognize our non-dominance and our reliance on both the individual components and the whole, which functions as an ecosystem. In this way, the work is similar to New Materialists and Eco Material artists in that it reverses anthropomorphism and places materials and biology on a horizontal value scale. Helen Harrison

said that “the significance of the piece is what you see. All of a sudden people are looking at the environment in one way or another, and they’re looking differently. In other words, it’s bringing their attention in a way that is meaningful.” (Genzlinger, 2018) The ecosystem is elevated to art through abstraction and observation.

From a critical point of view, the ‘*Survival Pieces*’ are successful. It would be next to impossible to depict the complexity of an entire ecosystem, and it would likely lose its potency in a sea of didactic imagery and information. It is the minimalism and simplicity of the chosen material and objects that allow for the piece to resonate and encourage further consideration. Each piece that makes up the whole of the work shows a depth of understanding and consideration, and speaks to the deeper meaning of the piece while encouraging viewers to think without insulting their intelligence. Overall, it encourages the viewer to reconsider our food and to examine the processes, people, and environmental factors that produce it.

I found that as I experimented with my own ideas and materials, I concluded that I did not want to recreate or simulate a system. Rather, I wanted to symbolize an idea like Vibrant Matter through materials sourced from and performed in my immediate environment. Also, I formulated the idea of vessels, or an altar. Although I appreciated the simulation of an abstract ecosystem, I wanted to use what was already there, a practice I return to frequently -- using what you’ve got. One of my influences in the realm of “using what you’ve got” is my father, David Engstrom. My dad, the grandson of Finnish immigrants, was frugal and didn’t like to waste anything. He was a great example of resisting commercial, capitalist consumption and spoke often of the difference between needs and wants. There is an epic story in our family lore where my father and his beloved aunt and uncle built a camp and a Finnish sauna on the north shore of Lake Superior. The story is enriched by the fact that the entire camp and the sauna were built

from the remains of an abandoned logging camp on Verte Island. All the material was disassembled and rowed across the lake to be used for the “new” camp. The remote camp is called Kama and is now cared for by my brother. We enjoy the camp and its rich history, which is made richer through economy and the principle of “using what you’ve got”.

My dad showed me that most of what you need is already there. I extended this idea to my work as I foraged for materials and staged the work, in situ, close to where the materials were gathered. I began to see the materials performing themselves, in their own environment, on the front lawn. Aided by the artifice of *The Vessels*, the materials are contained in various presentations and in layers of transparency and opacity.

The idea of representing nothing seemed increasingly undoable as any framing is subjective. Can you observe nothing? A concession to the idea to stage nothing is to stage what is readily available with as little intrusion as possible. *The Vessels* are a microcosm staged on a front lawn. They represent how materials and elements are regularly “performing” in our environment. They are ephemeral and they metamorphosize. *The Vessels* draw our attention to this phenomenon, this dynamic sculpture always happening around us; a constant state of flux. This state of impermanence was explored by Joseph Beuys and his contemporaries during the Fluxus movement. More recently, Jane Bennet and her contemporaries speak to this in a manner of terms like *polity* and *emergence*. These theories will be discussed later in the document.

Joseph Beuys, a contemporary of the Harrisons, believed in the power of art to effect change: “I have come to the conclusion that there is no other possibility to do something for man other than through art...[a]rt alone makes life possible.” (Rosenthal, 36) Beuys places art alongside the importance society places on capital. In this way, art has spiritual value.

Beuys' work sits in the material world. He often chose both organic and inorganic materials and assembled them to convey a narrative. He explored the staging of sculpture. "Beuys relied upon thermal energy to indicate a transformation of 'thought power, will-power, powers of sensibility.'" (Weintraub, *To Life*, 65) Beuys worked with conventional materials like fat, honey, and grease because they melt under heat through the process of thermal exchange. He elevated common, sometimes grotesque, materials as valid for making art and transformed them. "He laid the dry snot picked from his nostril on a ledge of rock; carefully. For the rest let look who will," he said. (Rosenthal, 57) Analogous to Eco Material artists, Beuys did not accept a vertical value placement of materials.

Beuys elevated his materials' status by combining them with found industrial objects and displaying them in boxes or rooms and sometimes he added a performance as in *I like America, and America Likes Me*. He created a performance of staged sculptures with a sublimated human performance.



Figure 8: Joseph Beuys, *I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974

In *I Like America and America Likes Me* Beuys places himself in a closed room with a coyote. He sublimates himself to the performance of the coyote and newspapers inside the staged sculpture. He and the coyote remained in the room for three days. Each day multiple copies of the Wall Street Journal were brought into the performance. The coyote defecated and urinated on the newspapers. When he travelled from the airport to the museum Beuys wrapped himself in a felt cloak and explained why. “I wanted to isolate myself, insulate myself, see nothing of America other than the coyote.” (Tate, 2021) His work was motivated by his opposition to the

U.S. intervention in Vietnam. He placed himself and matter in situations of performance and interplay, in part, in reaction to the codified nature of American art.

Beuys asks the viewer to pay attention by narrowing our focus until we see the extraordinary in ordinary, mundane materials. “Beuys’ felt blankets, walking stick and gloves became sculptural props throughout the Action.” (Tate, 2021) His choice of materials, and how and with what he displayed them, changed the meanings of the objects, and gave them a higher symbolic value. He was steeped in the world of materials, and viewed the materials as symbols imbued with spirit.

The visceral nature of his work speaks to the associative power of his choice of materials and conveys his comparison of art and sculpture with the greater ecosystem of society. That is, art and sculpture are mutable and in a state of flux, just as the natural world and the political, human-constructed worlds are.

Beuys' approach to art and sculpture was that it is changeable and ephemeral, like life. The work was always evolving. It was never finished or existed in a fixed state. I embraced this concept and incorporated it into my work. *The Vessels* has no end, really. It will continue to be staged as it evolves, breaks down, becomes new earth, and nurtures oak seedlings. Beuys embraced unconventional materials such as fat, tallow, felt, and honey due to their mutability. He appreciated the physical and chemical fluidity of materials as symbols of the changing nature and impermanence of life. “He hoped that they would serve as “stimulants for the transformation of the idea of sculpture, or of art in general.” His sculptures should “provoke thought about what sculpture can be and how the concept of sculpture can be and how the concept of sculpting can be extended.” (Rosenthal, 25) His choice of materials enhanced and confirmed his concepts.

Another characteristic of Beuys' work is how he imbues his material with meaning. He deliberately chose accessible, organic materials and imbued them with symbolic meaning to create a kind of narrative and performance of material interplay. Beuys explained, "[t]hat the principle of resurrection, transforming the old structure, which dies or stagnates, into a vibrant, life-enhancing and soul- and spirit-promoting form. This is the expanded concept of art." (Rosenthal, 25) Here, Beuys is touching on the concepts later described as trans-corporeality and Vibrant Matter. Like the Harrisons, he expands the concept of art and acceptable materials for art.

Beuys' use of the word vibrant speaks to the work of the philosopher Jane Bennet and the work of Tanja Beer (who are discussed later) around the idea of all matter having a vibrant energy and spirit. It is this suggestion of an ecosystem of mutability with vibrant energy or spirit running in and around it, that Beuys tries to try to capture in his work.

Like the Harrisons, Beuys' unconventional choice of materials set him apart from his contemporaries. Beuys emphasized that his use of fat as a medium was an "extreme position in sculpture, and a material that was very basic to life and not associated with art." (Rosenthal, 25) Because he deliberately chose mediums outside of art conventions, his choice of material is as important as what he is trying to convey and, in some ways, supersedes the message. He places great value in the mediums of his sculpture. Because of this intense consideration, the materials themselves began to have a vitality. In a sense, the materials become a message of mutability and sacredness in the common. "In this way, Beuys' sculpture manifested content rather than symbolized it." (Rosenthal, 26) The Harrisons and Beuys are similar in that they contributed to the development of art through their unconventional choice of materials and processes, and elevated them as acceptable mediums for creating art.

Beuys claimed that, "...there's a deep misunderstanding amongst people that art should be understood through logical sentences." (Laing, 2009) He believed that art is a complimentary collaboration -- a give and take relationship between the artist and the viewer. "The work of art enters into the person and the person internalizes the work of art as well, it has to be possible that these two completely sink into each other ... [a]rt enters into the person and the person enters into the work of art..." (Laing, 2009) In *Actions, Vitrines and Environments*, Beuys often presented his work in a theatrical, performative way. He places himself and matter in situations of performance and interplay. I want my work to function in a similar manner. The installed work is an interplay between neighbours' observations and the evolving nature of the work. Neighbours enter the work of art, and the art enters the neighbours.

Through research, I discovered contemporary artists working in a similar vein to Eco Artists, but they also incorporate inorganic materials as valid sources for art and performance. These artists are called New Materialists and it is necessary to define what constitutes a New Materialist. According to Linda Weintraub, "[n]ew materialists construct conscious relationships with all forms of matter including such common objects as paperclips, coffee mugs, pennies, zippers, napkins, [and] shampoo containers...." (Weintraub, *What's Next?*, 5) New Materialists also use natural materials such as acorns, ear wax, and breast milk. These objects are conscious choices that reflect the global ecosystem of design production and consumerism.

These radical choices of materials appealed to me and the aspirations I had for my work. The choice of materials is a statement in themselves as they are non-hierarchical, non-precious, and accessible. New Materialists' work differs from other forms of art because it reverses anthropocentrism and asserts that humans are no more significant than other life forms.

According to Manuel de Landa, one of the originators of New Materialism, “all beings exist within shared geological, social, biological and psychological conditions. There is nothing exclusive about humanity.” He extends this inclusiveness to non-living materials that, he believes, “...embody ‘nonorganic vitality’...that inert forms of matter are as vital as living entities because they too are immersed in the Earth’s flow of matter and energy.” (Weintraub, *What’s Next?*, 7) This extension of anthropocentric material as acceptable for art was a revelation. There seemed to be an idea that eco art should be made with organic, biodegradable materials. With New Materialists, it is expected that all materials are valid for making art, including inorganic materials.

Like Beuys and the Harrisons, scientist and artist Natalie Jeremijenko believes in the ability of art to change society. Her work lives in a science and engineering milieu. She claims that she creates, “[g]rassroots tool for monitoring the environment.” (Weintraub, *To Life*, 211) Her science background and training aid her delivery of playful, sound, and poignant artwork that has broad public appeal. Jeremijenko can speak to the science of her work, but she also employs humour to spread her environmental message. Moreover, she challenges artists and environmentalists by reversing the paradigm of practicing harm reduction and confidently asks: What *can* you do? She claims that the “[m]oral authority of environmentalism has been centred around what you cannot do. Turn off the lights, use less gas, use less paper, wring your hands, do not touch, leave no trace...[w]hat about what you can do?” (Weintraub, *To Life*, 215)

This question speaks to Jeremijenko’s scientific pragmatism, and its simplicity is an actant. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett defines actant by referring to Bruno Latour’s term for a source of action; “an actant can be human or not or, most likely, a combination of both. Latour defines it as ‘something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special

motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general.” (Bennett, 9) This definition describes the performance work of Beuys. It also speaks of the parallel nature of Post Dramatic theatre evolving into the relational and regenerative. It is true that we should practice a harm reduction ethos, but we must be careful not to let it lead us into non action and passivity. What *can* we do as artists to bring light to the cause of environmental degradation?

This call to artists is echoed by the work of scientist and citizen of the Potawatomi Nation, Robin Wall Kimmerer. She states that,

“[w]e are deluged by information regarding our destruction of the world and hear almost nothing about how to nurture it. It is no surprise then that environmentalism becomes synonymous with dire predictions and powerless feelings. Our natural inclination to do right by the world is stifled, breeding despair when it should be inspiring action. The participatory role of people in the well-being of the land has been lost, our reciprocal relations reduced to a KEEP OUT sign.” (Kimmerer, 327)

Kimmerer extends the call to engage beyond artists. She, like Jeremijenko, encourages *all* people to participate in the well-being of the land. I believe my work engages in a reciprocal way with materials and viewers.

Like Beuys, Jeremijenko brings a sense of the theatrical to her work with her 2008, ‘*x Design Environmental Health Clinic*’, wherein viewers participate by seeking out and implementing cures for “ailments”. Visitors to the clinic, referred to as “impatients”, want change, or cures, for the ailing environment. Somewhat gag-like in their terms and procedures, it is still playful and engaging. The clinic then dispenses “treatments” in the form of “referrals” to non-profits and environmental protection agencies. Finally, Jeremijenko gives them prescriptions according to their own concerns. Here, she approaches the audience as a participant, in the larger ecosystem. She encourages us to link our own health with the health of the environment. Her work, while somewhat didactic, is playful and intelligent.

A successful example of one of the prescriptions is the “mini park” planted in an emergency vehicle parking zone called, ‘*No Park*’. This “prescription” called for the asphalt to be replaced with low-growth mosses and grasses that can withstand the occasional ambulance parked on it. The “prescription” speaks to the concern of water runoff, tainted with pollutants and animal feces, entering water systems. Instead, these small parks create a pleasing green space that breaks up miles of asphalt and concrete and creates a filter for the absorption of contaminants.



Figure 9: Natalie Jeremijenko *No Park*. NYC

Jeremijenko believes that, as a society, we expect science to take the lead to finding solutions to our environmental woes. “What we’ve missed is that science is not the singular expertise.” (Weintraub, *To Life*, 215) Her work speaks to the ecosystem of interdependence

among all organic and inorganic elements, and to the ecosystem of disciplines too. Moreover, it incorporates the horizontal approach of New Materialists and the philosophy of Vibrant Matter. We need to recognize the validity of all materials for art making and that all disciplines can contribute to finding environmental solutions. Art and performance are as necessary to this as science. Art *and* science can effect societal change.

This bold position and paradigm shift gave me courage to construct the vessels and apply a sense of artifice to enhance the theatricality of *The Vessels*. The gold leafing, although not totally environmentally responsible, is theatrical and gives credence to the lawn as a stage and to *The Vessels* as forms of expression. I wanted to achieve a nuanced, multi-perspective approach in their construction. I wanted the materials to perform themselves and I didn't want to limit my approach to one concept or art movement.

In the spirit of experimentation, I created a performance called *The Table* because I wanted to experiment with the ideas of New Materialism and Vibrant Matter. In the performance, audience members observed while I layered the section of moss, soil, and acorns around an oak seedling on the table. These were the "objects of worship", so to speak. Alongside the worship piece were the man made and inorganic materials found in the soil under the sacred materials. As the materials were laid on the table, "congregants" sang the Shaker hymn, *Simple Gifts*. Then, audience members were invited to the table with these words: "Welcome to the table. We join together to pay our respects to the forest, and in particular, the native oak. We recognize our dependence on the forest and the life it gives us. And we acknowledge the damage we have done to it. We bear witness to the degradation of the soil in which we found this sapling. Please come up to the altar and bear witness if you feel moved to do so. You may touch the materials if you like."



Figure 10: *The Table Performance*

The choice of the hymn *Simple Gifts* was based on my respect and admiration for the principles on which the Shaker faith is rooted, as well as its beauty, distilled idea, and strikingly secular tone. The Shakers, “...were radical for their time in many ways; 75 years before emancipation, and 150 years before suffrage, Shakers were already practicing social, sexual, economic, and spiritual equality.” (WETA, 2002) The hymn speaks to an egalitarian, ecological code of ethics that lends the work a universality. The ideas expressed are as relevant today as they were when it was written in the late-Eighteenth century. Here are the words:

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,
 'Tis the gift to come down, where we ought to be,
 And when we find ourselves in the place just right,

'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gain'd,
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed,
To turn, turn will be our delight
Till by turning, turning we come round right.

The hymn speaks to the sacred yearnings for transcendence and transformation. The use of the spiritual as a motivator of work will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

The hymn evolved out of one of the most revolutionary utopian communities founded in North America. “The Shakers were connected to many reform movements of the 19th century, including feminism, pacifism, and isolationism. Fugitive slaves, including Sojourner Truth, visited the Enfield Shaker community in Connecticut. Furthermore, the Shakers became notable for their craftsmanship, because, according to Shaker tradition, God dwelt in the details and quality of their work.” (National Park Service, n.d.) *Simple Gifts* calls for humility and sublimation, which can be found in a more expansive definition of theatre and art that includes Non-Human Performance, non-hierarchical approach to materials, and a Post Dramatic equality of theatre elements.

While congregants gathered round the table to observe and touch the materials, the service continued: “We acknowledge our complicity in allowing this degradation. We seek to remediate and regenerate this soil. We seek to create new life and add to the biodiversity of this planet. We look to atone for these omissions by planting these acorns and caring for them until they reach a stage where we can plant a mighty oak. Will you participate in the act of communion? This act of atonement? This act of regeneration? If you feel moved to do so, please come to the table and receive communion.” Congregants were then asked, “If anyone would like to say a few words, recite a poem, or come back to the table please do so now.”

Some congregants then shared stories, remembrances, and emotions. Finally, we had a moment of silence and reflection followed by a benediction. The benediction was: “Go now in peace. Strengthened in your commitment to each other and to the stewardship of the earth.”

I found that people were quite engaged, particularly when sharing and singing. The performance was an effort to manifest the concept of Vibrant Matter through performance. It was guided by the forms and material choices of New Materialists. The choice of organic materials, sourced from my backyard, reinforced the ethos of harm reduction through using materials at hand. The materials were celebrated and elevated as sacred through ceremony. The anthropocentric materials, representing the profane, coexisted with the sacred on the altar. Through ceremony, they became one and represented the concept of Vibrant Matter.

The takeaway from this experiment was that the entanglement of the organic and human-created materials was the primary gesture of the performance. It was an acknowledgement of the entanglements of these materials across the globe and even beyond our atmosphere with the advent of space junk. This intersection of materials became the primary motivation for the work to come. My reflection on the performance made me question whether I wanted to include a human performance at all.

While artists should not limit themselves to ecological materials, environmental collapse requires us to consider the consequences of our choices. In fact, the philosophy of Vital Materialism and writings on Vibrant Matter by Jane Bennet, claim that working with animate and inanimate materials helps society recognize the interdependence and equality of species. Additionally, it helps us recognize the vitality of all matter, including synthetic materials. Even toxic sludge is acknowledged as a valid material, further pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable in the art, à la the Harrisons and Beuys. Vibrant Matter artists and philosophers claim

that all matter has a vibrancy, or spirit. The recognition of the vibrancy of even repulsive materials is essential to further an understanding of sustainability. We acknowledge and recognize our part in the creation of these materials, our dependence on them, and the fact that we cannot separate ourselves from either non-human, biological, or synthetic matter. We have brought synthetic matter into being and they continue to shape our environment.

The Table experiment was an acknowledgement of the concept of Conatus. Conatus is defined by the philosopher Spinoza as, “Anything whatsoever, whether it be more perfect or less perfect, will always be able to persist in existing with that same force whereby it begins to exist, so that in this respect all things are equal.” (Spinoza, 1992) Also, *The Table* was the beginning of my interest in the idea of place and gathering from place. I suggest that we can do both.

Artist and academic, Tanja Beer, is credited with creating the term Ecoscenography. She believes that we can choose our materials wisely, and that our materials can reinforce both the work and the meaning behind the work. By deliberately choosing materials we recognize the importance of the material itself, not only for its imbued meaning, as with Beuys, but as a conscious choice beyond its symbolic value, which speaks to the material itself as an ecological choice. We see that each choice we make has a series of consequences, which is the premise for ecological thinking. The choice of material can be a conscious ecological choice and, as a conscious choice, it can reinforce the meaning and impact of the work. “Ecological thinking acknowledges that materiality and environments are mutually dependent in making beings, things and places – it recognizes humans as part of nature’s system, rather than a separate entity to use nature at its disposal.” (Beer, *The Living*, 3) Like Jeremijenko, we can ask what we can do, but we can also be deliberate and work within the limits of an ecological choice. The two

options are not mutually exclusive, and by exercising restraint, the work becomes more disciplined and meaningful.

Bennett claims that “vibrant materiality” or “xenobiotic agents”, which are foreign substances, chemicals and organisms, run “alongside and inside humans” (Bennett, viii). Here, Bennett illustrates how materiality can “horizontalize the relations between humans, biota, and abiota” (Bennet, 112). Post Dramatic theatre, art installation, and philosophy intersect in the theory of Vibrant Matter and Beer’s work. She, too, speaks to the concept of Vital Materialism, a concept she applies to her designs and art. She posits that “[v]ital materialism dissolves the subject-object binary of the material world, incorporating notions of agency as a way of generating awareness of ecological issues.” (Beer, 2016) She expands on Bennett’s theory of Vibrant Matter and explains how she applies it to her own work:

“[t]he idea that materials are entangled across bodies, ecosystems, and built environments is a key consideration of “ecoscenography” – a practice I define as the integration of ecological principles into all stages of scenographic thinking and production – where creativity and expanded ideas of materiality are placed at the heart of sustainable practice. These theories converge to reveal how forms arise within flows of material and surroundings through our ways of finding, placing, transforming, and re-using objects.” (Beer, 2016)

The performance aspect of Beer’s *Strung (This Is Not Rubbish)* is part of research into a material, rescued from the garbage and transformed into an immersive performance, a wearable piece of art, and, finally, a stand-alone (non-human) artwork. Beer illustrates the concept of *trans-corporeality* and demonstrates how an object can transform through her choice of material and performance situation. She enriches the work through an ecological choice and transforms the material through performance and structure.

The ethos of “using what you’ve got” not only promotes sustainability but imposes limitations and a framework from which to work. The challenge lies in finding the material’s

meaning and potential. Beer describes it as “finding the value and life from discarded or disregarded material.” (Beer, 2016) I embrace this concept, and the idea of performing and finding the art from place, informed my work. That is, ‘Performing Place in a Suburban Context on a Front Lawn.’

In the piece, *Strung (This Is Not Rubbish)*, Beer seeks to blur the boundaries between artist and performer: “Here I analyze, combine and test these theories using a practice-based research project that seeks to dissolve the boundaries between performer and designer, installation and costume, site and material.” (Beer, 2016) This remarkable piece is successful in what it sets out to do. The viewer witnesses a live, edgy, improvisational performance that unravels before them and leaves them with a symbolic “web”. This “web” seems to represent, in a first-layer kind of way, our interdependence and, beyond the surface symbolism, suggests material interplay. What was considered discarded and meaningless has been upcycled through a process of *trans-corporeality*, the idea that

“...all creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them. While trans-corporeality as an ontology does not exclude any living creature, it does begin with the human, in order - paradoxically perhaps - to disrupt Western human Exceptionalism.” (Alaimo, 1)

Strung (This Is Not Rubbish) is an embodiment of these philosophies and evolves into meaningful work that speaks to interdependence and the vitality of all matter. I learned this approach from Beer and began to apply it to the thesis. I approach my praxis with the philosophy of finding the art from place.



Figure 11: Tanja Beer's *Strung (This Is Not Rubbish)*

Beer chose an ecological message for her work and her material choice advances her ideas about non-hierarchical materials. When the performance artist exits the piece, it further reinforces the concept of non-human dominance, and leaves the web to stand alone. It is successful because of her material limitations, and her applied ecological ethos. Her work rises to the challenge of what an individual can do. It demonstrates that the two concepts are not mutually exclusive. Rather, when employed together, these approaches add to its relevance.

Beer applies the principles of Sim Van der Ryn and Stuart Cowen's, *Architects Five Ecological Principles* to her practice. The five principles are: "Solutions Grow from Place," "Ecological Accounting informs Design," "Design with Nature," "Everyone is a Designer," and "Make Nature Visible". (Beer, 2015) These principles were applied as an initial guideline for Ecoscenographic practice. When applied, they are expansive rather than restrictive. Beer's work is consistent with and demonstrates Ryn and Cowen's ideas.

Beer works from an Ecoscenographic lens and blurs boundaries between traditional theatre set design, Ecoscenography, and art installation. Moreover, she relinquishes the traditional, dominant role of designer and allows the performance and artwork to evolve in its

own way. This approach is decidedly non-hierarchical. There is an emphasis on the non-egoic, reversing anthropomorphism, and a non-hierarchical approach to matter as put forth in *Vibrant Matter* by Jane Bennett. She explains the concept of Conatus as a “power present in every body”. This notion of equality among all matter underpins much of the work of Eco-Material artists.

Bennett defines Vibrant Matter as something not quite human, but intrinsically charged with vitality. She wants to remove the traditional link of materiality with the mechanistic or automatic. “The basic premise put forward is we (humans) are also non-human and that things, too, are vital players in the world...the hope is that the story will enhance receptivity to the impersonal life that surrounds and infuses us, will generate a more subtle awareness of the complicated web of dissonant connections between bodies, and will enable wiser interventions into that ecology.” (Bennett, 10) It is this complex web of “dissonant connections” that I believe requires acknowledgement and ritualization. It allows us to accept our complicity in environmental collapse and to psychologically insert ourselves, as humans, into the horizontal value scale of all life and matter.

Bennett describes the need for these relationships “... to be flattened [and] read horizontally as a juxtaposition rather than vertically as a hierarchy of being... [in order] to take a step toward a more ecological sensibility.” (Bennett, 10) This ecological sensibility is something I want to achieve in my work through material choice, reverse anthropomorphism, horizontal acknowledgement of materials, acknowledging the vitality of synthetic materials, metamorphosis, and, finally, an afterlife for the artwork.

Like Beer’s argument in, *Strung (This Is Not Rubbish)*, we must remove the subject and object dynamic of human subjectivity. Things exist on their own outside of human perception

and subjectivity. Negative dialects are like negative theology in that there is an unknowable god. “In emphasizing the ensemble nature of action and the interconnection between persons and things, a theory of Vibrant Matter presents individuals simply incapable of bearing full responsibility for their effects.” (Bennett, 37) Further exploration of this concept is warranted. Traditional methods of ritualizing and acknowledging complicity are problematic, but they still deserve reverence. I want to illuminate our non-human dominance, long-term systems thinking, the processes of metamorphosis, and the horizontal insertion of humans into the larger ecosystems. We are equal to all matter.

Chapter 3: Polity/Spiritual/Unsentimental

I'm Nobody! Who are you? ~Emily Dickinson

My work is informed by the ideas put forth by Bennet, Jonathan Rowson, and Barbara Brown Taylor. They all speak to the need for our interior life questions to be extended to political values, and the way in which we can best express our higher selves. For centuries, society's overemphasis on Western scientific thinking has narrowed our focus; metrics and algorithms have displaced our ability to identify broader patterns. As a society, we have failed to grasp the entirety of the challenges we face. Through the ritualization of art and performance, in an eco-material art context, we can acknowledge these challenges and speak to the urgency of our situation. Philosopher Jonathan Rowson touches on this idea when he states that, "[s]uperficial economic and political debates are... lively and pervasive, while deeper systemic and spiritual questions are strictly limited" (Rowson, 15) While our culture allows for deep research and serious inquiry into economic and political theories, it fails to acknowledge our interdependence with nature or adequately address humans' emotional and psychological need for a stable environment.

Rowson claims that "[c]ultivating spiritual sensibility, on the other hand, is a meaningful response to the world's increasingly urgent needs – mostly because it highlights what we share and what we need to develop." (Rowson,18) Also, his ideas are consistent with and reinforce the philosophical underpinnings of eco artists when he states that,

"[s]pirituality is ambiguously inclusive by its nature and cannot be easily defined, but at heart it is about the fact that we are alive at all, rather than our personality or status; it's about our 'ground' in the world rather than our 'place' in the world. It is possible and valuable to give spirituality improved intellectual grounding and greater cultural and political salience." (Rowson, 22)

These ideas call for a subtle understanding of human frailties. Rowson asks us to acknowledge our vulnerability and interdependence, and to recognize our need for the sacred. As for environmental collapse, he calls us to be more conscious of the sacredness of our environment and the interdependence of all life. Philosopher Gordon Lynch states that, “[t]he persistence of the sacred is not a symptom of a persistent cultural backwardness that rational Enlightenment can cure, but an inherent structure of morally boundaried societies.” (Rowson, 46) Ritual and the acknowledgement of the sacred helps us to understand our moral obligation to the environment writ large.

If spirituality is defined as transcendence, transformation, and sacredness, *The Vessels* are an attempt to embrace this aspect of acknowledgement and acceptance of the climate emergency and of our interdependence. Through contemplating *The Vessels* in place on a lawn, we get the sense of an ecosystem. The materials come from a suburban yard, and they are carefully placed on the lawn. In this way the colloquial meaning of a front lawn transforms beyond artifice and status symbol to stage and, perhaps, altar. The materials deserve contemplation beyond human performance. We transcend ourselves and become an audience to the materials through their interaction, decomposition, and metamorphosis.

As Beer and Bennett suggest, we can more readily recognize the vibrancy of all matter when we remove the subject/object dynamic of human subjectivity. Philosopher Robert Unger speaks to this concept when he states that, “[i]f spirit is a name for the resistant and transcending faculties of the agent, we can spiritualize society. We can diminish the distance between who we are and what we find outside of ourselves.” (Rowson, 77) In this case, art can be the actant/action for this acknowledgement.

Through ritualized performance and eco-material art, artists can be agents for change.

Rowson says that,

“in our work on climate change last year, the spiritual was implicit in the call to get over what we call ‘stealth denial’ – knowing while acting as if one didn’t know - and ‘wake up’, even if that means some kind of ritual process in which we grieve for our lost habitat, an idea suggested by various others who sense that the climate crisis has spiritual roots, including Philosopher Clive Hamilton and the Guardian’s Jo Confino.”
(Rowson,78)

Humans need to ritualize aspects of environmental collapse to increase our sense of interdependence with, and our reliance on, ecosystems. I think it is necessary to add ritual elements to my work. I want my work to reflect interdependence and to use materials that speak to interdependence and material interaction.

These reflections are supported by Beuys’ ritualized stacking and staging of sculpture; the bio-engineering work of Jeremijenko; Beer’s aesthetics, material choices, and performances; and, finally, the ritual aspects of the Harrisons’ *Survival Pieces*. My research prodded me to experiment further with ritual and identify ritual’s potency in artwork. Moreover, it has led me to identify as a New Materialist whose work incorporates the concept of Vibrant Matter. Finally, my research expanded my understanding of staging sculpture and performance.

I want my work to reflect this sensibility: non egoic design that includes metamorphosis, a performance, and an afterlife. That is, to have materials changing through biodynamic processes and then to have an afterlife spanning hundreds of years. I chose acorns because they are a vibrant material choice available from my yard, and as a tribute to Beuys’ *7000 Oaks*, *Social Sculpture*. *The Vessels* incorporate my principle of “using what you got” (from the yard and neighbourhood), places limitations on material choices, and pulls the focus from what is displayed to material choices (acorns, soil, moss, worms, newsprint from flyer delivery, and

cardboard scavenged from neighbourhood recycle bins). For construction of the structures, I purchased a few materials (wire mesh, gold leaf, nailing strips, and plexiglass).

These material choices reflect the concept of ecosystem in that I foraged nearly all of them from my neighbourhood. Also, they acknowledge the manufactured materials present in the ecosystem of the industrial realm. This is made evident by the materials found in the soil. These objects become a part of the performance of the installation itself. My own work reflects the research into how ecosystems have been represented by artists, whether it be by a direct representation of an ecosystem or how the artists' choice of materials and staging reflects an understanding of the interdependence of all matter.

My work explores what is staged in our experience of nature and how natural systems perform. It examines how people interact with the work and how their spatial relationship to nature can be designed as a type of scenography. The performance aspect of this work examines the role of ritual and how ritualization is a form of acknowledgement that assigns value to an activity or object. By enacting rituals around the soil, we acknowledge and elevate its value. The ritual aspect of the performance will imbue the soil with a sense of sacredness, which will communicate its significance beyond an objective sensory experience. It is valued beyond its colour, shape, and other measurable traits.

My work expands on Beuys' concept that art can do something not just for people, but for all matter. Respectfully, I want to expand upon Beuys' concept of stacking, ritual performance, and the staging of sculpture.

My work is embedded in a New Materialist perspective with an emphasis on the ritual aspects in order to make the work more effective and to engage viewers. Ritual is needed to

recognize human's complicity in the degradation of the environment and the acknowledgement of their role in remediation efforts.

Chapter 4: The Vessels

The Vessels is an exploration of place, of being, *at place*. On one level, *The Vessels* represent the physical manifestation of my exterior surroundings of being in one place and intensely observing my physical surroundings. There are two notable aspects to *The Vessels*: the superficial and the subtext.

Both levels of meaning are physically embodied in *The Vessels* and are morphing and mimicking the processes of decomposition, acceptance (Vibrant Matter), and objectivity. They are distinguished by their respective audiences. The superficial manifestation of performing place and manifesting the philosophy of Vibrant Matter has a broad audience of neighbors and species within my neighborhood, including me.

The superficial level manifests the theories and praxis discussed previously in the thesis. *The Vessels* grew from a discernment of materials being offered from my immediate physical surroundings and a desire to manifest relevant theories and philosophy and personal beliefs. I began the process of collecting materials early in my MFA journey. I collected soil, oak leaves, acorns, newspapers, and worms; materials that could create soil and transform. Their potential to mix and become something different made them attractive materials for art making. Also, they were also freely given from the place where I wanted to create a performance, my lawn.



Figure 12: *Gathered Materials*, 2020

As I continued my research, the process of collecting materials was often disconcerting, because I didn't know why I was collecting them or how they would figure into the work. I was torn between my desire to control the outcome and my fear of not being in control. It was months later that the idea of containing the materials in vessels and adding the anthropocentric materials found in the soil from *The Table* performance occurred to me. I found those months very challenging because I didn't know what to do or how to incorporate all the knowledge gained through process experimentation and academic research. It was an unsettling experience but ultimately created relevant and non-derivative work. I trusted the counsel of my advisors to not get ahead of myself and to let time, research, and process drive the work.

The materials sat in my studio for months and I was unsure how I would bring them together in a meaningful way to manifest the theories I was researching. I also wasn't sure where my work fit in the continuum of contemporary art and theatre practice. While sitting rather uncomfortably with my uncertainty, I continued to reach out to other artist friends, family, and

my advisors to discuss ideas and I wrote reflections about the research and my performance experimentation. I made a conscious attempt to trust the process and refrained from jumping to hasty or arbitrary decisions about what the work should be. I realized, with some help, that this is exactly what should be happening (uncertainty and insecurity) in the MFA process and to try and relax and recognize the privilege of having time and space to write and think. I was tempted many times to fall back on old skills like painting or designing a set and costumes. I felt guilty at times because I wasn't working physically or producing something material. I have learned to value thinking, research, and experimentation. I wanted to fully experience the process of allowing research and discernment to create work.

By late January of 2021, I decided that I wanted to combine all the gathered materials into the form of three vessels that were stacked with a repeating pattern of materials. I was still unsure how to metaphorically represent the theory of Vibrant Matter. After much deliberation and writing, I remembered the anthropocentric materials used in *The Table* performance (tarp, tin, and glass) and decided to incorporate them into the middle of the stacked materials within the vessels.

I was excited that these materials could be extended and used in *The Vessels*. With their value acknowledged, and their significance made richer from *The Table* performance, their symbolic representation of trans-corporeality manifested. I have visions of the oak seedling emerging from the decomposing material as it turns to soil and, in polity with the synthetic materials, wrapping its roots around the tin and tarp and glass. This aesthetic emergence is an aspiration of *The Vessels*.

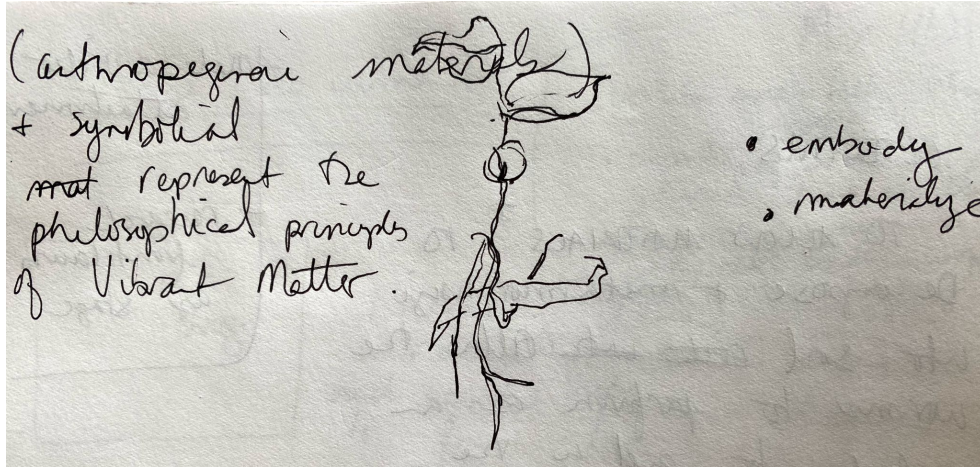


Figure 13: *Sketch and Thinking about Material Interaction*, 2021

I want to witness the force of these materials' emergence despite the interruption of man-made materials and the objectivity with which these organic materials continue to emerge as a performance. The objectivity of biology and its ability to carry on regardless of intervention is a force worth observation and contemplation. It is notable how it incorporates the matter into its own existence and continues to survive. This objectivity calls us to act and, at minimum, to acknowledge our complicity in environmental degradation.

After deciding how to bring the materials together, I started to sketch the vessels. It was important to me that they be simple, aesthetically plain spoken, and reflected an honest deliberation to use what was available from place, such as the cardboard. The performance of the emergence of the materials is the priority. I didn't want the exterior of *The Vessels* to overshadow the non-Human performance. However, I decided that I needed to purchase some materials in order to have structure to hold materials together. I purchased nailing strips, plexiglass, chicken wire, and gold leafing.

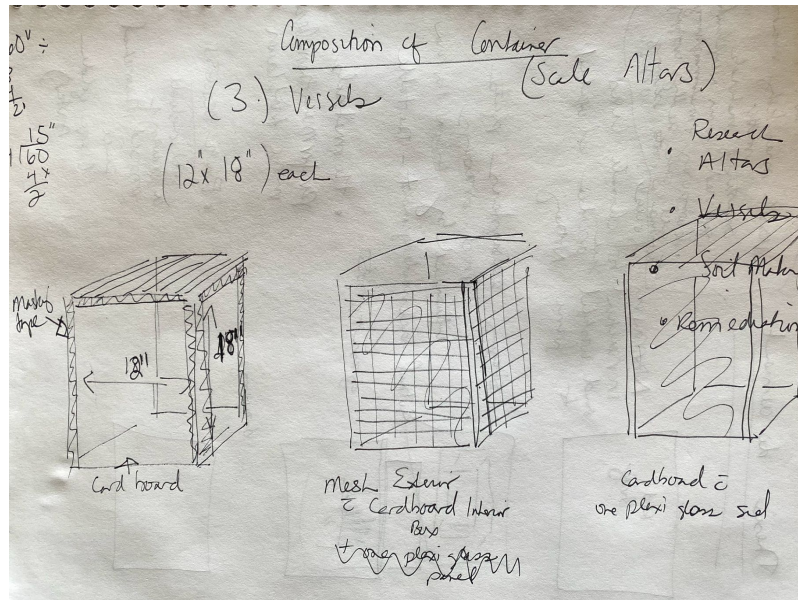


Figure 14: *Vessel Sketches*, 2021



Figure 15: *Vessel Framework Construction and Stacking*, 2021

As I constructed *The Vessels*, I made each step of the process a ritual through repetition and stacking. I wanted to incorporate the ideas of Joseph Beuys' stacking as a form of ritual and enriching materials through assembly and repetition.

Once the armatures were constructed, I began cladding the forms in materials with various presentations and layers of transparency and opacity. I chose chicken wire for its humbleness, strength, and transparency. Plexiglass was chosen for its transparency, structural integrity, and ability to contain the materials. Also, it creates tension with its toxic origin when compared to the organic materials within. It aligns with my choice of including the anthropocentric materials with the biodegradable materials, which speaks to Vibrant Matter and Trans-Corporeality. I aspire to create work that manifests these theories like Tanja Beer does in *Strung (This is Not Rubbish)*. Cardboard was a freely offered manufactured material that is organic, biodegradable, and able to take gold leafing and contain materials. But it can also decompose with the interior assemblage of emerging matter.

I struggled with whether or not to use gold leaf as it has many suggested layers of meaning. I was leery because it can suggest an attempt to look rich, or to create monetary value. Moreover, it is a coveted material that can stand in as a measure of wealth. However, after discussions with my advisor, I decided that theatre lives in the realm of artifice and that one level of meaning of the suggestion of gold is that it is valuable. I believe *The Vessels* are valuable and the performance happening within is worthy of such distinction. I have lived with the decision for five months; I believe it was a wise choice as it aesthetically distinguishes the work from objects of utility towards vessels worthy of consideration. It also plays with the incongruity of placing gold leaf on cardboard that is decomposing and exposed to the elements. It creates tension that serves the work.



Figure 16: *Various Vessel Constructions*, 2021

After I cladded *The Vessels*, they were filled with repeating layers of materials sourced from the yard. The layers are composed of cardboard, acorns, soil, newsprint from flyers, worms, and leaves with one central interruption of anthropocentric materials. In the vessel constructed out of plexiglass and cardboard, I inserted the materials from *The Table* performance. The other two vessels contain red and blue plastic sleeves that flyers are encased in when they are thrown from the delivery truck onto the driveway.



Figure 17: *Interior Layering Materials*, 2021

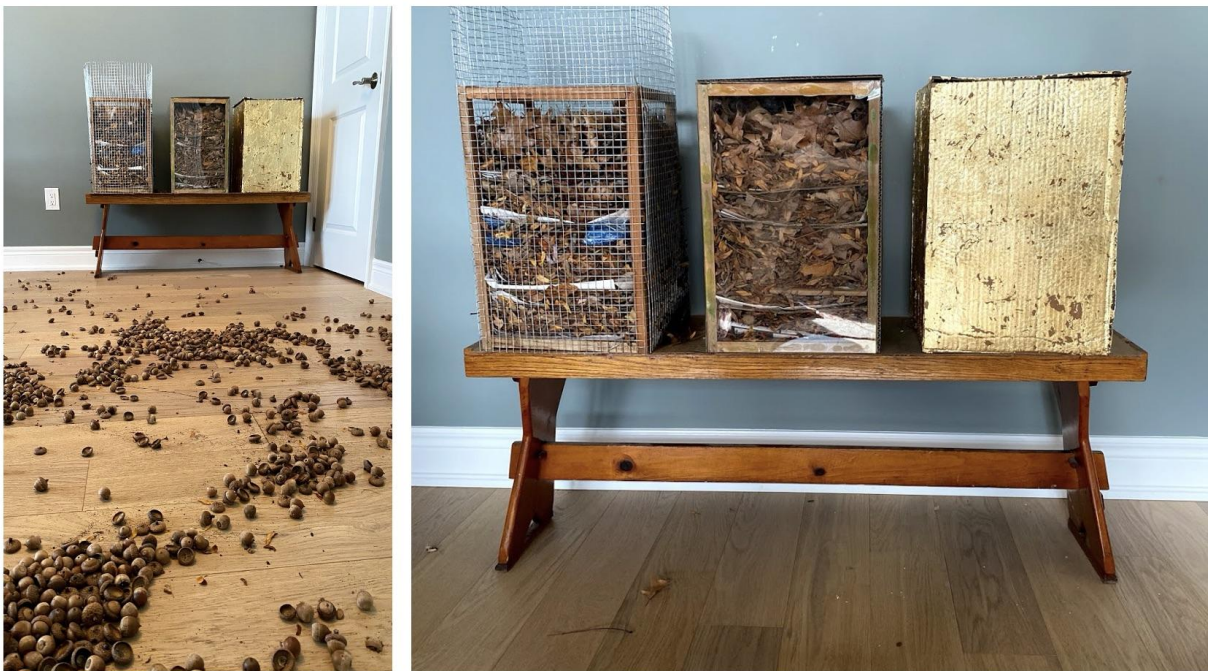


Figure 18: *Vessels in Studio and In Assemblage*, 2021

Once constructed and filled, *The Vessels* remained in the studio for a period of time. They inspired me to create artwork and experiment with performance. I enjoyed having them in my studio and living with their presence as they spawned other ideas. I recorded some images of studio assemblages and performance that included the leftover acorns from the gathering period. I was still uncertain what the thesis work was in its entirety and spent a month or so experimenting and researching.

Experimentation and further research led to many new ideas spawning from *The Vessels*. I found I was unable to put any end to the work or give it a clear definition. I eventually realized that they were enough in and of themselves. I let go of any idea of human performance and recognized the front lawn near the road was the right place for them to perform. On February 9, 2021, I installed *The Vessels* on the front lawn.



Figure 19: *Vessels Staged on Front Lawn, February 2021*



Figure 20: *Vessels Staged on Front Lawn, February 2021*



Figure 21: *Vessels Snowed In, February/March 2021*

After I installed the work, they were no longer directed by me. There was no human performance and my role as artist ended. Humans view the work and are part of the work as observers and audience. *The Vessels* now perform, on stage, in a state of emergence and polity. I constructed and created them, but *The Vessels* and materials are themselves, performing.

My research of contemporary artists helped me to place the work into the continuum of art and theatre practice. Helen and Newton Harrison, Joseph Beuys, Natalie Jeremijenko, and Tanja Beer are the artists who have had the most influence on my thinking and practice in relation to *The Vessels*.

The Harrison's abstraction of an ecosystem in *Hog Pasture* helped me to see that ecosystems are subjects worthy of staging. Their approach to staging a dynamic system of soil, animals, and plants is reflected in my material choices of worms, soil, and acorns. Moreover, their elevation of the non-human performance of biology, soil, and pig influenced my choice to make the work a non-human performance. I also appreciate their Post Dramatic use of constant present and incorporated that element into the performance of *The Vessels*. *The Vessels* are constantly performing in the present just as the pig, soil, biology, and light performed in *Hog Pasture*.

Joseph Beuys' theory of staging sculptures and his incorporation of ritual stacking, thermal exchange, vitality of material, and a sublimated human performance also influenced my work. His reverence for, and elevation of, common materials through ritual and assemblage gave me the idea to amass the materials I had gathered and allow them their own vitality and performance. His argument that art enters the individual, and the individual enters the art gave me the courage to allow the work to perform itself. The neighbourhood audience and other visitors to the street will, according to their degree of interest, enter the art and, perhaps, allow

the art to enter them. Some neighbors and sanitation workers have discussed the work with me, and some neighbors have indicated that they have discussed it among themselves. *The Vessels* exposure to the elements references Beuys' incorporation of thermal exchange in his work. The exposure acts as an 'actant' and facilitates the flow/flux of the process of biodegradation and allows for the emergence of *The Vessels*. Beuys' influence is clearly seen in my work, and he continues to inspire my artistic sensibilities.

Natalie Jeremijenko's influence manifests in my choice to include anthropocentric materials. Her *No Park* also influenced me to make *The Vessels* a non-human performance and to regard my front lawn as a stage. I was inspired by how she turned a common emergency parking zone into a stage and, by doing so, made the work accessible to an audience beyond the walls of a gallery. Her ability to bridge disciplines and her horizontal view of them also influenced me. Finally, I felt empowered by her provocation to *do something*.

Tanja Beer's emergence as set designer, academic, artist, and community builder is inspirational, as is her succinct manifestations of the theories of Trans-Corporeality and Vibrant Matter. Beer's hybrid approach to her work motivated me to bridge the roles of artist, scenographer, and sustainable designer in order to create plain-spoken work that is accessible, like *The Vessels*. Her work is accessible but also incorporates and manifests contemporary theory and philosophy. Her choice to use sausage casings in *Strung*, held up the discarded material and imbued it with vitality. Her work is both accessible and academic but, more importantly, it is not didactic. She reveals but doesn't tell.

The Vessels is a culmination of lived experience, research, experimentation, reflection, and aspiration. They are informed by artists, theorists, and philosophers I admire. The work

aspires to reflect and manifest these influences and insert itself into the continuum of contemporary art, theatre practice, and theory.

The subtext of *The Vessels* is a conceptual manifestation of my domestic, matrilineal life in that they represent my relationships with my mother and daughter. My mother lives in the same house as my family and me. And while she has her own self-contained apartment, our lives are intertwined. Due to the pandemic and to the fact that my studio window looks out to the front lawn, I observe *The Vessels* for several hours each day. In this way, the subtext is distinguished by its audience in that it is me observing the work and applying a layer of meaning that the subtext offers. I have observed their relational reactions to the elements and to their place. They are a totem for me to observe the relational aspects of *The Vessels* to each other and to contemplate the temporary nature of their existence and, by proxy, the fleeting nature of life.



Figure 22: *Matrilineal Metaphorical Vessels*, 2021

The Vessel's costumes represent three distinct stages of a particular life: Matriarch, Mother, and Daughter. While my understanding of these meanings is ever shifting, I feel the gold-leafed vessel represents the Matriarch. She is a container that holds and shelters the organic materials as they decompose. She holds the anthropocentric material with full acceptance -- as dearly as the other materials -- and she provides space for metamorphosis to occur while asking for nothing in return. The organic materials can become the soil that will nurture the acorn and allow it to transform into an oak seedling.

The chicken-wire vessel represents the daughter. She is open, vulnerable, penetrable, and minimally contained, while given structure. She is the most transparent in relation to her surroundings; open and clearly seen. She is losing much of her matter due to wind; about a quarter of the original material remains. Like any child, she is creating her own identity, but her foundation remains.

The daughter vessel is also a metaphor for parenting. Her structure is solid and needs less and less care as she finds her own identity, whereas the mother and the matriarch are decomposing and containing. Once installed, *The Vessels*, formed and shaped by me, were out of my control and set free to perform.

The centre vessel, partially clad in cardboard and plexiglass, represents the middle-aged woman, the older mother who is beginning to self-contain. And, like the plexiglass which has become unstuck from the wood frame, she is shedding her exterior artifice -- still penetrable but contained. She is gray and bent with time. It is interesting how both panels of plexiglass have become unstuck, and one is leaning on the matriarch. In my domestic situation, I often lean on my mother for support with my daughter, Simone.

There are two stages of the work. The first stage was controlled and included the collection of materials followed by the construction and installation of *The Vessels*. The second stage, post installation and observation, is a period of letting go and of unattached observation. In this way, the stages represent the domestic, in that it mimics the roles of Matriarch, Mother, and Daughter.

One of my advisors encouraged me to put more of myself into the work. While I am uncomfortable writing about the personal nature of my work, I think that it is important to do so because it informs it. COVID-19 pushed me to further explore my immediate surroundings and to find the art. And my immediate surroundings are informed by my domestic life. While the personal subtext and symbolic meaning is not obvious to the work, it enriches and layers the meaning of *The Vessels*.

The domestic is also relational, and I want my work to reflect this. Whether that be through the materials' state of emergence or the engagement of the audience, I want to be honest about the fact that it comes from my home. Early in my MFA work, I researched images and ideas that resonated with me. I came across the work of artist Maria Quigley. Her work explores the matriarchal relationship and identifies the domestic sphere as the source where much of human life originates and is fostered.



Figure 23: Maria Quigley, *Portraits of three generations: my grandmother, my mother and me.*, 2019 And *Details from my grandmother's flat.*, 2019

The two images above are on my studio wall next to pictures of work by the Harrisons, Beuys, Beer, and Jeremijenko. Quigley's work inspires me and serves as a source of contemplation. Quigley was born in Russia and moved to England when she was four. She states that, "[w]ith this project I wanted to engage with my family history and investigate my grandmother's life and the relationships between her, my mother and me. I felt that through exploring this one small, confined space I could find something typically Russian but universally human." (Quigley, 2020) I, too, wish to create something universal. I am drawn to work that sees the macro in the micro, or in Quigley's and my work, the universal from the domestic. In the case of *The Vessels*, the work goes beyond the universal human experience and extends the gesture to all matter. Quigley's work reminds me to find the macro in the micro. In other words, domesticity is universal and a worthwhile point of reference.

It is natural for my personal life to inform my work. My domestic situation also includes two brilliant men: my husband, who patiently makes everything possible, and my lovely stepson,

Nathan. These relations are informing my work in ways I don't quite understand or have the emotional objectivity to write about yet.

Chapter 5: Lawn as Stage

Working from the concept of making art from, *At Place* required that *the place* also provide, and function as, a stage. This way the materials can perform themselves in place, of place, and performing place. The stage that was chosen is my suburban front lawn. After careful consideration, my front lawn became the obvious choice. I have long felt that suburbia is a cultural desert, with bland socially isolated homes with indistinguishable front lawns that conform to strict aesthetic codes. They are manifestations of planned obsolescence, monoculture, and conformity. I am conflicted between the controlled aesthetic of a manicured lawn and its potential to be a biodiverse ecosystem that can serve as a stage for performance.

COVID-19 forced me to ‘just be’, and to embrace being *At Place*. I began to see beyond my preconceived notions about suburban lawns and recognized that performance is happening all the time.

The choice of a front lawn seemed natural not only from the standpoint of making work from place, but because lawns are ubiquitous and ripe for exploration and critique. Front lawns make up a large part of the North American Landscape. “The lawn is the quintessential American landscape, making up somewhere between 25 to 40 million acres of land.” (Steinberg, 2005) Front lawns are like theatres in that they exclude and are racialized. The monoculture of the front lawn excludes and does damage to unwanted species which are sacrificed for the manicured aesthetic and dominance of the front lawn.

I like that my work sits on the precipice of this dichotomy. *The Vessels* expose the inherent biodiversity and its intersection with anthropocentric matter. It’s contained and presented on a lawn for contemplation by people, who support and participate in the aesthetic

and obsolescence-driven economy. Grass lawns are inherently monocultural and harmful to other species. According to David Pimentai, a professor of entomology at Cornell University, “... roughly 7 million birds die each year because of the use of lawn-care pesticides.” (Steinberg, 2005) *The Vessels* resist conformity by asserting that more life is found right on this lawn and within the soil.



Figure 24: *The English Aristocratic Lawn*

I've added to the undirected performance by placing *The Vessels* close to the road where neighbors can easily observe them and to expand the meaning of what a lawn can be. In one sense I have imposed another layer of meaning on the lawn. Part of being '*At Place*' for me has allowed me the space to dispense with my judgement about what suburbia represents and accept its reality (like the biological materials that objectively accept the anthropocentric materials). And then to carry on creating and finding the potential for art, community, and expression within this framework. Like my exploration of narrowing focus, I have embraced the constraints of a suburban neighbourhood and found a place to make art that *comes* from the place.

Because I was raised in a suburban environment, I developed a nostalgic view of lawns. To me, they represent demarcations: my lawn, a playground, a source of constant labour for my father, the sphere of men's work outside the home, my father weeding and mowing the lawn in his GM coveralls (often with his chest exposed), helping my dad, and the smell of gasoline. It could also be a source of discouragement -- the weeds are taking over -- or serve as a setting for a beloved crab apple tree.

Beyond nostalgia, I sit now in my studio staring out at my front lawn that is serving as a stage for *The Vessels*' performance. I contemplate taking over more of the lawn with even more perennials, trees, evergreens, berry bushes, fruit trees, and edible hardy perennials, than already exist. But I feel compelled to hang on to some portion of the lawn. Aesthetically, and from a design point of view, the expanse of flat green grass offers a place for the eye to rest and serves as contrast to other elements of the yard.

The suburban front lawn is symbolically loaded, and I enjoy the tension created as I prod its historic, social, and economic symbolism. I am creating tension between conformity and resisting it. The grass covered front lawn is derived from a colonial aesthetic imported from Britain. However unsustainable and monocultural, the fashion persists. When it was first introduced to North America, grassing a front yard wasn't immediately popular. Most people who moved into suburbs were informed by a farming background. They saw land and soil for its potential to grow food. Yards were viewed pragmatically, and they provided an important source of supplemental food for the household. "[T]he front yard functioned as a miniature farm set up for growing various vegetables and raising small farm animals in order to put food on the table of a factory worker's family. Lawns could not flourish so long as the land was prized more for its use value than for its exchange value." (Murray, 2003) At this point, form follows

function. The time for the ecological conceit of a front lawn was yet to come. The idea that the concept of lawn is needed in a consumerist society is like the concept that theatre, performance, and art needs to be experienced in vested institutions and serve to nurture certain acceptable materials. Following in the tradition of questioning, and acknowledging the evolving nature of art and ideas, I want to challenge these institutionalized and exclusionary practices.

Early exchanges between Europeans and Indigenous people in North America brought more animal and plant species, including invasive grasses that forever changed the landscape. This process was coined *The Columbian Exchange* by Historian Alfred Crosby,

“The European voyages, in other words, altered the ecology of the Americas in some fundamental ways. Native grasses, for example, died because of the pressure placed on them by grazing animals, the cows, sheep, and goats that the Europeans took on their travels, animals that did not exist on the North American continent before the arrival of the white settlers. Meanwhile, European grasses, which had evolved in tandem with the grazing animals, expanded their reach over the American landscape, flooding into the areas abandoned by the native grasses.” (Liers, Crosby, 2005)

The front lawn’s aesthetic is a manifestation of the biological and social history of North American colonialism. The front lawn is a mirror to this aggressive past and runs parallel to the colonial development of art and theatre in North America, which tended to be elitist, exploitative, exclusionary, and hierarchical. With this contextualization of the suburban lawn, the subversive potential for art and performance is obvious. It is accessible, politically loaded, and historically unjust.

The contemporary aesthetic of the suburban lawn was cemented post-WWII when consumerist economic practices took hold, underpinned by the concept of planned obsolescence. New suburban development led to by-laws and rules that required a standard set back from the road on disturbed soil, which is a perfect host for grass. Grass flourishes on disturbed soil but is quickly overrun by invasive “weeds”. The lawn becomes a perfect product for a society that can

endlessly consume the petrochemicals needed to maintain the slick suburban aesthetic of thick, green grass. Suburban lawns became a ubiquitous manifestation of consumer culture: uniform, characterless, imposed, toxic, exploitative, and degrading to the cultural and biological landscape.

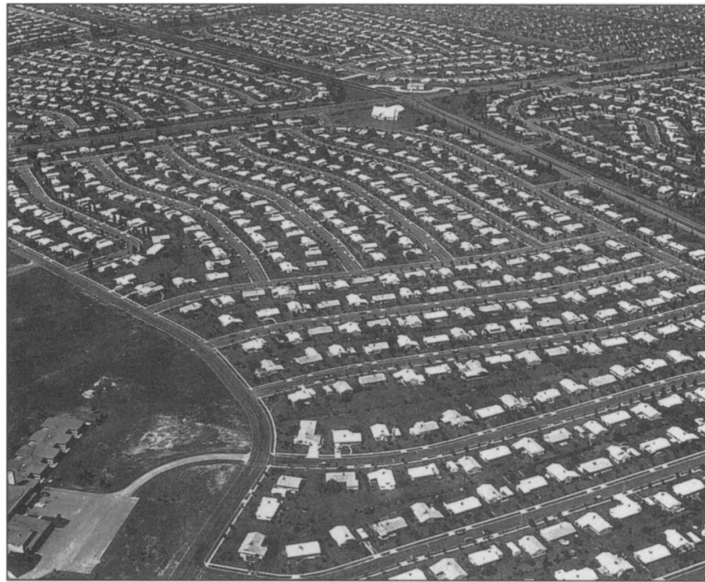


Figure 25: *Post War Suburban Development* Levittown, Pennsylvania

Well-managed turf contributes to water management and helps to prevent soil erosion but the chemical requirements for its manicured aesthetic are immense. The aesthetic has been reinforced by the international golf craze of the last 40 years and has contributed to the loss of habitat for many species. Consumers are encouraged to pursue the perfect lawn through the regular application of fungicides, herbicides, and insecticides. The aesthetic of the suburban front lawn sits at the intersection of colonialism, racism, and a toxic reductive consumerism. It is the ideal place to serve as a stage for *The Vessels* as they reveal the theories of Vibrant Matter, New Materialism, and subversive Non-Human Performance.

Chapter 6: Emergence

For while every public may very well be an ecosystem, not every ecosystem is democratic. -Bennett

My approach to the metaphorical meaning of *The Vessels* is like my thinking about Non-Human Performance, the plain-spoken vessels, and my non-hierarchical approach to the selection of materials. That is, the metamorphosis of the decomposing elements (newspaper, leaves, worms, acorns) among anthropocentric materials (glass, tin, tarp and plastic) is a non-binary representation of material. They are expressing themselves rather than being represented. It is my hope that *The Vessels* challenge existing aesthetics of vegetation and be seen as a container for the expression of these materials to perform themselves in place.

I am not controlling them or their processes, I facilitated through the conception and construction of *The Vessels*. I inserted myself by containing the materials and presenting them on the front lawn stage and that was the extent of my intervention. The remainder of the performance is influenced by the processes inherent in the structure and chemistry of the materials, their interaction with each other, and their exposure and reaction to the elements. The materials are the performers staged on a suburban front lawn. They have their own agency.

By allowing *The Vessels* to emerge, they acknowledge the inherent agency of matter outside of human subjectivity. Alongside the emergent quality of *The Vessels*, we acknowledge the assembly of the materials and their interactions. Beyond sentimentality regarding materials, "...the goal of a vital materialism is not the perfect equality of actants, but a polity with more channels of communication between members." (Bennett, 104) My work is an attempt to address past transgressions against biological materials which are seen as less than human and only necessary to serve human needs. Like the work of Beer, Beuys, Jeremijenko, and Bennett, it attempts to address these conceptions. By relinquishing control of *The Vessels*, they are given

the dignity of a valuable, worthwhile performance that exists within the framework of the lawn's ecosystem.

Allowing the materials to perform and express, rather than be represented by humans, we give way and begin to reckon with our place in an unsentimental ecosystem of interdependence and non-dominance. The work regards the materials as co-creators that can express and represent systems of interdependence that span the entirety of all material life on earth. Approaching plant and biological matter as independent from human subjectivity, we free ourselves and the object from a binary perspective.

These ideas are enriched by Kimmerer, a Western-trained scientist who honours the knowledge and teachings of her Indigenous ancestors. She states that,

“[s]cientists are particularly good at learning about the lives of other species. The stories they could tell convey the intrinsic values of the lives of other beings, lives every bit as interesting, maybe more so, as those of *Homo sapiens*. But while scientists are among those who are privy to these other intelligences, many seem to believe that the intelligence they access is only their own. They lack the fundamental ingredient: humility...and it takes humility to learn from other species.” (Kimmerer, 346)

Kimmerer echoes the concepts of a horizontal value of all species, Vibrant Matter, and Emergence. She asks us to aspire to a world view where matter and spirit are given voice. It is my aspiration that my work reflects this wisdom.

Gibson, Prudence and Brits in *Covert Plants: Vegetal Consciousness and Agency in an Anthropocentric World* argue that “Plant thinking allows an exploration of the paradoxes of human exceptionalism, because it draws attention to a refocusing on nature as more than a backdrop to human action. Plant thinking refers to moving agency away from the human and towards vegetal life, which is the backbone of all ecosystems.” (Gibson, Prudence, and Baylee Brits, 2018) We extend this agency to non-biological material and to all matter whether it is inert

or synthetic. In this way, we grasp the vitality of all material. Even if we view plastic in the ocean as the environmental disaster that it is, we must give it objective consideration as material that has a vitality of its own and not just see it as the enemy of environmentalism. Rather than dismissing undesirable materials as secondary, we objectively acknowledge its place in our world. *The Vessels* contain anthropocentric materials mixed in with the organic materials and are objectively interacting with and incorporating them into their processes. My work embraces this action of trans-corporeality. It is an acknowledgement to regard these materials without judgement or relation to ourselves. Only in this sober, non-sentimental way can we truly come to terms with the realities of the environmental crisis. Philosopher Michael Marder states, “Artists can either keep replaying this frustrating record of total loss, masquerading as total transparency, or they can imagine ways to see, listen to, be, and think with plants otherwise.” (Gibson, Prudence, and Baylee Brits, 2018) This stance of the co-creator challenges artists and audiences to move past the comfortable. This is not unlike the Harrisons’ staging of ecosystems or Jeremijenko asking what we *can* do. Let us not lament what is no longer there, but address what is, and find the art.

“Expression, for Marder, then allows for a ‘decentering’ of the ‘vegetal’ work done by the arts, whereby the object is not totalised by the subject position that renders it. Instead, the artist expands, extends, or exports their object, taking it outside itself, but not necessarily making it a possession or a secondary effect of a subject position.” (Gibson, Prudence, and Baylee Brits, 2018) Marder’s use of the term ‘expression’ mirrors Bennet’s use of the term ‘emergence’. The matter is assembled, and acts upon its own agentic impulses in polity with the other matter in a state of emergence. This is how I see *The Vessels*, as emerging, in polity, with matter gathered from place giving voice to spirit and matter.

An Epilogue: Reflection

*“You will write if you will write without thinking of the result in terms of a result, but think of the writing in terms of discovery,
which is to say that creation must take place
between the pen and the paper, not before in a thought or afterwards in a recasting...
It will come if it is there and if you will let it come.”
~Gertrude Stein*

The Vessels were installed on the front lawn February 9, 2021 and are in a state of emergence. They are observed daily by neighbours and members of the community coming into the neighbourhood. As Niagara Region sanitation workers observe *The Vessels* on their weekly rounds, I am reminded of Mierle Ukuleles Laderman’s, *Touch Sanitation Performance*. Ukuleles’ engagement of sanitation workers is an example of broad engagement across social hierarchies. Her elevation of maintenance as a form of art engaged previously excluded people and subject matter as valid for art making. She exposes racist, classist and misogynistic barriers by recognizing the significance of maintenance. In order “[t]o earn the respect of the department’s workers and to learn its byzantine system for vanquishing millions of tons of garbage per year, she conducted what became one of the most ambitious performance pieces in the city’s history — ‘Touch Sanitation Performance’ — in which she spent a year visiting each of the department’s districts and shaking the hand of every one of the 8,500 workers who would accept the gesture.” (Kennedy, 2016)



Figure 26: Mierle Laderman Ukeles in her *Touch Sanitation Performance*, from 1979-80

I want to pay tribute to the art of Mierle Laderman Ukeles and, hopefully, I have created an art installation for essential city workers to observe and ponder.



Figure 27: *Sanitation Worker with The Vessels*, May 2021

The Vessels engage a broad community with an objective and non-didactic approach. They allow matter to decompose and emerge, while engaging a variety of species. They speak to the place where they are from and, upon their stage, draw the interest of sanitation workers.

I facilitated an act of agentic assemblage that continues to emerge and will have no end. It will continue even beyond the aspiration of an oak seedling and stretch our sense of time and art and theatre's potential. Currently, *The Vessels* are ensconced by grass and are developing a new sculptural form. They are stretching my sense of time and my notions about how long the work "lasts". If anything, it continues to raise questions about the assemblages within and their polity. This process has peeled away my sentiment and impulsive creation tendencies. It has helped me develop patience, objectivity, inquiry, and rumination. I have learned to allow periods of "not knowing" and "uncertainty". I reached out to others and found a community of artists who helped me carry on and live with uncertainty. The space allowed me to be an artist and many other things too. Like Walt Whitman, I contain multitudes.

I was able to explore theories and practices that brought me to a place where I ponder Marder's proposal that "[t]he implicit suggestion that not only should art engage with plants but that it might also be, at its core, vegetal. It is true that we customarily think of aesthetic creation as one of the highest endeavors of human spirituality, a largely ethereal activity on the par with religion and philosophy." (Gibson, Prudence, and Baylee Brits, 2018) If we accept that spirituality is defined by an experience of transcendence and transformation, then I agree that art is a high form of spirituality. Like spirituality, art requires people to transcend their sense of self in order to be transformed. When artists sublimate themselves to the process and are guided by research, they align themselves with the vitality of matter and the vegetal process of making art.

I have endeavored to create work that transcends human dominance, acknowledges the vibrancy of matter, and comes from place.



Figure 28: *The Vessels*, May 2021

In summary, my findings led me to a state of acceptance. I accept my suburban environment, my hybrid approach to art, biological expression, human sublimation, and the validity of anthropocentric materials. *The Vessels* reveal that civic space and community *are* possible in a suburban neighbourhood and that suburbia is complex. I found that much of my work is underpinned by the domestic and the relational, and that the universal can be derived from the domestic. I understand that performance is happening all the time, in and outside of my perception. This process has allowed me the objectivity to comprehend these concepts in an unsentimental way. From this place, post MFA, I feel a sense of emergence and expression around and beyond me. I take this position forward into my future work.

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Figure 1: Two Photos taken from Romeo Castelluci’s *Orestia* executive production: Societas Raffaello Sanzio. In co-production with: Odéon-Théâtre de l’Europe.

Figure 2: Two Photos taken from “*The Austrian Football Stadium with a Forest on the Pitch – in Pictures*.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 6 Sept. 2019. Photograph: Unimo.

Figure 3: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom.

Figure 4: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom and photo taken from © Utah Education Network in partnership with the Utah State Board of Education and Utah System of Higher Education. <https://www.uen.org/lessonplan/view/33048>

Figure 5: Photo taken from Joseph Beuys, *Brasilienfond (Brazilian Fond)*, 1979. © Joseph Beuys/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York

Figure 6: Photo taken from <https://www.multispecies-salon.org/ecoart/newton-harrison-2/> “*Hog Pasture: Survival Piece #1*” (1970-71) by Helen Mayer Harrison & Newton Harrison

Figure 7: Photo taken from Helen+Newton Harrison, *Hog Pasture: Survival Piece #1*, “*Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*”. http://www.hadleyjensen.com/?attachment_id=172

Figure 8: “*Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitrines, Environments: Room 4.*” Tate, 2005. Photo credit Caroline Tisdall © DACS 200

Figure 9: Photo taken from *To Life! Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet*. University of California Press, 2012. Weintraub, Linda.

Figure 10: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom.

Figure 11: Photo taken from *STRUNG (This IS NOT RUBBISH)* The Arts Centre (Melbourne), World Stage Design (Cardiff), Royal Central School of Speech and Drama 2013. Photography: Alex Murphy

Figure 12: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom.

Figure 13: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom.

Figure 14: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom.

Figure 15: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom.

Figure 16: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom.

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Figure 18: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom.

Figure 19: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom.

Figure 20: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom.

Figure 21: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom.

Figure 22: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom.

Figure 23: Two photos taken from *Babushka Svetlana and Me*. Photo: Maria Quigley. Thu 11 Jun 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/jun/11/babushka-svetlana-and-me-a-photo-essay>

Figure 24: Photo taken from *Views of England* by the Detroit Publishing Company. Image courtesy of the Photochrom Print Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photo Division LOT 13415, no. 268.

Figure 25: Photo taken from *Lawn and Landscape in World Context*, 1945-2000 Author(s): Ted Steinberg Source: OAH Magazine of History, Nov. 2005, Vol. 19, No. 6,

American West (Nov. 2005), pp. 62-68 Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of Organization of American Historians. Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

Figure 26: *Photo taken from An Artist Who Calls The Sanitation Department Home.*
Robin Holland/Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/22/arts/design/mierle-laderman-ukeles-new-york-city-sanitation-department.html>

Figure 27: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom.

Figure 28: Personal Documentation by Paula Engstrom.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: THE TABLE PERFORMANCE

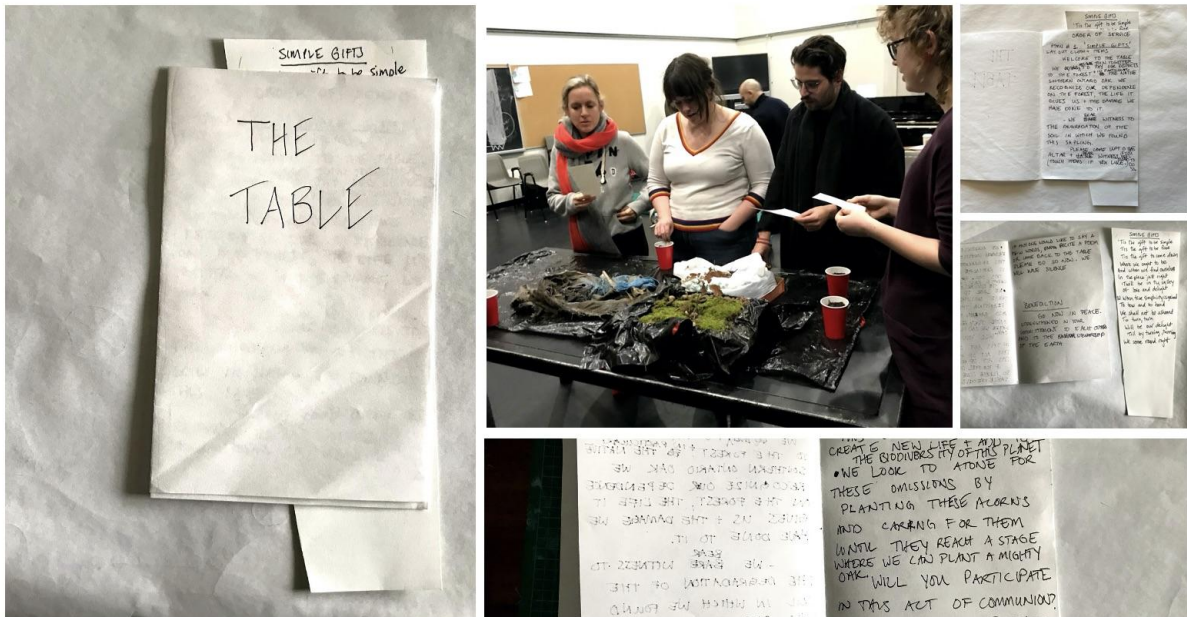
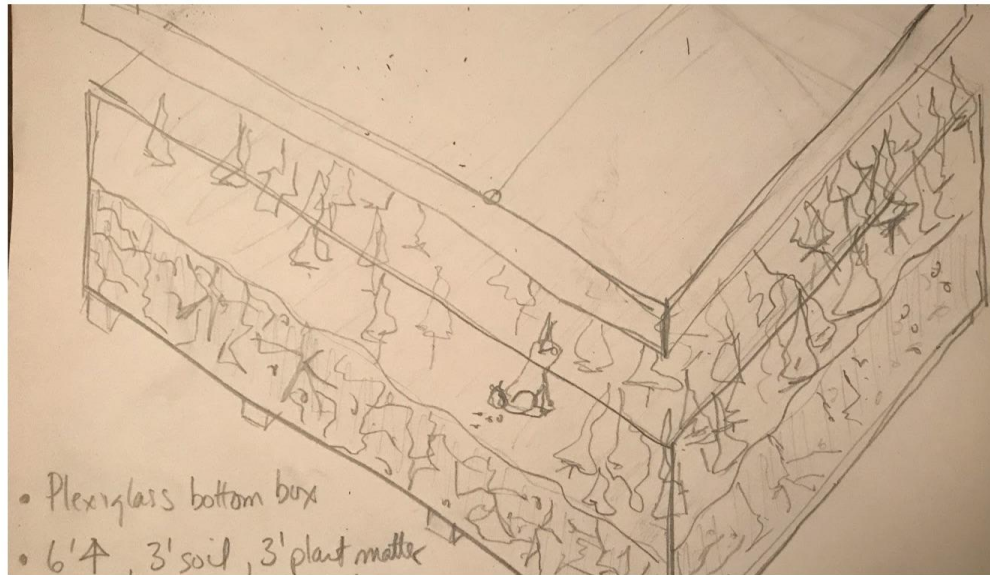


Table Performance and Program, 2019

APPENDIX B: STAGING ECOSYSTEMS

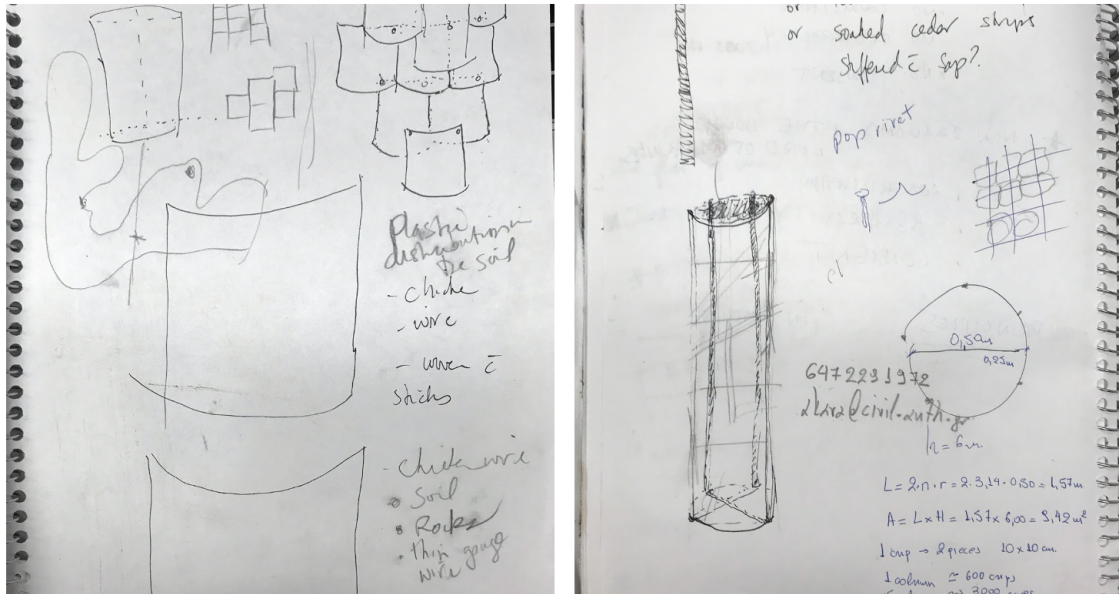


Staging Ecosystems Sketch, 2019

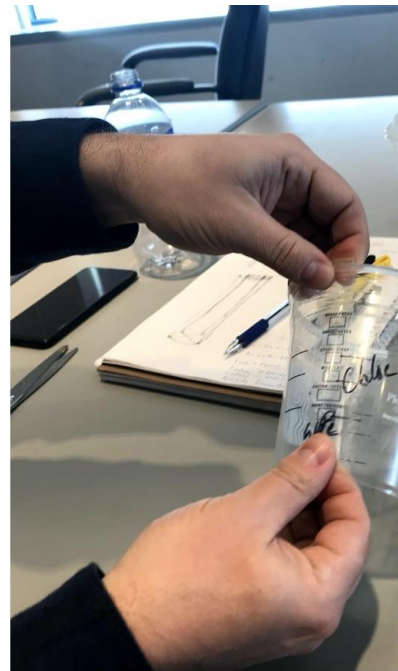


Documentation and Experimentation of Root Systems, 2020

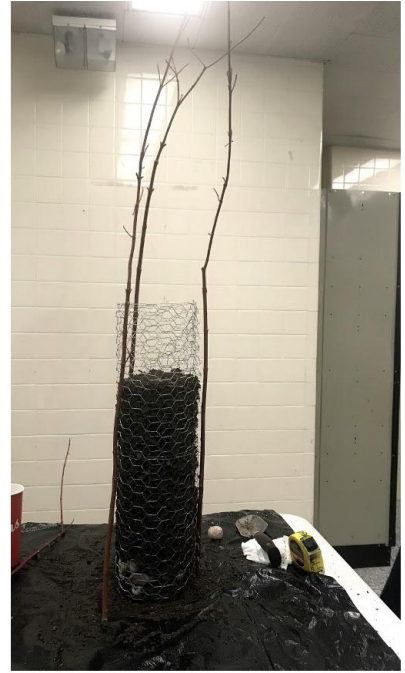
APPENDIX C: BEDROCK STAGING ECOSYSTEMS



Design Sketches for Bedrock and Soil Pillars, 2020



Gathering Materials and Experimenting, 2020



Maquettes for Soil Pillars, 2020

APPENDIX D: MATERIALS



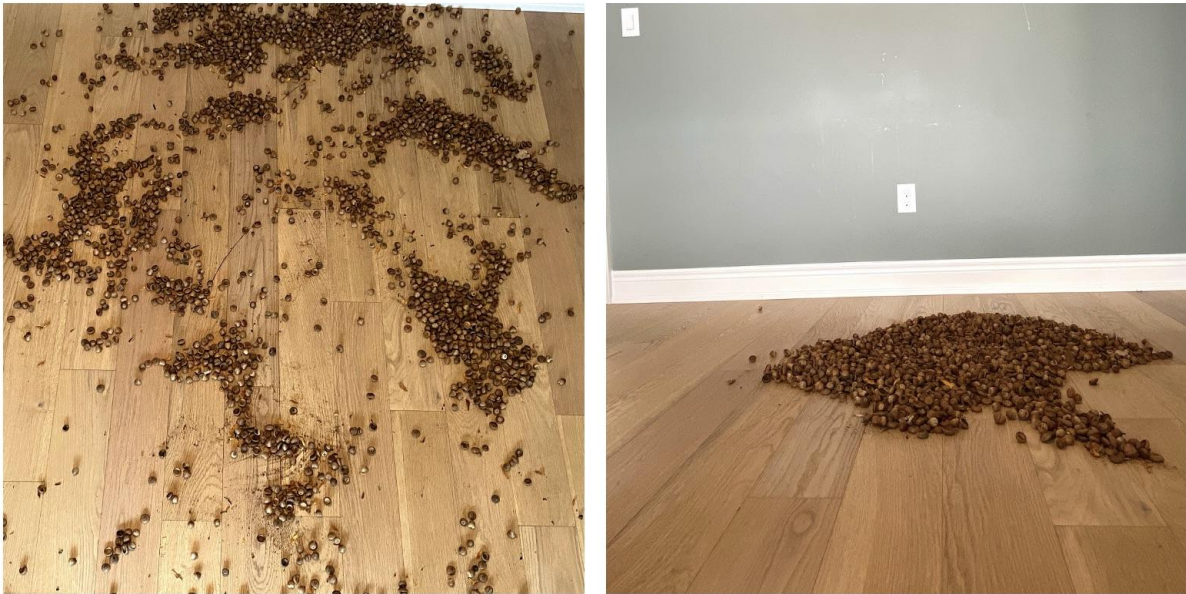
Materials

APPENDIX E: GOLD LEAFING

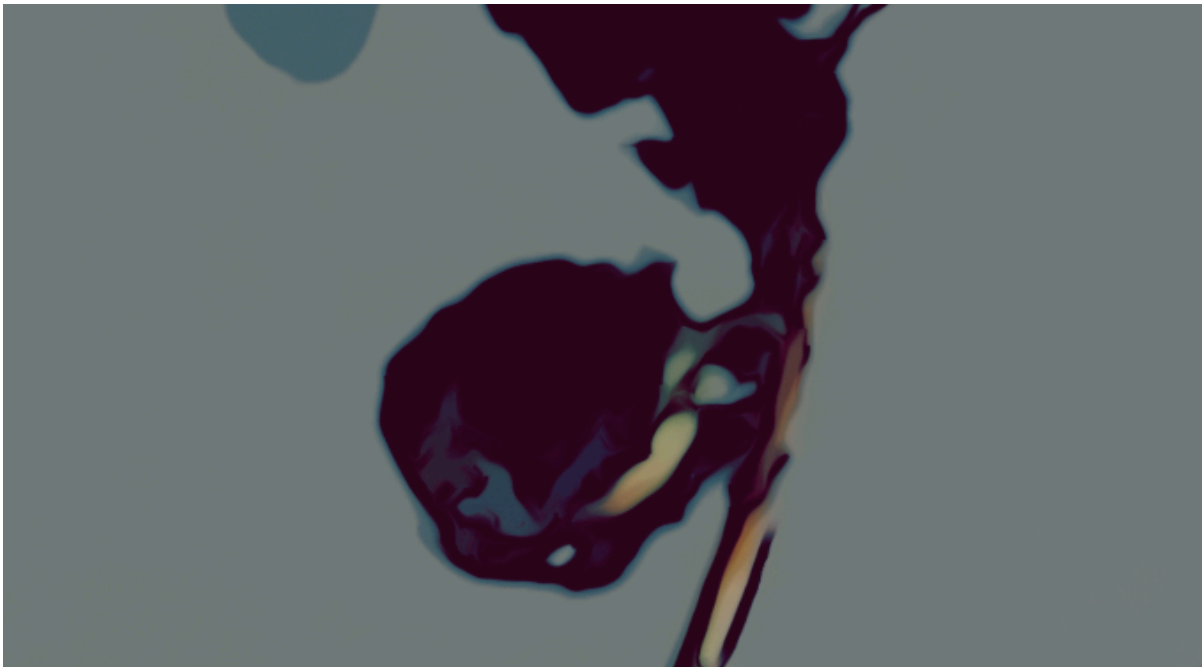


Gold Leafing Vessel

APPENDIX F: ACORN PERFORMANCE /EXPERIMENTATION/ART



Acorn Performance and Experimentation, 2021



Digital Acorn Art, 2021

Vibrant Matter Performances

<https://youtu.be/raNzi79-yGM>

<https://youtu.be/Tvs-h0TsNl0>

<https://youtu.be/Aqamho3QOzs>

<https://youtu.be/UbgwmJbgyqg>