A WIND FROM NOPLACE

Kristina Sheufelt

BFA, College for Creative Studies, Detroit, MI. 2013

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Approved by:



Nick Tobier, Graduate Thesis Committee Chair

40 air Cluy

David Chung, Graduate Thesis Committee Member

Achartin

Sara Adlerstein-Gonzalez, Graduate Thesis Committee Member

40 and clay

David Chung, Director MFA Graduate Program

Date Degree Conferred: April 2022





A Wind From Noplace
Using visual art as a lens for understanding humanity, emotion, and the changing earth through ecological intimacy

Kristina Sheufelt

Candidate, MFA University of Michigan Spring 2022

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Abstract

Presented at the Stamps Gallery in Ann Arbor, Michigan in March 2022, *A Wind From Noplace* is an interdisciplinary body of visual artworks and creative research surrounding my attempts to understand human ecology through a personal lens. In the making of these works, I attempt to uncover and transcribe the psychophysiological roots of my intimacy with land, flora, and fauna.

The installation includes two large kinetic landscape sculptures with corresponding videos and a third, smaller sculpture. Beside the largest of the sculptures, the wall text reads:

What does it mean to hold memories of a changing landscape? Like lost loved ones, can we keep mountains and meadows with us after they are gone, or after we have gone from them? A Wind From Noplace uses physiological data to understand the land as an object of affection, a surrogate for emotional relationships with humans absent from our lives. With a collection of heartbeats and brainwaves, I attempt to reanimate the landscapes of my memory, blurring lines of species, geography, and self.

In each kinetic sculpture, I capture several moments of my body's responses to natural landscapes, translating the fluctuations in physiological activity into a visual language for interpreting emotion and sensation.

These brief moments of bodily response to stimuli were captured over the summer in remote or isolated locations, after I completed a six-week trek through mountainous backcountry. I've spent the nine months since I came out of the backcountry trying to remember it, to hold onto what that immersion did for me, both in body and mind. In A Wind From Noplace, the viewer is both witness to those moments and

participant in my attempts to reconfigure them. In this document, I will present the research and methodologies that produced this body of work, and which also provided the framework for many works of experimental creative nonfiction and a budding philosophy regarding human ecological engagements.

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Field Note 1.

March 21, 2022 - Ann Arbor, Michigan

The woods are in my bones this week. The mountains, under my skin.

The rocks over which I stumbled for hundreds of miles are there,

unseen but felt.

like a tooth beneath the tongue. In my lungs are the ghosts of ridgeline winds.

I want nothing more than to get back to them.

Can I ever get back to them?

I spent forty-six days alone in the mountains, and it wasn't nearly enough.

I walked four hundred and eighty-three miles, ascending 112,300 feet. I carried my life on my back in thirty tightly-condensed pounds. I saw nine bears, crossed three state lines, missed two national holidays.

I try to understand what I experienced in numbers, not because numbers are what I understand best, but because I've tried to understand what I experienced in any way that I can. I've tried to explain the indescribable communion with the land under my feet to many people in the months that have passed since, and failed.

I've come closest through writing, and through listening to my body. I've tried to write what my body felt, and failed. I knew I would before I ever started this. But the body writes its experiences in a different language than the conscious mind. So I tried to find a language in which my body could speak.

This affair was born long before I set foot in Virginia; in fact, long before I set foot on any mountain. The love and longing that carried me here was born in ditches and gravel pits, in stagnant ponds and weed beds, those liminal, wounded places we can all name. It was cultured by a child turning over limestone chips in the driveway, looking for fossils, and rotting logs in the woods, looking for salamanders. Over many years it was fed by an absent parent and an emotionally distant

partner. When I was still learning its shape, it was tempered by a global crisis and a sweeping loss of human connection. It has become something I no longer have the words to describe, if I ever did at all.

Over the course of many years I have lost, and found, and lost again, the ability to articulate what it is that I feel for the elements of the natural world to which I am most intimately connected. In A Wind From Noplace, I attempted to circumvent conventional language and directly translate my body's psychophysiological² responses to engagement with natural landscapes and phenomena through experiential installation art.

As I have already stated, the closest I have come to conveying my own experiences and philosophy of ecological intimacy has been through writing, in the form of spontaneous, lyrical prose-poetry field notes. A Wind From Noplace has been my first attempt at creating visual, physical poetry.

In my life and creative practice, I find that I connect to landscapes less as *place* and more as kin. Furthermore, I consider the relationships I form with insects, soil, and wind to be surrogates for the relationships I have with humans which are broken, damaged, or lacking. Even as I heal from that lack of human care and connection, even as I find new love among humans, the land continues to be what most feels like the love of a mother, lover, and close friend, all at once and in different times and places. But as I investigate this surrogacy, I am coming to understand that to anthropomorphize is to cheapen it; yes, the love I give and feel in the woods, the water, the air fills a void left by people in my life, but it is also more than they ever could have given me in the first place.

When I began treating my ecosystem as an object of affection, but also as a living, changing entity with moods and phases that parallel

¹ Kimmerer, Robin Wall, Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants. Tantor Media, 2016

² Psychophysiology (noun): the study of the relationship between physiological and psychological phenomena; the ways in which the mind and body interact.

my own, I began to think about the ways we hold places and people emotionally, and the way we attempt to hold them in our memory. I found myself drawing parallels between changing lands that I am emotionally close to and changing people. When my mother was diagnosed with dementia in 2020, I became acutely aware of my role in the preservation of memories, not just of her and my childhood, but of the land on which I grew up. I also became aware of how deeply the two were intertwined.

Through careful research and a surplus of self-reflection, I have come to understand the circumstances that brought me here. But in learning how to share my ecological intimacies with other humans, I am now faced with a new question: does human love need to be absent in order for these bonds with land, flora, and fauna to grow so strong? Can we learn to cultivate these intimate ecologies from a place of wholeness, as well as brokenness? Furthermore, how can this intimacy be preserved for a time or place when it is absent?

In these inquiries, I am trying to find a path towards excavating the ways in which the body's physical experiences translate into emotion and memory, and further, the ways in which touch and sensorial memory play into the formation of human ecological behaviors and attitudes.

At the root of all prior and future questions is this: How can visual art help us rethink these connections, and bridge the gaps in our understanding of human psychophysiological ecologies? Having found verbal language and conventional research methods insufficient to bridge this gap, I have set out to find a new language for ecological intimacy through experimental sculpture, video, and installation.

In trying to find answers to these rapidly-compounding questions, I find myself chasing the moments that have most nurtured the precious feelings of *wholeness* such as I experienced in the backcountry last summer. I have chased them through writing and static visualizations.

I have drawn and painted and photographed. I have scribbled notes and diagrams in moments of inspiration, only to quickly find that even I cannot understand or decipher them outside of that moment. I have spoken aloud to myself on endless walks, slowly piecing together an understanding of myself and my place in the land I inhabit. I have spent hours touching and smelling and watching, soaking up weather and wildlife, integrating myself on every level into a variety of ecosystems, letting them change me in what ways they might.

Early on, I became aware of the powers of touch and motion when intentionally enmeshing myself with a landscape, a collection of animate and inanimate entities which have varying levels of agency and with which I share no known common language. Because for me, the indescribable comes not from the purely visual, but from a combination of sensory experiences. It was this realization that led me to break from static visual expression and into the realm of dynamic time-based art.

The installation includes two large kinetic landscape sculptures with corresponding videos and a third, smaller sculpture. Beside the largest of the sculptures, the wall text reads:

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the landscapes of my memory, blurring lines of species,

geography, and self.

In each kinetic sculpture, I capture several moments of my body's responses to natural landscapes, translating the fluctuations in physiological activity into a visual language for interpreting emotion and sensation. This visual language occurs in the swaying of even rows of robotic reed grass and the gentle lapping of waves on a fabricated cross-section of rocky lake shore.

These brief moments of bodily response to stimuli were captured over the summer in remote or isolated locations, after I completed a six-week trek through mountainous backcountry. I've spent the nine months since I came out of the backcountry trying to remember it, to hold onto what that immersion did for me, both in body and mind. In A Wind From Noplace, the viewer is both witness to those moments and participant in my attempts to reconfigure them. In this document, I will present the research and methodologies that produced this body of work, and which also provided the framework for many works of experimental creative nonfiction and a budding philosophy regarding human ecological engagements.

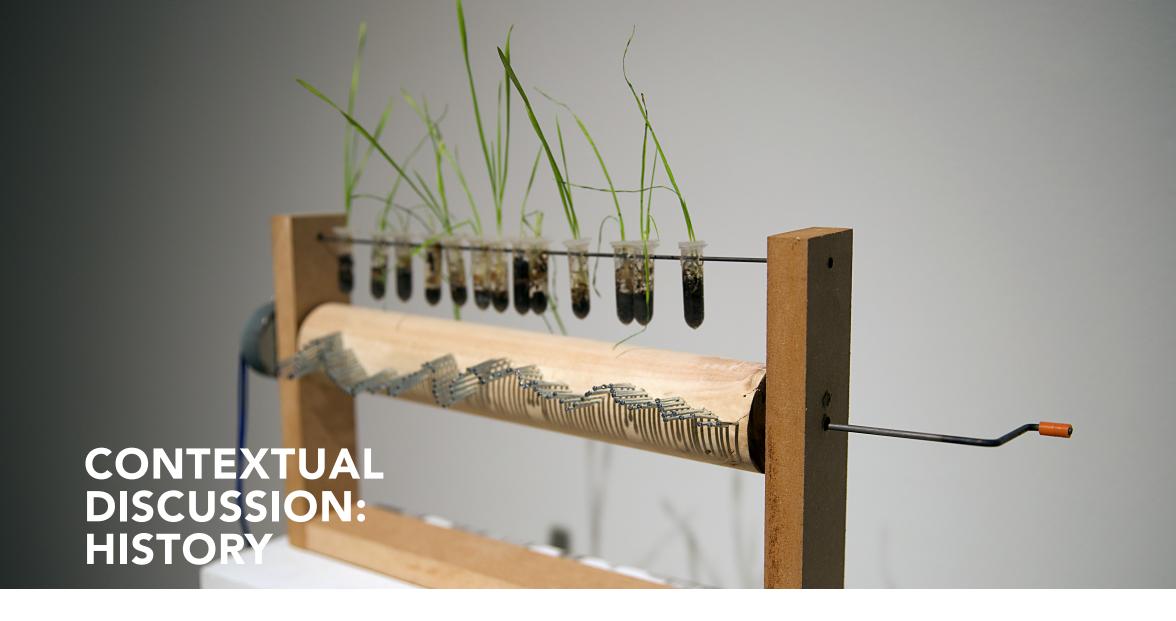
Some of these works of creative writing, which I have termed 'field notes', and which make up a critical part of my methodology, will feature throughout this document. 'Field notes' are spontaneously written pieces of poetic self-analysis. These will begin each section as a way of connecting the reader to a moment or state of mind which may have informed the subsequent, more structured writing.

Personal experience and self-analysis are central to my research, which uses the self as a case study for multi-species and sensory ethnographies, bringing attention "to the many dimensions of the world, both animate and inanimate, that may only with difficulty, if it all, be rendered with words".³ In a variety of environments ranging from roadway medians to pristine mountain ranges, I investigate and meditate on the implications of pursuing aloneness in living environments. In my

experience, one cannot achieve the full breadth of intimacy with land, flora, and fauna in the presence of other humans. For this reason, my practice begins and ends with solitude.

In my research, I hope to use personal experience to identify and address the gaps that exist in prior and current knowledge on these topics. By locating myself and my practice at the point of overlap between art, ecology, and psychology, I will find unique points of access into these critical issues, using my work to leverage those I reach back to a place of intuitive connection with the natural world and mindfulness of one's role in local and global ecologies.

³ Harvard Sensory Ethnography Lab



Nature with a Capital N

Putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of woman. It is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration.

- Timothy Morton, Ecology Without Nature

The earth is in distress. We all know this. A dozen headlines each day cry new warnings into the echo chamber of environmental consciousness. Warming climate, mass extinction, water shortages, extreme weather. Deeply embedded in each of these crises is a lack of empathy, or more specifically, a loss of love. Somewhere along the line in the rapid churn of recent human evolution, many of our species discarded love for our ecosystems in favor of lust for their resources. No longer do we value the natural world for what it can do for us in a reciprocal relationship; we are preoccupied by what we can extract from it.

I'd like to preface this discussion by addressing the word nature, particularly in its capital-N form. Much of my research comes from a place of deep dissatisfaction with language, and a desire to resolve the specific linguistic inadequacies that have both hindered and guided my practice. I find the word Nature frustratingly insufficient and work hard to avoid using it whenever possible. To quote a brief but succinct excerpt from Robin Wall Kimmerer's Braiding Sweetgrass, the book that has become a sort of bible for the theory of emotional ecology, "...nature herself is a moving target."4

However, I have yet to find a term I feel I can use in its place. I know that many environmentalist writers and artists feel the same, because over the course of the past decade I have noticed an attempted shift in the language surrounding human-nature relations. The terms "non-human" and "more-than-human" have made the rounds, but even these attempts to move away from anthropocentric language keep the focus on homo sapiens as the dominant species. As environmental theorist Stacy Alaimo remarks in her book, Bodily Natures, "even human linguistic systems are not ultimately separable from what it is difficult not to call 'nature'".5

When we use the word Nature, we are attempting to encompass all

beings, elements and phenomena within the planet and its atmosphere not specifically manufactured by humans; "...in short, a vast proliferation of forms and beings left to live independently according to their own laws of cohabitation." But the word has come to colloquially stand for only a few facets of an incredibly complex concept. When I hear someone say "I love being in Nature." I understand their idea of Nature to mean lush, pristine landscapes that one visits to escape from 'real life'. A headline speaking of the 'destructive force of nature' will almost certainly be talking about a natural disaster such as a flood. But I have yet to hear 'Nature' used in a context that I feel encompasses all that the natural universe is.

The idea of being in Nature is fundamentally paradoxical. Human beings are biological organisms which could not possibly exist outside of Nature, and yet we have constructed an altered existence for ourselves in which we are, physically and psychologically, separated from the rest of the natural world in varying degrees. We have in many ecosystems deconstructed the land, animals, and plants, and reconstructed them into something tidier, more palatable; a 'civilized' version of its prior self which reminds us less of our own wilder roots.

While it is important to acknowledge the human race as a species which in recent history has almost unanimously acted outside of, and against, the rest of nature, it is a delicate dance around words to avoid reinforcing language that perpetuates this duality. Humanity's ecocidal⁷ turn took place relatively late in our existing history as a species, so it should not be considered impossible that we return to an earlier mode of thought and behavior regarding the planet and its other living inhabitants.

⁴ Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass 5 Alaimo, Stacy, Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self. Indiana University Press, 2010

⁶ Descola, Phillipe, Beyond Nature and Culture. University of Chicago Press, 2013 7 ecocide - noun: destruction of the natural environment by deliberate or negligent human action.

On Nature, Culture, and Empathy

Field Note 2.

July 20, 2021 - Portland, Oregon

Last night I woke in confusion, still half-dreaming about the woods, and thought that the street light through the curtains was moonlight through pine trees, that I was sleeping on the ground outside my tent. I've never been more uncertain of my reality than in that moment. I've never so ached for miles between myself and the trappings of civilization. That was themoment I started mourning for the self I was in the woods. Today I drank the last of my creek water on the train. Now all I have left of the mountains is the dust on my boots, less with each step closer to home.

My thesis research focuses on reframing human ecological behaviors by using encounters with the natural as a platform for processing emotion and thought, much as we process the nuances of our human relationships. The goal of my creative practice is to use visual art to locate a higher mode of empathy with the natural world, using this empathy to dissolve Nature/Culture binaries, bridge widening gaps between the wild and the *unwild*, and theorize a new, more sustainable human ecology founded in introspection and personal ecological intimacy.

At the beginning of this research in the fall of 2019, I began to look into questions of how human perceptions of nature, often as something other or elsewhere, are formed. What cultural frameworks dictate the nature of human ecology, small and large? Which frameworks are helpful or harmful, and of those which are harmful, which cultural institutions support and uphold them? In searching for my research question, the first inquiry that felt like I was on the right track was this:

What elements of human culture, experience, and physiology impact our viewership of the natural (nonhuman) world? How do these elements influence us towards, on the one end, empathy for the non-human, and on the other end, entitlement to it?

This initial interrogation of human ecology left me feeling somewhat frustrated, in a way that I soon came to recognize; there is a certain helplessness that is undeniable when excavating the myriad issues surrounding the 'big-picture' ecological crises of our age. This frustration or helplessness is described in bits of environmental psychology, where lately it is easy to pick up neologisms like *solastalgia*, described as "a form of emotional or existential distress caused by environmental change".8

When confronted with rapidly-shifting ecological conditions, solastalgia, and compassion fatigue, how is it possible to find space in our collective human ecology for the kind of intimacy and empathy with nature which must be required for any substantial change? Experts across many disciplines agree that significant change is critical to the future of humankind on this planet. And for this change to hold up to the rapid progression of technology and expansion of the human population, it has got to be big, a fact which makes my forthcoming hypothesis seem contradictory.

At the heart of global warming, pollution, and all forms of environmental exploitation is a deep and pervasive lack of empathy. Yes, we want to solve these problems, but for most, that level of engagement only comes with the realization that they are no longer strictly environmental problems, but human problems as well. Overwhelmingly, the nature of our care for ecological concerns is selfish, often shallow or performative, and almost always selective, because we see ourselves as separate from the rest of the global ecosystem.

⁸ Smith, Zadie, *Elegy for a Country's Seasons*. The New York Review of Books, 2014

Where in our species' history did this loss occur? For it is a loss; of connectedness, of understanding, of empathy. What cultural systems or ideologies facilitated it, and how might they be subverted so that we can regain these elements of our humanity? Or have we never truly had this empathy, and are only now coming to that realization, as the consequences of centuries of unchecked exploitation for the first time make themselves known?

My early research focused on the ecological side of this conundrum. By understanding and engaging in the formal ways we study the nature/culture relationship, I hoped to be able to access a new lens through which to experiment within a local, familiar ecosystem. Throughout the course of my research, I have slowly shifted away from the 'big-picture' issues and toward a less quantifiable, more introspective study of human and natural relationships. I have found that many of the important questions surrounding today's global environmental crises also fundamentally apply at a much smaller scale.

I believe that the path to significant change in human ecological behavior lies in dissecting human ecology at its lowest level; that of a single human reflecting on their relationship, not to a single archetype of Nature, but to infinite natures. In this theoretical study, the human subject is a constant and active player, a single part of a complex whole. I am interested in discovering whether a carefully considered personal ecology can be used to facilitate collaboration between Nature and Culture, which next begs several additional questions:

Are Nature and Culture distinctly separate? If they are not, how can this unity be reflected by human ecological behavior within both global and personal ecologies? And, if they are, is true collaboration between these separate collectives even possible?

What can the cultivation of a personal ecology reveal about the broader cultural, social, and environmental contexts surrounding human ecology as a whole? How can the study of human emotional ties to the

natural on a microcosmic scale inform the conception of a sustainable, hybrid conservationism, and aid in the breaking down of barriers which uphold harmful nature/culture binaries?

The answers are both simple and complex. At the global scale, yes; Nature and Culture are, in their current forms, distinctly separate. But at the personal scale? Are Nature and Human distinctly separate? It depends on the human, but overall, I believe not. What stands in the way of a beneficial mutualism is often not our personal choices but the obstacles built into centuries of human societal structure. Therefore, the way to cause a collective cultural shift in human ecological behavior, the way to break down this binary, is to encourage personal ecological exploration; to experience nature intuitively, intimately, and privately; to build a personal ecology which facilitates coexistence at the most basic level.

Before I am able to investigate how others engage with their natural environments, I must first understand the ways in which I engage with mine, and the reasons for which I do so. This is a complicated and laborious task, as I am constantly engaging with my natural environment, often on a level which greatly surpasses that of the typical city-dwelling American. It is important to myself and to the work that I am able to differentiate the various ways in which I interact with landscapes, organisms, and unique ecosystems or ecologies.

What exists as the contemporary ecological debate today is a result of all the accumulated theoretical and scientific findings on the impacts of human activity on the natural world versus all of the accumulated cultural justification for these activities, good or bad. But that is the problem with the current ecological debate; it pits specific ideals against one another, leaving little room for the complexity of issues and their grey areas, choosing instead to see the picture as strictly black and white.

There is a critical gap in Western culture between our actions as

evolved beings and our roots as creatures of the earth. Somewhere along the way, we seem to have forgotten where it was that we came from, and where we will all eventually return. The sterile environments we have created for ourselves, the boundaries and borders we draw between the cultured Human and the othered Nature, only serve to harm us all in the long run.

My creative practice searches for a way back to the mythical place of intuitive connection with the natural world, and for a way to engender mindfulness of one's role in local and global ecologies. Through my work, I advocate for the viewer to apply my unconventional approaches to environmental engagement to their own personal ecologies, replacing the broad consumption of Nature with a more considerate and attentive lens.

Key Theoretical and Historical Concepts

Multinaturalism

Central to my notion of personal ecologies is the theory of Multinaturalism, coined by Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiro de Casto, which proposes the acknowledgement of multiple Natures, subverting the Western canonical ideology of a single Nature in opposition to a more or less singular Culture. I have used this philosophy as the basis for my understanding of the personal ecology- that of an individual human interacting with countless iterations of nature.

Gaia Hypothesis and Biodiversity Hypothesis

The Gaia Hypothesis, put forward by environmental scientist James Lovelock, states that organisms on the earth collectively define and regulate the material conditions necessary for the continuance of life. The planet is thus likened to a vast self-regulating organism. The Biodiversity Hypothesis focuses on a much smaller biome, and pos-

tulates that "contact with natural environments enriches the human microbiome", promotes immune balance, and improves general health. These hypotheses together assert that a healthy human ecology is possible when humans act as a part of the earth organism rather than as stewards of it

The Dérive, Psychogeography and the Edgelands

In a world that still holds to the Nature / Culture duality, the most interesting spaces are those which exist in the overlap. I will speak briefly on a pair of writings which have recently influenced my thinking towards these spaces, which, drawing from Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts' book of the same name, I have started referring to as edgelands. The pair of poets write about their experiences of such spaces as landscapes of unsung beauty, collaborations between city-scape and countryside which are largely ignored by tenants of either region.

Guided by their reflections, I have made an appreciation for the surprising vitality of these spaces as a sort of cornerstone of my personal ecology.

I also utilize the philosophy of the Dérive and psychogeography, coined by Marxist theorist Guy Debord in response to nineteenth-century writer Charles Baudelaire's concept of the *flaneur*, or urban wanderer. Debord proposed psychogeography as a philosophy for urban exploration, based on the use of drifting and playfulness to investigate the ways different environments make us feel or behave.

⁹ Haatela, Tari, A Biodiversity Hypothesis. Wiley, 2019

A Brief Human-Ecological History

"The Anthropocene is primarily a sensorial phenomenon... a rapid remaking of the world before our eyes." 10

Stewardship (n) - an ethic that embodies the responsible planning and management of resources.

The start of humanity's stewardship over the earth occurred around 15,000 years ago, with the first recorded instances of organized agriculture in the mid and far East. In the proverbial blink of geologic time that has elapsed since, homo sapiens has gone from humble farmer to grand architect of the land, air, and sea. What started out as systems of subsistence were soon driven by notions of conquest and divine will, and humankind set out to dominate the earth.

Today, a growing global population and rapidly-increasing demand for consumer goods has pushed us to extract resources at such an unprecedented rate that some geologists have declared a new epoch characterized by humanity as the primary geologic force. The theory of the Anthropocene is still widely contested; by its definition, geologic time is so vast that the entire history of human existence would be lucky to show up in the strata for even an inch. But it is also undeniable that the human species has had the most rapidly impactful relationship to its environment and co-organisms of any force of nature presently known in planetary history; that "...Earth is in the grip of human nature".¹¹

As an evolved, self-aware species, we are now faced with the responsibility to respond to this impact, even if only to preserve our own longevity in the midst of cataclysmic consequences. Evolution demands that we continue forward, but we now know that if we are to survive in

this altered world we must also go back- back to standards of early or pre-human ecological health.

But it is especially important to note here, that, as according to environmental political theorist Tim Hayward in his 1997 paper, Anthropocentrism: A Misunderstood Problem, "...it is not only conceptually mistaken, but also a practical and strategic mistake, to criticize humanity in general for [the] practices of specific groups of humans".12 While the 'we' I often speak to can be interpreted to mean the human race as a whole, there is a necessary focus on modernized societies, particularly Western culture, and even more specifically, America. Early Western expansion is responsible for a rapid redistribution of species between continents, a seemingly simple act which has had devastating and unprecedented ecological consequences in a matter of centuries, triggering a currently-unfolding mass extinction event. It is also impossible to ignore the connections between resource extraction and Western imperialism; the trauma inflicted on the earth is directly mirrored in trauma suffered by its indigenous people. These histories must be given credence when considering the role of the cultural psyche in the varying ways in which we engage with natural environments.

In many ways, we have no idea what the natural state of the world is or should be - what it could return to- because we are removed from that world by thousands of years and trillions of metric tons of earth dug and cut and pushed around the planet's surface. Recorded history and modern scientific techniques can paint a decent picture, but in reality we will never know a world free from our own influence. While there are some who believe the best thing the human race can do for our planet is to go extinct, the obvious goal is to find a way to avoid this.

But the question is not how to save the planet, and by proxy, ourselves; there are already countless professionals dedicating their lives to such solutions. Furthermore, we already know these solutions, they simply

¹⁰ Davis, Heather Saint Clair., and Turpin Étienne. Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies. London: Open Humanities Press, 2015.

¹¹ Biello, David. The Unnatural World. New York, Scribner. 2016

¹² Hayward, Tim. Anthropocentrism: A Misunderstood Problem, White Horse Press 1997

need to be enacted. And herein lies the true struggle; how do we live with this knowledge?

In the sociopolitical movements surrounding environmental justice, much attention is given to the big picture issues; ban single-use plastics, transition away from carbon-based energy sources, protect endangered species. But even in the most humble, grassroots organizations, the point can be missed. Environmentalism, as described by *Timothy Morton in Ecology Without Nature*, "…is a set of cultural and political responses to a crisis in humans' relationships with their surroundings".¹³

At the heart of global warming, pollution, and all forms of environmental exploitation is a deep and pervasive lack of empathy. Yes, we want to solve these problems, but for most, that level of engagement only comes with the realization that they are not strictly environmental problems, but human problems as well. Overwhelmingly, the nature of our care for ecological concerns is selfish, often shallow or performative, and almost always selective.

Where in our species' history did this loss occur? For it is a loss; of connectedness, of understanding, of empathy. What cultural systems or ideologies facilitated it, and how might they be subverted so that we can regain these elements of our humanity? Or have we never truly had this empathy, and are only now coming to that realization, as the consequences of centuries of unchecked exploitation for the first time make themselves known?

In addition to investigating these inquiries, it is important that we identify and critique our criteria for determining the success of our own methods of stewardship; since no impartial arbiter exists to provide an unbiased account of our successes and failures, it is up to the human race to judge ourselves. And unfortunately, as stated by David Biello in

The Unnatural World, "We have rules and religions to prevent murder, but far too few moral codes or stories to guide us as we attempt to survive and thrive on this planet for millennia more"¹⁴

The otherization of the natural world laid the groundwork for anthropocentrism; in this worldview, not only are we as a species separate from all the biotic and abiotic components of our planet, we are superior, and therefore it is natural and justifiable to prioritize the needs of the human race over all else.

The Human Epoch

Field Note 3.

July 4, 2021, somewhere in the Brush Mountain Wilderness, Virginia

The air up here is as thick as the undergrowth; it smells of heat and ripening blueberries.

As I ascend a dusty slope, the stagnant ridge atmosphere opens briefly on a slim, warm breeze above the brush that tastes of tall pines.

A crow croaks a throaty warning of my coming to the forest.

I want to tell it, no, there is no cause for alarm - but of course there is.

The idea of humanity as a force both of and against nature is intriguing for a number of reasons, but for a moment I will speak to its role in framing our emotional responses to the issues it seeks to address. The concept of the Anthropocene originated in 1978, when the term

¹³ Morton, Timothy. Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics. Harvard University Press, 2007

¹⁴ Biello, David. The Unnatural World: The Race to Remake Civiliztion in Earth's Newest Age. Scribner, 2016

was coined by geologist Paul Crutzen in his paper for Nature, titled The Geology of Mankind. The idea has since been co-opted by just about every other field of study, but has enjoyed prolific attention in the arts. And why not? As artists, we seek to reflect on the joys and tragedies of the human condition, and when has the global community of human beings ever been confronted with such a glaring critique of everything we do and know?

The idea that such a short-lived species as ourselves has possibly had a profound enough impact on a planetary body to be counted among geologic influences which typically exist over millions of years is both terrifying and comforting. Humans have always sought ways to leave traces of our existence, artifacts which might linger long after our brief lives are over, signaling to the humans or other beings of the future that we were here, that we mattered. The notion that we have done this so successfully as to be counted among supervolcanoes, giant asteroids, and plate tectonics feels almost like an accomplishment of which we should be proud.

This, I think, is one of several sources of cognitive dissonance within the human race's appraisal of itself as environmental stewards. For we have come so far, made so many advances to improve our quality of life, innovated far beyond any other species we are aware of. Do our achievements not deserve to outlive us? Should we not be allowed to create monuments to ourselves and our histories, regardless of how those lesser species may be impacted by the products of our vanity? It is a tough argument to take up on either side. Similar arguments have been going on for centuries, if not millenia. But today, in the context of instant global communication and information sharing, this rift has grown; not only between those who would champion the earth and its non-human inhabitants and those who support a human dominion over nature, but between the human and non-human worlds entirely.

With each new generation, acceptable thresholds of environmental health are being lowered. This is due to a sociological and psychological phenomenon termed Shifting Baseline Syndrome. Without information or experience of past ecological conditions, the conditions under which one was raised set the standard of normality.¹⁵ Shifting Baseline Syndrome is recognized as one of the fundamental obstacles to addressing the myriad environmental concerns that exist today. The consequences of this phenomenon include "...increased tolerance for progressive environmental degradation, changes in people's expectations as to what is a desirable state of the natural environment... and the establishment and use of inappropriate baselines for nature conservation, restoration, and management".16

In layman's terms, it is dangerous to allow our standards to slip. It is also understandable to receive push back when, by necessity, the conversation uses the seemingly regressive rhetoric of returning to an earlier state of being. Each year, industrial advancement increases exponentially, and we drift further from that critically important understanding of ecological health. The rift widens, and our chances of bridging it plummet.

At this point, it is likely not enough to conserve what can be conserved and keep these standards from slipping further. Human psychology must voluntarily undergo a reversal alongside the environments we aim to enhance and protect; otherwise, we will slip right back into old habits and begin the cycle all over again, forgetting in a few short generations what it was that we were trying to save.

This is much more easily said than done. In addition to the fairly benign and naturally-occurring phenomenon of shifting baseline syndrome, we must contend with centuries of cultural conditioning to view the earth as, above all, an exploitable resource. This conditioning comes in a variety of forms, stemming from several sociological structures and ideologies.

¹⁵ Soga, M., & Gaston, K., Shifting baseline syndrome: causes, consequences, and implications. Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, 2018. 16(4), 222–230. https://doi.org/10.1002/fee.1794
16 Soga & Gaston

Religion, Innovation, and Exploitation

In 1967, just as the idea of humanity as a malignant force against nature was starting to gain traction on a global scale, Lynn White Jr. published The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis, a much-debated interpretation of medieval history in relation to current environmental concerns. In this article, White argues that the destruction of paganism by Christianity and the subsequent emergence of a pervasive exploitative attitude towards the natural world was one of the most profound psychological shifts in human history.¹⁷ Here, he posits, began the notion that, "Man and Nature are two [separate] things, and Man is master".18

White was the first of many to look at the historical relations between organized religion and humanity's attitudes towards the natural world, once we had deemed our species separate from the rest of nature. The otherization of the natural world laid the groundwork for anthropocentrism; in this worldview, not only are we as a species separate from all the biotic and abiotic components of our planet, we are superior, and therefore it is natural and justifiable to prioritize the needs of the human race over all else. Christianity, particularly in its American form, is by far the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever known. Not only did it establish and enforce a dualism between man and nature. but also insisted "that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends".19

Of course, it is natural for any species to exhibit behavior which can be harmful to other species in the name of the protection or proliferation of their own. When a pack of wolves hunts and kills a caribou, we don't call that *lupicentrism*. For this reason, the term anthropocentrism has

come under criticism, with its defenders stating that anthropocentrism is merely making the case of compassion for other humans, and does not necessarily equate to a lack of compassion for non-humans.²⁰ I tend to occupy the opposite camp, upholding that, for the most part, anthropocentrism is ecologically harmful. The most widely implemented version of the anthropocentric ideology goes beyond compassion for other humans and into the realm of exploitation of non-humans and non-human elements.

Lynn White's view of Christianity as an ecologically disruptive system has been taken up by many other environmentalists and philosophers over the past few decades, as well as thoroughly debated by religious scholars. The consequences of this culture of religious anthropocentrism, as stated by Carolyn Merchant in Reinventing Eden, reach into other realms of critical inquiry like feminism and postcolonial theory. Merchant cites the frequent use of allegory in Christian rhetoric which call for humans to recover Eden by "...turning wilderness into garden, 'female' nature into civilized society, and indigenous folkways into modern culture".²¹ This narrative of the Recovery of Eden, Merchant claims, is the mainstream narrative of Western culture, and "...perhaps the most important mythology humans have developed to make sense of their relationship to the earth".²²

Prior to the advent of Christianty, pagan cultures and most Eastern religions believed in some kind of animism, the attribution of spirit or soul to plants, animals, and the earth. All natural resources were thought to have their own quardian spirit, which must be appeared before any extraction of that resource could take place. These spirits "...were accessible to men, but were very unlike men"23; centaurs, mermaids, druids, fairies, fauns were all human enough to be relatable, but otherworldly enough to be fearsome, and in this way animism kept early humans

¹⁷ White, L. The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis. Science 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 1203-7. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.155.3767.1203.

¹⁸ White

White

²⁰ Hayward

²¹ Merchant, Carolyn. Reinventing Eden: the Fate of Nature in Western Culture. New York: Routledge, 2003.

²² Merchant23 White

from running unchecked against their environment. So, as White says, "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects."²⁴

This shift in ideology occurred in tandem with, and as part of, early advancements in technology. The invention of superior tools for building and agriculture allowed primarily Western, Christian cultures to surpass less aggressive rivals in Eastern religions and Greek Christianity who still held to notions of the nature-spirit and living in harmony with nature rather than opposed to it. As their tools and weapons advanced, Europeans set out not only to dominate the earth, but also the other, non-Christian peoples occupying it. The centuries of colonization and plunder that ensued were felt in natural and social ecology around the world, and they are far from over.

Centuries later, as Europeans colonizing the Americas contended with indigenous peoples over rights to a wealth of natural resources, a name was given to this colonizer/exploiter rationale; Manifest Destiny. In short, it was considered the divine will that Christian settlers conquer godless heathens and their lands, claiming dominion over entire continents and the bounty those lands could provide. In the 1800's, this led to the near-extinction of the North American bison, genocide of many Native American tribes, and a push for westward expansion that significantly transformed the ecology of multiple North American biomes. It was "...a way of clothing imperial ambitions in a higher purpose ostensibly decreed by Providence". 26

The decades of the mid-twentieth century were perhaps the most transformative years in all of human existence. 1945 saw an unprecedented change in the chemical composition of the earth's surface, by means of the invention of the atomic bomb, which "...spread a unique

human signature of rare elements like plutonium across the globe".²⁷ For this reason, July 16, 1945 is considered by many to be the definitive start of the Anthropocene. It was also the moment that we crossed the line; despite humanity's long history of violence, never before had such a weapon been unleashed against our own species. As stated somberly by David Biello in The Unnatural World, it marked "...the beginning of the ability to be the destroyer of worlds".²⁸

In the face of multiple global ecological crises, it is imperative that humanity, particularly Western cultures, start down a path that leads back to emotional understanding and empathy for the planet we inhabit, as well as its non-human forms of life and the delicate balance of its systems. In the brief history of humankind, the history of the environmental movement is even more so. In that short period of time, rapidly changing environmental conditions have dictated that political and artistic movements regarding the environment change rapidly as well. With art as a primary driver of social change, it is now even more imperative that we get it right, as climate change and mass extinction drive the prospects of continued human prosperity on our planet ever lower.

I do not yet know exactly how these movements must change, only that there is a critical gap in Western culture between our actions as evolved beings and our roots as creatures of the earth. Somewhere along the way, we seem to have forgotten where it was that we came from, and where we will all eventually return. The sterile environments we have created for ourselves, the boundaries and borders we draw between the cultured human and the othered nature only serve to harm us all in the long run.

²⁴ White

²⁵ Isenberg, Andrew. The Destruction of the Bison. Cambridge, 2000.

²⁶ Heidler, David & Jeanne, *Manifest Destiny*. Britannica Academic, 1998. s.v.https://academic-eb-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Manifest-Destiny/50542.

²⁷ Biello 28 Biello



Early Environmentalism in Art

The tragedy of nuclear warfare opened up a unique point of overlap in environmental and humanitarian concerns, which led to the birth of several art movements protesting the use of such extreme measures. In the 1960's and 1970's, the Anti-Nuclear movement and Ecofeminism both found their roots in opposing war, patriarchy, and violence against

the earth. In this time period, many social and political movements were finding common ground, learning to work together and support each other for the sake of achieving common goals.

Heading up the Anti-Nuclear movement, artists like Helene Aylon seized this new intersectional platform to plead for the end of the unprecedented human and environmental destruction brought about by nuclear warfare. In her work, Earth Ambulance, Aylon converted a U-Haul truck into a symbolic 'ambulance' to save the world from nuclear war. With the Earth Ambulance, she gathered dirt from Strategic Air Command nuclear bases, uranium mines, and nuclear reactors from across the United States. Aylon filled pillowcases with the contaminated soil and used them in a demonstration at the United Nations during the Second Special Session on Nuclear Disarmament on June 12, 1982. In front of a group of spectators, the pillowcases were carried in on army stretchers.

Ecofeminism, a social philosophy conceived from the merger of the existing studies of ecology and feminism, was born in 1974, from the mind of French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne. In her book, *Le Feminismé ou la Mort*, d'Eaubonne speaks on the parallels that exist within the patriarchal society between the suppression of women and the suppression of nature. Since then, d'Eaubonne's book has spurred an entire activist and academic movement, with numerous feminist scholars adding their contributions to her argument. Analyzing the connections between women and nature in literature, culture, religion and iconography, Ecofeminism became, at its core, an intersectional lens for examining systems of oppression, particularly within Western culture, and a platform for resisting capitalist patriarchy.

While it may seem that ecology and feminism are two disparate areas of study, inherently unrelated, a cross-examination of the hierarchical structures which cause and perpetuate the subordination both of



Fig. 1 Earth Ambulance, 1982. Helene Aylon

women and of nature reveals quite the opposite. As a whole, the female gender and the natural world are treated in strikingly similar ways in the male-centered society. During the early years of the ecofeminist movement, a series of conferences were held in the United States by a coalition of professional and academic women, who noted that "women and nature were often depicted as chaotic, irrational, and in need of

²⁹ d'Eubonne, Franciose. Le Feminisme Ou La Mort. Paris: P. Horay, 1974.

control, while men were frequently characterized as rational, ordered, and thus capable of directing the use and development of women and nature". Working from this point of similarity, Ecofeminists "...contend that this arrangement results in a hierarchical structure that grants power to men and allows for the exploitation of women and nature, particularly insofar as the two are associated with one another. Thus, early ecofeminists determined that solving the predicament of either constituency would require undoing the social status of both". ³¹

Here, the driving philosophy of ecofeminism is laid out; "(to strive) for anti-oppression practices, meaning a society free of hierarchy, in which all living beings interact equally and are treated as parts of a common organism, the Earth". ³² As many have observed previously, this makes the sociopolitical umbrella of Ecofeminism incredibly vast, encompassing not just exploitative resource extraction and gender-based oppression, but all forms of oppression. Within this vast umbrella of social and ecological theory, there are also a multitude of approaches to Ecofeminism, and therefore multiple forms it can take as a practice. As noted by Lois Ann Lorentzen and Heather Eaton in their paper, *Ecofeminism: An Overview*, "One may be a socialist ecofeminist, cultural ecofeminist, radical ecofeminist, ecowomanist, etc." But while "The voices of ecofeminism are diverse... their common thread is the recognition of the relationship between the domination of nature and the domination of women". ³³

Ecofeminist art came into being shortly after its literary predecessor, with the works of artists such as Lillian Ball and Agnes Denes serving as an entry point for the new ideology into visual culture. Denes' Wheat Field, a Confrontation, an environmental installation which transformed two acres of landfill in lower Manhattan into a field of ed-

30 Miles, Kathryn. *Ecofeminism: Sociology and Environmentalism*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018

ible wheat, was a meeting place of feminism, ecology, and advocation of food sovereignty and equity.



Fig. 2 Artist Agnes Denes with her work Wheatfield, a Confrontation in the Battery Park landfill, 1982

Ecofeminism may have happened in direct response to the decidedly masculine movement of Land Art, made famous by earthworks such as Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, a work of sculptural terraformation which has become, perhaps problematically, a kind of poster-image for environmentalist art to those who exist outside of the genre. I call this problematic because while it seeks to promote a sense of connectedness with the natural world, it does so by means of ecologically disruptive practices which ought to be critiqued by such work. While fairly benign in appearance, especially as opposed to a work such as *Asphalt Rundown*, in which Smithson unceremoniously dumped a truckload of asphalt down the side of a quarry slope, *Spiral Jetty* still represents an unnecessary ecological transgression for the sake of artistic spectacle.

³¹ Miles

³² Franciose d'Eaubonne's La Feminisme ou la Mort. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, 2013

³³ Lorentzen, Lois Ann, and Eaton, Heather. *Ecofeminism: An Overview*. University of San Francisco, 2002.



Fig. 3 - Robert Smithson, Asphalt Rundown, 1969

I would not take such issue with the methods and outcomes of the Land Art movement were it not inaccurately touted as historically revolutionary; in fact, works like *Spiral Jetty* are contemporary contributions to a long history of earthworks, archaeologically termed *geoglyphs*, created around the world by many cultures over a range of up to 8,000 years.

The 1970's were a time of experimentation and exploration, particularly in the budding new fields of environmentalism and site-specific art.

While some of the works which came out of the Land Art phase hold

up conceptually and ecologically, I would say that a majority do not. All were certainly beautiful in their own ways; there is an indisputable aesthetic appeal in the reshaping of natural structures, especially when the remade structures are subsequently viewed from the air, a space that until very recently in our history, humans had no business occupying. And it was a movement that was bound to happen, perhaps even needed to happen in order to lay the groundwork for future (and more well-informed) artworks. It perpetuates a culture of altering landscapes as we see fit; mostly unchecked, because what higher power exists now that we have conquered the forces of nature? If there is a God, he seems disinterested. This leaves only humanity to question its own destructive nature, and if our art does not do that, then what can?

What I take away from Land Art for my own practice is this: while it may be tempting and even satisfying to let the methods of art-making shift towards the violent and extractive practices with which we are most familiar, this cannot be allowed to be a dominant language in environmental art. The spectacle of the altered landscape is too crude; it allows its viewer to enjoy an aesthetically interesting work of terraformation without asking critical questions about the role of the human species in thoroughly and violently rearranging the materials of the earth's surface over a geologically insignificant period of time.

Personal Ecologies and Bodily

Mark-making: Towards a gentler Land Art

"I argue now for the nearby, a microview of land and art, grass roots connections rather than macro pronouncements. In fact, I've come to the recent conclusion that much of land art is a pseudo rural art made from a metropolitan headquarters, a kind of colonization in itself."

Lucy Lippard, Undermining: A Wild Ride through Land
 Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West

In my attempts to shift my personal ecological musings more to the local, meaning my body, its immediate surroundings, and the biotic and abiotic components of those surroundings, I have often considered the implications of true enmeshment in a natural space.

While hiking on the Appalachian Trail, over a continuous dirt and rock line worn by thousands of human (and animal) feet, I thought a lot about the act of mark-making through walking. Richard Long's A Line Made by Walking is a simple documentation of that phenomena, which at the time of its creation in 1967 was a breakthrough in both Land Art and performance. In comparison to many of the other Land Art works of the 60's and 70's, Long's intervention was humble and brief, portraying a transformative act performed impermanently upon the landscape. A Line Made by Walking was hardly disruptive to the field ecosystem in which it was created, and after its abandonment, took very little time to return to its prior state. Long is quoted to have been uneasy being classified as a Land Artist, which I appreciate as an artist hesitant to disrupt and damage delicate ecosystems for the sake of pure spectacle. Long made many such lines and marks upon the land-



Fig. 4 - Richard Long, A Line Made by Walking, 1972

scape, and while much of his work still fits the mold of Land Art, it was typically executed more delicately than other famous earthworks from the era.

Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas* have come to represent a faction of ecological art occupied by ecofeminism, queer ecologies, and ecosexuality which reject the ecological violence of the Land Art movement at large. The simple gesture of inserting one's body, naked and vulnerable, into the landscape demonstrates an attempted dissolution of boundaries, both physical and psychological, between land and self. Further, her fre-

quent omission of identifying characteristics or use of natural camouflage and biomimicry suggests that it is not the specific self which is important to the work, but the idea of perpetuating a culture in which the individual at large merges in non-exploitative ways with the land and its organisms.





Fig. 5 & 6 - Ana Mendieta, Imagen de Yagul, 1973, and Creek, 1974

Janine Antoni's *Slumber*, while not concerning landscape or ecology, is a direct precursor to the type of mind-body-object transposition I attempted with my installation. Throughout a multi-year performance, Antoni slept while a polysomnogram machine recorded her unconscious eye movement. Over the course of the performance, the artist sat at the loom during the daytime, weaving a blanket fashioned from scraps of nightgown, and working into the pattern a graph of her REM movements. In this way, she created a physical record of her sleep and dream cycles, bringing the subtle nuances of handicraft into hard data collection and reflecting both the needs and limitations of her body.

While some early environmental artists shifted toward performance, others took a different tack, and began to bring the landscape into the gallery. Major contributors to this shift were both Robert Smithson and



Fig. 7 - Janine Antoni, Slumber, 1993

Richard Long, both of whom had a fondness for bringing simple arrangements of rocks and soil into the white cube gallery. Many of these earlier works still reflected the typical patterns of Land Art, but they paved the way for contemporary installations of a grander scale, such as Olafur Eliasson's *Riverbed* in 2015, which completely consumed the gallery, forcing viewers to traverse a rocky landscape through doorways rendered almost unusable by the height of the riverbed.

In my art historical research, I have found another kindred maker in German Artist Susanne Kohler, whose nineteen-minute film Antlitz documented her performative three-month journey through the Swiss Alps in search of an echo she remembers hearing as a child.

Kohler never found the echo from her childhood, which she remembered as taking at least four seconds to return her voice, but did locate and document twenty-two different echo locations, each with its own individual 'sound image' resulting from the specific space, atmosphere



Fig. 8 - Robert Smithson, Nonsite, 1969



Fig. 9 - Richard Long, Red Stone Circle, 1995



Fig. 10 - Olafur Eliasson, Riverbed, 2015

and her reaction and call into it. The echo, she said, "stayed in the air like a blueprint of the landscape."

In a manner similar to Kohler's chasing of an echo, my hike over the summer began in pursuit of something ephemeral that could, if captured and recorded, act as a blueprint for emotion and memory as tied to the land. Kohler's project further legitimized my focus on such subjective topics as memory and personal bodily experience as my primary research, and also gave me permission to fail in my attempts to find my own version of her childhood echo.

David Bowen's installation Tele-present Wind much more directly translates the physical movement of grass in wind for a gallery-viewing audience. Much in the way that open-ocean hydrological research buoys use motion sensors to relay oceanic movements to on-shore research facilities, Bowen's installation used real-time motion data from a single plant stalk attached to an accelerometer and located on the other side of the globe to individually animate dozens of motorized stalks in the exhibition, creating a false wind which reached across both time and space.



Fig. 11 - Susanne Kohler, Antlitz, 2012



Fig. 12 - David Bowen, Tele-present Wind, 2010

Early in my research, I found myself fixated on the fascinating and problematic dualism of 'Good' Nature versus 'Bad' Nature. I capitalize, again, to denote how emblematic these ideals have become in the consumption of Nature at large. While the notion of good/bad nature has not permeated in any noticeable way into my current body of work, it remains a cornerstone of my research at large. One artist toying with these imagined designations, and their implications, is French artist Julian Charrière.

In Charrière's Panorama, a series of photographs appear to showcase beautiful alpine landscapes in various weather circumstances, such as snowy peaks emerging from foggy valleys or mountain panoramas illuminated by a passing rainbow. But these photos are a clever deception; what Charrière actually captured in this series are a variety of transitory interventions created on-site in several Berlin construction sites. In the center of the metropolis, the artist created miniature Alps inspired by his native Switzerland using mounds of displaced soil, flour, and fire extinguisher foam. While playing the demiurge on his own, small scale, Charriere questioned not just the ways in which human perception works, but also our idealized relationship to Nature and the sublime.



Fig. 13 - Julian Charrière, Panorama, 2012



Fig. 14 - Julian Charrière, Panorama, 2012



Fig. 15 - Rachel Youn, Greener than Grass

A final contemporary sculpture reference found its way to me as *A Wind From Noplace* was being installed, but I would be remiss not to include it. Rachel Youn's recent installation *Greener than Grass* very much resembles some of my early prototypes for the kinetic meadow in *A Wind From Noplace*. Using a variety of common rotary devices, mostly therapeutic massagers, Youn created a flock of chaotically animated fake plants, which over the course of the installation destroyed themselves in their unnatural flailing. These works, and the resulting installations, instill a mixture of playful humor and alarm. Down a path very nearly followed, one which would have embraced humor and entropy over pensive reflection and subtlety, my installation may have looked very similar.



Love Languages, Earth language: How memory and human intimacy complicate our relationships with the non-human world

Field Note 4.

An attempt to recall an event long past - recorded February 2022

When I was a kid I got very interested in traditional skills; bush craft, herbal medicine, foraging. Growing up on a homestead, much of this was already there in the background, but I often

took it further than my parents or siblings. Around the age of twelve, I started making tools. That was also about when I started to become interested in hunting. I practiced archery with an old wooden recurve, shooting at a stack of hay bales with a paper target set up in the woods, and when my tool-making phase began, I tried making my own arrows.

I used the wrong type of wood for my first arrow, and didn't dry it properly, so it was far from straight, and weighed too much. I fletched it painstakingly by hand with feathers shed by our biggest tom turkey, trimmed to fine points. The tip was a rusted broadhead I'd found lodged in a tree* (this is one place where details from another memory may have seeped in), which I bound into its carefully-carved notch with thread coated in pine resin.

I practiced with my one arrow until I could predict its curved flight path and aim to compensate for its flaws.

One day, on my way back to my straw bale target, I caught a glimpse of something moving, low on the ground, just over the crest of the hill. Not thinking about consequences, only about testing my arrow, I notched it to the string and crept through the fence, up the shallow slope.

This is where I become uncertain.

What I saw may have been a hawk. It also may have been a groundhog. It may have been a hawk that had just killed, or tried to kill a groundhog. Somehow, the more I run through it in my mind, the less certain I become. I remember a time when this memory was still reliable, but I cannot remember what the reliable version of it was.

What I do know is that on one occasion, with or without my bow, I crested the hill and saw a hawk on the ground. I had

managed to sneak up on it, coming within fifteen feet before it caught sight of me and took to the air. I also know that on another occasion, I saw a groundhog, in almost exactly the same place as I had seen the hawk, and also startled it away at a short distance.

What I do not know is which animal I shot at.

Obviously, I missed. Had I injured or killed the animal, I would remember which it had been with far more certainty than I have of the miss. The part of me that now has a deep, nearly obsessive love for hawks balks to think that I may have once tried to kill one, even as a brainless child. My awareness of this bias makes me wonder if it had been the hawk I took a shot at; if my memory has rewritten itself to bury my shame.

A groundhog and a red-tailed hawk, both on the ground, the hawk with its wings folded, have a similar size and coloring.

They flee with a similar speed and urgency. But they are far from the same animal, and I should know which I shot at, recklessly, with my homemade arrow.

It had been evening during at least one of these tenuously-remembered encounters, the fading light coming from the west, behind the hill, further confusing the image I now recall.

The last thing I know is that I missed only by inches.

Later, with that same arrow, I hit an apple my friend had thrown out of the sky, cutting it cleanly in two. With that same friend, a different arrow missed wildly and wound up lodged in the neighbor's boat. I'm positive now that the shot that had hit the apple was pure luck, but that did little to bruise my ego then.

I'm glad I had less luck, the day with the maybe-hawk, maybe-groundhog. But it still haunts me, because now I have

several nebulous memories of this event, and I no longer know if any of them are real. Over the years I've become utterly possessed by this slip.

There is no end to this story, no conclusion, because unless life really does flash before your eyes in the moments before death, I'll never be able to dredge up any version of this memory other than the one I've muddied beyond repair in my clumsy examinations of it. There were no witnesses, only me and a hawk or me and a groundhog.

Red-tailed hawks in the wild typically don't live past fifteen years. Groundhogs live for only three. Even if I was actually fifteen at the time of this incident, not twelve, and the hawk (if it was a hawk) was only a yearling, and even if that hawk did, somehow, remember that I had shot a crooked homemade arrow at it, the only other recollection besides my own flawed version would have died last year.

Why does it matter? My arrow, foolishly fired in a moment of childish excitement, missed.

I am not bothered by the fact that I missed. I am bothered by the fact that I took the shot in the first place, but not enough to justify this obsessive self-analysis.

What I am bothered by is the failure of my mind. It has gotten under my skin, seeding doubt, making me stiffen at any foggy thought.

I remind myself that my mother's madness isn't hereditary, at least not according to the doctors.

I know that I could simply decide *it was a hawk*, or *it was a groundhog*, and over time convince myself that I am right, that I knew the answer all along, because that is how memory works. But then how could I ever trust myself or my memories again? In my creative writing and journaling practices, I often find it difficult to put old memories in order. In

this section, I will attempt to explain the logic of my attempted memory-keeping.

Because I have attached emotional and developmental significance to specific moments in time, the chronology has been overridden by a hierarchy that has nothing to do with linear time. This is naturally how memory works, to a certain extent, but fixating on and drawing connections between certain events is undoubtedly what has thrown them so completely out of order in my recollection. Some events may seem more recent or distant than others on account of the acuteness of their associated emotion.

Furthermore, I have consciously broken memory threads of similar psychological significance into their own chronologies. For example, I can put in order, more or less accurately, a timeline of every animal I have killed or seen killed, because those memories are tied to one another by similar emotional consequences. Similarly, I could piece together my history in weather events with a fairly small margin of error. But could I place the memory of killing a deer accurately between memories of storms? Probably not. In fact, almost certainly not. Because they are not measured by the same metric of understanding.

Time within a particular memory thread or theme seems to progress slower or faster based on the frequency of the event. Something I experienced, or experienced some version of, only once or twice, may feel less urgent and therefore more distant than experiences which were common, pressing themselves by repetition to the front of my memory. But within this logic, the hierarchy of psychological significance still applies; an event which happened only twice but which carried a heavy impact may exist in faster-moving memory-time than a common occurrence of lesser significance.

In memory, the present influences the past. The more we think about our emotions, the more they change. Depending on one's state of mind, each time an emotion is recalled it either grows or diminishes.

Every time we call to mind something now gone, our perception of it, embedded in the walls of our minds, shifts, so slightly that the shift is not registered or understood. And so little by little, over time, the thing, the person, the place embedded in memory, slides away from what it was until the version that exists in our minds is nothing like that thing in its original form. Does it cease to exist, or does it become something other than what it once was? Does it become something grander, or something weaker?

To recall an event through active remembering or writing is to integrate it into my present lived experience, which has no beginning or end. In a sense the things I write about are not the things that *happened*, but the things that are currently happening in my mind while I think about and reflect on the past.

What does any of this have to do with the environment?

Place is the concept to which I most easily attach memory and emotion. When I think of people, including myself, I typically think through a lens of place. The places I have been are also the best visual representations of change, both personal and relational. I understand my feelings for my environment and the non-human things within it much better than I understand my feelings for other people, so it is easier for me to process complex emotions through an impartial psychological surrogate in the form of such ecological players as land, weather, or animals.

Memory, like nature, is a moving target. In order to understand how the one affects the other, I must acknowledge that no moment preserved in memory and no moment experienced in nature will ever exist in the same form twice. This idea harkens back once more to the phenomenon of Shifting Baseline Syndrome, and to the notion that one of the most dangerous things we can do, ecologically speaking, is forget.

Self-actualization through the lens of Multinaturalism

Field Note 5.

July 1, 2021, somewhere near Tinker Creek, Virginia

When I speak aloud in the woods, who am I speaking to? It's a very specific place I come to in my mind, my way of thinking, and it wells up to a point where it has to meet the open air. Of course I found my way there quickly today, by way of a perfect, unrelenting rain and happenstance meetings with the living things of the mountains, simultaneously magical and perfectly normal. It's hard to describe.

I think when I speak aloud, I'm speaking to something outside myself, but also of myself. A version of myself I haven't become yet. And I think that's what I come out here to do - to meet or encounter that self, to coax it out so I might feel the rush of becoming it. And I think that's part of the ache that I feel for the world, for others; that I want them to experience that becoming, to experience what it is to have infinite selves, each unknown to the prior, a stranger to all but itself in the split second of its existence. Each version informed by accumulated experiences, knowledge, and desire. Above all, desire. I will never stop wanting, but the things I want are immaterial, often indescribable. And once attained, irreplicable, inimitable.

Do I speak to these other selves out of loneliness, to cope? To fill the forest stillness with a human voice? Or do I speak because, in these moments, I am bursting with words, and become incapable of repressing them? I find myself unable to shut up, because I have so much to say, if only to myself. And I am my

own closest confidant; the me I haven't yet become understands me, and I them, better than anyone in any moment of my existence, when we are in the woods.

This external self, the becoming I speak to, exists transiently, metamorphosing in perpetuity. In this way, it is unattainable; I will never achieve that self, for the moment I do it will evolve, becoming further unknowable.

It is both a comfort and a terror that so little is understood about the mind. Are these selves my own abstract manifestation of human potential? Or am I slowly losing myself and my humanity, regressing into something that can only function outside of civilization, and can only communicate with itself and the landscape it occupies?

Further, which of these possibilities appeals to me more? If there wasn't already such a history of madness in my bloodline, maybe I wouldn't wonder so intently. But I do.

The central tenet of multinaturalism is a simple truth which I have already mentioned several times- that the natural world is a vast, complex thing which exists in a constant state of flux, producing different versions of itself and its components constantly. In Eduardo Viveiros de Castros's Multinaturalist Perspectivism, "...these 'natures' include non-human animal perception along with a human one, all of them sharing a common perspective or affinity." This philosophy stems from, and necessarily must center Indigenous perspectives, but in the context of this paper and an overwhelmingly non-Indigenous readership, I must reiterate that the consideration of multinaturalist perspectivism in my research is an effort not simply to decentralize the human species as a body outside of Nature, but rather to rework the American

perspective of human ecology, which overwhelmingly maintains that humanity is a force not only outside of Nature, but superior to it.

Just as it is impossible to be an impartial arbiter of knowledge and epistemology pertaining to nature/culture dichotomies and their consequences as a self-aware being who is both an occupant of nature and a perpetuator of culture, it is impossible to alter an ideological framework of which one is a part without also changing oneself. It is for this reason that I focus on myself and my experiences. It is also true that as an American I have been raised in a culture of often narcissistic individualism, and it would be naive to assume that this deeply ingrained perspective has not shaped the ways in which I express myself to the world. With this in mind, I also understand that my target audience, non-native Americans whose ecological worldview is not shaped by Indigenous, multinaturalist, and multi-species perspectives, will best understand these concepts when presented through the lens of the individual.

As the individual at the focus of this art and research, it is important to present myself in the transitory state that I have described in the above field note, recorded after I had been walking in the mountains for several weeks. I have not set out to 'fix' my ecological worldview or behaviors; what I am trying to do is shift my way of thinking about myself, not as a static individual outside of Nature, but one of many components of Nature, constantly in flux. By being open to a state of constant psychological and physiological change more or less outside of my control, I consider myself a shifting part of the landscape, and embrace the power of the non-human to change me into whatever is most useful, or at the very least less harmful, to it.

³⁴ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Some Reflections on the Notion of Species in History and Anthropology*. Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, 1998

Halocline: Understanding Human Emotional Psychology through an Ecological lens

Field Note 6.

May 2020, Michigan

I have an interesting habit that I've recently, by way of surplus solitude and self-reflection, become aware of. I wonder if others share it.

I am singularly my most self-aware when walking outside alone, most in tune with the way I move around and bounce off of the various obstacles and players in my life. Sometimes when I am walking and content, feeling more connected to wind in the leaves fifty feet above my head than to the closest people in my life, I think, I am the trees. It started as a spontaneous mental verbalization of felt connection, but it has become something of a mantra.

I am the trees. I am the dirt. I am river water. Amorphous, undefined, yet fully occupying my place in this life. I feel no such comfort when I am merely human.

One day in early fall after a week of constant rain, I sat on my porch to feel the sun. Humans have a direct neurochemical need for sunlight, but we don't subsist on it as plants do. However, as someone who often has thoughts such as I am the trees, I have thought of my relationship to sunlight much in the same way as one might think of basic photosynthesis.

On a rare day of sunlight, I bare my face, spread out my leaves, soak up as much as possible to store deep in my roots for

leaner, darker days ahead. And it isn't just the sun. I'll hold a fistful of warm earth at length in June, trying to memorize its scent for January. I'll clear my head of anything and everything but the sound of waves as I drift and float in the summer river, making sure I've experienced a moment of nothing other than the water, tucking it safely away in the back of my mind like memories one might cherish of a lost mother, or an old lover.

In quarantine, the elements have often felt like a lover. Months without human touch have sharpened my senses to other forms of touch, and now that I am aware of it, I find myself spreading my fingers a little wider to feel the wind pass between them, opening my mouth as I walk to taste the air. The last time I swam, I spent long moments focused on the feeling of underwater currents moving over my skin, through my hair. On still days, the river caresses me; on turbulent days, it rocks me back to a place of calm.

Maybe this is a habit common to northerners, but foreign to those who live in southern climates where the growing seasons are longer or unending, where the sun doesn't leave them for months at a time. Maybe it is unique to those of us who think of being trees. But whether alone or in unknown company, I often find myself gathering those things which are precious to me, saving them up in some hidden chamber of the soul, carrying them with me until the days darken and the parts of me that live in the trees fall dormant.

I don't hold summer memories like this so that I can spend the winter indoors, dreaming of the sun. There are still things to be gathered in winter, it's just less of a gathering and keeping for later, and more like a slow sipping from a limited cup.

Some of this has its roots in absence. An absence of leaves in the trees produces a higher yield of hawk sightings. In the win-

ter I can gather these and keep them as memories. The hawks are still present in the summer, but harder to spot. But all winter long, these sightings, while not exactly frequent, are sustaining; my relationship with hawks is stronger in the winter. That cup is more full during the cold months.

If I store sunlight in my roots for darker times, if I conflate my sense of self with that of plants or air, what does that mean for these parts of the earth that I attach myself to? I didn't think of this until last night, when I experienced a jarring but not unfamiliar barrier to connection in my primary human relationship. A frustrating task led to an argument, led to a breakdown, and then we were lying side by side on the bed, inches away but worlds apart. When I closed my eyes I distinctly saw this divide, unconsciously summoned in terms which I could best understand.

There's a hydrological phenomenon wherein two bodies of water meet, but remain separate on account of vastly different chemical and biological properties. This is known as a halocline. When a halocline occurs, there is often a clear dividing line, as if an invisible wall exists between them. Each body has its own salinity, coloration, temperature, flora and fauna, which tend not to intermingle.

Instinct and basic knowledge of fluid dynamics would have us assume that all waters share enough common ground to flow seamlessly between one another, completing and repeating the basic water cycle we all learned in elementary school. But the properties of water, regardless of where it has been, are dictated by present location and environmental conditions; and even within the same river, the waters that exist near its banks can be vastly different from those at its mouth. The same is true for humans.

I kept my eyes closed for a moment, stunned by this sudden imagery, and understanding that I could not force my partner's hypothetical waters to mingle with my own. I was the churning, muddy river, and he was the vast, cold ocean. In that moment our psychological compositions were utterly incompatible, despite our shared species, shared culture, shared home. The ease with which I suddenly understood complex human behavior through the lens of nonhuman ecology felt like a revelation.

This early revelation raised many questions. If I am the trees, the dirt, the river, what does that mean for them? In this reflection I unthinkingly engaged in a sort of reverse anthropomorphization. What does the changing nature of these elements mean for me? If my partner and I are one thing when we are the river and the ocean, what happens when one of us is rain, or vapor? Water is as complex as human nature, its personalities as different as many human cultures. What am I when the water is still, versus when it is flowing? These same questions apply to the trees and the dirt, and every other piece of the earth I have ever felt at home in.

Obviously these questions are hypothetical. I don't truly believe that I am anything other than human. But in this moment I understood myself. My feelings for my environment and the non-human things within it are much clearer to me than my feelings surrounding complex (human) interpersonal relationships. I learned through this reflection on bodies of water that it is much easier for me to process complex emotions through ecological relationships than through other humans. I hadn't named it yet, but I realized then what I now mean by *psy-choecological surrogacy*.

For many years I couldn't bring myself to love my mother, who over the course of my life has tried to drink herself to death, but only achieved insanity. So instead I loved burrowing insects; I loved algae; I loved wind. Would I have loved them as intently if she had been loveable,

instead?

The field of neuroscience has barely scraped the surface of human/human interaction, and even less so human/nature interaction. Even though my own research is in its infancy, and has no firm footing in credible science, I hope that it can open a door to thinking about the cognitive parallels that exist between human ecological attachments and the emotional psychology of familial relationships.

The Hawk: Diagnoses and trying to understand my relationship with death

Field Note 7.

November 10, 2021, Michigan

Things get muddy when I am presented with acute, real-time grief. It is hard to find the boundary between living my practice and mourning outside of art. It is hard to know whether those actions can even be separate things.

I drove to Livonia to search for Loren. I knew what would be found, and not by me, but I searched anyway, unable to keep from imagining that I'd come across her sitting on a park bench, waiting for someone to talk her out of it. I'd been looking for less than ten minutes when I got the call.

Driving home, I saw a red-tailed hawk, which have somehow, over time, become living vessels for my emotions. It swooped down low over the freeway. Normally when I see a hawk on a good day, I greet it, quietly smiling. They are like old friends, close family. That day I saw it, and the greeting burst from me,

a panicked, gasping mantra; Hi, Hi, Hi.

I didn't think that the hawk was somehow a manifestation of my dead friend. I didn't think it was ferrying her spirit to the afterlife, because I don't believe in an afterlife. Loren is dead, but that hawk was alive, and I needed it more than I needed air. That gasping came on suddenly, the moment I spotted the hawk, and didn't stop until my vision started to go spotty and dark. I should have pulled over, but didn't.

I found The Hawk in the cold, chaotic weeks leading up to my mother's intervention, when her liver and mind were failing in grotesque tandem. Though I didn't know it at the time, they were also the weeks leading up to the sudden shutting down of the entire world. Michigan was the first state to lock down, and at the time we didn't think it would last more than a couple of weeks. But soon the entire country followed, then other countries, and the world entered a state of collective uncertainty that it hasn't yet left.

While my family was falling apart at the seams, gnawing ourselves to the bone over the impending grief and disorder we were planning, I was finally teaching myself to talk about what had led us there. I was finally letting the foggy, ambiguous trauma of having a violently alcoholic parent into my work.

I'd been watching hawks for months, studying them from my quiet commute along the partially-wooded highway. And one day in early February, I saw one lying still on the shoulder, perfectly intact.

At the time I didn't know, or care to know, what impulse drove me to circle back that night, to pull off under the cover of dark and carefully coax the frozen bird from the frozen ground. As I walked back to my car with it, a roadside assistance vehicle pulled up beside me, and I stuffed the hawk inside my jacket.

Two years later, I watch hawks now with ritual intensity, assigning each sighting an emotional significance depending on present circumstances which I know is arbitrary and problematic, but I cannot seem to stop. Once that February red-tailed hawk, killed by vehicle strike on the side of M-14, became an object of intuition onto which I projected the then-inevitable death of the person who had given me life, I was no longer able to think objectively about my relationship to the animal or any of its species. But in this break from objectivity, or whatever my attempt at objectivity had looked like then, I found the revelation of surrogacy for which I still do not have the words.

The closest I can come is to say that the hawk was my mother, and the hawk was me. The hawk was her failed death, her failed memory, her failure to be for me what living hawks, in that instant, became.

A Midwestern Childhood and the loss of Salamanders: Parallels in grief and recovery

I spent many hours as a child turning over logs. I went on to have a more than healthy interest in insects and spiders, but what I remember most from my log-turning days are salamanders. They seemed- and still seem- such an improbable creature to find under rotting wood. How did their tiny, soft bodies navigate the compressed world of the forest floor so delicately? How did they ever survive even my gentlest of touches? For I picked up almost every salamander I ever found under a log, until my teenage years and Advanced Biology. I can picture their delicate, slender legs, the curled, jelly whip of a tail, one inch long, which neighborhood legend told could grow back if lost.

Many years later, I think about that poorly-understood concept of the

phantom limb. The salamander can grow its tail back, but not well. The new tail will never be more than a weak facsimile of the original.

Several years ago, I was struck by a terrible realization. Hyper aware of the ways in which my family had terraformed and otherwise engineered the ecosystems of our five acres over the course of nearly three decades, I began to wonder about the fate of the wetland creatures and plants that had thrived there before our arrival, and with it the fill dirt and drainage ditches. I hadn't seen a salamander in years, despite still occasionally turning logs as an adult. Their vernal breeding pools dried up, my salamanders had gone locally extinct.

I have often wondered about the roles of novelty and rarity in the designation of ecological worth. Conservation value is something that is easy to understand, even for children; the less there is of a species or landscape, the harder we'll typically work to preserve it. But that knowledge doesn't have to be present in order for one to feel a simple joy at seeing something nonhuman for the first time.

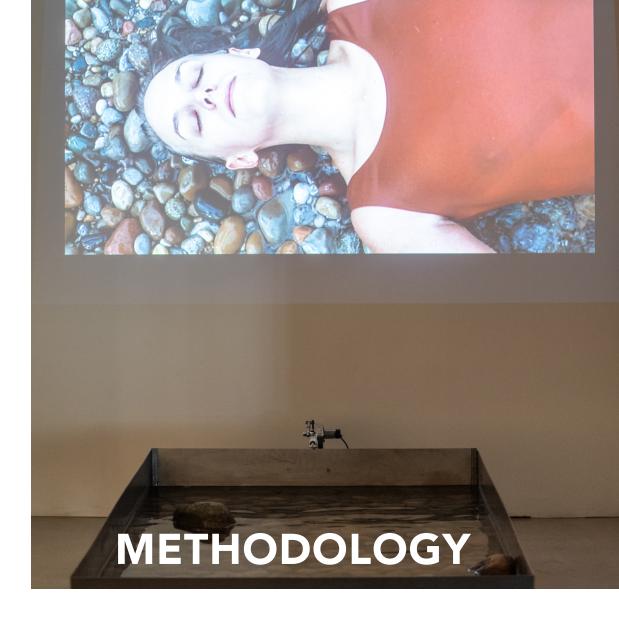
I loved the land with the salamanders until I left, and even then until my mother made it impossible to come back, even for short visits. And I love it again, now. Because she has stabilized, and I have started to heal, and because I've recently learned that the salamanders aren't all gone like I'd thought they were. I have merely lost, temporarily I hope, my ability to find them.

I asked my father about them one day, on one of my careful visits home after we were delivered from the darkest months of my mother's illness. I thought he'd shake his head sadly and report that no, he hadn't seen a salamander in years, either. But he only studied me for a moment, curious as to why I'd asked. "I still see them all the time," he said, and some nameless tightness in my chest loosened.

My entire remembered childhood and early adulthood was spent in proximity to those salamanders. Over the course of nearly thirty years, I have watched the landscape of my wooded childhood home shift

and change, but it was not until this moment that I realized that my perception of that change was impacted by the ways in which I and my family had shifted alongside the land. I had unknowingly come to associate the fluctuations in the ecosystem of my home with the confusing and traumatizing changes that had, over the course of many years, taken place within my family. I think I saw the imagined loss of salamanders as a direct reflection of the ways in which my mother's condition was robbing my father, brothers and I of our own certainty. Addiction and extinction became parallel diseases, each preying on the future, and hope.

It is not a coincidence that the perseverance of the salamanders became known to me, after many years of mourning them, when my mother's condition stabilized. It was only then that I allowed myself to tentatively reattach to that landscape, to have hope for it again. Had she died, I likely never would have asked about them, and my father never would have had cause to tell me that they were still there.



Field Note 8.

Late June 2022, somewhere in Virginia

Every day I wake up and walk until I have a reason to stop. Sometimes that reason happens after 20 feet, in the form of a bright orange salamander ambling snailishly across the trail; sometimes, it doesn't happen for miles, and then the reason is

only that I desperately need to take my shoes off, to tend my battered feet.

-

What if we could fashion a restoration plan that grew from multiple meanings of land? Land as sustainer. Land as identity. Land as grocery store and pharmacy. Land as connection to our ancestors. Land as moral obligation. Land as sacred. Land as self.

- Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass

My creative practice is a hybrid of visual art-making and environmental meditations, in which I frame the questions I seek to answer with my art through a lens of ecological investigation. By posing my personal sensory experience within a landscape as my primary research, I allow instinct and bodily responses to stimuli to dictate the form of the creative work. After marveling at the feel of river ice or the smell of soil, I may next navigate methods of presenting these elements visually in a way that makes the viewer want to touch or smell. I then present a sensory experience for the viewer which is limited by its form, or which must be experienced vicariously through the artist's body or camera lens. It is my desire that these barriers to connectivity haunt the viewer after they leave my work behind, because "...when the medium of communication becomes impeded or thickened, we become aware of it, just as snow makes us aware of walking." 35

I often focus on the byproducts of ecological relationships, or what I consider artifacts. These artifacts can be tangible, substantive, material; more often they are immaterial, incorporeal, unseen. While the most common and easily identifiable relationships are found in the immediate nature-culture overlap, I am also interested in ecological snowball-

ing and the interspecies relations that occur in an altered environment. The study of these relations allows me to flesh out the psychology of human interaction with nature, with particular focus on pinpointing triggers of motivating emotions such as joy, fear, and empathy.

Before I am able to investigate how others engage with their natural environments, I must first understand the ways in which I engage with mine, and the reasons for which I do so. This is a complicated and laborious task, as I am constantly engaging with my natural environment, often on a level which greatly surpasses that of the typical city-dwelling American. It is important to myself and to the work that I be able to differentiate the various ways in which I interact with landscapes, organisms, and unique ecosystems or ecologies.

I conduct a large amount of physical research in the form of regular explorations of site and material, which in turn inform my academic research. Often, these explorations are a building, growing thing, which evolve out of common movements or actions I undertake and repeat. Walking a familiar route, tracking the growth of a plant, noticing the accumulation of sediments on a surface, all lay the groundwork for further study. These methods have developed over many years as an intuitive part of my everyday life and practice. Having grown up on an interesting site of study, I am naturally observant of certain ecological situations, and take constant notice of anything which may apply to my area of inquiry. In recent years my formal research has given me the tools to fine-tune and better understand these practices.

The bulk of my methodologies can be classified as *unidealized engagements*. By 'unidealized', I mean any ecological engagement outside of the commonly romanticized (good weather, stunning topography, charismatic megafauna). In order to have true connection with and empathy for an ecosystem, one must experience it from all angles. For this reason, I will often go out in the rain or the cold, or push forward instead of turning back when confronted with mud, heat, insects, or

³⁵ Morton

topographical monotony.

During these engagements, I am acutely observational and engage in active sensory learning. Once I have "learned" to see, hear, or smell something of interest in a landscape, it becomes a recurring theme which is then captured in my notations or habits of exploration.

Field Notes

In my practice, I engage in repeat, almost ritualized engagements with certain landscapes. My analysis and interpretation of these engagements relies largely on instinct, and happens on its own schedule. I do not push this, because it is clear to me that these moments contain my highest clarity of thought. When clear thoughts emerge, usually in the form of spontaneous speech to myself in solitude, I write them down in the notes app on my phone or dictate them to my voice recorder. They vary somewhat in length and lyricality, but I refer to them collectively as 'field notes'. These field notes are not objective, scientific observations of an environment, but rather subjective observations of the way in which I and others respond to and interact with that environment.

Field notes are attempts to remember, and to retain memory related to an experience :

- To remember emotion and connections drawn between emotion and experience
- To remember physical sensation
- To remember connections drawn between emotion and sensa tion
- To remember who I was during the experience; that self may have only lasted an instant

Exploratory walking

I regularly investigate new areas, but more frequently return to those I am familiar with and have an ecological history within. I monitor and observe these familiar landscapes over time and season, noting changes in wildlife presence and behavior, plant life, weather, etc. Despite this informal monitoring, the basis of this practice is unstructured wandering. There is historical precedent for this method in the Dérive, a philosophy of exploration based on the use of unstructured wandering to investigate the ways different environments impact our thoughts and behaviors.

Foraging/Sampling

In my home bioregion, and places with similar plant life, I engage in foraging as a method of intimately knowing the land and its species. In order to correctly identify, forage, and consume wild plants, one needs to know many things about the land, including seasonal/weather patterns, wildlife biology and behavior, soil conditions, etc. Furthermore, consuming food sourced directly from the land, particularly 'wild' food, and particularly from a part of the land with which one is intimately familiar, deepens one's psychological connection to the land in ways that can only be understood once experienced.

Tracking

It is impossible for me not to notice game trails. Several times on my Appalachian hike this summer, I found myself moving up an impossible slope or through dense brush because I'd accidentally followed the social paths of deer and bears off of the human-blazed trail I'd been following for weeks. Back home, I've spent so much time following game trails through backyards and public lands and nature areas,

noting the tracks or bits of fur left by their makers, observing scat and herbivory, territorial scraping, and bedding areas, that I can usually glance at a depression in the grass or gap in the brush and know with a high margin of confidence which animal or animals created it. Part of this is because I grew up in a hunting and trapping community. Part of this is because I've spent my life in the woods, seeking out the company of animals over the company of people. This practice also involves learning to taste or smell coming weather in the air, to read soil conditions, to predict conditions which are likely to yield a particular wildlife sighting or other ecological encounter.

Finding evidence of a thing can be more exciting than finding the thing itself - no matter how much sign I've seen tracking them through the Green Rd. meadow, coyotes remain elusive to me, and this preserves the sense of scarcity or mystery that draws me to them. As much as I want to see one show up on my trail camera, or to see one in the wild, in the flesh, finding tracks and scat becomes a special thing which I do not hold as much in the case of more common wildlife such as deer.

This practice reinforces the feeling of just having missed a close friend somewhere in public. One week when I spent many late nights and early mornings coming and going from the Art and Architecture Building, I walked over the same patch of dirt beside the parking lot one night, then again the next morning and found fresh deer tracks. It made me wonder how close we'd come to crossing paths.

Field Work

For the past several years I have been working with the Friends of the Rouge River on a benthic macroinvertebrate monitoring project. This seasonal field work involves carefully dredging river and creek beds in the Rouge River Watershed with hand nets and collecting and identifying a variety of aquatic species. In addition to monitoring macroinvertebrate populations, this research provides important information on

water quality and overall ecosystem health by targeting specific indicator species whose presence or lack thereof can help determine pollution levels in the waterways. Leading these survey teams allows me to actively engage in a small corner of ecological study and to maintain a circle of influence not limited to the arts. Regularly conducting this field work also gives the contemplative and less quantifiable parts of my practice a unique standard for comparison and contrast. This summer I will be part of a team monitoring Steller's sea lions on a remote island off the coast of Alaska. I look forward to the ways in which this new research will impact the trajectory of my creative work.

Meditative practice

Meditation was already part of my practice prior to taking the class, but in Martha Travers' *Nature-Based Contemplative Practices* I honed and formalized my meditative engagements with land and the elements. I also learned some new frameworks for this type of practice, primarily through study of indigenous Andean cultural practices. The text for this course was Braiding Sweetgrass, which I had already read but which also frames intimacy with nature among Indigenous histories and contemporary sociopolitical context. My meditative practice takes two distinct forms, both grounded in memory and the cognitive theory of embedded and embodied cognition:

- 1. Meditative embedding, in which I consciously attempt to inscribe sensorial memory during an ecological engagement, essentially 'saving' it for a later time when I no longer have access to that experience
- 2. Meditative remembering, in which I attempt to revisit distant emotionally-embedded landscapes or experiences, particularly whilst physically occupying anthropogenic spaces, in order to resurrect the emotional state associated with the sensorial experience



Fig. 16 - Critique installation with first kinetic grass prototype, 2021

Building and Making

The above methodologies all serve as a form of research and development for potential creative work. Over the course of this process, I consider my own sensory experiences and thought processes the primary research, and the creative work that follows the research outcome. I must work in this order, because the way that I come to decide what creative work I will produce is based on iterative processing of senso-

ry experiences, and relies heavily on intuition. It is also for this reason that my creative practice is broadly interdisciplinary; I do not know the form that will best suit a work until I begin experimenting in the overlap between sensory experience and visual language.

In A Wind From Noplace, I worked for the first time in the opposite direction, which resulted in the need for a lot of reverse-engineering in order to come to formal decisions about the work.

Prototyping

By its nature, this body of work was very iterative. As I engaged with new tools and technologies for the first time in my practice, I had to self-teach a lot of basic robotics and programming skills, so the need for mock-ups and prototypes became necessary. As a professional fabricator but less-savvy engineer, I work through challenges in sculptural construction through experimental manipulation of materials and much trial and error. Through a series of five prototypes and several supplemental experiments, I was able to understand and execute the mechanics of what I was trying to do. While this process was very frustrating at times, I am happy with the creative outcomes and grateful for the deep learning it necessitated.

Failure

There are many failures to discuss in my work and practice; failed prototypes, failed programming, failed backcountry excursions, failure to connect, failure to understand, failure to make others understand.

One that nags me is the failure to see, in regard to massive concepts which cannot necessarily be altogether seen, like climate change, but which can be witnessed through computation and data collection. Yes, we can see the symptoms, but we cannot see the actual phenomenon which causes them, and for that reason the concept remains abstract, a problem situated on a different plane of existence than us. Similar quasi-paradoxes exist within emotional psychology and the human psyche at large.

In an artistic practice attempting to confront such failures, you might expect to see very few failures, or none at all. On the contrary, my work is rife with failure, both intentional and non. If the questions I'm asking were resolved easily, would the viewer even stop to think?

The function of failure in my work is twofold: primarily, it exists to teach, to hone my questions and experiments toward an unreachable perfection. Secondarily, failure is left as a barrier around which the viewer must navigate in order to come to the knowledge that we will never achieve that pinnacle of understanding and unity, but that we must try regardless.

from noplace Kristina Sheufelt

What does it mean to hold memories of a changing landscape? Like lost loved ones, can we keep meadows and mountains with us after they are gone, or after we have gone from them? A Wind from Noplace uses physiological data as language to understand the land as an object of affection, a surrogate for emotional relationships with humans absent from our lives. With a collection of heartbeats and brainwaves, I attempt to reanimate the landscapes of my memory, blurring lines of species, geography, and self.



Art since the age of sensibility has sought this [linguistic] immediacy. If only the poet could do a rubbing of his or her brain, and transmit the feelings to us directly.

- Timothy Morton, Ecology Without Nature

Over the past several years, the inability of humanity at large to cognize far-reaching ecological issues such as climate change and mass extinctions has led me to see the necessity of focusing on a seemingly much smaller issue. Simply put, how do we hold nature in our minds and bodies when we aren't there? For it is now possible, with our myriad borders, boundaries, and containment measures, to exist almost wholly separate from nature as we conceive of it. Of course, we and our microbiomes are nature, but the psychological gap we've created quite successfully undermines this technicality, at least from a conceptual point of view.

How can art provide space for the dissolution of an established binary to be enacted, both publicly and on the private, microcosmic scale? For my work is not about the land, but about one person's desperation to understand what it is to love the land.

Earlier Works: Developing an Emotive Ecology

Throughout the course of my first year at Stamps, I experienced a building emotional trauma surrounding the failing health and mind of my mother, an addict who has since been diagnosed with Wernicke's Encephalopathy, colloquially known as Alcohol-Induced Dementia, which is a degenerative neurological disease. Despite having always sought out private natural experiences as a way to process grief, I had not, until that point, involved my emotions explicitly in my research or process. When the situation with my mother started to peak in December, I was in the midst of starting my third project at Stamps, the Greenhouse Room, in collaboration with second-year MFA Kim Karlsrud. The Michigan winter hit hard during this time, and I found myself using the greenhouse not only as a tool for research and art-growing, but as a space to manage and process my emotional trauma.

I have used plants and environments as tools for self-therapy before, but this was different; I had coincidentally planted seeds that grew alongside a terrible situation, offering an immediate daily antidote to



Fig. 16 - Critique installation with first kinetic grass prototype, 2021

my negative emotions. Tending my winter seedlings became a ritual that met in the middle of my public, experimental art practice and my privately collapsing family life. Kim and I opened the greenhouse to other members of the studio who wanted to grow things, or to simply sit among the plants and enjoy a little artificial sunshine, and I found it equally therapeutic to witness the relationships of others to the space.

This experience helped me to understand that my emotional process is an active, possibly even primary part of my personal ecology; my emotions dictate the nature of my ecological experiences, and my ecological experiences dictate the nature of my emotions. The Greenhouse Room and other early works of emotive ecological art laid the groundwork for what has become an ever-evolving practice of psychoecological investigation through art making.

Exploring Psychoecological Surrogacy through Bodily Performance

Field Note 9.

July 30, 2021, Oregon

In the backseat of a stuffy Toyota Corolla on the way to the airport, I feel bereaved. Like I've broken off a budding relationship for work, or moved away from my family. I know the object of my affection is still there, but I am leaving it behind, and by choice. It's a hollow feeling.

Tony, the Corolla's owner, is a somewhat chaotic driver. It feels silly but the lurch of the car in traffic with windows down is enough to at least momentarily displace some of the hollowness. I am desperate to continue feeling alive. Wind, it seems, is the most efficient carrier of this critical vitality. I am often disappointed with the English language for its failures to describe such emotions, sensations. Even now - what I am struggling to convey is neither emotion nor sensation, but something in the fluid space between.

The wind on a remote mountaintop and the wind through the cracked window of a musty car are not the same wind, but they can, with the right consciousness, have the same effect. How do I bring the lungfuls I captured in the snow-capped Cascades home to the stagnant, polluted byways of I-75? How do I bring those puddles of glacial meltwater to the flood-muddied potholes of Detroit, their still surfaces swirling with the telltale rainbow film of leaked oil? Can I? Should I?

In the late summer and early fall of 2021, after coming out of my two months in the backcountry, I was adrift. The ability to convey the nonhuman intimacy I have always felt, but which was infinitely further cemented during my solitary immersion in the Virginian and Oregonian wildernesses, seemed suddenly even less possible than it had before I went into the mountains. Overwhelmed by the scale and complexity of the body of work which I had planned to create, I found myself in a state of mental and emotional paralysis, unable to build or write or think. Every day I thought only of the fact that at the end of that day, I would not sleep on the ground outside, but in a bed, cut off from trees and rocks and the hypnotic drone of cicadas. I was blindsided by a terrible depression.

In an attempt to force myself to make work, I went out to the river, planning to film the video paired with *Limnicardia*, which was ultimately filmed in Lake Huron instead. As I set up my camera on a secluded bit of pebbled shoreline in Detroit, a man appeared and spread a blanket beside me, cracking a beer.

There are many places on Belle Isle to enjoy the river with a beer, but very few to capture the lapping of waves that I needed for my shot. I explained this to the man and asked him to give me ten minutes alone there to film, as I would be stripping down to a flesh-toned undergarment and getting in the water.

"I don't mind," he said with a possessive stare, not moving. When I told him that I did, and again asked for just a few minutes of privacy before relinquishing the beach, he told me that it was his spot.

I left without filming, feeling violated both in my own body and on behalf of the sand and stones that the beer-drinking man had laid claim to. I felt all of the things that had been weighing on me since I returned from my trek come to a head, and almost started to cry. In that moment, I wanted nothing more than to be alone and immersed in the land, held in its comforting embrace. I wanted to dig myself a hole and

sleep there, to press the earth in around myself, because that seemed the only way to get back the feeling of being cared for that I had felt when I was alone in the wilderness. So I burrowed into the tall grass.

The smell and feel of the grass was instantly comforting. I breathed deeply, curling in on myself as my body pressed a womb-like depression into the meadow. I heard crickets moving through the spaces around me, and beside my shoulder a brightly-colored orb weaver moved unbothered through her web. Afterward, I ruminated on the nest I left behind, a gentle depression in the meadow that reminded me of the places where you can tell a deer has bedded down. The mark less immediately obvious that was left by this encounter was upon my own skin- a hatched pattern of grass-shaped indents on my shoulders and legs where they had rested for long periods on the bare, dry grass. It felt good that the land had left its mark on me as well this time, in a way that could be visible and understandable to others.

In the winter, I set out to recall this experience of embrace and exchange by wrapping my naked body around a body-sized mound of compacted snow and ice which I removed from a plow pile in a parking lot near the graduate studios. I transported the ice into the field behind the studio building, which has often been a site of ecological exchange that I turn to in my work, as well as for the simple comfort of solitude in landscape.

I will call these works 'performance' only loosely, because they were witnessed only by the land and a camera. In this performance, not spontaneous as the prior had been, I considered my motivations and the implications of treating a landscape object, particularly one as ephemeral as snow, as a surrogate for human interaction.

I have often thought about the role of weather and seasonality in my work. I have also wondered about the implications of loving something which, by no existing standard, can love me back. It is easy for most to love the Michigan landscape in the summer, but less so in the winter.



Fig 18. - Nest, 2021



Fig. 19 - Nest, 2021



Fig. 20 - Nest, 2021



Fig 21 - Embrace, 2022

Knowing my body's limitations, I had expected this performance to be difficult and painful, bringing up thoughts of harmful or one-sided relationships. Instead I found it incredibly intimate and joyful.

As in *Nest*, this performance documented my attempts to actively remember the feelings of connectedness I had experienced while living in the backcountry, to remind my body how it had felt to be in constant physical contact with the land while remaining in a local, and by most standards, unremarkable environment. While these works did not find their way into my thesis exhibition, they are directly connected to the body of work that I did present. I have found them incredibly cathartic and successful in their simplicity, and look forward to continuing in this direction in the future.

A Wind From Noplace

Throughout the course of my life I have lost, and found, and lost again, the ability to articulate what it is that I feel for the elements of the natural world to which I am most intimately connected. In A Wind From



Fig 22 - Embrace, 2022

Noplace, I attempted to circumvent conventional language and directly translate my body's psychophysiological responses to engagement with natural landscapes and phenomena.

As I have stated earlier in this discussion, the closest I have come to conveying my own experiences and philosophy of ecological intimacy has been in the form of spontaneous, lyrical prose-poetry field notes. A Wind From Noplace has been my first attempt at creating embodied sculptural poetry.

Poetry has long been a popular outlet for the expression of intense emotion and sensation. By occupying a different structure and cadence than typical speech, it allows us to assign new meaning to words and phrases, to guide a reader or listener into avenues of thinking and feeling not afforded by conventional conversation. In Lyrical Ballads, English poet William Wordsworth reflects on the unique mental state in which poetry is produced:

"I have said that [Romantic] poetry is the spontaneous over flow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a

species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition general ly begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried out...."³⁶

In *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and fellow poet Samuel Coleridge generated a revolution in poetry. *Lyrical Ballads*, their combined volume published in 1798, marked a significant turning away from the restraints of the classical tradition in poetry and toward a freer, more experimental, and more emotionally charged lyricism.³⁷

Wordsworth proposed making poetry through the selection and arrangement of the sincere and simple language of the ordinary individual, adapting prose language to poetic uses. Thus Wordsworth undermined the dignity of poetry, but he also gave it a newer, broader scope that included a range of persons and situations never written about before the humble and rustic life taken seriously.

Much in this same way, my sculptures are an attempt to reduce cumbersome and potentially inaccessible language to a near universally-experienced moment of sensorial witnessing. Despite these physical attempts to break from a logocentric framework, the context in which the work was created demands a written categorization of the works, which, along with this immensely wordy document, has strayed often into invented terminology.

While I believe I have thoroughly belabored my frustration with language in regard to the expression of sensory, psychological, and inter-species entanglements, I am still deeply in love with words. I spent several years in my early twenties studying Latin for the sole purpose of being able to interpret the linguistic roots of modern language. This fixation comes out in my attempts to title artworks, which is something



Fig. 23 - Limnicardia, 2022

I have struggled with my entire career as an artist.

In an intentionally dim corner of my exhibition space stands a sturdy steel tank, simply constructed with a gently sloping bottom, placed upon a wheeled base. Inside the tank are hundreds of smooth stones

³⁶ Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, 1798

³⁷ Calverton

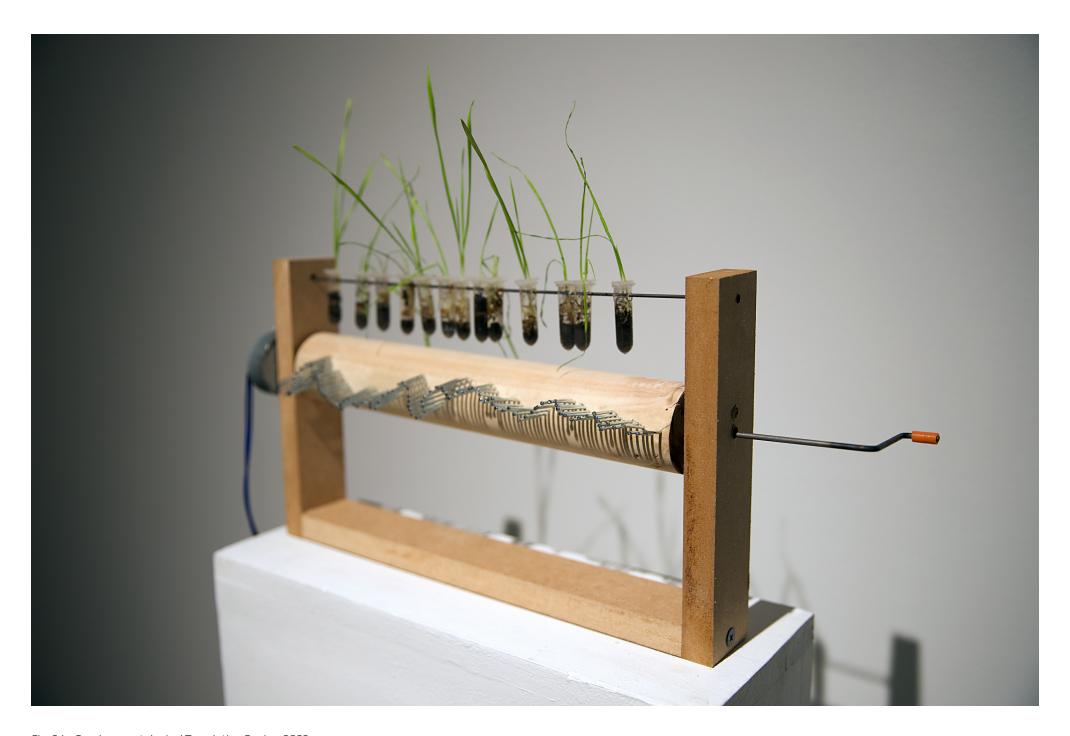


Fig. 24 - Psychoagrostological Translation Device, 2022

and hundreds of gallons of water. Above this contrived fragment of lakeshore plays a short video, in which scenes of Lake Huron in autumn cut in between a view of my body from above, being pushed and rocked by the waves. In the tank, a steel paddle pivots forward and back on a hinge, pushing the water within to form half-realized waves. This paddle is controlled by a reciprocating linear actuator to the pace of my heartbeats as I lay in the water.

The title of the kinetic lakeshore, Limnicardia, comes from an invented psychophysiological condition which translates to "lake-heartedness". This is the closest I could come with words to describing what I want the piece to portray in the rhythmic lapping of its waves.

Psychoagrostological Translation Device is similarly named; 'psychoagrostology' being a fabricated field of study at the intersection of grassland ecology and the human psyche. Much of my practice takes place in meadows, medians, or other open, often edgeland spaces, and so much of my philosophy of ecological intimacy has its roots among the many herbaceous plant species colloquially referred to as grass.

In this work, a row of live wheatgrass in plastic vials filled with soil and water is suspended above a wooden cylinder into which is set an irregular line of brad nails. These nails chart several seconds worth of line graph corresponding to cardiac data. On each revolution, generated by the viewer via a simple hand crank, the line of nails strikes the vials, bending the grasses forward in a rhythmic pattern dictated by the physical, meandering line of 'data'.

Psychoagrostological Translation Device was originally built as a prototype for a larger 'music box' style kinetic meadow. I ended up solving my programming and motor problems and building the meadow as originally planned, or near enough. However, I was very satisfied with the marriage of concept and form in the prototype, and charmed by its playfulness in contrast to the more somber larger sculptures. After originally fitting it with a fixed-speed motor, I returned the sculpture

to its original analog method of animation, inviting viewers to turn the crank in order to see the line of grass in motion. I found that the ability to interact with the piece helped viewers to better understand it, and that the exhibition also benefited from a work which was not in constant motion.

Taking up the bulk of the space is a fabricated field of reed grass suspended in a wood and steel frame, interconnected by specially-crafted hardware. Controlled by a geared shaft and programmable motor, the rows of grass sway in tandem, emitting a robotic chorus of squeaks and clicks. These sounds, along with the grasses' movements, indicate that the 'wind' manipulating the field repeats in a pattern, looping several moments of variable speed and motion in perpetuity. The significance of this pattern might be deduced by a glance to the right of the sculpture, where a video of me wearing an EEG headset is projected on the wall. Indeed, the neural activity recorded during that video-documented exchange provides the data which animates the sculpture.

Each of these works exists as an independent work of experimental research, a case study of somatic experience in landscape, a love poem, and in the terminology of artistic practice, a self portrait.

In this way, the spectacle in my work is not the land or the ways in which technology fails to create a comfortable facsimile of the land, but rather the desperation of a single person trying to understand the land and what it means to them.

My attempts to animate the grassland and the lakeshore are not about transcribing beauty or controlling and recreating nature, they are an attempt to honor the grass and the water as much as I possibly can by forcing others to see them, and by forcing myself to find the language with which I can express what it is to see them.



Fig. 25 - A Wind From Noplace, 2022



Field Note 10.

Fall 2021, Michigan

I am stupidly, agonizingly paralyzed by the fact that this didn't fix me. In the moment, it did, but when I left the woods, it didn't stick; the fixedness was more attached to those mountains than it was to the body my legs carried back to the city. And worse - it wasn't art or making that found me those weeks of

peace. It was stone, and solitude, and footsteps.

It intensified and confused my yearning; it distanced me from myself, and from the people who knew who I was before I was this. I felt my answers out there, but now they feel far away, confused.

Very suddenly it is autumn, and my body is responding with eager intrigue to the shift. The cool, moist air in the field tastes of vernal pools; fall mud and turning leaves. It is the taste of bird migration and bare branches.

Rain has so many moods. Today it felt like a reckoning, a call home. I want to drink it off of leaves like I did with blueberry bushes in humid Virginia. I want to bathe in a stream, to handle damp moss. I want the rain to know how much I'd like to wrap myself around it, to become it.

I simultaneously need a nap and a swim, rest and a shock to the senses, a comforting touch.

I need the comfort of solitude in familiar places, of communion with nonhuman kin. I need to go back to Virginia. My body feels sludgy, like some liquid which would normally flow, but that has become viscous. I feel like heavy, settling mud. Mud with a dull, churning heartbeat.

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I long for the North where unimpeded winds would hone me to such a pure slip of bone.

- Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

How does one, in writing, answer a question which was asked under the pretense of abandoning conventional language? Whatever exists at the confluence of my body and mind may have begun to understand the thing I set out to know, but I can only convey in written or spoken words that this research has far to go. Over the short and tumultuous years I spent in this program, I have produced a finished body of visual artwork, dozens of dry starts, and hundreds of writings. The body of work I produced and exhibited was created in an attempt to both ask and answer a question. Many questions were asked and abandoned, or changed, and many more sprung from those that were asked. But for the sake of producing a finished work, I settled on one, which I will pose now for the last time in this document.

What does it mean to hold memories of a changing landscape? Like lost loved ones, can we hold mountains and meadows with us after they are gone, or after we have gone from them?

I know now the ways in which my body holds memory, and the emotional and psychological states associated with memory. I know now how my ecological engagement factors into the themes of memory, love, and loss that permeate my work and my daily existence. But is that enough? Has anyone else, by way of this art, come to understand these things about me, or about themselves? Can we ever truly use ourselves as proxies for human culture at large, to make sweeping statements about the ways in which we must know and love the earth if we are to keep from destroying it?

In this body of work and the research surrounding it, I have attempted to achieve a kind of sensory biomimicry through the medium of deconstructed landscape. The half-real, half- fabricated landscapes of my kinetic sculptures became surrogates for my processes of emoting and remembering.

In much of art, as in our increasingly technological lives, mechanisms often become metaphors for the body. This work has been no different. However, I have deliberately, and I hope successfully, avoided placing any implications of morality upon the technology utilized in A Wind

From Noplace. The technology is simply a tool - and rather than railing against it as a mechanism of Culture which will ultimately destroy Nature, I chose to use it to help myself break from such binaries, to better understand the ways in which I am, and can further be, a part of the land and ecosystems in which I exist. The body is the machine, and the body is the land. The body uses the machine to get back to the land.

In the face of compounding ecological crises on every level, from the personal to the global, it is more important than ever that we theorize new ways in which to coexist with and on our planet. We know what needs to be done to correct our destructive course, but without widespread ecological connection, by which I specifically mean emotional connection to our ecosystems, it will never happen. Or at least, it will never happen the way it should. Because if we only change our ways out of fear of our own extinction, then we will surely fall back on them decades or centuries into the future, after the threat has been minimized and forgotten.

Throughout the course of this research, I have made great strides towards theorizing the ways in which human ecology and psychophysiology interplay, but I feel I have only scratched the surface. The methodologies I have developed have each begun to lead to their own bodies of work and research, which I'm sure I will be unraveling for many years to come. As I have throughout the creation of the works discussed here, I will continue to drift between disciplines, hopefully making ties in these fields which I have just begun to touch upon so that I might continue this research and let it lead to new interdisciplinary projects.

If I ever only had one research question, which is doubtful, I now have many, and possibly many more than I will have the opportunity to pursue in my lifetime. I want to learn more about the ways in which we hold and process emotion, and the ways in which emotion generated by human connection differs from emotion generated by ecological connection. Can the study of love and longing expand our understanding of humanity's current predicament, and provide a framework for

moving away from our disastrously ecocidal -and since there is no tangible divide between Nature and Culture, suicidal- behaviors? How can art become the site of such inquiry?

I find it incredibly difficult to end this discussion, as I do with all of my writing. To conclude my comments on what I see as excitingly unconcluded research, I will briefly speak to what, for me, is possibly the most important outcome of this work. In a recent writing tied to my endless compendium of field notes, I posed myself this question, which I will do my best to answer:

Why am I writing something with no beginning and no ending?

Because to recall an event through active remembering or writing is to integrate it into my present lived experience, which has no beginning or end. In a sense the things I write about and make art about are not the things that *happened*, but the things that are currently happening in my mind while I reflect on the past.

All of the visual artworks that I produced this year exist in a constant, repeating loop. Each video plays, then starts over. Each line of code runs, then repeats. The grasses move, and the waves lap on the artificial shore. They seem not to start and not to end.

In a way, this research never started, because it has grown organically out of me from a very young age, and I have slowly learned enough about myself and the world to begin digging deeper. And I think that in much the same way, it will never end. Since nature herself is a moving target, as Kimmerer said, there is no end to the conversation between the self and the infinite natures.

With that potential for infinite conversation in mind, I move forward from this initial inquiry toward countless others, hopeful in the face of hopelessness, knowing that I, at least, will never stop seeking; for new language, for salamanders, for the self I left in the mountains.

A wind from noplace rises. A sense of the real exhults me; the cords loose; I walk on my way.

- Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

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Glossary

Ecocide - destruction of the natural environment by deliberate or negligent human action.

Ecomimesis - Ecomimesis is the term used to describe the design of manmade ecosystems that imitate ecosystems in nature. Ecomimesis emulates the properties, structure, functions and processes of natural ecosystems in designing and constructing the manmade ecosystem.

Enmeshment - psychological term describing a relationship in which personal boundaries are permeable and unclear.

Multispecies ethnography - Multispecies ethnography is a rubric for a more-than-human approach to ethnographic research and writing rapidly gaining discursive traction in anthropology and cognate fields. The term is deployed for work that acknowledges the interconnectedness and inseparability of humans and other life forms, and thus seeks to extend ethnography beyond the solely human realm.

Psychoecology - the study of interplay between psychology and ecology, or the ways in which emotion and cognition affect human ecological behaviors

Psychophysiology - the study of the relationship between physiological and psychological phenomena; the ways in which the mind and body interact.

Sensory ethnography - A mode of ethnographic observation that takes sensory data into account