

Art, Actor Network Theory and The Anthropocene

by
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Figure 1 Tamsin Salehian *Matter in Translation* 2019 Modelling Polymer, wire, heat-formed bioplastic 70x42x35cm

Abstract

A multimodal practice can explore the conditions of the contemporary urban landscape through diverse strategies. These strategies highlight the relationship of art practice with the Anthropocene, where the discrete art object and its dematerialisation gain a new framing. Using Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory as a way to encourage investigation of the complexities of the current landscape, and Loraine Code's Ecological Thinking as a reflective theory to anchor practice within in an ethical framework, I have created site-based installations and studio-based artworks.

My process of investigation involved research at three geographic sites of urban expansion: Housing sites in far northern Sydney; Elara Estate in Sydney's outer west and the City of Ballarat in Victoria. Using a method of archival and site-based research and material experiments I have developed projects which explore processes related to Anthropocene. These include approaches to art practice that take into account a decentring of human and foregrounding of non-human activities. This process has highlighted the generative capacity for 'not knowing' to enter practice as a strategic tool.

Outcomes have included the development of photographic and sculptural wall-based works which communicate through materials and composition the inherent instability of Anthropocenic landscapes; ephemeral, site-based works in Ballarat, Victoria; and experimental works which led to studio and site-based installations in Sydney.

This project has developed ways that a combination of Actor Network Theory and Ecological Thinking can provide the grounds for new ways of making artwork.

Key words: Actor Network Theory, Ecological Thinking, Anthropocene, Art, Landscape, Installation Art, Ephemeral Art, Drawing, Photography in the Expanded Field

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree at the National Art School or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the exegesis.

I also declare that the intellectual content and visual record of studio work of this exegesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.

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Introduction

This MFA documents my process of exploring landscape as a condition of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene describes our current geological epoch as a shift in the earth's processes caused by human impact.¹ Making work became a method of thinking through the connections between urban expansion, surrounding landscape forms and the Anthropocene, uncovering an entangled net of interactions.

Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) emerged as a tool to understand the complex nature of interactions.² Working within the landscape is a process of recognising the numerous actants involved in creating the current state of the environment. It highlights the instability of the current conditions.³

Working from geographic sites on the fringes of Sydney and in Ballarat, Victoria, I re-enacted urbanising processes. These relied on research in the feedback systems of environmental, social and economic forces. I discovered that a multimodal approach reveals the complexities inherent in the processes of the Anthropocene landscape and urbanisation.

My work revealed an ethics of engagement which identified the shifts that occur between practice-based research and its epistemological framing. Consequently, my work has developed a set of ethical perspectives influenced by Loraine Code's

¹ The Anthropocene is proposed as the name for the current geological epoch. While contested and still to be ratified, the name is increasingly used to express the entangled processes and complex interactions across environmental, social and economic systems which result in the current state of the environment. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin "Art and Death: Lives between the Fifth and Sixth Extinction" IN Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (eds) *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* Open Humanities Press:London 2015p7

² Latour, Bruno (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.17

³ Ibid

Ecological Thinking⁴, and the ideas of Donna Haraway⁵ and Adrienne Rich⁶. These areas of thought foreground interactions with the non-human and a New Materialist⁷ agency of matter in my works. I found that by making work which responds to this set of ideas, an openness to 'not-knowing' becomes an important strategy within my process. It is expressed through both structural objectives and practical methodologies in order to find a way to sit with the current unstable conditions of the Anthropocene.

Before I began this MFA, my practice was concerned with speculative projects that cross mediums and disciplines. This project has been a process of reflecting on the motivations behind why I am moved to work in this way.

In this paper I have taken a methodical approach and defined structure in presenting my research and ideas:

I begin by describing my project *Folded Map/Ballarat Gold*, the interdisciplinary project that led to the theoretical interests in this paper. Then I discuss the post-medium condition which recognises the expanded field of art and interdisciplinary processes. I discuss the post-medium condition in terms of a critique of the discrete art object and its re-inscription which foregrounds its relational approach to matter.

I introduce the concept of the Anthropocene, describing the current economic and ecological crisis and the resultant implication for the art object and post-medium condition. Exploring conditions of the Anthropocene can lead to a deeper understanding of objects as it complicates the relationships between them. Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory emerged as a tool to study this net of interactions.

⁴ Loraine Code 2006 *Ecological Thinking The Politics of Epistemic Location* Oxford:OUP

⁵ Donna J. Haraway 2016 *Staying With The Trouble: Making Kin In The Chthulucene* Durham:Duke University Press

⁶ Adrienne Rich, 1986 'Notes Toward a Politics of Location' IN Adrienne Rich, 1987 *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* London:Virago p210

⁷ Jane Bennett 2010 *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* Duke University Press: London pxvi

I then further explore the links between the post-medium condition and the Anthropocene, where all phenomena exists in a complicated net, contained within a crisis vernacular. My art practice sits within this assemblage, where the destabilising conditions of the Anthropocene lead to alternative methods of my practice.

I go on to analyse Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) in terms of the possibilities for my practice. I discuss how ANT is an additive theory which has encouraged me to embrace the heterogenous nature of my practice. ANT also reveals an inherent instability within the contemporary world which has interesting implications for exploring my art practice in terms of the unstable composition.

I explore and outline New Materialism's connection to understanding ANT and the art object. These are complicated by ethical engagement with the non-human. Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway's approaches to the non-human problematise human centred activity and points to the need for ethical engagement.

I examine my need for ethical engagement and how this has been an epistemological part of my practice concerns. Loraine Code's theory of Ecological Thinking, Donna Haraway's Making Kin and Adrienne Rich's Politics of Location have helped me articulate this position. I discuss the way that my MFA project relied on situating practice geographically within three locations of urban development in Australia and the way this relates to my position.

This leads to the way sustained encounter has become a strategy for making new work. My work *Matter in a virtual world* is discussed in this context, touching on Donna Haraway's concept of encountering the non-human.

As encounter can never be a fully known state I consider instability and hesitancy as processes which embrace the unknown to enter practice to become generative processes. House wrap - Following the Actant, illustrates

how my research in new housing estates uncovers a network of interactions which illuminate scalar relationships of the Anthropocene and the instability of Anthropocenic connections and leads to my painting and spatial works exploring their inherent instability. I look at the works of artist Richard Tuttle from this perspective.

Using landscape as a reflective device to explore the conditions of art practice in terms of the Anthropocene, the post-medium condition and an epistemological analysis has given me a rich and exciting set of conditions to form new work, which has opened up multiple possibilities for the creation of future works.

Chapter One

Folded Map/Ballarat Gold

Folded Map/Ballarat Gold is a site-based, ephemeral installation I developed during the first year of my MFA. The work consisted of a public sculptural installation and a participatory drawing project installed in Ballarat, Victoria. The work expresses my philosophy of practice and my ecological interests. The theoretical concerns that resulted from this project are the basis of this paper.

A large wooden way marker, granite boulders and heat formed, bioplastic vitrines filled with sculptures of Murnong (Native Yam Daisy) plants were installed near the Ballarat Botanic Gardens, by Lake Wendouree. The installation acted as an epicentre, a central map point referring to an off-site participatory drawing. To create the drawing, instead of using traditional drawing materials, I enlisted local residents to plant Murnong seedlings in their gardens. I wanted to disrupt traditional understandings of what drawing could be by having a drawing formed by touch and planting. The Murnong daisies became the drawing pigment, where each plant acted as a point in the drawing. Stretching over 50 km, 63 seedlings were planted and their sites mapped, joining points across the topography of Ballarat. Both the participants and the plants themselves became co-authors of the work.

The act of planting engaged participants in spending time and attention to care for a plant, intimacy generating a sense of custodianship. Along with a possibility to encourage a deeper connection to place, knowledge specific to the Murnong became a way to insert a connection to history within the suburban landscape. The plant acted both as an harmless decorative perennial and as a quietly political disruptor. As my MFA research was deconstructing ways to understand place, history and landscape, the idea of plant matter as a drawing allowed an embracing of the issues that I was curious about – collaboration, the raising of non-human aspects of work to a parity with human, the destabilising or complicating of authorship, and the implications of these. I discuss elements of the project in this paper along with the subsequent works that developed from it. I have included a full account of the project in Appendix 1.

Contemporary art practice and the post-medium condition

I position my practice within a post-medium framework, informed by subject based conceptual investigations that result in a range of physical outcomes, including: participatory, installation, documentation, sculptural works and their crossovers. My work is influenced by interdisciplinary research in ecology and geography. I find this influence constructive and beneficial for thinking through the conditions of our contemporary world. I consider the role of the ecologist as a way to uncover connections which can be explored through art practice. This is informed by my earlier studies in science. I discovered there are rich spaces of engagement between disciplines that inform relative modes of thinking. Philosopher Bruno Latour considers Art and Science are 'different strategies for producing narratives around shared social and historical realities'.⁸ For Latour the inquiries of art and science share a basic form which create an ontological equivalence between the disciplines.⁹

Following Lucy Lippard's exploration of the 'dematerialisation of the art object', in the 1960s, art theorist, Rosalind Kraus' seminal 1979 essay 'Sculpture in the expanded field' described an expansion away from the discrete object into an open ended, post-medium set of interactions.¹⁰ Strategies of art production stretched beyond the singular object, merging aesthetic and theoretical concerns while scrutinising institutional systems of support, distribution and display.¹¹ This expanded field of art became part of a larger theoretical development of postmodernism, addressing how meaning is generated through the processes of art production, as well as through the subject matter portrayed.¹²

⁸ Francis Halsall 2016 'Actor-Network Aesthetics: The Conceptual Rhymes of Bruno Latour and Contemporary Art' *New Literary History* 47 p444

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Rosalind Kraus 1979 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' *October* 20 Massachusetts:MIT Press p38 pp30-44

¹¹ Lippard, Lucy, ed. 2001. *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1962 to 1972...* Berkeley: University of California Press

¹² Ibid p27

Artworks are often delineated by their strategies of production, display or epistemological methodologies rather than their aesthetic condition.¹³ The artistic gesture is able to reflect a conscious attitude to move within, between and beyond traditional art mediums and frameworks. Contemporary practice radicalises this extension where some artworks may seem almost indistinguishable from other disciplines, creating crossovers between fields.

For example, artist Mary Mattingly's work *Triple Island*, 2013 was a sculptural building construction informed by real estate speculation, waste production and ecology which the artist inhabited on the banks of the East River in New York. The work blurred the boundaries between disciplines and between art and life, allowing a performative process to combine these separations (figure 2). The conditions of the contemporary social and ecological environment are integrated with the development of art production.¹⁴ In my practice these concepts have led to the creation of participatory and performative artworks where activities outside traditional art practice, such as planting seedlings, moving rocks and walking through bushland, can be foregrounded within practice.



Figure 2 Mary Mattingly, 2013, *Triple Point* mixed materials, dimensions vary. Photo: Art 21 Inc.

¹³ Francis Halsall 2016 'Actor-Network Aesthetics: The Conceptual Rhymes of Bruno Latour and Contemporary Art' *New Literary History* 47 Ibid.p444

¹⁴ Cristian Nae, 2011 'Artistic Autonomy in the "Post-Medium Condition" of Art: Conceptual Artworks as Performative Interventions' *Meta: Research In Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, And Practical Philosophy* Vol. III, No. 2 / December 2011: 431-449 p433

Interestingly, the post-medium condition, rather than negating the discrete art object, foregrounds relationships between objects and subjects and their various environments.¹⁵ These relationships may be physical, structural, conceptual or social and can engage either within, or beyond the discourses of art.¹⁶ The object isn't annihilated, simply reassigned. Art historian Francis Halsall suggests that the still dominant legacy of Duchamp's readymade is evident in approaches to the discrete art object, where the distinction between individual art objects and their environment is rendered ambiguous.¹⁷ This legacy allows for the intrinsic arguments of a post-medium condition to inform the reading of discrete art object. It also highlights instability where meaning, for the art object, can shift, taking on temporal reassignments, affected by its environment, its reading unfixed. The progression of this development is important in the context of what critic Terry Smith names the contemporary condition.

Smith labels the approach of responding to the changes brought on by the dual concerns of the global economic crisis and the global ecological crisis as the contemporary composition; an exploration of the issues which concern the current timeframe and the associated environmental and social impacts.¹⁸ The combination of a post-medium condition in art, and the instability of the ecological crisis create a forum for exploring art production within a space that considers instability. Exploring the relationship between art production, objecthood, post-medium exploration and cross-disciplinary knowledge creates a stage for studying complex contemporary issues. It becomes an important factor where issues related to the contemporary environment and cultural production fall within the framework of Anthropocenic discourse.

¹⁵ Francis Halsall 2016 'Actor-Network Aesthetics: The Conceptual Rhymes of Bruno Latour and Contemporary Art' *New Literary History* 47 p442

¹⁶ Ibid p444

¹⁷ Ibid p442

¹⁸ Terry Smith 2016 *The Contemporary Condition: The Contemporary Composition* Aarhus: Sternberg Press p13

The Anthropocene

The Anthropocene describes our current geological epoch, melding local time with deep time, setting up a scalar set of implications on human activity.¹⁹ Current climatic events and globalised political structures have created a condition of comprehensive ecological crisis.²⁰ The complicated set of human-centred socio-material interactions, which cause ecological destruction, impact all life forms including ours. These include climate change, pollution, resource-extraction and population growth.²¹ This has repercussions for the foreseeable future.²² It is a contingent complex, where the activities that are enacted in one part of the environment have the possibility of catastrophic effects in another.

Philosopher Bruno Latour states that the Anthropocene implicates capitalism, putting every object under a critical lens. The simultaneous call to arms and cry of calamity of the Anthropocene refocuses discourse towards objects and relationships, and the processes that can examine and dismantle the Modernist attitude of 'mastery of nature'.²³

Latour continues, by perceiving nature and culture as an inseparable assemblage, we are integrated within every part of their associated ecological processes.²⁴ This interactive space depicts a nature-culture association as a continually emerging set of conditions. Human and non-human activities have the ability to affect one another. This recognition of interaction highlights both an ethical proposition of engagement as well as an understanding of non-human forces. This leads to an assertion of the primacy and consequences of all activity, encouraging a shift in social behaviour to redress the nature-culture split.²⁵

¹⁹ Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin "Art and Death: Lives between the Fifth and Sixth Extinction" IN Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (eds) *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* Open Humanities Press: London 2015 p7

²⁰ T.J. Demos 2017 *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* Aarhus: Sternberg press p12

²¹ Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin "Art and Death: Lives between the Fifth and Sixth Extinction" IN Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (eds) *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* Open Humanities Press: London 2015, 6

²² T.J. Demos 2016 *Decolonising Nature: Contemporary Art and The Politics of Ecology* Aarhus: Sternberg Press p13

²³ Bruno Latour 1991 *We Have Never Been Modern* Cambridge: Harvard University Press p28

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Bruno Latour 1991 *We Have Never Been Modern* Cambridge: Harvard University Press p28

I use art practice as a way of thinking through nature-culture dynamics. By focusing on the issues of urban expansion and its links to globalising forces of environmental change, I wanted to use the materials of the built and unbuilt environment to explore meaning within a set of concerns of the contemporary world.

My work *Untitled (cycles of matter I)* expresses the connections between an endangered plant in NSW, rock formations in Victoria and enclosed environments of bubbles, vitrines and buildings (figure 3). The work emerged from photo-documentation of fieldwork looking at soil types, rock formations that have a historical connection to gold deposits, plant associations within remnant urban bushland and the manipulations of plastic materials used in packaging and building processes (acrylics and bioplastics). Through my art practice I am exploring the phenomena of a subject through my process of making. My work is a personal engagement with the phenomena involved in urban expansion. The abstractions of this process integrate my emotional engagement with the environment and theory-based research.



Figure 3 Tamsin Salehian 2019 *Untitled (cycles of matter)* (installation view) 40x60cm ink on satin, acrylic bio-plastic, modelling polymer, wire, wood,

Seeing nature-culture co-creation produces a shift in the way I can understand matter in the contemporary world. Latour expands 'Because of the very logic of the Anthropocene, you are inserted into the phenomena you study in a way that is

unexpected and still unfathomed.²⁶ This highlights complicated interactions, and the ethical underpinnings of concepts of nature and culture.

Investigating these complex interactions has been an important part of my process, deepening my engagement with the issues of urban expansion and unveiling ways to use art practice to explore them. Latour's Actor Network Theory, has been a tool for exploring the intricately connected networks of phenomena (more on this later).

Contemporary art and the Anthropocene

The language of the Anthropocene produces a crisis vernacular, a calamity of images and the recognition of destructive human activities.²⁷ Art production is both implicated and venerated.²⁸ The art object can be seen in the light of the Anthropocene's interrogation of capitalism. Art practices and their subsequent material objects are part of the entangled network of relationships which trace cycles of desire, implicating the destructive movements of commodities and their attendant processes of production and waste.

While art is a force within a capitalist cycle of desire it is simultaneously a form of cultural knowledge and critique.²⁹ Artworks have an ability to work through imagery which can allow a political agency - an ability, through the questioning of art's assumptions, to find alternate forms of expression.³⁰ Australian artist David Haines' work *Slow Fast Mountains (earth aroma)*, 2014 is an art object that links the gallery

²⁶ Heather Davis 2015 'Diplomacy in the Face of Gaia: Bruno Latour in conversation with Heather Davis' IN Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (ed) 2015 *Art in the Anthropocene : encounters among aesthetics, politics, environments and epistemologies* London:Open Humanities Press p44

²⁷ In *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Kathryn Yusoff interrogates the use of both the term Anthropocene and the activities of colonisation. Drawing links between the two Yusoff highlights the fact that the Anthropocene isn't caused or experienced equally amongst humans and illustrates the importance of language and the way social and environmental crises are intimately connected. Kathryn Yusoff 2018 *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press p12, 17

²⁸ Irmgard Emmelhainz "Images Do Not Show: The desire to see in the Anthropocene" IN Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (eds) *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* Open Humanities Press:London 2015,147

²⁹ Lucy Lippard 2014 *Undermining: A Wild Ride Through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West* New York: The New Press p13

³⁰ Ibid p13

visitor to the ecological processes of a wet forest (figure 4). The work consists of lumps of coal found on the edge of Wollemi National Park which have been treated with Geosmin, a chemical derived from a harmless bacteria which emits the scent of damp earth, petrichor.³¹ The work functions by presenting coal as a material object shrouded in its Anthropocenic implications while simultaneously communicating the connection of coal to earth through the nostalgic, bodily sensed connection to soil and humus. The art object is complicated by its function.



Figure 4 David Haines 2014 Slow Fast Mountains (earth aroma) Coal, Geosmin.

This uncovers a two-fold understanding of the art object; as a complicit activity within the destructive forces of the Anthropocene and, as a generative way to interpret and explore alternatives to these destructive forces. Accordingly, processes that are related to the dematerialisation of the art object, performance, conceptual, land

³¹ David Haines and Joyce Hinterding 2014 'Slow Fast Mountains (Earth Aroma)' *Haines & Hinterding* (accessed October 2, 2019) <http://www.haineshinterding.net/2014/10/15/slow-fast-mountains-earth-aroma/>

based work, become entangled in the narrative of the Anthropocene. The activities and outcomes that explored the dematerialisation of the art object and the post-medium condition in the twentieth century are further complicated within this current lens.

Paradoxically, the ability for material engagement to reassert the primacy of an object as a positive force has become one way to redress the nature-culture split. This is the argument of New Materialism and Object Oriented Ontologies, which I discuss later in this paper, where the material vitality of the non-human is a force of independent change.

In the book *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* editors Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin describe art as an important vehicle of aesthesis for this current age.³² Framed by the language of the Anthropocene, Davis and Turpin raise the question, ‘What does it mean for art to encounter the Anthropocene?’³³ Theorist Irmgard Emmelhainz suggests artists are responding through re-examining the context of image production and a radical change in the condition of visibility. They propose that artists are allowing new experimental approaches to visual language to inform this process.³⁴ Artforms can cross and link data, observations and materials that can be found in fields beyond disciplines. Artwork can navigate complex ideas through poetic and documentary methods together to explore the condition with the understanding that there is both an urgency and an instability within the process.

³² Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin “Art and Death: Lives between the Fifth and Sixth Extinction” IN Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (eds) *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* Open Humanities Press:London 2015 p6

³³ibid p6

³⁴ Irmgard Emmelhainz “Images Do Not Show: The desire to see in the Anthropocene” IN Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (eds) *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* Open Humanities Press:London 2015,147

Chapter Two

The Anthropocene condition and my art practice

The destabilising nature of the continual assault of images depicting ecological crisis affects both my art practice and my orientation within the world. The interconnections of my practice to the metalanguage of this moment has encouraged me to reflect upon the ethical factors that are entangled in the way I make work.

My practice involves performative, relational projects alongside studio-based, object making processes. By allowing the plurality of expression, the multimodal investigations become fragments of a larger net. Assembling the fragments I can reflect on the complexities of composition and how composition can enact the conditions of the Anthropocene. This set of interrelations between object and activity, between creative and destructive forces and between material use and ethical engagement form the underlying core of my investigations.

Folded Map/Ballarat Gold - Murnong Project (figure 5) created a format where plant matter was a co-author and non-human activity became a co-creator of work. This method involves using botanical knowledge to discover a means to reframe materiality through art-making. This approach of co-creation was a result of work I have made previously, artworks which required co-authorship by non-human agents such as seeds, and processes such as weather, to realise the work. This process allows for me to question, through practice, what the boundaries of an artwork can be.



Figure 5 Murnong (Microceris Lanceolata), documentation - nursery flats, seedling planting, bud growth. Photo: Tamsin Salehian

Additionally, by giving plants away to public, the daisy was able to exist as a gift object, playing a part in forming new community networks amongst participants (figure 6 & 7). The work was designed to act in various ways that existed outside of my ability to monitor it.



Figure 6 Some of the participants of the Murnong Project Photo: Tamsin Salehian 2018

Figure 7 John planting Murnong Seedlings Photo: Tamsin Salehian 2018

This gentle gesture through the ordinary act of planting, frames a subversive act, a counter to the capitalist forces which drive the conditions of the Anthropocene. I

tested gentle gestures further in the work *untitled (rock walk)* figure 8 and *untitled (rock bath)* figure 9, both acts of care performed with granite boulders. I worked with the premise that a gentle gesture can be a radical act of care. Care can dismantle capitalist actions, opening up alternatives to patriarchal paradigms. Writer Sasha Grbich observes that feminist, ecological artists are engaging in radical acts of care to encourage a material attentiveness as a way to decentre human positioning.³⁵



Figure 8 Tamsin Salehian 2018 Untitled (rock walk) Photograph

Field Trip Three, Granite, Basalt

*Climbing over stockpiles of basalt and granite in a quarry which bordered a new suburban estate cast the production of suburban housing expansion as a repositioning of landscape. The basalt and granites of the quarry held rock which was formed during the Cambrian period, 560 million years ago, when the city of Ballarat was encircled by flowing rivers of lava. The boulders have been shifted by weather and water and more recently by earth movers. Gathered from positions across the landscape to make way for housing expansion. The quarry's stockpile acts as a repository of deep time. As a performative expression, I strapped a small boulder to a carton trolley and took it for a walk. I also bathed and scrubbed another boulder in water from Lake Wendouree. Enacting a process of care towards boulders, heavy rocks that had been shifted across the landscape through processes of urbanism, created a repositioning of myself within the net of things around me. Both boulders became part of the installation *Folded Map/Ballarat Gold* before moving back to the quarry and local suburban gardens.*

³⁵ Sasha Grbich 2017 'Radical care: Personhood and the river' *Artlink* Dec 1, 2017 (accessed September 3, 2019) <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/4642/radical-care-personhood-and-the-river/>



Figure 9 Tamsin Salehian 2018 *Untitled (rock bath) Photograph*

It also required slowing down. Writer and geographer Deborah Bird-Rose suggests that a slow approach to site and inclusion of the body can allow for a 'decontextualising cosmology' to be mitigated by an ethical relationship to place. Embracing not-knowing creates an unmaking through observation of alternative connections.³⁶ This can establish a sense of wonder or enchantment allowing for a reconnection to place which may have been lost through what writers Tara Woodyer and Hilary Geoghegan call the disenchanting and distancing processes of globalized urbanization.³⁷

Fiction writer, scientist and academic Donna Haraway writes extensively on the conditions of the Anthropocene,³⁸ Using the term Chthulucene³⁹ to decentre the human sense of mastery that Anthropocene implies, Haraway considers that 'staying with the trouble' rather than looking for fixes is the way that we can begin to understand the complexities of the situation for both ecological processes and for

³⁶ Deborah Bird-Rose 2013 'Slowly writing into the Anthropocene' *Text* Issue 20

³⁷ Tara Woodyer and Hilary Geoghegan 2014 Cultural Geography and Enchantment: the affirmative constitution of geographical research *Journal of Cultural Geography* Vol 31 p225 pp 218 - 229

³⁸ Donna J. Haraway 2016 *Staying With The Trouble: Making Kin In The Chthulucene* Durham:Duke University Press

³⁹ For further discussion of terms see Donna Haraway 2015 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin' *Environmental Humanities* Vol 6, pp159-165

human identities.⁴⁰ This idea of staying with trouble requires a deep exploration of entanglements, relationships and processes involved in every aspect of our world.⁴¹

Actor Network Theory (ANT)

To 'stay with the trouble' implies an engagement with things as they currently are. Engaging with the urbanising historical forces in the city of Ballarat led me to develop *Folded Map/Ballararat Gold - Murnong Project*. I found, as my research expanded, that the entanglements were interdisciplinary and contingent. Urban expansion was tied to the social, economic, architectural, colonising, environmental and extractionist processes of the city. This is a complex entanglement of phenomena. Latour's Actor Network Theory emerged as the tool to allow the complexities of the process to be understood without overly reducing them.

Actor Network Theory (ANT) is a tool for describing the complex interactions between subjects.⁴² It describes a process of interrogating subjects in order to uncover links which may be drawn between their various and seemingly unrelated objects and activities.⁴³ In my practice I began to investigate subjects and objects in Latour's terms, as actants performing within a set of relations which form a complex network.

Any self-contained object, on closer inspection is made up by countless other objects that were not visible before, but in fact had always been present, and this division is a never ending process. (Latour 2005)⁴⁴

I found ANT useful in my practice as it sets up a framework to hold and explore multiple actants and situations which are both temporally dependant and historically weighted.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Donna J. Haraway 2016 *Staying With The Trouble: Making Kin In The Chthulucene* Durham:Duke University Press p

⁴¹ Ibid p

⁴² Latour, Bruno (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.17

⁴³ Francis Halsall, *Actor-Network Aesthetics: The Conceptual Rhymes of Bruno Latour and Contemporary Art* New Literary History Johns Hopkins University Press Volume 47 numbers 2 & 3 Spring/Summer 2016 pp439-461

⁴⁴ Latour, Bruno (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

⁴⁵ Latour, Bruno (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.24

ANT offered a clear framework for understanding *Folded Map/Ballarat Gold – Murnong Project*. The planting of biological material is an ephemeral act, temporally dependent. The internal growth of the daisy itself is a temporal activity. Additionally, through genetic selection over thousands of years by indigenous Australians, Murnongs became an important food crop. The plant's near extinction in the Ballarat region by the colonising forces of European invasion, parallels the destruction of the Indigenous Wadawurrung Nation.⁴⁶ In this way a plant (the Murnong) can reflect a social history. Additionally, colonising forces are closely tied to activities of land use which perpetuate environmental destruction and resource extraction.⁴⁷ Links between the Murnong, gold, land degradation, and legislation over landownership became apparent. Non-human actants are understood through complex interactions enmeshed in colonisation which are connected to the conditions of the Anthropocene.⁴⁸

In ANT the network is described by its actants, which are surrounded and influenced by their environment and subject to change, if one aspect or part of the system is affected. Social and ecological structures (including artworks and art discourses) can be studied from the perspective of following an actant. Anything can be defined as an actant; each actant is part of a network, each network creates a quasi-object or composition. While actants act on things in the network, they are also acted upon by the relationships the network enables, hence the instability and constantly shifting nature of networks.⁴⁹

An actor is nothing but a network, and a network is nothing but actors, To be self-contained (an actor), and to be thoroughly dependent (a network) is to twice say the same thing. Latour, 2005⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Fred Cahir 2019 *My Country All Gone The White Men Have Stolen It: The Invasion of Wadawurrung Country 1800-1870*, Ballarat: Australian History Matters p224

⁴⁷ Bruce Pascoe 2014 *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture*. Magabala Books, p12

⁴⁸ Francis Halsall, *Actor-Network Aesthetics: The Conceptual Rhymes of Bruno Latour and Contemporary Art* New Literary History Johns Hopkins University Press Volume 47 numbers 2 & 3 Spring/Summer 2016 pp439-461

⁴⁹ Latour, Bruno (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.9

⁵⁰ Latour, Bruno (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

My work *Terraformed Maple* (figure 10) followed the actant of urban construction processes. I used a piece of milled maple to signify an architectural construction process. The wood became one way to explore contemporary timber frame construction. I became interested in the way construction alters a landscape through foundation excavations that are required by suburban architecture. I undermine this through a series of tests to see how a piece of timber would perform if it was shaped over a building site before an excavation, shaping the wood to conform to the physical, rock and soil landscape. This created a sculptural gesture. This gesture led me to consider how this approach could lead formal construction and be applied to entire housing developments where the form of buildings is informed by the undulations of the ground. I have explored this idea further in the work *Foundation II* discussed at the end of this paper.

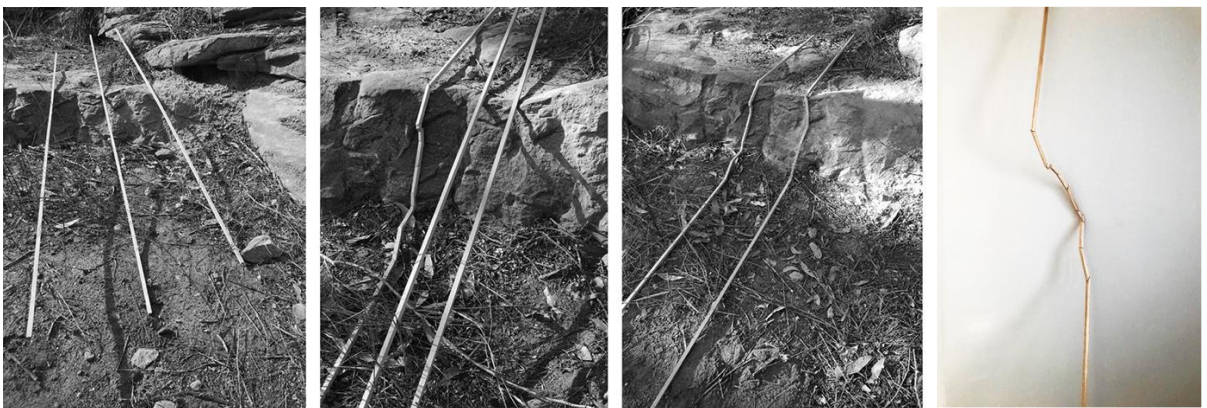


Figure 10 Tamsin Salehian 2018 *Terraformed Maple*, maple wood architrave, glue, 1x1x190cm L-R
Process images and installation view.

ANT describes the connections between all things, human and non-human, in an enactment of materially or discursively heterogeneous relations that produce, and also reshuffle, all kinds of actors. These include objects, subjects, symbols, signs, human beings, machines, animals, 'nature', ideas, organisations, inequalities, scale and sizes, and geographical arrangements. ANT creates list-like sets of activities through the tracing of actants and implicates the seen and unseen processes, which make up a subject.

It is through a combination of objects and signification that I can put ANT to work in the studio. ANT can be used to enact/frame a process of making which allows

multiple strands of thinking and various material relationships to co-exist.⁵¹ This enables the information discovered through local projects to form a connection to processes which are enacted on global scales.

The Australian art collective Open Spatial Workshop can be seen to use an ANT-like investigation in their practice. Their 2015 project *Fault* (figure 11) began with a sea lily fossil and traced connections, from the brickpit it was discovered in, to a relationship with cosmic time. Using a process of untangling actants—the fossil expressed the formation of the Eastern Australian coastline now enmeshed in the urban fabric of the city, it traced changes to climate, industry, housing booms, planetary processes and industries of wealth creation—the work uncovered a historically corrective network. Uncovering these actants centred around the geography of the Melbourne suburb of Brunswick. Stories that were previously hidden or lost were uncovered enabling a new understanding of the site and connection to place.



Figure 11 Open Spatial Workshop 2015 *Fault* Images from the research project. Photo:OSW

ANT implies an irreducibility of things which allows for all things to potentially exist equally in multiple narratives, though their emphasis or effect may alter.⁵² This creates a flat ontology, a state which nullifies the binary thinking of modernity. This is a key reason I find ANT so useful. ANT is a process-based way to explore the deeply complex and sometimes paradoxical state of the world without reducing the complexities. Hence, it becomes a way to make work through an additive, relational

⁵¹ Martin Müller and Carolin Schurr 2016 "Assemblage Thinking and Actor-Network Theory: conjunctions, disjunctions and cross-fertilisations." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* Vol 41 (3) Accessed <https://rgs-ibg.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/tran.12117> p217

⁵² Ibid p217

approach.⁵³ This structured way of seeing the world as a flat ontology, where ideas and objects are constantly affected by and interrupted by fragments, gave me a way of looking at art work which allows greater compositional freedom. Results of complex investigations can keep their accumulated knowledge about site and still work together. For instance, works that I developed in the Murrnong Project can be used as fragments within other compositions and still reference the Murrnong Project. The shape of their composition can take a playful process and signifiers can be layered and complicated or simple and simply positioned (figure 12).

The ability to combine these heterogenous subject associations into cohesive dialogue, by tracing actants' relationships, equally allow the act of art production and its subject to be a focus of the network. In my art practice, the idea of irreducibility can be applied to artworks so that aesthetic conditions can exist as equal and separate concerns to the ecological or social performativity of the artwork. The subject of art becomes an actant in this flat ontology. This allows a freedom in making which weaves in and out of various aesthetic paradigms as well as subjects. Precedents of art history can enter the aesthetic decisions which define the creation of work.

Exploring ANT allowed me to consider how art processes can investigate subject matter and encourage multi-strand research. In my work *Matter in a virtual world*, research into remnant bushland uncovered complex soil-plant relationships which are expressed through the growth patterns of the Hyacinth Orchid. Concurrently, the process of sculpting the orchid explored links between art practice and methods of knowing (discussed further in the section 'knowing through being with') as well as art practice and museum aesthetics.

⁵³ Latour, Bruno (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press p14



Figure 12 Installation view (l-r) Tamsin Salehian 2019 cement forms, *concrete, dimensions variable*; Tamsin Salehian 2019 *Matter in a virtual world modelling polymer, plasticine, paper 58x15x12cm*, Tamsin Salehian 2019 *untitled (foundation slab II) concrete, steel, photographs on satin, 80x165x7cm*

ANT embraces the co-existence and co-creatory forces of human and non-human actants.⁵⁴ I used ANT within my work to gain a more acute sense of the means by which non-human materials and subjects assist in shaping the world.

⁵⁴ Francis Halsall, *Actor-Network Aesthetics: The Conceptual Rhymes of Bruno Latour and Contemporary Art* New Literary History Johns Hopkins University Press Volume 47 numbers 2 & 3 Spring/Summer 2016 pp439-461

New Materialism

ANT requires an investigation into a materialist approach to the agency of matter.⁵⁵ New Materialism seeks to question the stability of an individuated human subject and reposition non-human actors as necessary to critical engagement.⁵⁶ New Materialism's approach casts matter as agential, where all matter has the potential to form transversal connections or networks with all other matter.⁵⁷ Vital Materialist, Jane Bennett, argues non-human matter is imbued with a liveliness that can exhibit distributed agency by forming assemblages between human and non-human actors. 'Thing-power gestures toward the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects. To manifest traces of independence of aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience'.⁵⁸ If we include a Marxist understanding of material conditions, with capitalism seen as an ecological force, matter is cast in a political frame.⁵⁹ New Materialist thinking destabilises the figure of the sovereign subject by exploring matter's capacity to disrupt. In New Materialism a new and altered emphasis on the discrete object imbues it with its unseen connections to all other 'things'.⁶⁰ The vitality and power of the non-human to effect change can be extended to art objects.

Photography is one way I have explored and documented material vitality. Photography's indexical nature allows me to play with the ambiguities that produce multiple truths within an image, its ability to both record and invent can create ways to bring actants together. I use reflective satin as a photographic substrate, the optical nature of the fabric creates a mirage-like effect, and destabilises the function of the image.

⁵⁵ Donna J. Haraway 2016 *Staying With The Trouble: Making Kin In The Chthulucene* Durham:Duke University Press

⁵⁶ Jane Bennett 2010 *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* Duke University Press: London pxvi

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Rick Dolphijn, and Iris van der Tuin. 2012. *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*. Open Humanities Press:London

⁶⁰ I have included OOO and New Materialisms together as their approach to matter prioritises the agency of non-human actants although they differ in their ontological interpretation. For further discussion see: Kameron Sanzo 2018 'New Materialism(s)' *Critical PostHumanism: Geneology of the Post-Human* (accessed 18 June, 2019) <http://criticalposthumanism.net/new-materialisms/>

Embedded in *Foundation II* are satin photographs, images from my fieldwork on Black Mountain in Ballarat (part of my research for *Folded Map/Balarat Gold*) figure 12. The hill is a former open cut gold mine, and my survey recorded soil and rock types. By introducing imagery from this site, tracing the material refuse leftover by the colonial search for gold, the work links earlier commodity exchanges with the commodity processes driving urban expansion.

Similarly, *Fieldwork (rocks I)* evolved out of the photographic documentation of *Folded Map/Ballarat Gold - epicentre*. This work traced the process of making work from the granite boulders in Ballarat, the original work was local stone which was painted to produce an optical effect of a metallic patina and used in a public installation by Lake Wendouree. Photographing the rock surface and using the resultant images as raw material to develop subsequent work from has allowed the original work to become an actant in the creation of new work, figure 13.



Figure 13 Tamsin Salehian 2019 *Fieldwork (rocks I)* c-print on folded and sheet aluminium, 25x20cm

Knowing through being with

Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway's work has been particularly useful. Braidotti draws attention to the dynamics of power within human societies and proposes a stage of becoming-other (becoming animal, becoming earth, becoming machine) as post-anthropocentric modelling.⁶¹ Haraway seeks to mitigate the ecological crisis

⁶¹ Rosi Braidotti 1996 'Cyberfeminism with a Difference' IN Michael A. Peters, Mark Olssen and Colin Lankshear (eds) 2003 *Futures of Critical Thinking: Dreams of Difference* NewYork: Rowman and Littlefield

through an undermining of modernist masteries which have relied on separation between humans and other species.⁶² Exploring material through this lens not only casts every object as an actor but also has an implicit ethical dimension where every actor is networked to every other and therefore changes them.

My work *Matter in a virtual world* is an ethical engagement with an orchid in remnant bushland, a process of identification with the non-human through art making. I engaged in a process of encountering plant matter intimately yet remotely (Figure 14). Relying on botanists notes and botanical archives, I recreated a Spotted Hyacinth Orchid at a 1.5x magnification, using polymer, plasticine and paper, a slow and deliberate process. The tiny fruiting bodies, smaller than the head of a pin are modelled, mimicking the original. The process led to an understanding of the physical growth structures of this living organism. Yet, due to the immateriality of source material, the process became paradoxically distancing. The work's title *Matter in a Virtual World* considers the status of understanding matter as inhabiting a space between forms of knowing.

⁶² Donna J. Haraway 2016 *Staying With The Trouble: Making Kin In The Chthulucene* Durham: Duke University Press



Figure 14 Tamsin Salehian 2019 *Matter in a Virtual World* modelling polymer, plasticine, paper 58x15x12cm Photo: Peter Moran

The Spotted Hyacinth Orchid (Dipodium variegatum), found in remnant bushland in Sydney, is a precarious specimen with a complex soil-substrate relationship. The orchid relies on the mycorrhizal fungi associated with open forest in the Sydney Basin. Most of the year the orchid is dormant and there is no sign of the plant on the surface of the soil. When a particular set of conditions are met a flower spike will emerge, intricately formed and brightly marked with spots of pink and purple.

When working with threatened species I uncovered methods of encounter that didn't perpetuate destruction. I used web-based botanical archives and field botanist's flora histories as a way to encounter plants outside of a physical presence and created a situation of knowing a specimen through its trace. The process relied on a digital or virtual presence of a subject for sculpting plants without a specimen.

I have produced ten plant sculptures, five of Murnong in various growth stages as part of the installation *Folded Map/Ballararat Gold* and five of flora species found in NSW on degraded or threatened remnant bushland sites. The choice of the NSW plants came through a process of ANT analysis of the building sites I have explored. The analysis exposed the plants through a set of following an actant within the

urbanisation process. Six of the sculptures were housed in vitrines, which were created from heat formed bio-plastic to look like clear bubbles, referring to museum cabinets and Wardian cases (the glass cases used to ship live plant specimens from Australia to Europe in the nineteenth century). Rather than create the microclimate of a Wardian case, I considered the precarious bubble form of the vitrines as a space filled with breath, referring to my close engagement made through the production process.

Haraway considers the attentive process an artist encounters when responding to non-human agents as a form of Making Kin.⁶³ It is a way to become part of the world of the other. Haraway proposes a process of 'intimacy without proximity' that creates a situation of 'a presence without disturbing the critters that animate the project'.⁶⁴

Haraway uses the artwork Crocheted Coral Reef by Australian artists Christine and Margaret Wertheim (under the collective name Institute For Figuring) to illustrate the way art processes create a sym-poetic knowing through the process of making.⁶⁵ The artists spawned a project which included an open invitation for, currently 8000, participants to take part in the crocheting variants of mathematical models of hyperbolic planes, similar in structure to a coral reef.⁶⁶ The making of the forms combine mathematics, marine biology, ecological consciousness and women's handicrafts together as an art-science-activist 'worlding'.⁶⁷ The work has become the world's largest participatory art project in which over 8000 people have added to the reef with crocheted forms (figure 15).

⁶³ Donna J. Haraway 2016 *Staying With The Trouble: Making Kin In The Chthulucene* Durham:Duke University Press p78

⁶⁴ Ibid. p79

⁶⁵ Ibid p78

⁶⁶ Institute for Figuring 2019 *Crochet Coral Reef* (accessed October 2, 2019) <https://crochetcoralreef.org/about/index.php>

⁶⁷ Donna J. Haraway 2016 *Staying With The Trouble: Making Kin In The Chthulucene* Durham:Duke University Press p79



Figure 15 Institute for Figuring (IFF) 2005-present *Crochet Coral Reef*
wool and other fibres, dimensions variable Picture: IFF

'Being with through art making' creates a sentient space which can be explored through sustained attention.⁶⁸ I found the process of sustained attention requires an internal shift, the gap between self and other to be understood through empathy. Haraway refers to this as 'becoming with'⁶⁹ which I understand as a process of transforming myself, through the act of making.

The purple spotted orchid became part of a composition of positioning myself within the built environment, referencing the exterior landscape and my interior emotional landscape, a way of synthesising the understanding I have gained, that is then communicated through the materiality of artefacts.

Ecological Thinking

Loraine Code's theory Ecological Thinking is an ethics of analysis that starts with the assumption that nothing is made in isolation, 'everything is located within a social-

⁶⁸ Donna J. Haraway 2016 *Staying With The Trouble: Making Kin In The Chthulucene* Durham:Duke University Press p79

⁶⁹ Donna Haraway 2007 *When Species Meet* Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press p36

physical world that constrains and enables human practices, where knowing and acting always generate consequences'.⁷⁰

These ethics are part of my art practice. Radical acts of care and concentrating on the multiple actants within the nets of ANT analysis allow a particular attention to the hidden, the vulnerable and the precarious which open up my practice to new ways of seeing.



Figure 16 Kate Newby 2019 *I Screamed "I was there!!,"* glass panels in window frames, 2.7x14.1m

New Zealand artist Kate Newby follows an ethical approach that can be seen to enact Ecological Thinking. Newby works with everyday materials and foregrounds poetic processes in the fleeting and contingent nature of the quotidian. It is a way of making visible the often-missed traces of quiet nature-culture assemblages and their links to deep time. Newby's work focuses on small gestures which examine an intimate understanding of matter. In Newby's 2019 work *I Screamed "i was there!!,"* (figure 16) the artist removed panes of glass from the existing gallery windows and replaced them with kiln cast panes created to look like the melted sheets of ice found in a cold climate, winter puddle. The work foregrounds a sensitivity to ephemerality. Within a frame of the Anthropocene, attention focused on small gestures of care or

⁷⁰ Loraine Code 2006 *Ecological Thinking The Politics of Epistemic Location* Oxford:OUP p5

attention allow for an illumination of alternative activities or attitudes to place and action.

My art practice involves sustained attention and experiments in material exploration to trace a relationship to place which connects a study of actants along with a process of Ecological Thinking. I do this through the practice of sculpture, photography and performative investigations.

Situating practice geographically

The ground of Ecological Thinking is a situated space where its conditions and nature feed the systems and circumstances that describe it.⁷¹ Code points to Rich's observation that where knowledge is made, negotiated and circulated the situations and circumstances of specific knowers interact in specific ways.⁷² A subject is enmeshed with the social and physical site the subject is speaking from, therefore no space is innocent.⁷³ There is no universal 'us', instead there is only situated, deconstructed or structurally defined points of view. This positioning implies we all make work that comes from a multilayered set of circumstances, knowledge and histories. This approach, when applied to art production, is conceptual as much as it materially invested and can be understood as expressing art's post-medium condition.

In this light my knowledge, interests and my prejudices are enfolded into any observations that I make. Code's theory articulates the ethical processes that drive the set of decisions I use before making a work. I found that this method leads to more complicated methods for making art, where I understand my practice as equally investigative and reflective.

One way that I have considered Ecological Thinking's implications of location is by thinking about the relationship between situated knowledge and geographic sites. This came from an assumption that where I live affects my identity. Over the last two years I have worked from three distinct physical locations to encourage a dialogue

⁷¹ Lorraine Code 2006 *Ecological Thinking The Politics of Epistemic Location* Oxford:OUP p22

⁷² Ibid p4

⁷³ Ibid p26

with a particular landscape, topology and temporality. I found that a physical, geographic location prioritises the inherent detail of a material space as it shifts abstract theories onto physical test sites. The location of investigation is grounded in its geographic location but has a scalar connection to the superstructure of globalising urbanisation. Accordingly these sites have differing ethical implications for me as their locations are linked to different site histories and pressures. In all of these sites, I employed a process of finding and then following an actant which led to the creation of the work.

One way to explore the politics of location was to include the area around my home as one of my sites. This is on the northern outskirts of Sydney in an area surrounded by remnant bushland. It is a space where the material and ecological interactions of place have been mitigated by suburban housing encroaching on a national park. The works *Matter in a virtual world*, *Terraformed Maple*, *rock garden* and *Foundation I & II* are a result of this site.

Elara Estate, on the far western fringe of Sydney is my second site. This is a site which is undergoing a direct processes of urbanisation. Four years ago it was farmland and remnant forest. Geoengineering works, new roads and park construction are rapidly terraforming this site, and numerous homes are completed daily (figure 15).



Figure 17 Birds eye view, Elara Estate 2014-2018, Marsden Park, Sydney, Google Earth images.

I have been observing the growth of the suburb through photography and investigating the material processes of Elara using art materials to stand in for construction processes, a form of reconstruction. Using paint, wood and plastic sheet in my studio to explore Elara has created a different relationship to the site. I can visit

and document the site and then return to the studio to reflect and make work. The work becomes an abstraction which allows for a gap between site and interpretation. The works *Following the Actant - House Wrap, untitled (Elara)* and the painting *Proposition for painting an unstable landscape* resulted from following construction materials as actants after spending time in Elara (discussed later in the paper).

My third site, the city of Ballarat in Victoria, contained a major work, *Folded Map/Ballarat Gold*. Ballarat is a regional city two hours north west of Melbourne. Although I have a history of travelling to Ballarat as my mother lived in the city for a few years, I was a visitor through the process of developing this work. My visits led me to cast a critical lens over my work. Accordingly, I designed my work from my position as a guest, trying to enact a sensitivity to site and site histories, and the issues my research uncovered. This encouraged an ethical aspect in my work, which lead to many parts of my work enacting reparative gestures. The decentred objecthood of the Murnong project acknowledged the loss of the space the plant held in earlier eras. It acknowledges its entropy. It also acknowledges its current precarity.

The three sites inform each other, through their similarities and differences and all of the sites directly inform the work that I produce. Living in a built environment on an ancient continent is entangled with colonial histories, genocides of First Nations peoples and implications for contemporary Australia, which question the very nature of urban development.⁷⁴ At my home site, informal information communicated by local historians tells of how the Guringai Nation fought extensively to keep sovereignty over this place during the frontier wars.⁷⁵ The echoes of this loss are implicit in the material structure of the remnant bushland that surrounds this site.⁷⁶

While there isn't anything that can make up for this loss, the exploration of landscape holds an Indigenous past and present which I have been aware of through my

⁷⁴ For information regarding genocide, Lyndall Ryan has begun the process of building a massacre map which shows some of the recorded atrocities, there are many more which could be added if oral accounts can be used as well as written evidence. Ceridwen Dovey 2017 'The Mapping of Massacres In Australia, historians and artists have turned to cartography to record the widespread killing of Indigenous people.' *The New Yorker* December 6, 2017 (accessed May, 20, 2019) <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/mapping-massacres>.

⁷⁵ This was told to me during a history walk a number of years ago, the names and dates are no longer available. As indigenous history is written into contemporary accounts a more comprehensive record will hopefully be collected.

⁷⁶ Bill Gamage 2012 *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines made Australia* Crows Nest: Allen Unwin p44

project. In *Making Badlands: Places Past Disappearance*, Ross Gibson writes of the Australian landscape as an environment conditioned by 'an aftermath culture' where so much vital evidence of the cultural and ecological history of the country has been lost.⁷⁷ Gibson highlights the importance of fragments to inform a whole through their speculative possibilities, where 'generative incompleteness' prompts the imagination through the void of information and its sobering implications.⁷⁸

Living in Australia is a constant reckoning with cultural and ecological loss. Part of my practice is trying to understand this through the process of art making. Simply by becoming aware of these processes I may experience them more fully. It also raises questions, how can I interact with landscape now? How can I work with the complicated net of agents, incessantly working on each other and the gaps and fragments which make up any current history? What does it mean to make work within a framework of Anthropocenic crisis? Working with three physical sites involved both challenges and possibilities of new ways to engage with natural processes and to comprehend landscape history, which in turn have led me to begin to answer these questions.

The unstable condition of thinking through material

Gaps, voids, fragments and networks are all part of the material conditions of instability. Latour states the global is never entirely visible in representing the world. What we see is always a fractured, fractious world in front of us.⁷⁹ The entire composition can never be known. Additionally, the unknown actants at work within networks and the reliance of networks on multiple links is a condition of instability, if one link fails the composition shifts. This implies a condition of 'not-knowing' is a constant and an active element when viewing the world. This is a possible unseen destabilising or decentering force.

⁷⁷ Ross Gibson 2006 'Making Badlands: Places Past Disappearance' *Transformations: Journal of Media, Culture and Technology* Issue 13 Brisbane:Southern Cross University (accessed May 10, 2019)

http://www.transformationsjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Gibson_Transformations13.pdf

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Bruno Latour *An Attempt at a Compositionalist Manifesto* <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/120-NLH-finalpdf.pdf>

Returning to art processes, the dissolution of the art object creates an unstable composition, that combined with the re-assignment of the object through New Materialism creates an open-ended approach to the art object, one that has both material agency and instability. By using the concept of instability as an actant, conditions of doubt or 'not knowing' can be used as generative methods to create work. Through this process art methods can enact an intersection with the unstable conditions of the Anthropocene.

With this in mind I explored materials used in urban expansion in terms of ANT, instability and a process of 'not knowing'. Visiting Elara, I was curious about the way banal materials could communicate these entanglements of the contemporary world. The utilitarian fabric house wrap, a moisture barrier used in construction, is one such material. It has a surface of shiny, silver weave on one side and a matt, chemical blue on the other. I created a text work (figure 18) which explores this fabric, tracing it from tar pits to chemistry discoveries of synthetic paint. This led to experiments using art materials and processes to think through this material of moisture barrier.

Figure 18 Tamsin Salehian 2019 *Following the Actant - House Wrap* digital print on 40x60cm



In the early twentieth century, before the advent of petroleum-derived materials, moisture barrier was made from tar paper. This tar was dug from great pits, deposits which were created during the time of the dinosaurs. They were finite, smelly, unsustainable but effective - wrapping the house in a kind of geological sheath. The house wrap used now is a plastic and metal (aluminium) hybrid, and like nearly all of a new builds materials, entangled with oil and the critique of capital and inclusion of politics that accompanies it. Building codes and Australian Standards classify and designate house wrap type and use, legislation is a close companion to the visual expression of many parts of Australian homes. Although removed from tar pits, symbolic time still sheaths the new house.

On a building site, after timber frame is erected, the construction is swathed in 'paper', a home is presented neatly wrapped in house wrap, a very bright blue. The bright blue is a colour that is hard to classify, it shifts from a saturated phthalo to a light ultramarine, depending, variously, on the material's manufacturer and the quality of light. The blue is a synthetic blue, created from advances in chemistry. It catches the sky, but not quite matching its hue, mimicking it down on the ground. Moisture barrier's physical role is to mediate the movement of water, it repels water from one side but is porous from the other, water may move out of the home but cannot seep back in. The house breathes out, slowly, through its walls.

A building, just before being wrapped is a construction of lines, vertical stud walls, horizontal beams, the weights of lines changing with the rhythm of the engineering codes which specified them. They work neatly with gravity's consent, a drawing in space. When wrapped in blue, the balancing act of lines immediately becomes volume. It becomes mass. The mass of a building is formed. This change is formed by paper. Paper, that slightly ripples when the wind blows. Paper houses make up this newly forming landscape, their bright blue at odds with the blue of the sky. The paper is a temporary pause, a stage between open and closed. Walls can't be walked through any more, but the hard, cement surface that will clad most new homes is not yet ready to be fixed.

There is a visual game that these houses play when wearing blue. Australian suburbs consider themselves fashionably sombre with a palette of beige, cream and grey. The blue house is an anachronism and this construction factor gives each beige house undergarments of bright blue. Finished streets, with fresh laid turf, organise buildings which stand tall, clothed by deep time, formed by the intricacies of transnational landscapes.

In the studio I explored the material properties of house wrap. *Untitled (housewrap)* investigates blue moisture barrier through painted swatches of colour on translucent plastic ground sheets, (figure 19). The work was initially a method of expressing the folding, shrouding and unwrapping of form over structure I saw in urban construction processes. By overlaying painted blue rectangles on clear plastic it became a way of enacting landscape within the studio. The interaction of forms in varying configurations which referred to building sites also becoming a way to think about painting.

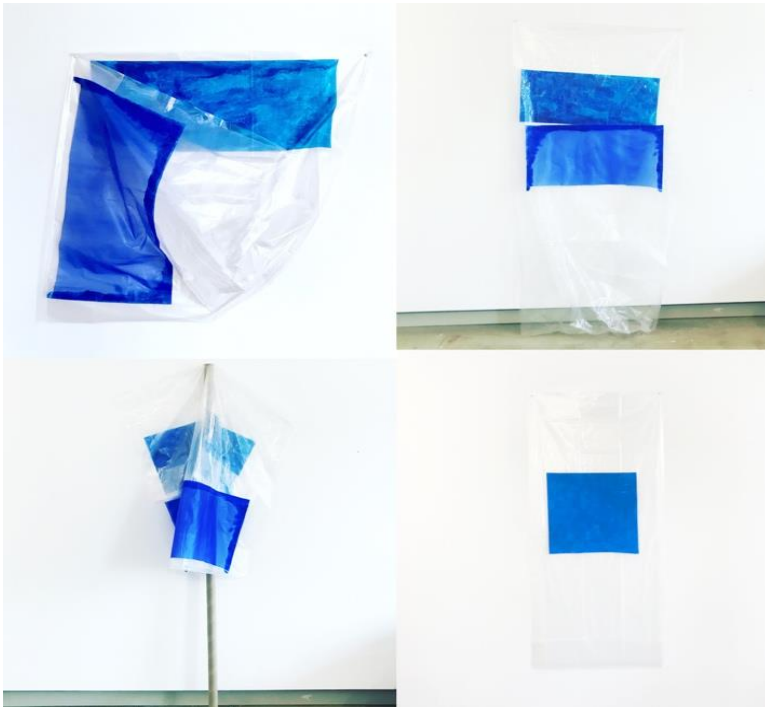


Figure 19 Tamsin Salehian 2019 *Untitled (housewrap)* acrylic, clear plastic sheet, blue plastic sheet, cardboard, dimensions variable



Figure 20 Tamsin Salehian 2019 Proposition for painting an unstable landscape 1.6x2.4m acrylic, cast silicone, plastic sheet, gesso, gel medium on primed canvas (process image)

The plastic sheets expressed a material instability, their formless nature needing a support structure to work within a display space. As I worked with the sheets, they became a way to explore spatial concerns and an expanded field of painting. As they progressed, I wanted to translate the instability I was discovering onto a new support surface, I decided to use the process of painting on canvas to continue an unstable composition (figure 20). By moving towards more traditional materials of paint on canvas I wondered how I could keep the impression of material instability within a more formal format. I wanted to find a way to transfer the Anthropocenic instability of the urban landscape into a painting and use a process of not-knowing (working intuitively and not relying on a painting precedent for guidance⁸⁰) to generate work.

Using house wrap, I was interested in combining a sense of its materiality—its plastic nature and its visual connection between a synthetic blue and the changing hues of the blue sky—with a sense of how a hesitant application of paint could communicate instability and be transferred into a painting. I developed the painting by using

⁸⁰ Exploring clear sheets revealed an immediate connection to the expanded field of painting and referenced experiments in formlessness of the mid-late twentieth century, including support/surfaces. I wanted to find a way to keep these ideas just outside my mind while working, to see if a different way of working would emerge.

watered down pigment as a stain and contrasting this with denser paint applications. Alternative approaches to mark making, expressed on the one canvas, jostle with each other. In some sections I worked over the paint, the way a hole might be dug and filled and dug again. I was interested in the way that the painting may look like a swatch sheet of colour tests rather than a painting in the traditional sense.

Unbalanced rectangles, curiously looking like a drone-eye view of the buildings themselves, neatly arranged by lot number, jostle with blue plastic collage pieces and drips. The work is open, the result of the overlapping processes, a test site and an exploration of a material. The blue works, which are a thinking about and through material, describe both the unstable material conditions of the building site and my thoughts about the inherent unstable aesthetic conditions of art and the contemporary condition.

The process revealed that by taking a position of not knowing and still making, exploring and testing, could result in work that extended my way of thinking about the post-medium condition. Researcher Arianne Berthoin Antal, who examines ideas about 'Not knowing' and 'doubt', considers that they have an ability to complicate and generate art research. The staying with 'doubt' is an interesting practice, it has a potential for discovery, a search for questions rather than a search for answers.⁸¹ Antal's ideas reveal new ways of creation which mitigate the need for the traditional sense of completion.

Latour states that networks can never be fully known as the net can be ever widened.⁸² Actants have constantly shifting connections, made and dismantled during their assemblages.⁸³ Understanding the precarious or hesitant connections within a network illuminates the precarity of intricate relationships in the ecologies that make up stable complexities. In ecology a stable environment is one which has enough diversity in order to persist in an equilibrium for ecologically relevant time-scales. The Anthropocene has been seen as an eroding of these complexities to the point where the weakest, most hesitant and most precarious links are disassembled.

⁸¹ Arianne Berthoin Antal 2013 'Art Based research engaging not-knowing in organisations' *Journal of Applied Arts and Health* Vol 4, no 1

⁸² Bruno Latour *An Attempt at a Compositionalist Manifesto* <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/120-NLH-finalpdf.pdf>

⁸³ Ibid

By exploring precarity and hesitancy through painting I have been trying to embody these neglected parts of the system. I pondered how the gaps in history could take active positions in a work's construction. Can the space between things become a vessel for these gaps?

To achieve this I valorised hesitancy and not knowing as positive activities in many of my experiments. Governed by conditions of doubt, which assumptions about skill as a method to undermine theories of mastery, I investigated ways conditions of application, construction and historical precedent can be reassessed in order to create new work.

Richard Tuttle is an artist who is comfortable with the mediating factor of instability, where a hesitant gesture can be embraced.⁸⁴ In Tuttle's work, objects of the urban environment are encouraged to engage in dialogues, investigating spatial concerns of compression and forms which Tuttle pairs with hesitation.⁸⁵ Objects are often left in states that seem unformed, precarious and unstable.⁸⁶

In the exhibition 'Making Silver', Tuttle staged a collection of minimalist steel constructions which appeared to be falling apart and drawing notebooks which were a collection of hurried brushstrokes and scribbles. By interspersing them through the Bergen Kunsthall museum's permanent collection of 18 and 19th century paintings, Tuttle's works are positioned in awkward spaces, at awkward heights, diverting the audience from the understanding of the space as a display of the mastery of human culture.

The notebooks held a year's worth of Tuttle's drawing output resting on nails roughly tacked onto the museum wall. The lexicon of the artist's marks are resistant to clear reading, they shift in style and content from page to page, book to book, scribbles, lines and loose collections of colour make up each drawing (figure 19). The work could be regarded as a reflection on the paradox occupied by art in social space as

⁸⁴ John Hutchison 'Festina Lente' IN Richard Tuttle 1996 *Grey Walls Work* Camden Arts Centre:London p9

⁸⁵ Agnes Martin, Richard Tuttle *Agnes Martin/Richard Tuttle*Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth SITE:Santa Fe 1998 87

⁸⁶ John Hutchison 'Festina Lente' IN Richard Tuttle 1996 *Grey Walls Work* Camden Arts Centre:London p10

being simultaneously democratic and elitist.⁸⁷ The casual display is, paradoxically both in contrast and in sympathy to the museum collection of romantic paintings that surround it—concurrently pointing out the museum’s physical and conceptual vulnerabilities.



Figure 21 Richard Tuttle 2010 *Sketchbook, 2010*, mixed media on paper in spiral bound sketchbook, installation view Photo: Bergen Kunsthall

Tuttle’s approach to drawing responds to an internal logic rather than academic concerns of analysis. The drawing seems to exhibit the process of the artist’s thinking through a problem or simply responding to the material agency of watercolour and pencil. *Proposition for painting an unstable landscape* demonstrates how I have been influenced by Tuttle’s work and reflects my understanding of the possibilities for art to approach unstable compositions.

⁸⁷ Andreas Schlaegel 2012 ‘Kuri, Henriksen and Tuttle not at Bergen Kunsthall Why the unlikely trio of Gabriel Kuri, Knut Henrik Henriksen and Richard Tuttle succeed in making a convincing case for the autonomy of art, even in site-specific interventions in Bergen.’ *Kunstkritikk Nordic Art Review*, 21.12. 2012 (accessed March 26, 2019) <https://kunstkruttikk.com/kuri-henriksen-and-tuttle-not-at-kunsthall-bergen/>

Tuttle's steel works defy traditional reading of sculpture, the minimalist compositions are destabilised, cable tied and bolted instead of welded which makes the sculptures appear on the verge of collapsing (figure 22). Placed in unorthodox positions on the wall or floor their reading is mediated by the surrounding utilitarian objects within the museum's architectonics. There is a sense of not being able to solve the visual or philosophical problem of the work, an awkward or hesitant object or mark presented with no insight into the way these uncomfortable ideas can be understood. Tuttle relies on a direct physical reaction to the work.⁸⁸ The uneasiness of encounter is coupled with the simplicity of the pared back action of the work.



Figure 22 Richard Tuttle 2012 *Making Silver*, steel, installation view Photo: Bergen Kunsthall

Using a strategy of museum critique Tuttle brings an esoteric notion of immateriality to the built environment.⁸⁹ Tuttle asserts that he is not political⁹⁰ but his artworks enact a political action through their various position in opposition to the areas of display in the ecology of the museum.⁹¹ Tuttle creates a subjective logic, through his

⁸⁸ Tuttle 2012 *Making Silver* Bergen Kunsthall:Bergen

⁸⁹ Richard Tuttle *Grey Walls Work* Camden Arts Centre London 1996

⁹⁰ Richard Tuttle 1996 'Interview, Paul Nesbitt and Richard Tuttle' IN *Grey Walls Work* Camden Arts Centre London p43

⁹¹ Andreas Schlaegel 2012 'Kuri, Henriksen and Tuttle not at Bergen Kunsthall Why the unlikely trio of Gabriel Kuri, Knut Henrik Henriksen and Richard Tuttle succeed in making a convincing case for the autonomy of art, even in site-specific interventions in Bergen.' *Kunstkritikk Nordic Art Review*, 21.12. 2012 (accessed March 26, 2019) <https://kunstkruttikk.com/kuri-henriksen-and-tuttle-not-at-kunsthall-bergen/>

use of poetic and idiosyncratic devices, to negotiate with the immediate surroundings of the museum.⁹² In doing so, he undermines the structures of power within the museum. Tuttle's strategies are playfully ironic and hold interesting possibilities for ecological thinking. The shift in focus from an object in isolation to the emergence of the network that holds the object uncovers its inherent instabilities.

Tuttle's work explores the way seemingly illogical connections can be strategically followed, tracing networks along pathways less travelled. Tuttle states he used the phenomena of raindrops on the museum's window as the basis for a system of internal logic to create the steel works.⁹³ An alternative logic, such as the effect of weather, can highlight parts of a system which have been overlooked.

Like Tuttle, my work attempts to articulate the hidden and explore strategies of instability. My work *Foundation slab I* is a concrete slab poured onto unexcavated earth near my home. The slab mimics the processes used on construction sites to begin the erection of housing. The work disrupts the process by using the hidden underside of the slab as the final display surface. The topography of the ground became the work. The slab traces an intimate relationship with the physical surface of the soil. Embedded in the form is remnant building refuse – tiles and a square piece of marble found onsite, as well as seedpods from the native *Cassuarina* trees and sandstone rocks which carpet the sandy soil here, articulating geologic and natural history. This initial cast was structurally sound and physically dense, a solid slab recording a palimpsest of landscape. I cut the slab in two with a concrete grinder, the palimpsest becoming parchment pages. I proposed that buildings could be sheathed in this process, where the hidden topography of the ground becomes the face of the building.

⁹² Andreas Schlaegel 2012 'Kuri, Henriksen and Tuttle not at Bergen Kunsthall Why the unlikely trio of Gabriel Kuri, Knut Henrik Henriksen and Richard Tuttle succeed in making a convincing case for the autonomy of art, even in site-specific interventions in Bergen.' *Kunstkritikk Nordic Art Review*, 21.12. 2012 (accessed March 26, 2019) <https://kunstkruttikk.com/kuri-henriksen-and-tuttle-not-at-kunsthall-bergen/>

⁹³ Tuttle 2012 *Making Silver* Bergen Kunsthall: Bergen p13



Figure 23 Tamsin Salehian 2019 *Untitled (foundation slab I)* two pieces each 80x85x9cm concrete, building refuse, sandstone, seedpods, leaves.

This slab tests a geomorphic system to build a structure, the idea that I imagined that all of our buildings were shaped by the topography of the ground they stand on, a further development of the work 'Terraformed Maple'. New estate housing is driven by the current set of design styles that codifies them in contemporary society and the economic needs of quick housing construction. Instead a set of rules could guide a house to be created from its geography, formwork would be built in lengths and cast with soil mix to create solid bars which articulate the surface of the ground where they are cast – wrapping up and over undulations in the ground. These could then be used to build a spatial construction, instead of using cement as a material for casting, natural adobe or rammed earth mix could use site materials. The resulting building would be a kind of 3D grid of earth formed pieces which articulate the site they are made on.

After creating this slab I wanted to destabilise it, to understand the foundation pour in terms of instability. *Foundation slab II* tracing a logic of casting cement which defied itself through a non-structural mix (figure 12). This second cement slab is a way of exploring the unstable conditions of the quickly built urban fringe landscape, a site affected by conditions of the environmental change and urbanising pressures. I used a sandy cement mix to create a more unstable parchment. The non-structural qualities of the material undermined the structural qualities of the slab. The conscious undermining of the mix was a way to refer back to the instability of material and test

what would happen in terms of the work's ability to perform in the gallery space. The work slumps on the wall, precarious, in a state of undoing. These two slab works became a way to understand the relationship of a building's foundation pour with the skin of the topographic landscape and its future time in terms of eventual ruination.

In my works through this MFA, I have explored a number of approaches to the urban landscape within the conditions of the Anthropocene. Each of these works have been experiments which test a hypothesis, whether about material engagement or following an actant or translating shards of site activity or history into artworks. These fragments all form an overall practice where I can use their parts to create a composition, a world forming. Returning to Latour, 'Composition may become a plausible alternative to modernization. What can no longer be modernized, what has been post-modernized to bits and pieces, can still be composed.'⁹⁴ By composing my art practice can combine these multimodal expressions and allow them to co-exist.

⁹⁴ Latour, Bruno 2010 'An Attempt at a Compositionalist Manifesto An Attempt at a "Compositionist Manifesto' *New Literary History* Johns Hopkins University Press Volume 41, Number 3, Summer 2010 pp. 471-490 <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/120-NLH-finalpdf.pdf>

Conclusion

Investigating the issues that are entangled with landscape changes on the urban fringe, I have initiated a set research inquiries resulting in studio and field tests, which become fragments of larger assemblages. The experiments and assemblages form compositions that enact a kind of world-forming; a speculative approach to considering the urban environment. This allows an understanding of the space that marks the city's edge in an intimately material way.

Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory opened new possibilities for developing these ideas.⁹⁵ The ability of ANT to frame an art practice is complex. ANT's flat ontology allows for aesthetic concerns of art to be enacted along-side other functions of an art work. Exploring a subject in terms of an actant and the additive nature of enlarging the net to embrace multiple approaches to practice gave me great research and compositional freedom. Testing compositions through this framework allowed for open-ended processes, which have given me exciting possibilities for further explorations. The interwoven sets of ethical concerns informed by Code, Haraway and Braidotti allows for an analysis of method through a critical lens which is also generative, with alternative possibilities arising from this process.

Using landscape as a reflective device to explore the conditions of art practice in terms of the Anthropocene, the post-medium condition and an epistemological analysis has given me a rich and exciting set of conditions. This process has opened my work to further research: the way instability could be explored as an artistic and reflective device; the possibilities for further crossover between disciplines in my practice, both within the expanded field of art between art forms and, in interdisciplinary approaches between art, science and humanities; the allowing conditions of not-knowing and doubt to encourage new approaches to making; and finally the generative processes that come from the explorations of ethics with art practice.

⁹⁵ Latour, Bruno 2010 'An Attempt at a Compositionist Manifesto An Attempt at a "Compositionist Manifesto' *New Literary History* Johns Hopkins University Press Volume 41, Number 3, Summer 2010 pp. 471-490 <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/120-NLH-finalpdf.pdf>

Site-based research and installation

Folded Map/Ballarat Gold

Throughout 2018 I developed and installed a largescale installation work titled *Folded Map/Ballarat Gold* in the Victorian Goldfields city of Ballarat. The resultant project was a series of works, a speculative drawing, and a sculptural installation of three parts: a large sculpture, a collection of botanical museum models and altered geological specimens. The drawing was made by a participatory planting project stretching more than 50km across the Ballarat region and a sculptural installation positioned by Lake Wendouree. To distinguish the parts they are named *Folded Map/Ballarat Gold – Murnong Project* which describes the drawing/planting project while *Folded Map/Ballarat Gold-epicentre* describes the lakeside installation. Both parts were installed/planted from 16-22 September, 2018. The installation was exhibited for two months as part of the Biennale of Australian Art, the plants will grow for as long as conditions allow. The process of developing *Folded map/Ballarat Gold* involved interdisciplinary research, relying on both an investigation into the ecology of the site, the history of Ballarat and the social networks of the region. I set out on three research trips to collect data to make the work .

Folded Map/Ballarat Gold – Murnong Project.

Over fifty people participated in planting 63 Murnong (*Microseris Lanceolata*) seedlings in their gardens. I plotted these out to make an abstract drawing. These seedlings become markers on a map and as they grow, set seed and create further plant colonies, the drawing would grow. I chose the Murnong as it emerged as an important symbol during the three research trips I made to the region during the development phase of the project, April - July 2018. The Murnong is an edible,

native tuberous daisy and can be seen as an actant in a network of events and connections which have unfolded over vast time scales whose entanglement turned out to be vast and deeply symbolic.

The Murnong's role and disappearance is a signifying part of landscape destruction which began with British colonisation. Within three years sheep arriving in the region, the Murnong became endangered. It's role within the ecology of the region was shifted with British colonisation. Bruce Pascoe writes extensively on the Murnong and its significance for indigenous Australia.⁹⁶ Reading botanists, indigenous and historical accounts of the yam daisy, a rich understanding of the symbolic properties of plant matter as a cultural object emerged. Its loss through the goldfields region triggered further dispossession of the Indigenous Wadawurrung Nation, original and continuing custodians of this landscape. The Murnong could be seen as gold. The Murnong has important role for flora and fauna communities. On a hill just outside the city I found the plant growing within a diverse plant community in a reserve which has more recently been kept ungrazed.

I wanted to reframe this native edible daisy as a valuable species, more valuable than gold in terms of its actual capability as an endemic, sustainable perennial food source to feed populations and symbolically in the ability of plants to create links between humans and non-humans. Instead of using pigment to make a drawing, I speculated that biota would become pigment in a conceptual state. By casting the plants as pigment, and human participants as instruments, tools, brushes, I surmised that a drawing, as a set of marks over a ground, could be enacted by a large scale planting. By participants and plants becoming part of the drawing, I wondered if a conceptual connection to an imagined whole could allow for a significance beyond the individual planting of the specimen. The planting proposed a New Materialist relationship to drawing would show the tension between the expanding metropolis and the unbuilt environment. New Materialist thinking has allowed me to investigate the material of the Murnong as defined by the primacy of its matter.

⁹⁶ Bruce Pascoe 2014 *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture*. Magabala Books, p5, p19, p39, p167

The use of plant material in the Murnong project relied on this understanding of the temporality of landscape. The work itself is ephemeral by its nature of being subject to time and entropy as living plant matter. The expansion of a city through the building of new estates is swift and the subsequent weathering and ingress of plant and animal life into these spaces, an interaction of terrains is a slow exchange of materials. The overall shift in landscape types from rural to urban is absolute, ingress can only act in a small way and the only way that the urbanisation can enact entropy is through ruination. The act of replanting endemic species within the Goldfields region became a possibility. Plant matter could become a disruptor to the understanding of space. This sets up new inscriptions across the landscape creating new maps in real materials. It requires the ordinary act of planting a seedling to become a way for endemic biological material to enter a degraded landscape, witness to past atrocities and think about future worlds, a gentle gesture in a very small way.

By using plant matter as a tool as if it was a pencil where the plant matter itself becoming a drawing, co-authorship becomes a way to embrace methods for non-human activity to become a co-creator of work. This method relies on interdisciplinary knowledge and also allows drawing to become a means to reframe materiality. This approach of co-creation requires the co-authorship of non-human agents such as seeds and processes such as weather, to realise the work. It allows for me to question through practice what the boundaries of an artwork can be. Planting as a reparative action also became a way to think about my approach to art production and the way being a guest in a region can affect my art production. Giving plants away to participants allowed the daisy was able to exist as a gift object which played a part in forming new community networks amongst participants. The work was designed to act in various ways that existed outside of my ability to monitor it.

Drawing as Mapping

The drawing became a speculative artwork to interrogate the meta-language of economic, cultural and symbolic power which positions marginality and perpetuates globalising forces. These can be seen as underlying structures of the Anthropocene. As the drawing was a mapped assemblage, I considered the map as a way of both

understanding place and the assumptions of value that mapping entails.⁹⁷ The maps history as a colonising tool within Western power structures became a way of looking at the physical, social and economic landscape and history in Ballarat. The power of the map to find gold. The power of the map to re-orient ideas about wealth.

The Murnong work could only be seen in its entirety through its mapping. The scale of the distribution area could only be seen from a birds eye perspective, yet the small size of the young seedlings inhibited any ability to see the map from the air. This sense of never being able to view the work in its entirety is important. Reflecting on the scalar implications of the contemporary world and the Anthropocene, the work relies on either mapping or imagining, a process which connects the positions of activity.⁹⁸

By plotting the planted specimens, a map can be created yet the resultant map is unstable, plants are ephemeral objects, environmentally sensitive. Using the mapping of plants, the precarious nature of mapping a biological agent becomes visible. It also opens up questions about mapping, for the notion of mapping relies on the unmapped and the unmappable. The act of mapping is an activity of value appraisal. As a speculative endeavour, the mapping project becomes a question of mapping the unknowable social and political acts that have defined biological and historical positions in a post-colonial country.

The Murnong Work also became a way of world-forming – by mapping spaces where the daisy has been planted I was overlaying a construct of a new relationship to the concept of centre and periphery through a process of custodianship. Where plants are set, the natural forces of growth, pollination and seed set usually occur. This act of replication upsets the stability implied by mapping. Through this process the periphery becomes a centre. Each parent plant becomes a centre and its vector of seed fall creates a new set of points. Through this process the periphery becomes a centre. Peripheries, due to their location on maps away from economic, political, cultural, symbolic centres of power can use resignification as strategy from

⁹⁷ Karen O'Rourke, *Walking and Mapping: artists as cartographers* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2013): 134.

⁹⁸ Irmgard Emmelhainz "Images Do Not Show: The desire to see in the Anthropocene" IN Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (eds) *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* Open Humanities Press:London 2015, 132

dependence, questioning canons and the authority of central paradigms.⁹⁹ The artist statement reads: 'The centre is an ephemeral space, temporary. It exists in relation to its periphery. What happens to the mapped plants when the epicentre is removed? Do they become their own centres? At the end of the exhibition the map centre will be removed but the plantings remain, growing on, propagating, spreading. Creating another map, with many centres.'¹⁰⁰

The aesthetic role of the work was caught up in its conceptual framework, but also in its materiality. The artwork happens elsewhere. By 'elsewhere' I mean that the artwork isn't bounded by the state of a final object but, instead, is deeply enmeshed in the process of exploration which consists of investigations that may or may not result in, or be present in, any objects that result from it. This way of thinking about artwork requires that the idea of composition stretches to include the temporal. This expands on Latour's positioning of the network as unstable and expandable.¹⁰¹

Folded Map/Ballararat Gold - epicentre

Folded Map/Ballararat Gold-epicentre describes the lakeside installation. The installation was a set of granite and quartz boulders, bluestone slabs, plant sculptures and a large wooden way-marker sculpture. The installation acted as the temporary epicentre of the planting project. The work was a physical site where visitors could read about the plant drawing that had been made in the surrounding 50 km and experience a set of objects which I created by developing artworks responding to my research investigations. By folding a map and taking the folded

⁹⁹ Judith Collins 2007 *Sculpture today* Phaidon:New York p17

¹⁰⁰ Tamsin Salehian 2018 Artist Statement 'Folded map/Ballararat Gold' *Biennale of Australian Art* Ballarat Aug - Oct, 2018.

¹⁰¹ Latour has recently posited that Actor Network Theory could be named Actant-rhizome ontology which includes Bennett's approach to matter (mentioned earlier in this MFA) and Deleuze and Guattari's exploration of the Rhizome (Not discussed here due to word limits). Both of these authors have informed my MFA but Latour's direct approach to ANT gave me a framework of terms that I could develop.

Bruno Latour 'On actor-network theory. A few clarifications plus more than a few complications' IN Finn Olsen (special issue of the Danish philosophy journal), " Om aktor-netvaerksteroi. Nogle fa afklaringer og mere end nogle fa forviklinger" *Philosophia*, Vol. 25 N° 3 et 4, pp.47-64; (article écrit en article written in 1990). English version web edition <http://www.cours.fse.ulaval.ca/edc-65804/latour-clarifications.pdf> See also: Deleuze, Giles and Felix Guattari 1980 *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (English edition 1987) University of Minnesota Press

structure as an alternative method for creating a form, I constructed a 6m x 3m x 2m sculpture influenced by the idea of a way-marker as a centre point.

The form of the sculpture was developed through studio experiments which involved folding maps into various forms and developing them into drawings and small structures. A pencil wall drawing made in my studio was integral to the final structure, where the folded form transferred into a set of lines which were intended to keep the structure of the fold as an expression between sets of points. I was interested in disrupting the map's codified presumptions, a fold upsets the ability of a map to perform its navigational function.

As I constructed the work, translating the lines of drawing into lines made by recycled timber building joists, the material informed the construction process. I shifted to joists from vertical to skewed planes, which articulated a break-up of the space around the sculpture and encouraged the lengths of timber to become navigable pathways, developed by walking around and through the structure. This referred to the way lines on a map symbolise recommended routes. Setting the joists at skewed angles conveyed an articulation of movement which relied on a sculptural language, where the angle of a shape directs the gaze and movement of the viewer. The planes of wood directed gaze and navigation and became a loop of movement which took a spiral path around the sculpture.

Along with the central wooden construction, five large circular bluestone slabs held heat-formed, bioplastic vitrines. I constructed these by experimenting with heat-forming processes to create large bubbles. Inside these were hand modelled, museum-like botanical models of yam daisies, which I had sculpted at various growth states. The plants were created to look life like and to link to the way museums memorialise ecologies. As the Yam Daisy Project was a way that I could think about the complications in nature-culture assemblages, using the format of a modelled or preserved specimen aimed to engage with this.

The final material element of the installation was a set of granite and quartz boulders. These came out of my fieldwork around Ballarat. Both granite and quartz are very dense stones, this limited the design of the work to the size I could carry. Black and white images of Ballarat during the goldrush showed huge swathes of the landscape

had been de-vegetated and upturned, the photographs looked like the surface images of the moon. This allowed me to attempt to create a space reminiscent of a moonscape, with the sculptural form sitting within a field of objects.

Site Research

Field Naturalist

One of my trips involved visiting remnant bushland on Ballarat's outskirts with a field naturalist and classifying botanical specimens. This personal engagement gave me an insight into the plants of the area. The botanical and ecological study of a bush site with a local resident and ecologist allowed an exchange of information which included the more subtle observations which arise from the deep connection of a person to place. Scientist Jessica O'Reilly proclaims that intimate scientific observation allows for this through the tacit knowledge gained.¹⁰² This tacit knowledge comes from an extended time of close attention and is aided by specialised knowledge.

Soil survey

A further fieldtrip on my own involved walking and recording transects¹⁰³ of quartz on Black Hill, charting soil types, plant associations and geology types. This encouraged an understanding of the magnitude of the landscape changes of the gold rush.¹⁰⁴

Walking

A psychogeographic approach to exploration led me on a number of research walks.¹⁰⁵ This approach led me across the landscape of Ballarat and its surrounds on a number of walks over three visits to the city, highlighting various connections between objects, environments and histories. Walking uncovered entanglements of

¹⁰² Jessica O'Reilly 2016 'Sensing the ice: field science, models, and expert intimacy with knowledge' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* Vol 22, S1 pp27-45

¹⁰³ A transect is used by ecologists (as well as various practitioners who use site specificity and measurement to record or assess landscape) to define an area of a physical site where information is recorded (this is proposed by various discipline specific methods).

¹⁰⁴ This trip was done alone, with my previous studies in ecology and soil science to guide my investigations.

¹⁰⁵ Psychogeography is the psychological, emotional and behavioural reaction to place through the act of physical exploration enacted by the group Situationist International. Guy Debord, 1955 *An introduction to a critique of urban geography* (accessed August 10, 2019) <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/geography.html>

painted plaster casts of gold nuggets and the architecture of the colonial city. It implicated the social and economic construction of suburban growth and the subsequent landscape of the city. Wealth creation could be seen through an architectural and city planning trace. The colonial attitude to land use and connection to commodity systems had begun in the area with the arrival of English squatters in the region, whose sheep caused the near-extinction of the Yam Daisy within three years of arrival. Expressions of this became visible during walks, through local landscape plantings and various objects of farming nostalgia on display in storefronts. Additionally the extraction mentality which caused a reconfiguring of the landscape of the region left traces that appeared in the remnants of geological material, random boulders in front gardens.

Chatting to residents about their experiences of their city was another way I got to know the region. Residents spoke to me about the recent shift in the local economy of Ballarat from an agricultural city to a satellite city of Melbourne which has had a resultant shift in work types and social interactions. This has created a shift in identity for residents. Suburbia incorporates a physical geography with philosophical dreams and aspirations, describing a cultural space.¹⁰⁶ I wondered about the commodity driven methods of urban development and their connection to activities of colonisation. In Ballarat, urban expansion and house and land packages have become the new commodity for the local economy as Melbourne commuters move to the city. Land ownership has strong parallels to a colonial attitude towards nationhood, so closely entwined with the politics of resource extraction and contested sovereignty.¹⁰⁷

Climbing over stockpiles of granite in a quarry which bordered a new suburban estate became another exploration which cast the production of suburban housing expansion as a repositioning of landscape (for discussion of this see p22 in the exegesis). The quarry held rock which had been cleared to make way for housing expansion. This stone can be traced back to the volcanic history that formed the soils, mountains and landscape of the goldfields.

¹⁰⁶ Melanie Smicek 2014 *American Dreams: Suburban Nightmares: Suburbia as a Narrative Space between Utopia and Dystopia in Contemporary American Cinema* Hamburg: Anchor Academic Publishing

¹⁰⁷ Colin Raymond 'Our Terraforming' *Regional Climate Perspectives* 31 January 2018 (Accessed October 19, 2018) <http://www.regionalclimateperspectives.com/blog/placeholder-post>

Planting project design

The Murnong yam daisies were grown for the project at the Ballarat Wild Plant Nursery using endemic seed, this allowed the genetic stock to be both local and diverse so that future plants grown through the project would be relevant to the local landscape. Participants were found through a call out which utilised three intersecting social networks. These were the regional permaculture network, the local chapter of the Field Naturalist's association and the Friends of the local regional gallery, The Art Gallery of Ballarat. Communication between myself and the participants was conducted via email exchanges culminating in physical exchange of plants and discussions with participants, generally at the participant's homes where the plants were to be grown. The plants were all distributed during a site visit to Ballarat from 16-22 September 2018. The plantings traced a random distribution, as decided by the suburban distribution of the volunteers, with plants replanted in each participants garden. The project was envisaged as a custodianship between person, planting and place. It was a gentle action of terraforming where the landscape is replanted with local, threatened native plants. The work enacted a recolonising the landscape across the city. My past work in the field of environmental science and environmental humanities¹⁰⁸ has encouraged an interest in the way artmaking can question the ability to be of a place, especially in the complicated mire of landscape in the Anthropocene and in the contested landscape of a traumatic colonial history.¹⁰⁹

The research towards the planting project became a type of speculative fieldwork which allowed me to think about what the role of fieldwork is for artists and how fieldwork can be a generative outcome in and of itself, separate to documentation and separate from any studio and gallery work that comes from it. These were grounded by researching the colonial and indigenous history of the region beforehand, using archives and published texts. It was the process of fieldwork and the participatory project interactions that became meaningful. The factors of time, participants and concepts of the work that related directly to that place, at that exact moment.

¹⁰⁸ I have studied both art and ecology and have worked with the environment in various roles, this has allowed me to investigate scientific methods that I can utilise within my art practice. I am interested in this interdisciplinary space.

¹⁰⁹ Bruce Pascoe 2014 *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture*. Magabala Books, p11

Applying Latour's actor network theory, by tracing an actant and following it into a new composition, may allow for the uncovering of new understanding of place. In this way place has a dual effect of being actant and receiver. The changing roles of landscape and history encourage a living story of landscape defined as a set of marks made by Murnong daisies, past actions intermixed with futures made by current activities.

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