

Borrowers and Bullies

by

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Author's Declaration

This thesis consists of material all of which I authored or co-authored: see Statement of Contributions included in the thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Statement of Contributions

This thesis support paper and exhibition was produced through the collaborative efforts of Jacob Irish and Julie Hall. We intentionally blur our authorship as a thematic and creative choice throughout the proceeding paper.

Abstract

Borrowers and Bullies is an exhibition of sculpture, installation, and video. I was highly impacted throughout the making of this work by the Covid-19 pandemic, which began immediately preceding my acceptance into the UW MFA program and has endured to the present at the time of writing. By walking the same paths daily, in my home and in the park behind my home, I more clearly saw my own habits in settler-colonial greenspaces and the built environment.

Central to this work is my understanding of a habit as not just a set of repeated behaviours but as a central, life-configuring scaffold for building and maintaining relationships to one another, the built environment, and the land. During the summer of 2021, my collaborative partner and I harvested materials, documentation, and experiences from settler-colonial greenspaces in Southern Ontario and The Maritimes, while asking myself: *How does my social muscle memory inform how I understand my home, my neighbourhood, my nation? And do these habits inform my ethics?*

I see my collaborative art practice as an opportunity to manifest anti-colonial and anti-capitalist ethics by tugging at relationships between subjectivity and materiality. *Borrowers and Bullies* is an exhibition with its eyes turned to the colonial-capitalist enclosure of time and land, and how that enclosure configures the knowable, the thinkable, and the imaginable.

This exhibition, *Borrowers and Bullies*, is a document of work that took place in very interior spaces. What is in the gallery is residue from the work embedded in my body and my collaborator's; I proceed from this thesis work transformed.

Land Acknowledgement

J: I moved to the east end of Waterloo to attend university. My backyard was Bechtel Park. Within the first week of sleeping on this new land, I had a dream in which I was hosting a large dinner. Before I could begin cooking, J and I were asked to go pick up *the old people*. I made my way but got sidetracked by a visit to the Grand River, which escalated into a two-hour nap on the bank. The dream had little tension despite the upsets: I was late to pick up *the old people* (they didn't mind), no one had started cooking by the time I got back (they just ate dessert first), and it marks my only memory of falling asleep close to a body of water (I survived). This dream has kept me company throughout my time in KW. I felt noticed by the River, I felt visited, perhaps vetted. As a settler-descendant person far from the lands where I was raised, Mi'kma'ki (Nova Scotia), I'm remiss to suggest that the river was welcoming me. But I keep this dream with me as a reminder of reciprocal curiosity, a relationship between myself and the land, and of its unique features as agential characters.

Kitchener-Waterloo sits directly on the Haldimand Tract. This is the ancestral land of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. The Haldimand Tract is a cut of land six miles on either side of the Grand River's ebbs. The river begins up north near Dundalk and flows south into Lake Erie at the community of Port Maitland, collecting water from the Contestogo, Nith, Speed, and Eramosa Rivers. The 950,000 acres banking the Grand River were promised by the governor of Quebec to the people of the Six Nations Confederacy in the Haldimand Treaty of 1784. That promise was broken, and the current sovereign territory of the Six Nations people is only 48,000 acres. Even this land suffered recent encroachment from housing developers between the summers of 2020-2021, but was defended by Haudenosaunee land protectors with the Land Back Lane campaign. The Six Nation's government declared a moratorium on housing developments along the Haldimand tract a year ago, April 2021, which goes unobserved by the Provincial Government.

Benefitting from colonial violence is the reality of being Canadian. My collaborative art practice acts as my conversational and strategic space to understand and dismantle settler-colonial-capitalist systems of power that overtly and covertly guide many aspects of my life. I am working towards my own consciousness raising of these forces that enclose my relationships to time and land, and that continue to subvert the ability of Indigenous communities throughout Turtle Island to self-govern on their ancestral territories.

Acknowledgements

I formally acknowledge that a pandemic was a very strange and disembodied time to study fine art, a notoriously physical discipline. But despite setbacks, I learned a great deal about being embodied, present, and to confront the horrors of my inescapable reality with humour and love, especially for my partner, but also for the people listed below.

My ever-changing committee: Bruce, Joan, and Lois

My through-line: Logan

My peers: Amber, Ashley, and Sarah

My friends: Cameron and Nutmeg

My internship hosts: Anna, Angella, Ursula, and April

My lifesavers: Emily, Gillian, and Spencer

My family: Lisa, Rob, and Kiegan

My sisters: Colleen, Amy, and Talia

My future: a dog to be named Tempo

Dedication

To future Jacob. I hope this holds up.

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1: Context

We find it convenient that both our first names begin with the letter J. We share co-authorship of our thesis work, both the exhibition and the support paper. To help the reader inhabit this intention, we wrote from a first person-plural perspective and where first person-singular was required, we called ourselves J.

J: Are we being glib with this *the reader* framing? Should we just say *you*?

J: Me?

J: Hmm.

Over the last eight years that we have been collaborating, we have been collecting idioms to provide constraints to work within and against:

I can only speak for myself.

If I do not understand, I may have missed something.

If I do not understand, I may have misunderstood something.

Artists must ask questions.

Artists mustn't answer all the questions.

Give your viewer as little as you can, they have some of their own.

One thing at a time.

Everything in its own time.

J: If I can only speak for myself, how are we going to collectively write a thesis?

J: Radical consensus?

J: For every sentence? Every word? We're two people, we have differing opinions.

J: Do we?

J: Hahaha.

Our collaborative practice acts as a microcosm for the rest of our lives. We support each other's subjective sense of time. We support each other's discovery of memories formed before our paths joined. We support each other by believing each other instead of scrutinizing each other for proof. Such is the shorthand of our coupling. We are two people building one life. We share a bed, a hairbrush, friends, meals, clothes, anxieties, sentences, silences.

In the studio, we often tell each other stories. It helps us put to words the non-discursive feelings behind or because of the work. When one of us makes progress on a sculpture, the other of us will look to it and respond with the description of a memory. Through this process we fold and braid our stories together. The work becomes embedded with narrative through our labour.

In reflecting on our past collaborative work, we realized we tended to provoke questions through disparity and hopelessness. Our conclusions were fixed, and we personally felt deflated by our work's affect. We had a hard time imagining a future when our focus had been disparaging the moment. This realisation has contributed to us re-orienting our practice. Our breaking point was the pandemic. It's been a whole new rock bottom for all involved.

We've adopted a new stance with our thesis work by looking to our habits. Habits and attitudes seem co-constitutive, but habits offer us more tangible points of intervention. Habits forecast while attitudes reflect. *To change one's attitude* recalls parental threats in childhood. *To change one's habits* speaks to devotional practices to recalibrate our everyday.

It is important to flesh out how we are thinking of *habit*. A common perspective of habits under colonial-capitalism manifests itself in self-help and self-optimization literature that positions the individual in service of capital. This positions one's relationship to time as transactional, and pits the individuated, isolated subject in *competition* with other individuated, isolated subjects. There is often a connection drawn between habits and *efficiency*. Speed and efficiency do not interest us, and do not make for a good life for us. We see these ideas as echoes of what Silvia Federicci talks about as the *mechanization of the human body*, which we will touch on later.

J: Where do we have agency in our own life to intervene in our habits?

J: On New Year's Eve, when the year changed from 2019 to 2020, I came down with a cold. I stopped smoking cannabis for the first few days of the year while I was sick and recovering. Subsequently, I decided to abstain for the entire year.

J: Egg on your face when two and a half months later the federal government paid out CERB and OCS was delivering grass door to door.

J: But I made it through the year and decided to abstain from alcohol throughout 2021, which was also successful. These year-long gestures remind me of something artist Carol Bove wrote about in that seminar reading, her self-imposed intervention in vaguely calling her art "work", and they remind me of Tehching Hsieh's performance art—tethering himself to another performance artist for a year, living in a cage for a year, and taking a photo of himself every hour for a year. I remember him saying something about it being a unit of human time. For me, they have become a year-long decision to practice declining something I generally enjoy. I'm remembering how, or perhaps learning, to tell myself *no*. This year, 2022, is the

year of declining to eat processed sugar, which is logistically a greater challenge than the other two, but not as unwieldy as I had anticipated.

J: After riding the blood sugar rollercoaster of *keep an ear out, keep an ear in* (2021), I was worried going cold turkey on sugar would be impossible, but we're nearly four months in.

Some things *feel* insurmountable, like giving up sugar, but some things essentially are insurmountable at the individual human scale, such as: the housing crisis, ecological collapse, and at time of writing the price of gas and the vague threat of nuclear war. When we surveyed our life for what was within our control, we settled on our own behaviour: towards ourselves, towards others, towards our experience of time, towards the land. We repeated new behaviours until they became habits, and used those new habits as scaffolding to develop the artworks in *Borrowers and Bullies*

In compliance with pandemic protections, we began to look very closely at our home, our neighbourhood, and the lands where we were raised. What were our habits within these spaces and how could we adjust those habits? Settlers brought their traditions from their homelands and laid them atop the land. How are these relatively new cultural practices on this land faring? How do they serve the land? How do they serve the people? Who is their priority? Whom do they exclude?

To make our thesis work, we have adopted a seasonal approach; collect in the warm months, synthesize in the cold months. We harvested material, documentation, and experiences from settler-colonial greenspaces during the summer. In doing so, we began interrogating our behaviour in action: What is our social muscle memory in our home, our neighbourhood, our nation? What are we doing without thinking about it? What would we rather be doing once we notice what we're doing and how we're doing it? And specifically, towards the land: How does maintenance compare to stewardship?

J: Do you remember this past summer when we were visiting Kate and Adam, and Kate was telling us about how she used to be able to plant things in her garden four inches apart, but over the years she has had to widen the spacing between her plants because they just want to rot. I hold this story in dialogue with our idea of a seasonal approach to artistic practice as a complicating factor in that the climate is changing and is felt in a myriad of small and catastrophic ways. Borders and boundaries become unreliable.

J: Oh, I love those two. Kate is generating her own almanac and she's just discovering that her model is in flux, she's proving climate change through vegetable gardening. I was surprised by how unbothered she was. Remember she was excited that her fig tree was fruiting? She was like, "In Nova Scotia, I'm growing figs outdoors."

J: This also reminds me of that Tega Brain essay we read in Winter 2021.

J: *The Environment is not a System?*

J: Yeah, she talks about how our mathematical models of weather and climate are based on historical data, and as our climate shifts, those models become less and less accurate. Our ability to forecast is at risk on multiple fronts.

J: The language around weather is going to have to change. Like, what is winter anymore? It started snowing at the beginning of November in 2021, and it's mid-April and we just got a snowstorm.

J: How are we going to do our seasonal art practice of gathering in the warm months? Our growing season is closing in.

Our collaboration in life and artmaking goes unnamed. We conceptualize our shared studio art practice as two halves of the same brain, a third space that we build between ourselves.

J: We recognize that naming is powerful. Once named, a thing no longer needs to be physically present to be summoned. The power of naming and the power of language are contingent and somehow involved in knowledge-making. As yet, we are not significantly constituted by a knowledge system that has a befitting name for our collaboration. We can only summon it by doing it.

J: Do we not also do this as a means of avoidance? Or maybe it also comes from the desire to protect the other, to be each other's bodyguards in complex social situations.

J: We are usually showing up together and can help hold reality for the other.

J: Our practice isn't really happening unless we're both there doing it.

To fulfill our Shantz internship with an established artist, we connected with Angella Parsons and Ursula Johnson via our common friend, Anna Sprague, seeking to learn from another artist-couple who work in collaboration.

Angella and Ursula call their collaboration *Kinuk* (K's sound more like G's to our English speaking ears), a Mi'kmaw word meaning *us, exclusive*. Ursula knows it from her maternal tongue; she was raised in community in Eskisoqnik. *Kinuk* is an apt term for a collaborative couple. It comes from a knowledge system whose language identifies social constructs with precision.

Languages influence one's worldview, they shape thinking and subjectivity. Dr. Lewis Williams, Indigenous scholar of European and Maori ancestry, identifies thinking through regional Indigenous languages as a methodology to reconnect both a person's relationship to the land and to begin repairing their ontological and epistemological dissonance. She writes: "Language acts as a medium for mediating and connecting the reciprocal and reflexive relationship between our embodied experiences of place and the ways in which we construct and articulate our relationship to place." (Williams 175)

We two are not Indigenous people. We are descendants of settlers, our relationship to the lands we call home are complicated and fraught. We are consciously looking to Indigenous



Figure 1. The remains of a tree in Kejimikujik, a traditional gathering site to Mi'kmaq people, a national park to settlers.

scholarship to learn from systems of knowledge whose foundations were established outside of western hegemony. We want to learn to love the land we're on and from, the land of Southern Ontario and The Maritimes, specifically.

Settler-colonial priorities, the mentalities we were both raised within, reduce land to a static site for resource extraction. Or should there be no shiny goodies to be ripped out of the land, sites become aesthetic monuments to the ideology that facilitates more extraction elsewhere/later.

J: There is a joke to be made here about the suburban lawn as aesthetic (not to mention environmentally disastrous) monuments to colonialism, and colonial power "hedging" its bets.

The objective seems to be: *What can we take from this land?* This is unsustainable. We feel that our communities express themselves through their habits as unwise stewards on these

lands. Elwood Jimmy, writing collaboratively with Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti in *beyond unsettling*, gave us the language to identify that our sites of investigation in our thesis writing and exhibition concerned habits, both our own, our families', and our national community's.

... colonialism is seen and sensed as an onto-metaphysical problem—a problem of a harmful habit of being, rather than a problem of (a lack of) information, knowledge, methodology, or representation. In this context, the occupation of lands and the subjugation and elimination of peoples are symptoms of a deeper predicament related to our sense of separation or 'separability' from the living land, or what we have come to call 'nature', and what this separability does to our relationship with reality, *time*, knowledge, pain, life, and death, and to our sense of being, belonging, and worth. (Jimmy 124)

J: It's funny, we pass a business in Waterloo on our drive home called "Cartesian Solutions". I feel like the idea of a cartesian solution—or one underpinned by cartesian spatial mapping—could describe the methodology of land "development" and construction playing out across Canada. Gridification. Maybe it's not funny, but it makes me think about the flow of ideas between abstraction and reality, and maybe this serves as an indicator of what Elwood Jimmy

refers to as “separability”. When we’re thinking land through that grid overlay, with that level of abstraction, are we demonstrating/practicing that separability?

J: Like the conception of forward-marching, linear time. Jimmy’s mention of *our relationship to time* stands out in the above quotation.

J: Another instance of separation. Uncoupling time from the sun, uncoupling the value of money from gold, it always involves separability, isolation and reduction.

Time’s existence is evinced by everything around it, emerging as a property after the fact. Anecdotes, fragments, and run-on sentences about time weave their way throughout the final works and the process of making *Borrowers and Bullies*: pieces of drywall left in the rain, dipping into a weather system cycle; grey hair from J’s head, lovingly grown and harvested. We employ a radical slowness regarding our co-labour. The shared labour of the two of us requires we spend time to process, temper, and nudge, ideas together. We enter our art making together as ever-expanding fractal lists of negotiations.

Our studio practice most often results in sculptures because we are interested in transgressing the purposes and intended outcomes of materials that configure our reality and we sculpt as a practice to experiment with reality. In a sense we want to situate our work within “the economy”, defined by Economic Anthropologist Jason Hickel as “... our material relationship with each other and with the rest of the living world.” (Hickel 290)

Spending all our time at home during the pandemic propelled us to look closely at the built environment around us. What is the ready-to-hand language of our shells? Or what are homes made of? How can we intervene in the teleological purpose of the materials destined for domestic construction? How is subjectivity shaped through proximity to these materials?

Questioning the materials of domestic constitution led us to making work in the Winter 2021 term that investigated materials of social reproduction within the domestic, that is, what we eat at home. The work, *keep an ear out, keep an ear in*, came from a question: What if we changed our current diet to the diet of J’s childhood, one of which they have very few memories and feel confused and conflicted. Could that material re-enactment summon feelings and memories long inaccessible? This work opened new methods of working and unveiled to us the idea that memory is materially contingent. Or, is always *situated*.

While we are sculptors; for each other, we are performance artists. Our performance is our intersubjective life. Through collaborative habits to make work that centres the land, we were also locating sites within our personal life where we could intervene. Our guts unfurled and we considered the links between food security, class, and well-being amidst our own emotional experiences of challenging memories and associations summoned through the confusing smell of *Cheez Whiz*. We came out of this experience thinking: *subjectivity is a sculpture*.

The built environment is, of course, not the only force that shapes subjectivity. We believe that people are discursively constituted, that is to say, people’s subjectivities are constituted by the discourses available to them, and the stories they tell themselves and each other.



Figure 2. Installation view of *keep an ear out, keep an ear in* (2021), ballistic gelatine imbedded with dehydrated food consumed for the project suspended in a crocheted linen fascia netting.

J: Maybe it's good to say narratives, or discourse, or stories, are these things interchangeable?

Speaking is telling little stories: editorials, fantasies, autobiographies, puff pieces, historical fictions, mythologies. Canadian academic, Natalie Loveless, writes:

Stories are powerful. The stories that we believe, the stories that we *live into* shape our daily practices, from moment to moment. They have the power to promise some futures and conceal others. They encourage us to see some things and not others. Entrenched stories like "race," "gender," "class," and "nation" have historically done this very well, prescribing who might accomplish what, where, when, and how. (Loveless 20)

If language and storytelling are world-building and world-configuring, what stories do we tell ourselves through our habits? Can stories and habits be co-constitutive? If so, how do habits relate to ethics? In this vein, we look to our art practice as an opportunity to manifest our ethics. Our work is an opportunity for us to think our life-narratives with plasticity. For *Borrowers and Bullies* we are considering this through habits that involve time and land, the two points the work swings around.

J: Contained in the idea of a habit is the implication of repetition. I think repetition as a basis for narrative applies some friction to western conventions of narrative arc, or myth of progress. Beginning, middle, end.

1.1: Glossary of Touchstone Words

When adjusting our *habits* within our performative life practice, we are shaping our *subjectivities* through interrogation of *dominant worldviews*.

When identifying *dominant worldviews*, we have settled on the term *colonial-capitalism* to encapsulate economic and political forces of global dominion.

When scrutinizing *dominant knowledges*, we fixate on *colonial-capitalism's* three-pronged-approach, its trident: *isolation*, *enclosure*, and *extraction*.¹

When feeling overcome with hopelessness towards an uncertain future, we turn to *humour* to nourish our collaboration and relationships.

When performing our life, we follow our *intuition*, like a siren's call to the shore. Because we're grounded, its lure is refreshing, not wrecking.

¹ The trident is our coinage, though its three terms are rooted in core concepts capitalist theory: *isolation* encapsulates hyper-individualism and alienation from labour, *enclosure* to reflect the inescapability of society and debt, and *extraction* to speak to natural resource commodification.

2: Only time will tell

A sense of time, like a language, speaks to the knowledge system that conceived it. There is a narrow application of time in colonial-capitalism. Here are some aphorisms we grew up hearing:

Be on time // *Time is money*

What a waste of time // *something failed*

That was time well spent // *something succeeded*

Time flies when you're having fun // *Money flies when you're having fun*

These sayings construct a world in which time can be spent like a currency. Time is, incidentally, *the* factor in Marx's labour theory of value. Perhaps with this concept in mind, when Carol Bove was an emerging artist, she challenged herself to stop saying the unspecific word "work" in relation to her art practice, as in *going to the studio to do some work* was clarified declaratively as *going to the studio to, for example, draw*.

The work exercise made me feel as if I was awakening from one of the spells of capitalism. And there was more to it than that: I was able to begin the process of withdrawal from my culture's ideology around the instrumentality of time, i.e., that you can use time ... I think the ability to withdraw from consensus reality is one of the most important skills for an artist to learn because it helps her to recognize invisible forces. (Bove 2)

We can remember delaminating from consensus reality in early life, illustrated by this quasi-chiastic structure:

J: I always wanted to be at school, home was an intense place for me.

J: I always wanted to be at home, school was an intense place for me.

2.1: Weathered by time

There is a series of eight framed drawings along the back wall of the gallery. They mostly depict what looks like disembodied spines, propped up on a variety of precarious supports, while a few depict shapes contained within short, stacked stone walls. The drawings are graphite on toned paper. Their frames are walnut with light grey matting. Each drawing is on a sheet with approximate dimensions of 8.5x11, like printer paper, but none are identical. Each drawing has its own name, but for the purposes of our thesis work, their series name is *they didn't get stronger, they just got sore*.



Figure 3. they didn't get stronger, they just got sore (2022).

We decided to frame this series to invest care into works that felt extremely fragile out in the world. Those feelings were both towards the medium of paper and towards the subject matter: the spines look pained, the walls sturdy but old, everything indicates age and weather-wornness, a patina theme picked up materially throughout the exhibition. But the investment to frame was also a mechanism to safely display this work for J, whose connection to drawing as a private means of recalibrating dysregulation goes back to childhood.

J: Drawing is a lifelong habit for me. I've always practiced automatic drawing. It's a coping mechanism for when I'm in a situation that doesn't hold my attention, or when I'm in a conversation in which I have lost the thread, or I don't understand. Drawing is connected to education for me, it's a shield when an educational setting becomes uncomfortable. Drawing is a place to which I retreat. I'm interested in the accessibility and humility in a drawing, its ability to generate affect. I like the directness of it. It's humble and it's an archetype of communication, *putting pencil to paper*, or maybe *pencil you in*. It's why it's an effective mode of socially retreating in a school setting: it's a camouflage because my pencil *is* on the paper. Printer paper, an 8.5"x11" sheet of bond, that's been my framing device for my own psyche since I was a very young child. It feels intuitive to work at that scale.

For the purposes of our exhibition, the drawings are a series. But to us, they are each their own artworks. We're willing to share one name amongst the eight for *educational purposes*. Above, in *Figure 3*, the upper-right, red-toned drawing is called *Monument*.

J: Each drawing is its own holistic object, but I'm trying not to monumentalize each one, especially *Monument*. I've been thinking about surrealism since my conversation with Matt Ledwidge [a friend], for its relationship to mental health and self-extraction as a source of generating imagery through automatic drawing. When I reflect on *Monument*, and how it was made through automatic drawing, it reminds me of the social and political condition in Canada, and conversations about hegemony of histories, whose histories, and why? What histories are inscribed on the land? I think of Canada as a dying, propped up monument.

Framing a drawing gives it a kind of business-casual dress, but it reminds us too of a tomb. They have been sealed in a box and their exhibition is a wake. We intend to sell them after we graduate. That will feel like their burial.

2.2: Pathologized with time

J: What is your experience of time?

J: I get caught in the feeling of suspended time and I don't want to leave it. It's like a belief that I'm able to choose when to dip into the flow of time, even if I am intellectually aware that seems impossible.

J: Why would you not want to be in time?

J: For the fear of wasting it. It's the only annoying thing that I find about having ADHD, how warm it makes me when there are those transitions between timelessness and timeliness.

J: It's tough for us to get out the door some days.

J: Yes, but even in the smaller scale like being in a classroom in young-school and having to change subject. It's challenging to hold all those subjects or stories when they're built in a fractured way, a little bit each day. I hear people talking about being able to set down and pick those threads back up where they left them, and I'm like, "Wow, that seems awesome." I would love to have that strength of a narrative capacity.

J: Our relationship provides a lot of that narrative on the day to day.

J: And I cherish that continuity of narrative because it's consistent and feels like it can be built off instead of constantly falling out of mind. I cherish it, it feels like it has sedimented into tangible history.

J: What's old-school like for you now?

J: I encounter the limits of what are the permissible characteristics of a mind fit to be instrumentalized and teased out by capital. By inadvertently transgressing, I'm simultaneously pathologized but also given this kind of access to see the horrors of a larger mechanism of classification of individuals.

Regarding pathologizing ADHD and other divergent ways of experiencing time and information cognition, we see the machinations of colonial-capitalist methodologies— isolation, enclosure, extraction. We're all expected to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and give everything we have towards building our society through alienated labour. Those who fall outside of those expectations are enclosed within a pathology; the system endures no scrutiny in its inflexibility to incorporate a multitude of ways of being, instead opting to project the problem onto the individual.

Related is the violence felt through pathologizing mental illness under capitalism and the deflection of responsibility via causation. British cultural theorist Mark Fisher knew this experience all too well:

The current ruling ontology denies any possibility of a social causation of mental illness... It goes without saying that all mental illnesses are neurologically *instantiated*, but this says nothing about their *causation*. If it is true, for instance, that depression is constituted by low serotonin levels, what still needs to be explained is why particular individuals have low levels of serotonin. This requires a social and political explanation... (Fisher 37)

The cognitive disobedience of neurodivergent people is threatening to the mechanization of the human body, as described by Italian feminist scholar Silvia Federici in *Caliban and the Witch*. In the chapter titled "The Great Caliban: The Struggle Against the Rebel Body", Federici identifies an industrial gaze upon the human body, severing its complexity, animistic conception of nature, and relationship to magic, to fulfill the regularization of the human body.

This means that the mechanical body, the body-machine, could not have become a model of social behaviour without the destruction by the state of a vast range of pre-capitalist beliefs, practices, and social subjects whose existence contradicted the regularization of corporeal behaviour promised by Mechanical Philosophy ... Eradicating these practices was a necessary condition for the capitalist rationalization of work, since magic appeared as an illicit form of power and an instrument to obtain what one wanted without work, that is, a refusal of work in action. (Federici 141-142)

J: "Magic is a refusal of work in action" is almost tattoo worthy if we were into that. We can decide to reclaim our bundle of pathologies as forms of resistance to colonial-capitalism. What if they are remains of historical subjectivities that persist through time? Federici identified it above as "...social subjects whose existence contradicted the regularization of corporeal behaviour..." It is interesting that she is using the language of behaviour.

- J: It seems connected to our discourse surrounding ADHD and NPD in that they are pathologies that are often discussed by their observed effect on others. Maybe it has something to do with severing a body's complexity, isn't this another instance of separability?
- J: Beginning with ourselves, through attentive, slow, collaborative practice we can develop habits of radical self-acceptance.
- J: Our art practice as a space for our ethics to be held and propagated.

2.3: It will come to me in time

the old me, the old me, a miniature textile work, is a difficult sculpture to photograph. Around 300 grey hairs were plucked from J's head and woven between a taught warp of nylon thread using a needle as a shuttle. The finished weaving is five inches long and looks like a mouse's scarf. It embodies the audacity of a first-time weaver: hair is an incompatible weaving medium.

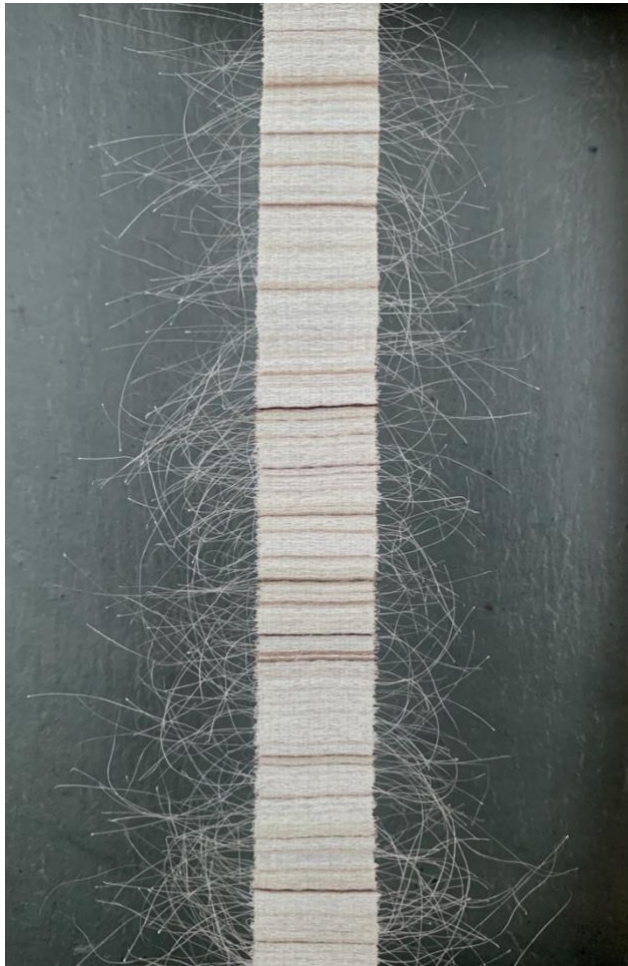


Figure 4. *the old me, the old me* (2022), detail.

What makes it especially challenging to photograph are its feathery edges. They move in all directions, back and forward and up and down. Photographing it with a shallow depth of field captures the woven hairs in the main body but loses the loose ends where the hair root is visible, confirming the material and the pain of plucking. It needs to be seen in person, moved around, so that the light can highlight its features.

While making this work, J was not confronting trichotillomania, the compulsion to pull one's hair out, nor confronting anxiety over aging or conforming to beauty standards. But during the making of this work, when grey hair was an accessible extractive industry, we started to collect grey hairs when found in our hairbrush, and on clothes, tucking them in a pocket for later. Anticipating scarcity, grey hairs became a commodity in our daily habits.

J: Completing this tedious work was taking years off my life. I sat at a desk with a cup of tea and a blanket over my lap. I craned over a hand loom, adjusted the task lamp's glow as natural light waned. I tucked half-used tissues into my shirt cuffs. I squinted deep wrinkles whenever rethreading the tapestry needle. The workable warp was so tiny by the end, I had to switch to a sewing needle with an even smaller hole which required light cursing when threading to get it to work.

J: A decade ago, the old me used to pluck my grey hairs when they were few, under ten in total. When they persisted, I asked myself to stop this vain habit. I'm in a narrow window where plucking greys will not leave me with bald spots, but this time will not last. *the old me, the old me* looks forwards and backwards in time: the old me had fewer grey hairs, the old me will have many more. Some grey hairs remain fixed to my scalp but, after plucking around 300 hundred for this project, I now look visibly younger, and less like my mother.



Figure 5. *the old me, the old me* (2022).



Figure 6. Alabaster (2017-2022).

Tentatively emerging, as if from hibernation, we affectionately call the character Alabaster. Alabaster is a material whose history and use not only evokes classical sculpture, but the production of plaster, a material that proliferates through our sculptural installation, *take only what you can carry*. Alabaster holds a web of stories. One of which is a short story by British fiction author China Miéville, “In the Slopes”. In a Pompeii-analogue, archeologists discover non-human (somewhat angelic) figures amongst the plaster-cast bodies preserved by volcanic ash. Looking to the past will inevitably unearth surprises and shed light on misunderstandings, like watching inuendo-laden Disney films as an adult. Sifting through J’s confusing childhood, we suspect their mother is suffering from Narcissistic Personality Disorder, or NDP. Her symptoms match too closely to be a coincidence. There is a type of cosmic horror particular to having one’s world shattered.

NPD is a Cluster B personality disorder often characterized by a heightened sense of self-importance, a destabilizing requirement for admiration, and diminished empathic feelings for others. Some psychologists conceptualize it as never growing up, the sufferer’s inability to emotionally mature from early childhood expressions of emotional states—a form of Arrested Development. “Cognitively, they are adults, but emotionally, they are toddlers.” (Hall 8)

J: Ironically, my mom really likes the show *Arrested Development*.

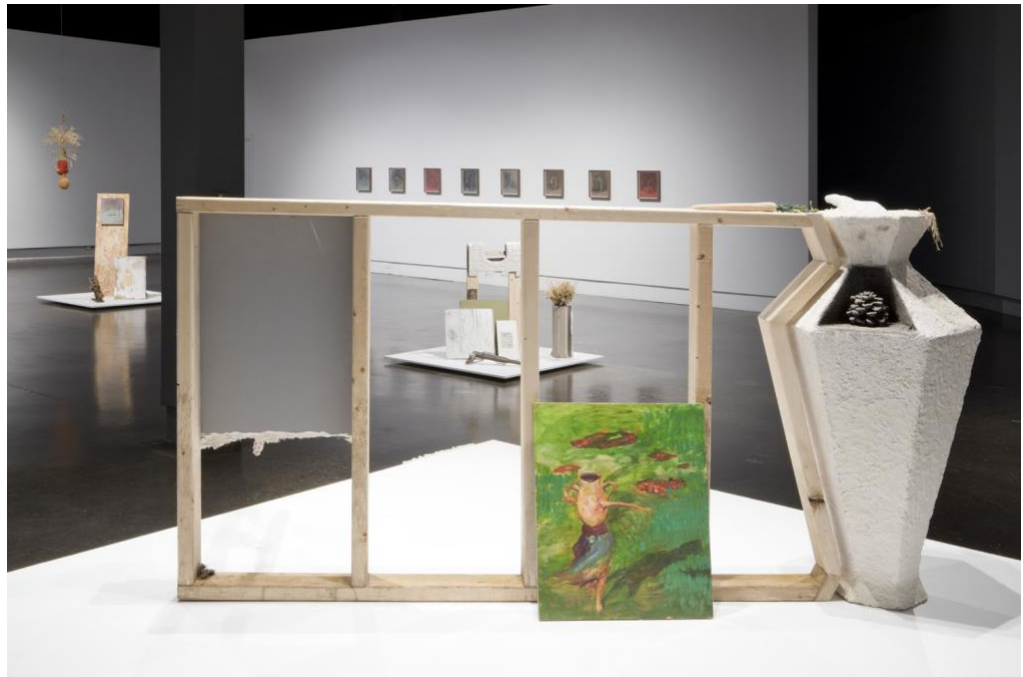



Figure 7. take only what you can carry (2022), back view.

Diagnosing and treating the person with NPD can be especially challenging for psychologists due to a narcissist's proficiency with deflecting personal responsibility for their abusive behaviour and resistance to therapy. Luckily, a diagnosis is not essential for the sufferers of narcissistic abuse to seek recovery. From *The Narcissist in Your Life*, author Julie L. Hall writes: "Narcissism has the dubious distinction of more often being treated for its traumatic impact on others than for the condition itself. As the saying goes, narcissism is a sickness for which everyone but the patient is treated." (Hall 10)

J: When I was a kid, I would summon the courage to privately tell teachers that something was wrong at home. They would not believe me. I had great grades; I was a great kid. *Everyone goes through these rough patches with their folks, it is part of growing up.* My mom was right, everything was my fault—or more likely, my scapegoat sister's fault, or occasionally my withdrawn sister's fault, just never my mother's. I buried my family problems as deeply as I

could for as long as I could, but emerging into the world as an adult, I began to re-enact self-destructive social behaviours I had learned at home without my conscious knowledge or permission. I was deeply depressed, self-medicating with food, drugs, and compulsively sexualizing my close friendships. Even as late as the Winter 2021 critique, when the content of our work *keep an ear out, keep an ear in* was criticizing my childhood diet of highly processed foods—a project I found intensely liberatory and painfully guilt-inducing—I responded to one of the faculty's suggestions of publishing my food diary by saying how that would expose me to risk, that putting my experience to words would be read as a betrayal should my mother ever read it because my truth would remove her agency and ability to control the narrative. But protecting the narcissist in my life from the consequences of her abuse came to an end during our Shantz internship in August 2021. She kicked me while I was down for the last time and I have not spoken to her since, nor do I intend to until she commits herself to healing. I am beyond grey rock²; I am no contact. I now feel capable of steering my life without considering the abusive consequences I would have otherwise had to endure. My internal clock counting down the anticipation of *having* to call my mom before she blows up at me from feeling ignored or shut out is no longer ticking like a bomb in the back of my thoughts. It's why I hate media that says, "Call your mom."


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Mom Has No Memory of That Traumatic Childhood Event



*Reductress**



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reductress "I'm not denying that it happened," said Barb. "I simply have no memory of it, so I'm not sure what you want me to say."

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Figure 8. J felt very seen by Reductress.

² A strategy for concealing oneself from the gaze of the NPD sufferer, going "grey rock" is an intentionally performed mask of low affect. It has its problems, but it can be affective in the short-term.

NPD is a useful pathology to extend outside of the family and apply metaphorically to colonial-capitalism, whose central societal value of perpetual accumulation of wealth through violence is the cause of global poverty, class disparity, and impending ecological collapse.

The giant wheel of capitalism turns on narcissistic values and beliefs...shame, self-hatred, intolerance, polarized thinking, reactivity, arrogance, entitlement, hypocrisy, paranoia, competitiveness, lack of compassion, self-involvement, envy, hierarchical thinking, objectification of others, compulsive projecting, desire for power, and need to be right are forms of despair. Despair batters and hollows out the mother, father, and child. The family suffers and the world suffers. The narcissistic family becomes the world stage. (Hall 264)

J: Western society needs to go no contact with colonial-capitalism. But it is not quite as simple as it was for me. My mother no longer holds any power over me. I am not dependent on her for the essentials of life, and I am not her property. I have the privilege to walk away. All oppressed peoples within colonial-capitalism are under its boot as modes of living autonomously are made illegal or inaccessible. We sell our time for wages, leaving us no time for ourselves to reproduce our own lives in significant ways, especially those of us for whom access to land has been foreclosed upon, leaving us no land to grow food and house our communities. That is why liberatory activism often targets food and housing insecurity; activism is working towards obtaining the leverage to go no contact with our narcissistic overlords. We need our time back. We need to liberate land from colonial-capitalism.

This painting has been with us for years. It came from a series of paintings about Pompeii that J has been working on well before our MFA, an automatic painting series probably depicting climate grief. There are many paintings in this series but they never quite felt complete. During our MFA, J would occasionally put it on an easel and add to it. Just recently, we noticed that it is a painting of Alabaster, our friend emerging from the vase.

Self-knowledge through critical reflection is an antidote to narcissism.



Figure 9. It was Alabaster's portrait all along.

3: New habits are second nature

We have not strayed far from home in the last two years. Our daily along the same paths in the yard of the house where we lived and the park behind the house where we lived brought their changing features into heightened reality.

Our neighbours paid landscapers to maintain their ample lawn. It was a twice a week service of roaring gas mowers bookended by each the spring and fall pesticide spray. They had exactly three tulips growing in their front yard... garden.

In contrast, our landlord sent us a “friendly” reminder that the City of Waterloo is litigious about lawns exceeding 8” of growth. We trimmed the front lawn before that point, but we let the backyard grow a yard tall and go to seed. It looked like a suburban maquette for Agnes Denes’ *Wheatfields – A Confrontation* (1982). We anticipated getting fined and considering that money and physical ticket as potential ephemera for our thesis work, but the infraction was never served.

We bought a scythe and woke up early one July morning to bring in the harvest: we gathered the fodder in a haystack, made bouquets, and hung them to dry. We did it with a true love of donkeys in mind: silage, damp and fermented hay, causes donkeys fatal ulcers.

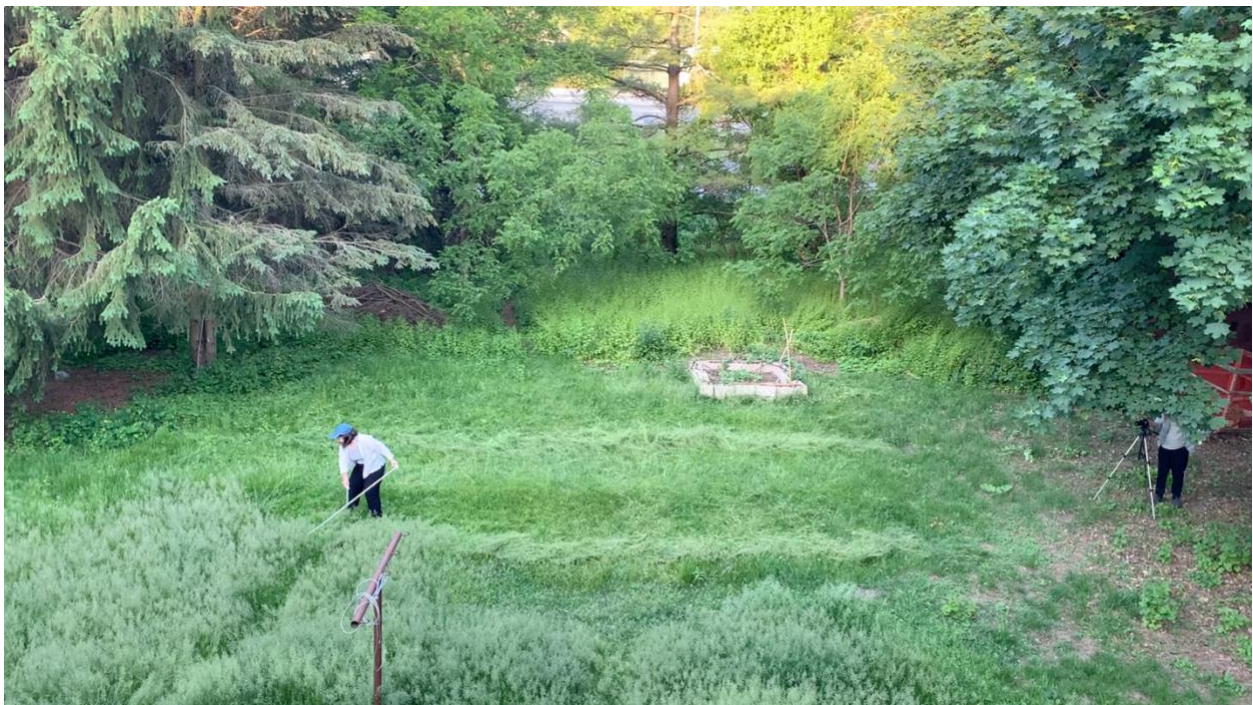


Figure 10. Harvesting our backyard as the sun was rising in July, 2021.

J: The maintenance of a lawn seems second nature to suburban people, the thick green sod a flag of success. But success for whom?

J: I’ve heard that lawns are made of a turf with very shallow roots and after a few generations the ground compresses, causing water to flow over the surface of the land without sinking in. Bad for the bugs, bad for the bacterial, bad for biodiversity.

J: Yeah look up wildflower roots or bunchgrass compared to turf. You won't believe it.

J: Turf is good over septic tanks.

J: Sport fields, graveyards, we had all that in the backyard in Waterloo.

3.1: Old habits die hard

a *turning point*, our soft sculpture, depicts an inverted character with the aforementioned dried grass as its foliage; its silhouette mimics the giant hogweed cut-outs in *a month of stolen light*. The character's pose was based on *The Hanged Man* tarot card, a harbinger of one feeling stuck in time and unhappy with their situation. The card anticipates a breaking of old patterns by viewing their stuck situation from a new vantage point. In both *a turning point* and *a month of stolen light*, the plant matter came into our lives through new habits to look at land from a new vantage point, folding further into *The Hanged Man* reading.

a month of stolen light is a sculpture comprised of three digital images of the same giant hogweed flower opening to full bloom over three days. The digital images are printed on a hemp cotton rag paper and are mounted

with the printed image facing the wall. The flowers are hand-cut within their print and are falling upside-down and backwards out of their print.

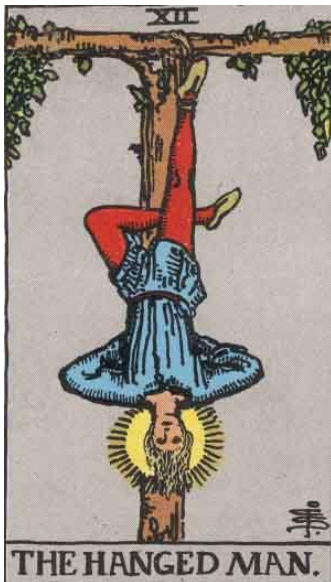


Figure 12. *The Hanged Man*.



Figure 11. *a turning point* (2022) (front) and *a month of stolen light* (2022) (back).

J: The most frightening dream I've ever had took place in the backyard of a newly constructed home, still covered in Tyvek, the yard was red clay and grey rocks. I approached a group of women standing in a circle and speaking reverently of a man. They each spoke in turn of how well he treated them, how they enjoyed his company, how important he was. But one woman stood out from the group because she was bent over and weeping into her hands. When her turn came, the women looked to her and invited her praise. She agreed, she loved him so much, he was so good, but what troubled her was that every time she thought of him and every time she dreamed of him, he appeared in her mind upside-down and backwards.



Figure 13. a month of stolen light (2022).

The giant hogweed flowers were photographed blown out (i.e., ultra-white whites) and are curated with intense lighting aimed at the flower. This sharp light is a visual mimic to the plant's sap that causes phytophotodermatitis, a painful skin inflammation that often results in blisters. *a month of stolen light* is a project about transplantation, waking up in a nightmare, and generational abuse. But it also raises questions about our impulse to see/apply these attributes within a plant.

J: What about making a photographic medium out of giant hogweed sap. It seems like it would work to burn an image into a material if applied through a screen or stencil, but the only material we know works is our own flesh. Maybe that doesn't seem worth it for the image?

J: Depends on the image. 70's performance art would do it.

J: The masculine urge to...

a month of stolen light talks about invasive species, a metaphor for settlers, finding themselves on foreign soil and going about growing without restraint. But we cannot be sure of the plant's involvement in decisions that led to it arriving, settling in, and thriving. It was brought overseas by those seeking to colonize their gardens with a stunning ornamental, a massive monument to Queen Anne's Lace. It's lovely, but it is dangerous, and it is spreading with impunity.

Our personal settler descent is the implied beneficiary of colonial-capitalist wealth and privileges. It does not matter if we can actually access these benefits, just believing that they are for us—and are worth aspiring toward, worth working for, and worth protecting—is how this system of bottom-up wealth accumulation functions smoothly. This is racism, capitalism, and nationalism at work. Our personal ethics require us to turn away from and delegitimize these practices of white supremacy, economic exploitation, and colonialism.

American historian Cedric J. Robinson speaks to the simultaneous emergence of racial hierarchies, capitalism, and nationalism in *Black Marxism*. Robinson begins with a salient analysis of the classes emerging in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, creating the conditions for wage slavery and, as a result, our contemporary Western racial and economic conditions:

In England, as an instance, representatives of the great landowners, and agrarian capitalism, in pursuit of their own social and financial destinies disciplined first the church and then the monarchy and finally "the masses" through enclosures, the Poor Laws, debtors' prisons, "transportation" (forced emigration), and the like...The delusions of medieval citizenship, which had been expanded into shared patrimony and had persisted for five centuries in western Europe as the single great leveling principle, were to be supplanted by race and (to use the German phrase) *Herrenvolk*, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The functions of these latter ideological constructions were related but different. Race became largely the rationalization for the domination, exploitation, and/or extermination of non-"Europeans" (including Slavs and Jews). (Robinson 26-27)

And, further:

Racialism insinuated not only medieval, feudal, and capitalist social structures, forms of property, and modes of production, but as well the very values and traditions of consciousness through which the peoples of these ages came to understand their worlds and their experiences. Western culture, constituting the structure from which European consciousness was appropriated, the structure in which social identities and perceptions were grounded in the past, transmitted a racialism that adapted to the political and material exigencies of the moment. In the medieval and feudal social orders of the European hinterland and the Mediterranean, racialism was substantiated by specific sets of exploitation through which particular caste or classes exploited and expropriated disparate peoples. (Robinson 66)

Learning Western history is a long story of conquering. It is told with a seductive suggestion that settlers and upholders of its story are its inheritors. Its narrative foundation is violence. When our first impulse is to be violent, or isolate, enclose, extract, we need to question our methodologies

and incentives. Through our work, we choose to interrogate our impulses towards land before they become an unsustainable habit.

a month of stolen light emerged from a habit: a daily walk through the park in our backyard along the same unofficial and unmaintained park path around the same time of day to photograph the daily growth of the same flower. In preparation of this work, we searched for resources and found that there are ad-hoc collectives of land activists who respond to giant hogweed outbreaks, organizing to remove them well before they go to seed. *a month of stolen light* could have taken shape as our daily walk through the park to seek out and destroy giant hogweed seedlings but by documenting the work, we were positioning ourselves as observers (Sontag). We are taking a step back to see the material take shape in front of us.

In conversation with *a turning point*, we are recognizing that invasive species disrupting local ecologies is a current situation in which we find ourselves unhappy. Our first gut reaction was perhaps to destroy the plants. If we were in America (and we very nearly are) we could just declare war on giant hogweed, its sap is a WMD. However, with this work, we want to consider that colonial-capitalists' strategies of ecological stewardship act more like maintenance, misunderstanding nature's natural state as static. What are options for supporting ecologies' homeostasis without robbing the land of its agency? What gifts could be gleaned from this disruption? Is doing nothing worse than doing something? Knowing how and when to intervene is not something to be taken lightly.

3.2: I didn't remember until I was there

"How many yeses can we spend in a day?" is a line from the poem-script of *a policy of neglect*, a single-channel video of a walk along a barricaded national parks path on the north shore of Prince Edward Island. The video is rendered in reverse and filmed with a hand-held camera, capturing the bounce of J's gate. The live walk was away from the ocean and back to the car, while the projected video depicts two backwards-walkers seeking out the ocean, and never quite arriving. This work emerges from an intuition spree during the final two weeks of August 2021, a new methodology we employed (and enjoyed) in making autobiographical work.

We travelled to Nova Scotia by car from Waterloo, Ontario to fulfill our Shantz Internship. Our program encouraged us to plan internships up to six weeks long but in the pandemic reality of social regulations changing on a dime, we found ourselves unable to forecast.

We decided to follow our intuition day to day while "abroad"; this came from the advice of our host artist and internship mentor, Angella Parsons. As a mid-career artist supporting her wife's J-O-B as a National Parks interpreter at Kejimikujik during the warm months, Angella did the legwork of hosting our internship with Kinuk at the Cottage. In the time between our gathering, she would see us off from their property with leading advice such as, "If I were headed down to Lunenburg, like you are, I would make it out to Blue Rocks." We went, as per her suggestion, and found a forage-able gathering of wild blueberries on the blue rocks. Stirring the bushes at dusk sent us running back to our car to escape the mosquitoes, but we made it out alive with the blueberries and made Angella the absolutely smallest pot of Blue (Berry) Rocks Jam Session, which we presented to her, and she immediately put in her purse, "I've got to keep that shit on me," while cracking a knowing smile. She

was the impetus for our down-to-the-minute impulsive trip to PEI, originally suggested so we would attend Charlottetown's *Art in the Open* festival, which we did, but the trip became otherwise resonant.

The day before heading out to PEI, we had spent an afternoon in a graveyard looking for a grave J had not seen since childhood, based on a very faded memory describing the stone: near a gate, perpendicular to the road, underwhelming. We tried just wandering, and that helped to locate many graves with the correct last name but not *the* grave. Following the memory down to the letter brought the grave to our feet. Most of the graveyard was parallel to the road, so we went to the perpendicular rows. The stone was only a footstone. The road was still noisy. J's memory was real.

Going to PEI was a trip of just-in-timing. We disembarked from the outskirts of the Halifax Regional Municipality very early in the morning, stopped for a meal in Truro, and drove our car onto the Northumberland Ferry moments before it disembarked from the pier—literally, we were just unbuckling our seatbelts and the boat was already in motion. Driving from the ferry, we arrived at our B&B just as the *Art in the Open* festival was beginning. This was our first trip to PEI together and we became sidetracked from our mission by a feeling: we should go check out the area where J's family cottage had been. It was known that the cottage was gone, long since sold and demolished. But J was remembering a long boardwalk to the beach that family often took. Maybe the boardwalk was still there. There were just enough daylight hours left for us to go explore. So, we did.

We drove north across the narrow island, wandering by car, reading street signs for potential resonance, guessing from maps in our phones, drip-fed clues from the older generation with deeper memories: the cottage was within a kilometer from the gates of the park, the boardwalk was accessed from a road whose name began with W. It became a real murder mystery.

We looked up the road. It was a dead end. Literally, a cul-de-sac. And there was a gate. It led to a path. The path led to a boardwalk. The boardwalk led to the ocean.

J: When I was a kid this boardwalk felt like forever. I did not know if that memory was deeply rooted in my experience of time, in the way society pathologizes my experience of time. I wanted to know, as an adult, if the boardwalk was actually long. Confirming this experience became important to me.

We walked along the boardwalk. The ocean gradually grew louder. We breached the dunes, and the ocean was deafening. The wind was whipping. It was not a touristy kind of beach, more like the kind of beach locals walk their dogs.

The boardwalk was indeed long, so long its maintenance had lapsed to the point that Park's Canada considered the path closed. It was astoundingly long, in fact. Looking at a map, the boardwalk is about half a kilometer long. The maintenance alone that it would require to upkeep this path is staggering.



Figure 14. Install view of a policy of neglect (2021).

- J: There's a connection to the boardwalk and *the old me, the old me*, don't you think?
- J: In that the boardwalk amongst tall grass looks like a part in hair?
- J: And the time taken to build these narrow paths. Board by board. Hair by hair. The time.
- J: We were standing on a similar boardwalk in Keji taking the photo in the introduction (*Figure 1*). These national parks wooden boardwalks remind me of wooden rollercoasters: arms in at all times, don't touch the plants, we are protecting you from yourself.
- J: More like protecting nature from you.
- J: More like preserving nature in a static state against its own nature.
- J: Either way, it is an example of a material experience that screams "separability."

4. We have to go back



Figure 15. The near small island of take only what you can carry (2022).

J: “Fiberglass is to drywall what mycelium is to soil, haha.” That metaphor doesn’t quite hold water... maybe like, “fiberglass is to modern finance capitalism what mycelium is to trees.” Doesn’t have the same flow.

Approaching this work required us to reorient our expectations constantly. The state of negotiation this reorientation produced is the arena in which these works were shaped. Using our lens of psychological co-constitution, we build a reciprocal relationship with the materials to tease out their embedded logics of production, to think through how ideas burrow into objects. We wonder if those embedded ideas emanate out, like some radioactive half-life, into the social.

Using 2x4 lumber from different eras shed light on a lineage of ideological development with material consequences. Why is a 2x4 today actually 1.5” x 3.5”?

There is an island in the exhibition housing a collection of sculptures, primarily composed of pine, plaster, drywall, and XPS insulation. These are the materials that constitute more than 90% of residential housing in so-called North America. Not universal but situated, of this place.

There are miniature rock wall enclosures, tea, and bird bones. An outlet may be visible, a bird’s nest concealed. This installation work is called *take only what you can carry*.

Some drywall is curved, brittle as it is. Other drywall is carved in a relief. Drywall does not carve well, it is reinforced with fiberglass, and caused our tools to skate and chip the surface unpredictably. The material used to transmit information across the earth in fractions of a second is the same used to keep our walls from crumbling, subsequently making change in the substrate painful. The poetry available here is lovely.



Figure 16. Near small island back view.

While the history of this development is interesting (Curtis) it amounts to a market solution that attempts to solve problems using speed, and maximal profits as its motivators. What is lost in this process of abstraction from its initial life as a bronchiole of the earth is any semblance of relationship. These poor anemic boards have been shaved, slimmed, and sculpted according to an ideology that *only* considers the tree's value in its death and subsequent commodification. We feel an affinity for this wood.

J: Is object oriented ontology just white people trying to re-explain animism using computer science language?

J: We white settlers have little cultural access to ideas of animism or even forms of spirituality that are not wrapped up in institutional power and/or someone's plans to get rich.

J: How can we hope to dismantle capitalism if we can't even dismantle a wall?



Figure 17. *The far small island of take only what you can carry (2022)*.

There are independent structures leaning against each other. The central most figurative shape is Alabaster, who we have already introduced. Alabaster has been framed into a structural wall. His studs are on 16". He has a secret cubby in the part of the vase that would be his shoulder blade. The cubby is housing an ash-coated pinecone from Pompeii.



Figure 18. *take only what you can carry (2022)*.

These sculptures are combinations of trajectories of redirected materials moving through space and time. Incorporating objects into physical narratives. Carrying a stack. Sourced from readily available building supplies, common units that constitute our ambient psycho-architectural texture. The emotional terroir of where we find ourselves is pressure treated. The care etched into and rubbed over these materials speaks to a want of care for the built world around us.

An orange *temporary condition sign* from the City of Waterloo is missing its letters. It is coated in a dry pigment, like Alabaster's pinecone. Its message reads: TRAIL CLOSED. The letters were hand-cut with a fret saw and spiral blades. Through the cut-out letters, a large image of a coat hook screwed into a stump is visible. This individual work we call *evidence of a habit*.

We don't know how to talk about these works as an installation before we install them in UWAG. The work is so ongoing we can't quite see it for what it is.



Figure 19. *evidence of a habit* (2022).

- J: I don't think we should cut them. They're too relatable for people. Remember when Ashley responded so strongly to them as a child of divorce? That's where their title comes from.
- J: And the short rock wall enclosures are echoed in *they didn't get stronger, they just got sore*. They speak to the interior of a colonially-constructed habitat. They remind us that our reality is constructed and not always amenable to care. Or art. Or whatever.
- J: *a policy of neglect* was filmed on an island.
- J: To me, they're about the future. They're embodiments of how we feel looking towards the dominant structures in which we were raised. We're putting them into materials and isolating sections, we're making brittle materials flexible, worked into, flaccid.
- J: The trebuchet structure does give a subtle ring of foundational violence.
- J: It'll come together. A big part of our process is gallery installation. So much happens then.

5. Ending here for now

Our exhibition is titled *Borrowers and Bullies*. We came to this title through conversation, a poetic phrase jumped out at us as we spoke about our work: *borrowed time, bullied land*.

But teasing it out, *borrowed* and *bullied*, with its past tense verbs, felt passive. Making them into nebulous nouns provokes more questions. *Do J&J think they are borrowers, or bullies?* We do feel we are on borrowed land, in borrowed homes, as tenants. We have both been bullies and we have both been bullied. This is the cycle of abuse.

J: To me, *Borrowers and Bullies* is a balance between gentle treaders and violent coercion. It's emblematic of the suburban and rural environments where we were raised. It speaks to our settler-descent, it speaks to parental abuse, it speaks to invasive species, it speaks to public schools, it speaks to the housing bubble, it speaks to the narratives we were raised to live into and our subsequent subjectivities.

J: But by naming something, it can be summoned without being physically present. Remember, naming is important. We've brought the borrowers and the bullies into the gallery and we've sat with them, and from this work, this very internalized work we've pursued, we're proceeding from what we've learned transformed.

This is the most personal work we have ever made. We're looking retrospectively at our conversations and how the work came into being, very slowly, revealing surprising connective tissues between ideas. To us, some work is complete, like the framed drawings, *they didn't get stronger, they just got sore*, and the hair piece, *the old me, the old me*, and the video, *a policy of neglect*. These feel well contained.

The soft sculpture, *a turning point*, and the giant hogweed prints, *a month of stolen light*, were combined in conversation, with the Hanged Man figure became a spectator to the flaccid flowers beaming bright light. These works are in conversation in the gallery, initially conceived as independent works, but together there is a mimic, a replication in form. Are either of these works complete? Are they only complete when together? Despite their scale, we suspect they are maquettes for ongoing work.

The installation of sculptures made of building materials, *take only what you can carry*, is the most perplexing work to us because it feels so alive. We suspect it's incomplete, that it's the seed of a series that is generating new ideas and forms daily. However, we decided to include it in our thesis exhibition because we know that once it is installed in UWAG, we will see it from another vantage point, and its ideas will either solidify and we will discover that it is indeed complete—to cue a viral mantra, *you are enough*—or we will see its potential for growth more clearly.

We work sculpturally for a love of materials. One needs only to look at *the old me, the old me's* material list to see. We work sculpturally for the physical constraints of materials, to collaborate with their qualities, to learn through making, and to engage directly in the material world through which our subjectivities are constituted, what Jason Hickel terms the economy:



Figure 20. In-progress installation in UWAG.

Degrowth provides a way for us to approach this challenge. It stands for de-colonization, of both lands and peoples and even our minds. It stands for the de-enclosure of commons, the de-commodification of public goods, and the de-intensification of work and life. It stands for the de-thingification of humans and nature, and the de-escalation of ecological crisis. Degrowth begins as a process of taking less. But in the end, it opens up whole vistas of possibility. It moves us from scarcity to abundance, from extraction to regeneration, from dominion to reciprocity, and from loneliness and separation to connection with a world that's fizzing with life.

Ultimately, what we call 'the economy' is our material relationship with each other and with the rest of the living world. We must ask ourselves: what do we want that relationship to be like? Do we want it to be about domination and extraction? Or do we want it to be about reciprocity and care? (Hickel 289-290)

We see economic power as one of the largest life-configuring forces in the contemporary moment. Ultimately, it must be re-imagined in order for new kinds of relationships to be possible. To see our ethics echoed in western economic scholarship is hopeful to us. It helps us to imagine that there is a future.



Figure 21. Completed installation in UWAG.

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