

rinse and repeat

an exhibition of relational collaboration in sculpture, photography, and performance.

by

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in

Studio Art

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this 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.

Abstract

rinse and repeat is a collaborative thesis exhibition of art created by my plant collaborators and I that uses the visual language of sculpture, photography, performance, audio narratives, and collaboration to question the devaluation of life within imperial-capitalist culture. I work intimately with Fungi and Moss through attempts at *listenings* to seek to unlearn individualism and apparatus of separation. This thesis exhibition consists of both indoor and outdoor components, as collaboration with the Land is vital to redefining the personhood or beinghood of autonomous beings and the white-cube gallery is an inhospitable environment for my collaborators. Materials range from gathered wooden limbs to Soil, sawdust, plywood, copper gilding, gold gilding, and photography on paper, as well as Moss and Fungi. Each artwork has undergone a transformative process through iterative choices that lean towards interspecies collaboration and away from scientific-mechanistic indoctrination. By working alongside different Fungi and Mosses, I have come to realize that my upbringing in the imperial-capitalist system was unethical, violent, and delusional. The breadth of my research is sustained through thoughtful actions that have real life consequences, as all life is intrinsically linked and ethically bound together. The aim of this thesis is to address alienating ways of living, making, and behaving, and extending collaboration to gallery visitors through walking tours and performance.

This accompanying support paper has three sections that articulate artistic methodology and theoretical contexts for the thesis artwork. The first section, “Intangible Transference: A Reevaluation of *Beinghood*”, is a mixture of descriptions, reflections, and conceptual underpinnings about each artwork. Forming the pieces began with simply connecting to beings in habitats, recording auditory reflections of site-specific areas, constructing, or sculpting habitats, and taking meditative walks through the in-between spaces of the urban and peri-urban

landscape. This research is inclusive of experiencing and observing relationships in the more-than-human world, making vessels for collaborators, extensively reading and learning about and from Moss, Fungi, decolonization, and habitats, growing Fungi and Moss in multiple ways, and continually processing and synthesizing the many failures that come with such a non-linear practice. In this work I attempt to develop interrelation between decolonial practices, relational ways of knowing, and climate change. Through this work I seek to reevaluate beinghood as an essential facet for moving through the climate crisis. Relational ways of knowing and living are intrinsic to the Indigenous Nations of the Turtle Island and the Sámi people of Sápmi. In weaving together the writings of Robin Wall Kimmerer, Leo Killsback, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Merlin Sheldrake, a comprehensive understanding of relational ways of living works towards an appreciation for the complexities of interspecies life. These connective ways of living are supported by the theoretical writings of Achille Mbembe, Kathryn Yusoff, David Graeber, and Ariella Azoulay by contemplating necropolitics, white geologies, imperial archives, and imperial taxonomy.

The second section of the paper, “Methodology on the Haldimand Tract”, is an overview of the methods I applied in making the thesis artworks, and how certain choices became necessary. Lastly, in the section “Contemporary Practices as a form of Oneness,” I discuss establishing *listening* as a foundational practice to building interspecies bonds through the writings of Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, and Katya García-Antón and Liv Brissach. By examining the artistic works of Paula Kramer and Máret Anne Sara, I unfold an understanding of what *listening* is, leading to a synthesis of how deeply embedded ritual is in art, and how art blurs the lines of living with intention.

Acknowledgments

Land Acknowledgement

This Land does not belong to anyone. Land has an inherent autonomy as it has its own spirit, personality, and ways of life. My upbringing and belonging to this Land are one of being in-between. I do not belong here because of my colonial ancestry, but I am also accepted and belong to the Land as a person born on Turtle Island, or specifically in the boreal forest known as amiskwacîwâskahikan. Amiskwacîwâskahikan was colonially renamed Fort Edmonton and then later shortened to Edmonton, Alberta. In this name change, a sense of entitlement and owning came from the British and British colonial subjects. Turtle Island cannot be owned, just as (h)umans, Animals, and all beings whether living or non-living cannot be owned. To be owned is to be a resource, slave, subject, object, and non-being. The rightful heirs of this Land – meaning those with an honourable purpose, treaty, and respect for Turtle Island – are the Indigenous nations that have lived here since time immemorial. The governments of Canada and all corporations and businesses that consider this Land simply as resource and continually take from it rape and defile with no consideration of future generations. This is criminal. Give back what you never owned.

I, Stephanie Florence, acknowledge how I have benefitted as a settler in the Indigenous Land, amiskwacîwâskahikan, which is located on Treaty 6 territory, the traditional Lands of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. amiskwacîwâskahikan is home to a diverse range of Indigenous nations and peoples, including the nêhiyawak / Cree, Niitsitapi / Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Haudenosaunee / Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway / Sauteaux / Anishinaabeg, Tsuut'ina, and Inuit. I am committed to combating colonization, capitalism, racism, ableism, and cis-hetero-patriarchy by

acknowledging my inherent privilege as a white Canadian settler. I strive to make inclusive safe spaces for all perspectives.

Subsequently, I do not believe the Canadian federal government or Crown has ever attempted to act with honour in any legal standing with Indigenous peoples, as Specific Claims and Comprehensive Land Claims Agreements, also known as Modern Treaties, are continuously broken. The legacies of the “Doctrine of Discovery” and terra nullius are racist, antiquated forms of legal standing that do not give the colonial-Canadian-state a right to rule, discriminate, steal, and murder Indigenous peoples, their Lands, and their sovereignty.

Currently, I am completing my MFA research and thesis at the University of Waterloo which is located on the Haldimand Tract – the traditional Lands of the Attawandaron, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. Only 48,000 acres remain of the original 950,000 acres of the Haldimand Tract.

As a second-generation Canadian, I am grateful to the nations of Turtle Island and believe they are the rightful guardians and keepers of the Land I have grown up on. I believe they should be consulted and considered in every decision that affects Land and Kin. I stand in solidarity with all Treaty peoples that further break down racism and colonialism that is systemically deeply embedded in so-called Canada.

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I also need to thank my cohort for their support and the many wise words, reminders, and check-ins that produced a nutritious environment for all of us to grow. Thank you, Brent, for being your charismatic self and for being the studio guardian in the morning, afternoon, and night. Thank you, Sarah, for always being a leader in our group and for introducing me to the Staircase. Clara, thank you for the many coffees and conversations; I still want to meet your daughter. Christine, thank you for enlightening the room with your humour.

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Lastly but most of all, I want to thank my partner Eric and my two furry family members Kiki and Oki. I am so grateful for the support and love that only my people can give me. Thank you, Kiki, for cuddling me at night and yowling at me to take breaks when writing. Eric, thank you for your generosity in caring for me when I was in pain, and unable to take care of myself. Oki, thank you for being fluffy and funny all the time.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to all the beings that are silenced, eliminated, and dominated by colonial structures, specifically to the Moss and Fungi I have collaborated with and to all the wood chips that nested in my hair and lungs.

In dedication to my family members who could not see a way through the chaotic trauma of life and sought the earth in solace.



Fig 1: Moss and Liverwort in the Region of Waterloo.

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Introduction to rinse and repeat

Communing with a More-than-(h)uman Collaborator: Listenings

Step one: *find a safe place for you and your collaborator*

Step Two: *Ground yourself, connect to the present moment through ritual breath work and feeling the ground beneath you. If this is new to you, visualize your feet having roots that extend into the ground.*

Step Three: *Neutralize your energy, breathe in the energy around you and breathe out the energy that does not belong to you. If worries, responsibilities, or thoughts of people come into your mind or you are feeling this in your body, take the time to let it go. Allow the beings around you to guide you and the wind to take it away.*

Step four: *Reach out with your mind, spirit, and intent to the beings around you. If you have a specific collaborator in mind, connect to this being.*

Step five: *Continue the connection and attempt to commune while listening to their needs and your own. If you think in words, do not expect a species that does not use language to talk back to you. Beings without verbal and written languages use energetic speak, impressions, and imagery.*

Intangible Transference: A Reevaluation of *Beinghood*

If you look into an Animal's eyes or down a Plant's stem, do you see a being, subject, or resource? When viewing the Landscape in Canada, do you see a world abundant in food, a future of Land alteration, or Land rich with potential profit?¹ These questions are essential to considering ethical behaviours and ways of living, as all beings and non-beings on the planet continue deeper down the path of the "Sixth Mass Extinction Event."² Ethics and ethical behaviour can be defined by many dimensions, and further complicated by values, evaluation, and identity.

My thesis exhibition tackles a subject matter close to my heart and is complicated by my identity. I am a being, a white (h)uman from a colonized society, a non-binary pansexual, a neurodiverse person, a Mammal, and an Earthling.³ These are parts of my identity that only partially influence my values while also drive my artwork and special interests. I am constantly learning, seeking to collectively redefine perceptions of matter and being, because treating a living being as a resource is criminal. This process is complicated by my indoctrination as a child of imperial-capitalism in the Canadian context and my experiences as a neurodivergent person.⁴

¹ Land is spelled with a capital "L" to emphasize that it is not a resource but instead a being that has been devalued to the point of ownership. To give something a capital letter is a small gesture and it does not change the devaluation that occurs daily, but it draws attention to Land as a being. The words Plant and Animal are offered this same respect.

² For a definition of the term see: Kolbert, *Sixth Mass Extinction*, 187.

³ I am using (h)uman instead of human or Human through this paper to attempt – physically and mentally – to go against the ingrained grammars of the colonially language of English, which has "required the murder of local dialects (Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, 46). (h)umans are not lesser or greater than all the beings, matter, and non-matter on this planet. More-than-(h)uman is a linguistic attempt to revalue beings that are not (h)uman. Instead of using (h)uman-centered language such as non-(h)uman or Latin taxonomic terms that both show an evaluation of beings as colonial subjects to be cataloged based on differences, rarity, and kind (Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, 10). This again points to the valuation of beings based within the archive and hierarchy that Western society proclaims. "Unlearning" is attempting the "initial refusal of dispossession" which means reframing our concept of (h)uman (Azoulay, 21).

⁴ The imperial capitalist system is mentioned throughout this support paper in order to point to specific socio-economic and political structures and processes that describe the ways in which modern Western world has

My material explorations through this thesis work are fraught with issues that come from growing up within capitalist-imperial ideology and anxious need to address complex histories. This is a struggle I address head-on through action. The mistakes and missteps that I take are part of what I must do to work through the lack of knowledge that has been passed on to me through the extractive capitalist education system. My thesis is a self-initiated step towards a hopeful new identity as an interspecies citizen and relational collaborator.

In my thesis, *rinse and repeat*, I attempt to collaborate with Moss and Fungi to make art. At times these are successful collaborations and at other times the success is questionable due to my evident power over these beings. This brings all my actions into question through my process-based methodology, and it often leaves me paralyzed to make decisions and choices. All of this is part of the process.

My research into relational living further informs my work process and accountability. The values and ontologies of the Indigenous nations of the Turtle Island, the Sámi people of Sápmi, and Moss and Fungi cultures, as well as the relational art practices of Paula Kramer and Máret Anne Sara are my touchstones.⁵ *Listening* is a crucial element, as is thinking about art as

developed since the 18th century, or the time of the so-called modern imperial age. More specifically, the term refers to Canada and its part in this imperial, capitalist world system. Although imperialism and capitalism did not begin in Canada, the country grew out of the oppression that came from the many European countries over hundreds of years of imperial conquest. My use of these words therefore refers to Canada's place in this long process. As historians Immanuel Wallerstein and Samir Amin have argued, the capitalist world system we are currently living in, is a complex system of oppression which depends on creating hierarchies to control human population and the natural world to create wealth, it thrives on alienation from life-giving and nurturing processes, and turns all Beings into objects of its extractive processes. For more information see: Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*; Samir Amin, *Global History: A View from the South*.

⁵ This content is grounded by the writings of Leanne Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*; Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* and *Gathering Moss*; Karen Barad, "Post(h)umanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter."; Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures*; Katya García-Antón and Liv Brissach, "When the Red Calves Arrive, the Hope Returns. Sámi Healing and Senate Sovereignty in Máret Anne Sara's Practice."

ritual and as a magnification of living with intention.⁶ Necropolitics, white geologies, imperial archives, and imperial taxonomy, all of which speak of the scientific-mechanistic regime, are undercurrents.⁷ Most significantly, my art practice has shifted from focusing on (h)uman manipulation of beings towards an interspecies dialogue that releases control to centripetal forces of “matter” and “mattering.”⁸ Caring is not enough and living ethically is not enough; collective bonds through action must be made to overcome the constrictive intergenerational norms of imperial-capitalism.

The artworks in my thesis exhibition take place both inside and outside the gallery. As the gallery is part of the art market and a broader capitalist system, I found it vital to maintain the majority of my work outdoors. Each artwork is collaborative and therefore needs to remain autonomous and outside the institutions that render artwork into products. Listeners or participants can engage with the Land directly and be given an opportunity to question the ongoing imperialist-capitalist structures of the university campus – and colonial-settler society more broadly – in relation to the Land. The colonized Land of the campus is an active participant in my art, allowing for audio and video interventions, sculptures that house Moss and Fungi, and interactive engagement with audiences through listening.

A vital factor of this exhibition was the need to avoid forcing my collaborators to live in a hostile environment. As indoor (h)uman environments lack Wind with nutrient deposits, moisture or dew, and connection to an ecosystem, it would be cruel to bring Mosses into the gallery. Yet, another reason for my artworks to remain outdoors, away from the gallery setting.

⁶ I define *listening* or *listenings* as the action of being present with the collective. It goes beyond using one’s ears to classically hear, instead being present and aware of presence, energy, matter, and being. See Paula Kramer, “Bodies, Rivers, Rocks and Trees: Meeting agentic materiality in contemporary outdoor dance practices” for an expansion of receptivity (86).

⁷ See Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 38; Yusoff, 4; and Azoulay, 34.

⁸ See Barad, 817.

With the proper care, mycelium can flourish indoors, although they will eventually need to grow larger and connect to different ecosystems. Furthermore, the gallery becomes a connecting hub between the (h)uman world and the relational ecosystem that is introduced through the *listenings* and walking tours. The role of the gallery is altered from a location that exists to exhibit into a collaborative-dialogical space that embraces community discussion and participation with all beings and matter.



Fig 2. Scott Lee, *rinse and repeat*, view of exhibition including *the apparatus* and *personnel growth*, 2023.

The indoor exhibition includes a collection of documentation images from my process, walks, and research over the last five semesters (Fig.2). Spanning over two walls is the artwork *Personnel Growth*, which connects both outdoor and indoor studio practices to the gallery audience. The photos have been divided into five categories – Moss, Fungi, *Dandehead* series, *Is it Exponential Growth or Rapid Decay?* series, and my studio flow – which have been arranged as a wall collage in an arch or semi-circular form with different sized images. As the sincerity of my MFA thesis has come from the practice of action and reflection, it has become critical for me

to offer peeks into the documented process. As participants engage in walking tours (explained below), they can send pictures to myself that will be printed and added to *Personnel Growth* as the exhibition carries on. This living installation becomes more than a document, burgeoning into a living social sculpture that embraces the complexity of time, space, and community.

When walking into Gallery Two, the first artwork that appears is *The Apparatus*. One portion of the artwork is a horizontally-hanging plywood ring, three feet in diameter, gilded with copper leaf. Mirroring it below is another plywood ring with copper and gold gilding. Within the inner area of the lower ring are damp Oyster Mushroom spawn in wood shavings. On top of the copper and gold gilding are Potato batteries that form a circle around the Oyster Mushrooms. The gilding metals are conductors that amplify the Oyster Mushrooms' electrical impulses while also allowing conductance from the Potato batteries to join the Mushroom spawn. Electrical impulses have two major effects on Mushrooms, as electrical spikes form the words Mushrooms use to communicate to one another, while also providing extra energy for Fungi growth.⁹



Fig 3. Christine Flammer, *rinse and repeat*, during the *listening with the apparatus*, 2023.



Fig 4. Scott Lee, *rinse and repeat*, view of exhibition including *the apparatus*, 2023.

⁹ See Adamatzky in "Language of fungi derived from their electrical spiking activity" about communication in four different mushroom species.



Fig 2. Stephanie Florence, Interactive Map of the University of Waterloo Campus, 2023.

My first attempt at “*listening*” brought me from making artwork indoors to working in an ecosystem.¹⁰ In *fractured listening*, I spent over 40 hours in the second-growth forest near Parking Lot C at the University of Waterloo (Fig. 2).¹¹ Likewise, I encourage participants to connect to the Landscape through layered experiences of listening as they walk, via recordings of overlaid continuums of sounds, thus generating a multi-layered input of sensations. Together, they draw attention to the repression of Land, the complexity of time, and Indigenous and Kinfolk histories.¹²

The poem in the audio-recording reflects on the physical features of the Parking Lot C: the stream, woods, and cracked pavement (see Appendix, *fractured listening*). The cracked pavement became a literal example of how the Land and growing vegetal beings are reclaiming

¹⁰ Kimmerer, Kramer, and Simpson have a shared goal in decolonization and revaluing the knowledges and beliefs of cultures that have been attempted to be eliminated by white-colonial pursuits.

¹¹ See University of Waterloo Archives. Ephemeral Files Collection. Campus Guides. The oldest map in the collection is a drawn map from a 1958 aerial image. Retrieved November 2022 then again in March 2023.

¹² See Simpson and Killsback, “Indigenous Perceptions of Time: Decolonizing Theory, World History, and the Fates of Human Societies” for an immersive read on the repression of Indigenous histories and views of time (127); specifically for this research, the Attawandaron, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee nations on the Haldimand Tract.

the (h)umanized Landscape. Fungi have lived on this Earth for 2.4 billion years and Mosses evolved to terraform the Land around 470 million years ago.¹³ Moss and Fungi are active participants in producing the complex ecosystems that (h)umans need to survive and ironically that some (h)uman groups seem bent on destroying.¹⁴ The audio artworks are an attempt at understanding these deep geologic eras, conveying a different sense of space and time.

When spending time with cultures like Moss and Fungi that so greatly oppose the imperial-capitalist agenda, I have learnt the vital need to slow down and recuperate while being generous to the other beings around me. I recognized that many species function on a different time scale than (h)umans. I have become attuned to colonies of Moss and Fungi, see that they reproduce at high rates, and are sensitive to their environmental conditions in ways that (h)umans are not. Moss can live through extreme conditions, weather patterns, and go dormant if the conditions are too much, whereas Mycelium are sensitive beings that need to live in dark, decaying, moist spaces.¹⁵

In the urbanized Landscape, Moss and Fungi are unwanted, which leads to people eradicating them from their “property”.¹⁶ The question of what happens to displaced species due to (h)uman intervention informs *Quarters or Cradles?* and *displaced centers* (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). With plywood, reclaimed lumber, and wacky wood¹⁷, I constructed two large mobile wheels that

¹³ See Bengston, “Fungus-Like Mycelial Fossils in 2.4-Billion-Year-Old Vesicular Basalt”, 1; Reboledo “Moss Transcription Factors Regulating Development and Defense Responses to Stress”, 1; and Sheldrake, 4.

¹⁴ Yusoff calls the non-(h)uman perception of time “geologic time” to expand the concept of (h)umanity’s definition of matter and mattering. Peter Wohlleben in *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World* notes how Fungi, Lichens, Trees, Mosses, and Matter all have different concepts of geologic time, but the beings living collectively are all valued by each relational member for their role (4).

¹⁵ See Kimmerer in *Gathering Moss* 37, 42, and Sheldrake, 3-5. I use Fungi, Mycelium, and Mushrooms interchangeably. In *Gathering Moss*, Kimmerer recounts how Moss fosters ecological benefits for the Trees, Plants, and Fungi surrounding it by slowly releasing water vapour. As the vapour releases, it produces a microclimate of fog that has symbiotic effects maintaining ecosystems (142).

¹⁶ Property is in quotations as the habitat is reduced to capitalist real estate instead of valuing the Land, beings, and Earth as intricate members of interconnected life.

¹⁷ Wacky wood is a bendable or wiggly plywood where the grains all face the same direction which makes it curve in one specific direction.

had space within the inner circle for Moss and Fungi to grow. Several questions arose in this process, regarding my lack of understanding of the collective ties and needs of the Moss and Fungi. Why do Moss and Fungi need to be in a mobile structure? Why do the Moss and Fungi need habitats outside of their chosen colonies and would they live well upside down? Am I constructing these for my ego or for these beings? These questions indicate that my work was more important than the beings, which was the opposite of my intent. Such separation from “the animal or vegetal world” acts as a catalyst for treating “the Earth that humans inhabit ... [as] a mere passive object” to be exploited and commodified. This aligns with the imperial-capitalist war that “pits species against one another, and nature against human beings”¹⁸ and devalues beings to become capitalist “automatons”.¹⁹



Fig 3. Stephanie Florence, *Quarters or Cradles? And displaced centers*, 2023.



Fig 4. Stephanie Florence, *Quarters or Cradles? And displaced centers*, 2023.

¹⁸ See Mbembe, 15.

¹⁹ See David Graeber in “Turning Modes of Production Inside Out: On Why Capitalism Is a Transformation of Slavery”, where he examines social reproduction as a long-term capitalist program that separates the homelife and school system to undermine collectivist ties and social responsibility (69, 71, 75). Graeber notes that as competition increases in the imperial-capitalist project, so does the violence towards individuals or groups that have been devalued, again pointing to the imperial-conceptual apparatus of separation and valuation (63, 76). Similarly, Sheldrake emphasizes that organisms are used functionally as resources, which produces a cyclical effect of devaluation leading to a rationalized mistreatment of living beings as machines or objects (212). As competition increases in the imperial-capitalist project, so does the violence towards individuals or groups pointing to the imperial-conceptual apparatus of separation and valuation.

Addressing these ethical concerns, I turned the large mobile wheels into quarters or halves, now closer in appearance to rocking gardening beds, which lets the Fungi and Moss grow better. Furthermore, unwanted Moss can be collected and rehabilitated while the Fungi can slowly become one with the wheel, decomposing the wheel while gaining nutrients.²⁰

I have often found that secondary alterations were steps towards being a better interspecies citizen and collaborator. However, there is still the issue of why the Moss and Fungi need to be in these cradles at all, and why do they need to be taken out of their original habitats? These questions are vital to understanding the cultural ritual power over othered beings in imperial-capitalist society.

At Risk Moss

- *Mosses that are devalued and unwanted.*
- *Mosses that are being displaced by (h)uman activity.*
- *Mosses that could be transferred to new areas of growth instead of drying up and dying.*
 - *Mosses that have Fungus Gnats.*
 - *Mosses that are growing on (h)uman dwellings.*

As Robin Kimmerer shows in *Braiding Sweetgrass* and *Gathering Moss*, Pecans, Strawberries, Tress, Sweetgrass, and Moss represent essential knowledge systems that need to be revalued; the reduction of “a nonhuman being to an it, or it must be gendered, inappropriately, as a he or a she” becomes a precedent for devaluation through the English language and through the

²⁰ Mosses are largely unwanted in the urbanized landscape, on lawns, and in gardens. This makes little to no sense in the current climate crisis as Moss captures moisture and releases it to produce microclimates. This has led me to rescuing Moss from individual’s roofs, the campus, and Moss in forests that near the end of their life cycle on drying barks.

capitalist economy.²¹ Acknowledging the value, worth, and *beinghood* of one another as more than just an individual, but instead as a greater collective strengthens intergenerational ties and intentional living.²² Revaluation of *beinghood* in my artwork is formed through *listenings* that are shared with the (h)uman collective or potential interspecies citizens.

With shared citizenship in mind, questions of consent are carefully considered in my thesis. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson iterates that “consent” is ingrained in reciprocal recognition as a “web of ethical relationships” that establishes “relational terms set out in diplomacy”.²³ I resist scientific-mechanistic ways by collecting Tree limbs to use for sculptures, taking long walks and sitting in forests to listen, collecting at-risk Moss, making relational observations on walks, and asking questions of people who know more than me. *listenings* is an action I ask participants to attempt during the workshops and walking tours as it is vital that I am not the only individual listening. As beings on an interconnected planet, it does not serve us or the entanglement of all matter to shut ourselves off and away from connected consciousness and energetic connections. If the goals of colonization are disconnection and dispossession, then the ultimate disruption in this operation is to find deep and meaningful connections which break cycles of shame and devaluation.²⁴ When walking on the grounds, I will also ask individuals to collect materials or take pictures that will be installed in the growing installation *Personnel*

²¹ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 56 and 11, 22, 144, 156, and Kimmerer, *Gathering Moss*, 143.

²² See Simpson, 184. *Beinghood* is a play on the word personhood. *Beinghood* can be seen as the state of existing or recognition of existence as a being. Personhood is synonymous with a (h)uman individual and therefore *beinghood* is synonymous with being in existence.

²³ See Simpson, 180-5. Simpson argues that the antithesis of dispossession is “interconnection and interdependence” as the “radical resurgent organizing” of Indigenous peoples and the “radical refusal” of a Canadian occupation, all of which are vital to rebuilding an identity outside the colonial lens. In essence, reciprocal recognition is the opposite of and challenges the ethicality of the Canadian-colonial-state enforcing Treaties on Indigenous peoples. The regulation of defining Indigenous identity is significant as the Canadian colonial state imposes a separation of Indigenous peoples from Canadian citizens through identity laws. The purpose of this is to not give Indigenous peoples agency or sovereignty, but instead to impose a power imbalance which continues the dispossession of Indigenous Land, resources, ways of life, and Kinfolk relations.

²⁴ See Simpson, 188.

Growth in the gallery, to demonstrate the active collective voice. *Personnel Growth* is thus a living social sculpture that connects the documented process of my work through the last two years with a dialogical approach to collective action and art making.

The website with an interactive campus map employs embedded links to audio and video files placed on specific sites around campus (See Appendix, *listenings*). The website plays through five digitally drawn images that progress through a timeline inspired by a campus map drawn in 1958 that I located in the University of Waterloo Archives (Fig 5). The final interactive map is a guide for listeners to walk the colonized campus paths towards the areas recuperating from (h)uman activity (Fig 2). The University is situated on a small portion of the Haldimand Tract of Turtle Island that was taken first taken from Haudenosaunee, given back to them, then taken again for farming before becoming the sprawling campus. In the interactive map, I have altered the imagery of the map to represent this criminal activity of not upholding Treaties.²⁵

²⁵ See the Government of Canada in “Specific Claims” and “Modern Treaties”. Specific Claims deal with colonial crimes located in history that are ongoing. Currently, there are “250 accepted for negotiation,” “71 claims before the Specific Claims Tribunal,” and “160 specific claims” under current review. In contrast, Comprehensive Land Claim Agreements are modern treaties occurring after 1975, *Calder et al. v. Attorney-General of British Columbia*. I have cited the government of Canada website, which interestingly only considers these crimes against Indigenous Nations as “wrong-doings” and calls for fair settlements. Fair settlements should include giving back stolen land with actions to restore the habitats and kinfolk without threat of further displacement or destruction. See Monchalin, *The Colonial Problem: an Indigenous Perspective on Crime and Injustice in Canada*, 61-5. These antiquated laws were founded in 1493 through a papal bull – a document ordered by Pope Alexander VI – for the king of Spain. The all-consuming act of this Christian and Catholic order was to further refute the autonomy and sovereignty of any non-white, non-Christian, non-(h)uman being. The depth of murderous intent and genocide that has occurred in Canada goes beyond the scope of this support paper, however, there are numerous accounts from Indigenous historians, knowledge keepers, documentarians, and individuals who continually live under the unwavering weight of traumas caused by European colonial exploits. Please see the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*, Patrick Wolfe’s definition of colonial and cultural genocide, and Alanis Obomsawin’s documentary *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* for factual and rigorous forms of information about the crimes of the Canadian colonial state.

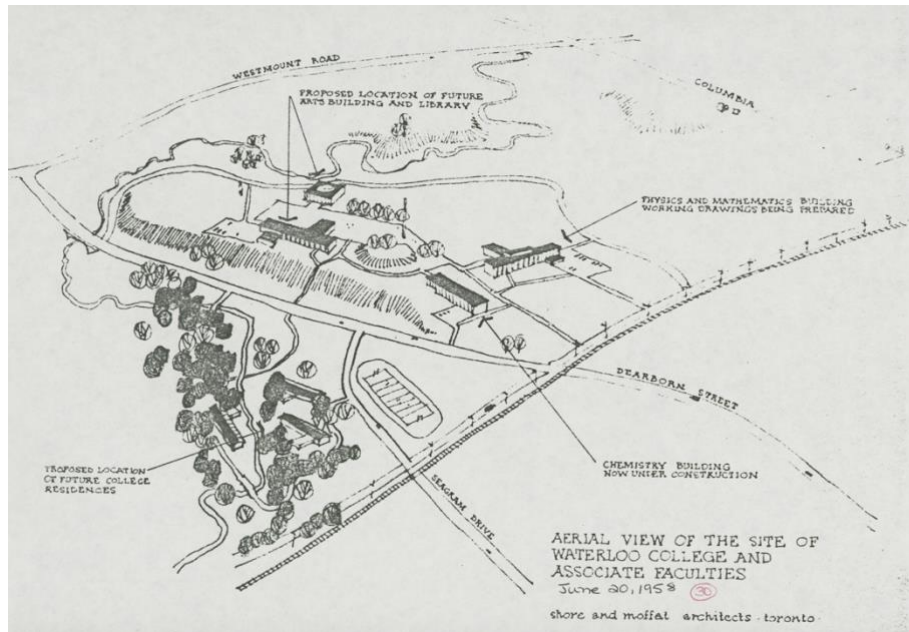


Fig 5. Campus Map from 1958 from Archives, retrieved March 2023 from University of Waterloo Archives. Ephemeral Files Collection. Campus Guides.

Specifically, I have photoshopped trees on the interactive map that look like Moss to symbolize the displaced Indigenous Nations, repressed histories, and timelines. These maps (and written histories of western society) point to the mass repression of Indigenous and Kinkfolk cultures.²⁶ Furthermore, the audio narrative associated with each site employs recorded poetry spoken on site mixed with singing and sounds from that specific location. The poetic stories are a mix of dreamlike recollections, memory narratives, and rude awakenings that were written over the course of two years. These combine with the real-time auditory walking that happens enroute and at these locations. Collectively they function as a metaphor for the unknowableness of time in spaces where interdependent life entangles (Fig. 6). This, in turn, points to and disrupts the hierarchy of languages and histories of colonial cultures.²⁷

²⁶ See Yusoff, 2 and Mignolo, 6. These valuations are conveyed through social reproduction and indoctrination in language, science, and imperial-taxonomy. Cultures that are unaccepted by the white-colonial hegemonic norms are seen as being on the boundaries or borders of society.

²⁷ See Yusoff's definition of "inhuman matter", 7.



Fig 6. Moss on fallen Tree in the Region of Waterloo. Picture taken during a walk and listening.

As listeners walk through the Landscape, they will encounter physical artworks integrated into the Land, some more obviously placed than others as interventions and intrusions. One of these is *offering*, which went through a transformational process. When I began, it was originally named *Extracting Dis-place* and involved sculpting wooden limbs of trees into amorphous Animal limbs (Fig. 7). I initially hung the wooden limbs – of *Extracting Dis-place* – with steel cable in a studio in the Fine Arts department in East Campus Hall. However, this lacked the connection to the Landscape that was needed for a clear understanding of the power imbalances that affect the Land, the Water, the Kinfolk, the Plant-beings, the Animal-beings, the Invertebrate-beings, and Bacterial-beings. The transformed artwork, *offering*, has a clear reflection of giving back to the Land and relational beings in the area which the first iteration lacked.



Fig 7. *Extracting Dis-place*, the first iteration of *offering*.

I also did an action of care with the Maple Trees' sawdust produced in the sculpting of the limbs. I wore a mask and goggles to protect my eyes and lungs while repetitively hugging and embracing the sawdust. Upon reflection, I found this action to be problematic as it was still embroiled in the asymmetric relationship of my power over another being; an action that was about the care given following the violence of a being that was cut down and the violence of sculpting the wood with a grinder. Achille Mbembe shows how, “the world is no longer considered an artifact that humans make,”²⁸ and the “indifference to objective signs of cruelty” signal the disposability of life and meaninglessness of death.²⁹ When colonial violence occurs in

²⁸ See Mbembe's explanation of how these dynamics are ingrained in (h)uman histories and more-than-(h)uman worlds. Power relationships are produced in all facets of life under the regime, but is especially prevalent in race, species, and technology, and discrimination enforces beings to be subjects of death and necropolitics. Mbembe articulates that racism is the driving force of necropolitical power to determine the value of beings through “organized destruction, for a sacrificial economy.” Cultural discrimination and elimination enforce a white lens of (h)uman-centric epistemologies and (h)uman-centered histories, (13, 24, 40).

²⁹ See Mbembe, 38.

a habitual way, “nobody bears the slightest feeling of responsibility or justice” for death and life. How then am I treating the Maple Tree limbs any differently than the (h)umans who cut down the being?

I gave the sculpted limbs back to the ecosystem of the Land to become nutrition and balance for the entire community, intending to acknowledge the autonomy and worth of the Maple Tree limbs. I renamed the work *offering* (Fig. 8 and 9). I also added Moss to the cracks in the sculptures, in an effort to re-habitate the Moss within the Waterloo Landscape. I did this in the spirit of exchange, a gift economy that creates – as Kimmerer explains – a set of relationships.³⁰ The circular and regenerative aspects of a gift economy work to establish ecologies of habitats. The artwork has now become more of a habitat than a product, but the extractive violence that was done upon it cannot be undone. Nature is violent and gaining energy to survive is violent, however, when (h)umans take more than they need to survive without caring for the balance in the web of life, then it is purely greed. Living beings like the Maple Trees become assets for control and domination.³¹ Unlike the hierarchy entrenched in late-capitalist societies, Nature has checks and balances; when something in the ecosystem is damaged or fails there can be severe consequences for the whole web of life. Moss, Fungi, and beings of decay reclaim *offering* which in turn gives back to the ecosystem. My hope is that these limbs become a moment of thoughtful pondering during the walking tour.

³⁰ See Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 28. A gift economy works in opposition to a capitalist society as it does not force hierarchy on the beings touched by it and labour is given free for the collective good.

³¹ Assets could include minerals, Water, Trees, metals, oil, labour, infrastructure, capital investments, stock markets, and Animal bodies.



Fig 8. Stephanie Florence, Details from the artwork *offering* out in the Land near the University campus, 2023.

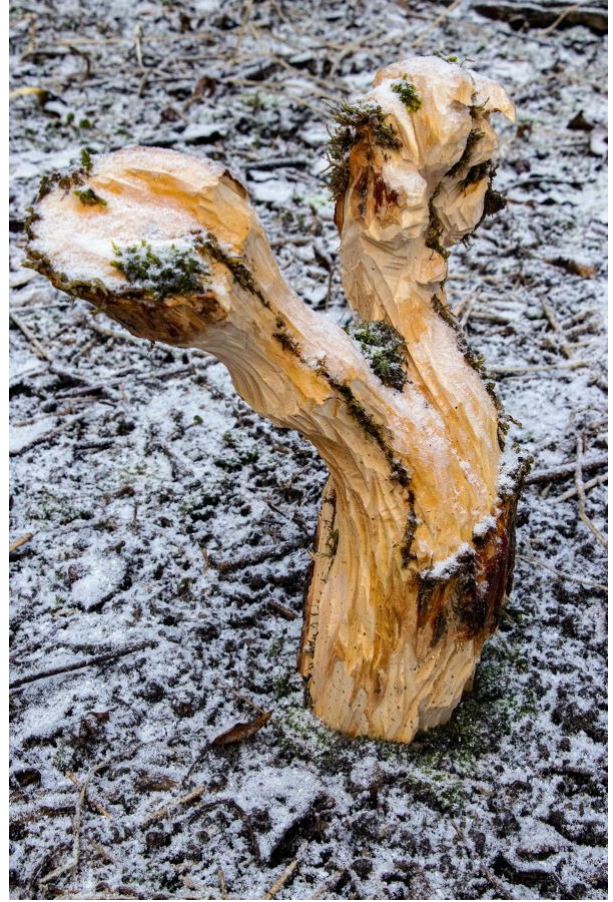


Fig 9. Stephanie Florence, Details from the artwork *offering* out in the Land near the University campus, 2023.

As a child, I spent as much time as I could outside with my Grandma, Cats, Friends, and Family. As the Flowers, Plants, and Insects grew around me, I grew with them. I fostered relationships with the more-than-(h)uman beings in my surrounding habitat and wondered why others around me did not. I observed a disconnect between how my Friends, Family, and Acquaintances spoke about loving “Nature” while simultaneously using it without concern. From elementary to high school, I learned about how important the natural world was for survival, while also being indoctrinated into a regime of resource use and striving for progress at all costs

to overcome “natural forces.” During this time in school, I began to distance myself from my more-than-(h)uman friends as I was made fun of for my behaviour and told that my experiences of connection were impossible.³² The result of this loss of self and community produced an irrational logic that Animals, Plants, Insects, and Nature are not relational, empathetic, or friendly, that in fact they do not belong as part of (h)uman existence.

By limiting acceptable knowledge, various Christian faiths as well as the rational science of the ‘Enlightenment’ estranged, devalued, and targeted many cultures, including those of the Indigenous nations of Turtle Island.³³ This fact has been a major inspiration for my thesis artwork, as a need to reconnect to the knowledge that was forcibly repressed from my childhood. Walter Mignolo articulates how the prime targets of colonial devastation are cultures whose power and sense of knowing come from spiritual and intuitive information.³⁴ The goal of this violent targeting was and is to eliminate powerful forms of gnostic knowledge that empower individuals to seek relational and collective ways of living. Colonial lessons are burned into my mind, as I still struggle to unlearn the irrationality of “enlightened” logic which forces a cognitive dissonance between my relational experiences and imperial indoctrination, fueling a dueling identity.³⁵ For instance, I experience the feuding feelings of being connected with

³² Mignolo writes about the inter-relationship between three different forms of knowledge: *gnosis*, *doxa*, and *episteme*. *Doxa* is understood as common knowledge or opinions that are not proven, and *episteme* is that of proven logic or rational scientific thought. During the ‘Enlightenment period’, logic or *episteme* became the pivotal form of knowledge which was shared by secular groups in contrast to the reinterpretation of *gnosis* into hermeneutics or biblical “salvation” (10, 11).

³³ Mignolo names hegemonic languages of English, French, and German (9); specific dominant colonial countries like Spain, England, and the United States (11); and conservative religions such as Catholicism, Protestantism, and Christianity (9, 12). These colonial forces have attempted to dominate, control, and devalue cultures in Africa, Asia, the Americas/Caribbean, and Turtle Island (7, 11). Killback and Simpson also iterate how Christian cultures have an obscene ability “to proliferate rapidly and destroy other societies” through colonization (Simpson, 148).

³⁴ See Mignolo, 10.

³⁵ See Yusoff, 10.

“other” beings while simultaneously feeling powerless when Trees, Animals, living-beings, and non-living matter are rendered into “resources.”³⁶

Another example from my life experience is a story about the murder of a Maple Tree on the Land I grew up in (a)miskwacîwâskahikan.³⁷ I grew up learning from, spending a massive amount of time with, and becoming close companions with this Maple Tree. As drought came year after year, its roots began to clog the sewer pipes of my family’s house, which led to it being cut down. For my family this was a practical and reasonable thing to do. However, for my seventeen-year-old self, it was devastating. My family made this choice and decided to not tell me about it in fear of my reaction. This trauma has impacted me but also the Land that surrounds it. If I feel this disregarded death so deeply, then how do the other Plants and Trees feel? How has this altered the Flora communication, the Trees’ cultural transmission of information, the Trees’ ability to send nutrients and capacity to fight disease?

In the audio artwork, *untethered dreams*, I read a poetic narrative that I wrote across the campus at different site-specific locations (See Appendix: *untethered dreams*). Throughout the narrative I attempt to reconcile between the dream of wanting to be connected and feeling at oneness with the harsh realities of the imperial-capitalist state.

³⁶ See S. Ahmad in “The Performativity of Disgust”, 87. See also Graeber, 77 and Azoulay, 35-6. (h)umans are also rendered into resources, as capitalism forces all citizens to sell their labour or else be unclaimed and in need of erasure.

³⁷ See Simpson, 180 and 182. Simpson explains how taking time to have a deep connection with another being generates reciprocal recognition. Reciprocal recognition is fundamentally different from the politics of disregarding recognition that fuel Land acknowledgements and Canadian apologies to Indigenous nations while continuously breaking treaties. By having meaningful exchange with another being, there is an understanding of agency and ethics. For example, Simpson will give offerings and prayers before hunting for a moose which does not limit the questioning of the act. There is a constant concern for the wellbeing of the hunted being as Simpson questions whether her “actions made her [the moose] feel like a resource” or “feel exploited”. Offering consideration of another being even in a life and death situation shows respect which is an act of interspecies citizen. The point of this is not to un-(h)uman oneself but to move beyond seeing more-than-(h)uman beings as resources but instead beings with lives that have worth beyond monetary value or purely subjects. Interspecies interactions that lead to death are not seen to an end but an understanding of transference of energy and if that life is disrespected or dishonoured, then it leaves an energetic stain of consumption on both the spirit of the hunter and the hunted.

Moss Spa Recipe and Instructions

Bath #1: Soak and Soothe the Moss in rain Water for 12 to 24 hours

Bath #2: Buttermilk and rain Water soak for 15 to 30 minutes³⁸

Bath #3: Gently dunk and wash the leftover milk off the Moss in rain Water

Bath #4 to #5: With rain Water soak the Moss for 10 minutes and gently move the Moss through the Water. Attempt to get any remaining milk off the Moss as Fungi will easily colonize the left over milk particles.

The narrative in *untethered dreams* connects directly to the artwork *Discordia (Victims of Indigestion)*, which grapples with my feelings of being unwanted and undesirable in contemporary society due to being non-binary and neurodivergent (See Appendix, *Discordia (Victims of Indigestion)*). As Moss is also an unwanted being, I have documented Moss in the region of Waterloo at a site of listening and the Moss Spa process. A body must be formed through a taxonomic archiving into the “scientific humanism” that enlightens and erodes an understanding of matter outside of hegemonic languages and *gnosis*.³⁹ The Moss and my neurodivergent self can only be understood through this obsession with logic or *episteme* of the “white geologic lexicon” – or racist, ableist, and genderist white redefinitions – that allow for “toxic legacies” of white-colonial domination across generations. I offer these narratives to be

³⁸ The use of buttermilk in the Moss Spa is restorative therapy for Moss. Although some internet critics say this is a myth, the green colour of the Moss can improve after bathing in a Moss Spa and rain Water mix. The colour does not improve to the same degree when submerged in purely rain Water. Moss absorbs the nutrients through the intake of liquids through osmosis directly in their cellular structure.

³⁹ See Yusoff, 10. Yusoff emphasizes that there is a “reclaiming of innocence” by establishing the Anthropocene as a universal (h)uman struggle instead of taking responsibility for 600 years of violence (11). By indoctrinating youth through racist scientific languages, colonial cultures can undermine the authority of Indigenous nations of Turtle Island to employ subjects into the capital schemes of “mining, petrochemical sites, and ... colour lines” (10).

listened to as participants walk through the Landscape as a way to experience connection and/or dissonance in relation to the narrative content.⁴⁰ It is essential to dissolve illusions of “proper” enlightenment by breaking down and disrupting the cycle of shame and devaluation.

How does one reconnect to a knowledge base that is seemingly forsaken and unwanted by most scientific-mechanistic subjects? By working collectively with Moss and Fungi in the region of Waterloo, I have entered a listening relationship with beings that readily terraform the Landscapes and habitats that Canadian extractivist culture seeks to use as resources. The Fungi and Moss collaborators have taught me how ill and dissociative (h)uman dwellings and buildings truly are. As an interdependent being in a complex ecosystem attempting to be an interspecies citizen, my choice to remain inside the imperial-capitalist structures dismantles my ability to be a true collaborator to “othered” species.

⁴⁰ Sheldrake iterates how our understanding of beings is “founded on the idea of rational individuals”, who make choices based on the scientific pursuit of progress at all costs which is inherently a fundamental right-leaning “rigid dichotomy” (213).

Methodology on the Haldimand Tract

Walking into my studio, one is met with smells of damp soil and dry sawdust, the hum of an air filter and humidifier, and the textures of rough bark, doughy mushrooms, and squishy Moss visible within easy reach inside the nursery tents (Fig. 10). Though perhaps idyllic, this description of my studio does not convey the processes, actions, and procedures that I had to follow in order to make the space a livable – although still hostile – environment for Moss and Fungi. Furthermore, it does not describe the challenges and mental/emotional dilemmas that I faced by unwittingly bringing these sensitive beings inside – into hostile environments. As an avid researcher, I took great care in reading books, watching Mushroom-growing experts' videos, as well as talking to bryologists and biologists about the best ways of growing and caring for my Collaborators. I learnt how to grow Mushrooms, which Mosses to collect ethically, and how to wash Moss to remove Fungus Gnats. After working with Mycelium for over a year, I have come to realize how deeply impacted these fungal beings are by their environment. For instance, the Mycelium that grows wildly in the old-growth forest near where I live has an ease to life, but unless I prepare the soil of my backyard garden with decaying matter, my Mycelial Collaborators will die. Why is this? The soil in the urban Landscape has been greatly disturbed by infrastructure, grass seed, and pruning.



Fig 10. Stephanie Florence, Fleshy Oyster Mushrooms growing in the studio nursery, 2022.

Fungi Growth

Step one: Gather materials needed for Fungi growth which could include wood chips, manure, wheat bran, coconut coir, wheat grass seed, inoculated Fungi spawn, at least 8 wood logs 2' to 3' long with a diameter of 3" to 7" maximum.

Step two: Boil wood chips for two to three hours OR drill holes into wood logs (fresh cut, wet, frozen, or dry) at least 1" to 2" deep

Step three: Add 1 to 2 cups of wheat bran, handful of wheat grass seed, a small amount of coconut coir, and allow boil chips to cool to warm OR add inoculated wood pellet into the holes on the wooden logs. (Fig. 11)

Step four: Add the inoculated Fungi spawn to the cooled wood chips by mixing it in OR melt wax in a small crock pot and dap the melted wax over the drilled holes with Fungi spawn pellets.

Step five: Cover the wood chip and spawn with a cover or plastic bag OR leave the wood logs somewhere dark and damp allow 4 to 8 months depending on width of wood.

(Fig. 12)



Fig 11. Stephanie Florence, Mycelial and Wheatgrass roots growing in sawdust, 2022.



Fig 12. Stephanie Florence, Healthy Blue Oyster Mushrooms growing in the studio nursery 2022.

A normal day in the studio might start with setting up bowls and tubs for Moss Spa, boiling sawdust in a two-foot homemade “tea bag,” or filtering watering water to go into a humidifier (Fig. 13). On another day, I might be using a grinder to make sculptures out of the limbs and stumps I have collected, which are eventually given back to the Land to be reclaimed by nature. On other days I am building circular mobile habitats for the Moss and Fungi, which are evolving into half circle and quarter cradles. However, these actions are based in a circular practice that is grounded in relational thought that place value on consent, care, respect, honour, and giving back to the collective.



Fig 13. Stephanie Florence, Boiling Sawdust that was collected from sculpting Tree limbs or given from sculptors in the Region, 2023.



Fig 14. Stephanie Florence, Moss collection and washing. rinse and repeat. 2022.

Relational-Living Labours List (Fig. 13)

1. *Worrying about your Collaborators at all times of day and night.*
2. *Waking up in the middle of the night in fear of Fungus Gnats and a white Mold infection.*
3. *Traveling to Collaborators to feed, care, and commune with them.*
4. *Cleaning the humidifier with alcohol every 2 to 3 days to remove Bacteria.*
5. *Putting alcohol on hands before touching Fungi.*
6. *Boiling sawdust in a teabag.*
7. *Sculpting wood to make sawdust.*

8. *Asking friends, supervisors, and peers for sawdust.*
9. *Info dumping about Moss and Fungi to anyone who will listen.*
10. *Gain Moss-rescue allies.*
11. *Researching more about Fungi and Moss.*
12. *Reaching out to Bryologists and researchers about Fungi, Lichens, and Moss.*
13. *Learning about healthy habitats.*
14. *Learning about hostile habitats.*
15. *Anxiety and panic attacks about hostile environments and ethical conundrums.*
16. *Speaking to University affiliates about putting artwork and Collaborators on Campus.*
17. *Being ignored by university staff about artworks on Campus.*
18. *Finally getting permission to place artworks on Campus.*
19. *Fundamentally realizing that (h)uman habitats are hostile to all beings, even (h)umans.*
20. *Putting artwork and Collaborators back into the Landscape.*
21. *Ethically questioning every moment and action.*
22. *Listening to Collaborators to understand what needs to be done.*

I have built a bond with the Land by understanding its cycles and noticing the differences that occur in the habitat, more-than-(h)uman beings, and self. For instance, one day I stumbled upon hundreds of Moss patties burning in the sunlight. They had been tossed from a roof onto a bed of pine needles. How can a University with a Water Institute, Waterloo Climate Institute, and Waterloo Institute for Sustainable Energy be so haphazard with these beings? The Moss

needed immediate attending. At first, I thought about rearranging the Moss in the area, but upon a close inspection many had Fungus Gnats, which at the time I did not know would kill the Moss. I also connected to the Moss on an energetic level, one of recognition (Simpson) or listening (Kramer).⁴¹ What followed over the next few months was a process of learning and unlearning. Learning more about how to care for the Moss, learning how to listen and respond, but also unlearning habitual assumptions of colonial, consumer thought.

There was a lot of soaking and rinsing, lemon juice, hydrogen peroxide, and drying out – a kind of Moss spa to get rid of the Gnats and rehydrate it.⁴² Once it looked healthier, I thought about finding it a more permanent home that would give the Moss stability.⁴³ I tried to listen and respond ethically. Over time I asked each Moss colony if it wished to be sewn on my Grandmother’s crocheted shawl, an ancestral object (Fig. 15), which would become part of a performance piece. Some Moss colonies said no, which I respected. They stayed in my studio or were placed back on campus in areas that were more protected –further from people.⁴⁴ I sought

⁴¹ Some might think this is an explanation of convenience, however, it is not. It is not readily accepted in Western society that more-than-(h)uman beings can communicate which is fundamentally inaccurate. Communication looks, sounds, and feels different in more-than-(h)uman experiences. Although this needs to be studied at greater length, Khait et al. in “Plants emit informative airborne sounds under stress”, have shown how “tobacco and tomato plants” scream when they need water or might be damaged. The scream is “65 dB SPL ultrasonic sound” that can be heard from several metres away. This study has not been peer-reviewed but it is an example of how a more-than-(h)uman being might attempt to get aid.

⁴² Fungus Gnats are attracted to wet Mossy soil or Plants where they can safely lay their eggs. The eggs become larvae and Fungi begin to form on the Moss for the larvae to eat. The Fungi then begins to use the nutrients that the Moss needs, which eventually kills the Moss as the infestation grows. As I have an active collaboration with the Moss, the Fungus Gnats respectfully cannot stay. That does not devalue their life but it shows how easily balance in Nature can be lost and how observation and listening are essential to understanding these relationships. Ironically, Fungus Gnats have been thriving in my home Plants since working with the Moss, so there is some balance occurring and not all the Gnats are gone, just the ones living in the Moss.

⁴³ This is an example of energetic exchange and mutual understanding. Some of the Moss patties gave consent to being on the shawl and some did not. Ethically this could be viewed as my domination over the Moss as care can often look like domination when one being is dependent on the another. My argument is not to prove my ethical superiority or purity, which I am not as I live in a colonial consumer society; instead it is to consider how interspecies communication and collaboration can exist inside such ethically compromising positions. See Puig de la Bellacasa in *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (155) and Barad for more information on ethical care, matter having meaning, and energetic exchange (823).

⁴⁴ An ancestral object is an item made by an ancestor or deceased loved one.

to extend the care and comfort of my ancestors while giving the Moss a safe area to grow and rejuvenate without the fear of being blown away. For the Moss colonies that agreed, I could only cover half of the shawl and it took nearly two months to complete as I was attempting to do it with care and kindness, when the Moss was ready.



Fig 15. Stephanie Florence, *Remedy*,
Grama's crocheted blanket with Moss,
2022.

Contemporary Practices as a form of Oneness

Time is of the essence, as declines in certain devalued beings will continuously accelerate.⁴⁵ At the Venice biennale of 2022, I witnessed the artwork of Sámi artist Máret Ánne Sara. Walking into the Sámi Pavilion, large lengths of birch barks covered the permanent signs of the Nordic countries of Norway, Sweden, and Finland. This gentle symbolic erasure contrasts with the genocide and colonial dismantling of the Sámi way of life. As Sara explains, every year she loses half her Reindeer to wolverines and eagles, due to laws that the Norwegian state has instituted.⁴⁶ For her, these losses are spiritual, devastating, and, above all, cause “existential exhaustion”.⁴⁷ The trauma inflicted by colonial rule has slowly eaten away at the interconnection and morals



Fig 16. Máret Ánne Sara, '*Ale suova sielu sáiget*', 2022.



Fig 17. Máret Ánne Sara, '*Ale suova sielu sáiget*', 2022.

⁴⁵ See Kolbert, 187.

⁴⁶ See García-Antón and Brissach, 86.

⁴⁷ See Sara in *Máret Ánne Sara*, a five-minute interview.

that guide her through life.⁴⁸ The art she made for the Venice Biennale is visceral and sacred. As she lost Reindeer calves during the spring while pregnant with her first child, she constructed a mobile that she named *Ale suova sielu sáiget* ('Don't let it wear out the soul', Fig.16 and Fig. 17).



Fig 18. Máret Anne Sara, '*Gutted – Gávogálši*', 2022.



Fig 19. A still from the Portrait film of *Máret Anne Sara*, 2020

The mobile is made from cotton grass, two cured red newborn Reindeer calves, and dried Plants from the northern Sápmi. At the Biennale pavilion it slowly pivoted in the gentle breeze. Beside the mobile were many dried Reindeer stomachs, aptly named *Gutted – Gávogálši* (Fig. 18).⁴⁹ These stomachs are the material form of the spiritual recognition between the Sámi and Reindeer, as the stomach is the “first site of emotion to events in the world” and intuitive sight of

⁴⁸ See García-Antón and Brissach, 88, 90.

⁴⁹ See García-Antón and Brissach, 88. The translation from Northern Sámi of *gálši* is stronghearted while *gávagit* means to lay down or bend.

instinct (Fig. 19).⁵⁰ The Reindeer’s stomach embodies the lived experiences of violence towards the Sámi and Reindeer inflicted by the Norwegian state, “the dispossessor of futures” to the Sámi and Reindeer.⁵¹



Fig 20. Máret Anne Sara, *'Du-ššan-ahttanu-ššan'*, 2022.

The interconnectedness of all beings is central to Sámi philosophy: “what happens to animals happens to us”.⁵² Sara’s artwork is not just fighting and resisting the Norwegian state, it also aims to reduce the trauma load on all beings affected by long-term violence. *Du-ššan-ahttanu-ššan*,⁵³ another piece by Sara in the Biennale, mixes the smells of (h)uman and Reindeer, expressing the non-verbal communication and knowledge that is erased by colonial systems of

⁵⁰ See Sara interview, García-Antón and Brissach, 93.

⁵¹ See García-Antón and Brissach, 83, 99.

⁵² See García-Antón and Brissach, 85-91.

⁵³ García-Antón and Brissach, 89. The translation of *duššant* becomes dying of unpredictable circumstance, while *-ahttanuššat* describes a fragile person recovering from illness and gaining strength.

power (Fig. 20). By heightening the sensory experiences of the audiences, this knowledge will imprint with the (h)uman, as the body knows the scent of fear and stress. The artwork is thus imbued with hope to overcome the colonial dispossession of Land and infliction of violence.

The depths of trauma and damage to the Land cannot be undone, but instead certain techniques can be used to repair, nourish, and care for instead. For instance, Paula Kramer uses contemporary dance to connect through “listening” to the Land, Elements, Flora, Fauna, and energetic matter.⁵⁴ Kramer sees her interventions to be a “mutual interdependence and co-creation of organism and environment” by making “(h)uman and non-(h)uman assemblies”.⁵⁵ By acting with intent and attentiveness through non-verbal actions, a revaluation of all agents or matter involved occurs as the ripples of effect transform the energy in the area.⁵⁶ Kramer uses Jane Bennett’s theories to explain how all matter contains “affective bodies”, always changing through physical, intentional, or energetic contact. These could be considered “agents that operate in relation” to cross-contaminations or exchanges of contamination.⁵⁷ Also relevant is Karen Barad’s theory of “agential realism” that takes into account the “materialization of all bodies,” whether (h)uman or non(h)uman, accounting for their specific differences while still acknowledging the interconnection between them.⁵⁸ Bennett and Barad show the significance of crossing “the (h)uman-non(h)uman divide” through an event or “phenomena”, and these events occur in Kramer’s *listenings* through the interaction of energetic matter, non-verbal language, and intent.⁵⁹ Through the *listenings* and empathetic actions that are essential to my artwork I aim to produce small changes. As a solitary actant, the improvements are not drastic, but by having

⁵⁴ See Kramer, 86.

⁵⁵ See Bennett in *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things*, 23; and Kramer, 84.

⁵⁶ See Bennett, 9.

⁵⁷ See Bennett, 24; Tsing in *The Mushroom at the End of the World: on the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, 27.

⁵⁸ See Barad, 810.

⁵⁹ See Bennett, 22; Barad, 815.

the more-than-(h)uman collaboration be experienced by visitors and participants, more people may revalue their own actions, ways of living, or knowledge systems.

The habitats of Earth and the balance that (h)umans and non-(h)umans have adjusted to are changing at unprecedented rates. By seeking the wisdom and knowledge of the more-than-(h)uman cultures, we can learn how to collaboratively produce microclimates with Moss while supporting a nutritious ecosystem with Fungal life. The inherent lack of rationality in how scientific-mechanistic societies are functioning is becoming more than apparent – it is life-threatening. The only wise way forward is to look to the beings that have survived on the planet long before (h)umans evolved here. I will continue to spend my time in the forests listening to the Moss and Fungi to gain the knowledge they willingly share. Their ripples have ever altered my matter.

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Appendix: Audio Narratives

Stephanie Florence, [*Discordia \(Victims of Indigestion\)*](#), 2023, excerpt 2 minutes and 30 seconds, digital video compilation. Full-length 6 minutes and 58 seconds, mp4, video and audio credit to Stephanie Florence.

Stephanie Florence, [*fractured listening*](#), 2021, digital audio compilation. Full-length, mp4, audio credit to Stephanie 27 minutes and 47 seconds. audio credit to Stephanie Florence.

Stephanie Florence, [*listenings*](#), 2023, website built to house digital audio files and digitally drawn narrative map series. mp4, audio and image credit to Stephanie Florence, website constructed by Au7umn. stephanieflorence.ca

Stephanie Florence, [*untethered dreams*](#), 2022, excerpt 1 minutes and 13 seconds, digital audio compilation. Full-length 9 minutes and 39 seconds, mp4, audio credit to Stephanie Florence.