



**MONASH** University

**Cinematic Affect in a Time of Ecological Emergency**

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## **Abstract**

*Cinematic Affect in a Time of Ecological Emergency* is situated within a moving image practice that applies methods aligned with essayist cinema and video installation, as well as historical avant-garde film. The project was initiated in response to subjective experiences of ecological devastation, which induced a personal state of melancholy. It works from the position that another tactic for progressing discourses around anthropogenic climate and geological change might be poetic or affective modes that are often present in the aforementioned moving image practices. The research aims to eschew ‘fact’ based representational modes, for contemplative, expressive and ambiguous registers of visual and aural inquiry.

The iterative studio practice is composed of a range of moving image experiments and approaches, including extensive field investigations in locations linked tenuously or specifically to fossil fuel production and consumption. Through research into a variety of cinematic devices, conclusions were reached, which led to the application of creative constraints in the composition of the works. These techniques include, high-speed cinematography, ultra-long or ultra-wide lenses, formal composition and camera movement.

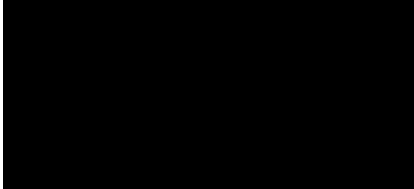
The project has been guided by the belief that the sensate realm holds greater political potential for filmmakers than tactics that use didactic means to tell a ‘story’ about the crisis. Thus, the project has explored in some detail the concepts of affect and sensation, through the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze. In addition, it locates theoretical provocations that have contributed to my thinking and making, with the objective to reveal the political potential of grief (Judith Butler) and the ‘politics implicit in aesthetics’ (Jacques Rancière). Rancière’s notion of the invisible becoming visible at a moment of rupture and Butler’s argument configured by Levinasian ethics and her post-9/11 experiences of living in the United States have been important influences. Writers and thinkers whose discourses are focussed on the subject of the ecological crisis situate the subject historically with the help of Felix Guattari’s transversal ‘ecosophy,’ while Timothy Morton’s ‘Ecological Thought’ and Jane Bennett’s ‘vital materialist’ positions are enlisted as methods for reflecting on the ‘uncanny’ experience of living in a time of ecological emergency.

From the position of thinking through the poetic and political potential of art, *Cinematic Affect in a Time of Ecological Emergency* has turned to Robert Smithson, Agnes Denes and Buster Simpson. Chantal Akerman, Chris Marker and Werner Herzog provided insights into essayist modes of cinema through their distinct methods of practice. Chris Welsby's and Richard Mosse's films and installations are reviewed in relation to their capacity to extract the invisible and make it seeable through the material.

The creative outcomes produced during this research are two video works. The first, *Flight*, is a series of filmed passenger jet stream or contrails — forming a database of a particular type of human presence and movement. The work seeks to evoke a space of contemplation, uneasiness, and sadness by engaging with the residual and stratified signs of our collective impact on our environment. *Flight* is accompanied by *Crude*, an essayist film that attempts to see and hear some of the elusive signs of anthropogenic climate change in order to make what is invisible, visible, to evoke contemplations on the subject of ecological crisis, through affective cinematic devices.

## **Declaration**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.



26/02/2016

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## Introduction:

“Modernity is the story of how oil got into everything.”<sup>1</sup>

*Cinematic Affect in a Time of Ecological Emergency* was initiated in response to subjective experiences of ecological devastation, which induced a personal state of melancholy. The project works from the position that another tactic for progressing discourses around anthropogenic climate and geological change might be poetic or affective modes of cinematic inquiry. It aims to eschew ‘fact’ based representational modes, for contemplative, expressive and ambiguous registers of image and sound. John Rajchman distils from Gilles Deleuze this thought: “To extract sensation from representation, making it a matter of experimentation rather than judgment, is also to free the art of seeing from its subordination to prior concept or discourse.”<sup>2</sup>

In September 2013, I watched Neil Young on the news compare Fort McMurray, the centre of oil sands mining in Northwestern Canada, to Hiroshima after the bomb. Local radio stations soon stopped playing his music and outrage at the singer’s comments filled the talkback commentary from the region.<sup>3</sup> I decided to visit the town as part of my early field investigations. The sands operations in Northern Alberta are devastating in a spectacular way. Images of these otherworldly landscapes are all over the Internet and at times on the nightly news. It was not my aim to film the sands – others have already done that. I was more interested in the outside edges and fragments of their presence. I attempted to sense what those elements were. Is it the roads, the melting tundra, the machinery, or the trucks? Maybe it is somewhere in the lingering melancholic emotions that thinking through the crisis evokes in me.

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013), 59.

<sup>2</sup> John Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 129.

<sup>3</sup> Neil Young, “The fact is Fort McMurray looks like Hiroshima. Fort McMurray is a wasteland. The Indians up there and the native peoples are dying. The fuel’s all over – the fume’s everywhere – you can smell it when you get to town. The closest place to Fort McMurray that is doing the tar sands work is 25 or 30 miles out of town and you can taste it when you get to Fort McMurray. People are sick. People are dying of cancer because of this. All the First Nations people up there are threatened by this.” “Neil Young on oil sands: ‘Fort McMurray looks like Hiroshima,’” Michael Babad, in *The Globe and Mail* (Tuesday, Sep. 10 2013), accessed February 18, 2015, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/top-business-stories/neil-young-on-oil-sands-fort-mcmurray-looks-like-hiroshima/article14213233/>

The mining and drilling operations bring a significant amount of money into Canada and a lot of people rely on them for jobs. What becomes emblematic during the drive, and in my time in Fort McMurray, is the high volume and density of trucks and machines that support this industry, an endless flow; a moving symbol.

A part of me knows the human narrative in this mining town. This is primary industry at full operational capacity, in an economy that relies on a transient workforce. Roughnecks, loggers, miners, truckers, foresters, fisheries workers, surveyors and geologists might not start out cut from the same cloth, but they inevitably develop a survival demeanour. In an earlier life, I lived an itinerant life of a reforestation worker in British Columbia, Canada. I have trudged in mud-caked boots frozen to the bone; my hands have been scarred and dirty. I know what it feels like. It's hard and it makes you a little hard as well if you are to protect yourself from its hardness.

When I stayed in Fort McMurray the trees were shedding their yellow and orange leaves. I could smell and taste the tar mixed in with the grit in the cool fall air. The hotel where I stayed is a 'flea-pit', and yet due to demand, it is more expensive than a four-star hotel in Los Angeles. The windows were covered in a silt dust that seemed to be on everything...

*I set up the camera as soon as I got into the room. I wanted to film the multitude of trucks entering and leaving town from a fixed and repeatable position. I started to experiment with filming at high-speeds (so the shots were all in slow motion). To get an exposure I needed a lot of light (eight times more) to hit the chip in the camera. The highway was backlit by the sun, which meant because of the silt on the window that the air would cause a strange disruptive affect in the image. The direction of the late afternoon light cast a rim around the trucks (a high contrast effect), while the oil sand residue on the window softened the light into a ghostly refraction (a low contrast effect)...*

Lost in the technical aspects of the shoot, taking light readings and setting the menus, I had been taken off guard by the physical reaction that overwhelmed me when I first

looked through the lens. The anxiety I experienced at this moment surprised me. A single affective moment of connection with the subject tapped into me. I realised how depressed I was. I was unable to leave the room for several hours. I just kept hitting record. Such an experience, where I became physically altered by the instant in the lens, happened often during the filming of this project: these moments when I saw and felt the world in strange and perplexing ways.



Fig. 1. Andrew Denton. [Film Still: *Crude*] Oil Tankers Leaving Fort MacMurray, Alberta, Canada (2013).

The creative outcomes produced during this research are two video works. The first, *Flight*, is a series of filmed passenger jet stream or contrails — forming a database of a particular type of human presence and movement. The work seeks to evoke a space of contemplation, uneasiness, and sadness by engaging with the residual and stratified signs of our collective impact on our environment. *Flight* is accompanied by *Crude*, an essayist film that attempts to see and hear some of the elusive signs of anthropogenic climate change in order to make what is invisible, visible, to evoke contemplations on the subject of ecological crisis, through affective cinematic devices.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy Corrigan offers an insightful definition on the essay film as a form that resonates with my own understanding of its dynamic if elusive characteristics. He says, “the essayistic stretches and balances itself between abstracted and exaggerated representation of the self (in language and image) and an experiential world encountered and acquired through the discourse of thinking out loud.” Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, after Marker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 15. I discuss how I problematise the genre in my practice in Chapter Four.

This exegesis presents a range of contextualising theoretical and critical investigations that have influenced the direction of the research and the outcomes of the practice. These include engagements with writers and thinkers whose discourses are focussed on the subject of the ecological crisis. Chapter One, situates the subject historically with the help of Felix Guattari's transversal 'ecosophy,' while Timothy Morton's 'Ecological Thought' and Jane Bennett's 'vital materialist' positions are enlisted as methods for reflecting on the 'uncanny' experience of living in a time of ecological emergency.

Chapter Two locates the theoretical provocations that have contributed to my thinking and making, with the objective to reveal the political potential of grief (Judith Butler) and the 'politics implicit in aesthetics' (Jacques Rancière). Rancière's notion of the invisible becoming visible at a moment of rupture and Butler's argument configured by Levinasian ethics and her post-9/11 experiences of living in the United States have been important influences on this project. From Butler, the conversation folds into Erin Manning's and Brian Massumi's line of inquiry that locates in the practice affective experiences of collecting, making, and rendering the material, in a 'capture–see–sense–emote–reflect–select' nexus.

As such, what guided me from the very beginning was the belief that the sensate realm held greater political potential for filmmakers than tactics that used didactic means to tell a 'story' about the crisis. Thus, I explore in some detail the concepts of affect and sensation, through the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze, providing a platform for thinking about affective modes of cinematic investigation. I focus in particular on the 'affection-image' in its various manifestations, using the 1920s avant-garde city films of Dziga Vertov and Joris Ivens as illustrations of Deleuze's cinemas of perception and affection and his use of 'any-place-whatevers.'

To a greater or lesser extent each of the theorists, reviewed in Chapter One and Two, have overlapping interests across three core concerns of this project: the ecological emergency, art, and politics. They therefore make their presence felt throughout the various chapters in this document, in varying degrees of concentration, borrowed and deployed as needed to discuss, position, and contextualise the research.

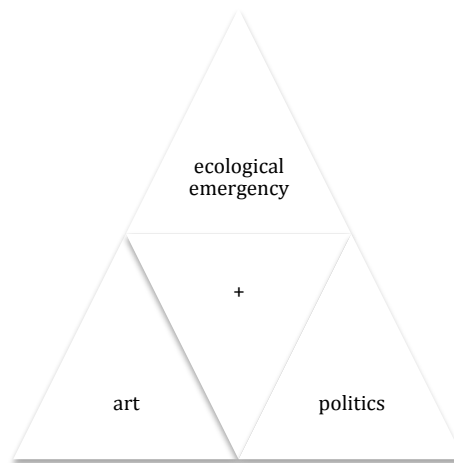


Fig. 2. [Diagram] Art, Politics, Ecological Emergency Nexus.

To support these philosophical discourses, Chapter Three presents and discusses a range of practitioner-theorist, artists ('Earthworks') and filmmakers, identified as having linkages with my practice. From the position of thinking through the poetic and political potential of art, I have turned to the artists, Robert Smithson, Agnes Denes and Buster Simpson. Chantal Akerman, Chris Marker, and Werner Herzog provided insights into essayist modes of cinema through their distinct methods of practice. Chris Welsby's and Richard Mosse's films and installations are reviewed in relation to their capacity to extract the invisible and make it seeable through the creative constraints they impose on their practices; Welsby's a structuralist method of material rigour, Mosse relying on the conflict that can arise when aesthetic 'beauty' is paralleled with the horrific imagery of war.

Chapter Four positions the practice through the discussion of the test project, *Aspects of Trees* (2015). The film was used as a leaping off point to experiment with the affective materiality of moving image in the development of practice based methods, and how these manifested into approaches and decisions during the production of the final exhibited videos, *Crude* and *Flight*. The investigations ranged from 'objective' documentation to more poetic interventions. I discuss how these processes developed through the production and post-production processes, and how interfaces with the contextual influences reviewed in Chapters One, Two and Three, invoked a fundamental shift in my thinking and making practices.

The questioning that initiated the projects and activated experimentation with video and audio materials was formulated into the following propositions: (1) if working from the belief that fear-inducing or fact-based documentary polarises popular opinion, alternatively might a poetic and affective mode or register act as a provocation for progressing debates around anthropogenic climate change?<sup>5</sup> (2) might cinematic affect, through sensation, recalibrate our perceptions of the world at this moment of ecological crisis? I hypothesised that my feelings of sadness about the crisis might be a common experience for people who were attempting to grapple with the complex problems that face our planet's ecology. I felt, and still feel at times, incapacitated by the enormity of the problem and wanted to address it through my practice, supported by a range of research methods that would allow me to not only see the world as it is, but also to sense it more acutely. This exegesis maps and communicates the pathways in and out of this making, thinking and feeling process.

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<sup>5</sup> As Brian Massumi notes: "Philosophies of affect, potential, and actualization may aid in finding counter-tactics." "The Autonomy of Affect", 106.



## Chapter One – The Ecological Emergency:

This chapter navigates philosophical and contextual territories that engage with threats to the ecology, in relationship to concerns and practices traversing this project. The current ecological and social conditions contemplated through the writing situate the underlying political aesthetics framed in the creative outcomes. This project was initiated in response to my own tacit experience of ecological devastation, which induced in me a personal state of melancholy, anxiety, and helplessness, particularly around the complexity of the crisis. I have sought out thinking companions that frame the project from an historical perspective, such as Felix Guattari's 'ecosophy' and those that interrogate current ecological conditions such as Timothy Morton's 'ecological thought,'<sup>6</sup> and Jane Bennett's, 'vital materialist positions.'<sup>7</sup>

The theoretical concerns of this chapter have overlapping interests related to the ecological emergency. The writers are not necessarily in accord as they negotiate these territories, and their critical geneologies and positions often counter each other. These differences in positions provide provocations for thinking and making. *Crucially* however, it is the point at which their interests overlap that has framed this project's critical point of view and how these have mediated the practice. As examples: Guattari, Bennett, and Morton each make a critical turn away from historical environmentalisms such as the Romantic, activist, or green consumerist discourses. Bennett, and Morton hone in on Freud's 'psychoanalytical' notion of 'the uncanny,' where the familiar is rendered unfamiliar through repression, thus evoking a sense of disorientation "that recalls the helplessness we experience in certain dream-states."<sup>8</sup> Their concentration is on 'the uncanny' in relationship to aesthetics, affect, and/or the strange and weird experience of living in a time of ecological crisis. The key refrain that harnesses these writers' positions together is the aim of the practice, which is to problematise the ecological subject, in order to agitate a

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock, 2003 ed., *Penguin Classics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1919), 144.

disrupted view of it, to slightly alter the familiar in order to see it again, and to make the invisible visible as a provocation for contemplation.

Throughout this exegesis I refer to theory, contexts, practices, experiences, and moods as, what Deleuze has interchangeably been translated as, mediators or intercessors of practice:

Mediators are fundamental. Creation's all about mediators. Without them nothing happens. They can be people – for a philosopher, artists or scientists; for a scientist, philosophers or artists-but things too, even plants or animals, as in Castaneda. Whether they're real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, you have to form your mediators.<sup>9</sup>

Deleuze is clear that these mediators or intercessors (the preferred translation)<sup>10</sup> are not direct interventions in the thinking and making; in fact it is sometimes in the falsities of their application or in the subjective interpretation of them that another kind of truth emerges. He says of his partnership with Guattari that “each of us falsifies the other, which is to say that each of us understands in his own way notions put forward by the other,” and that it is “these capacities of falsity to produce truth, that's what mediators are about...”<sup>11</sup> Manning and Massumi interpret Deleuze’s notion of intercessors as “friends” that provide vibrations across the practice in that they are only allies “insofar as [they] contribute to a thinking-feeling tremulously poised on the edge of what cannot quite be thought, felt, said, or painted.”<sup>12</sup> My subjective reading and application of the intercessor, mediator, friend, is how I have approached the theorists, practitioners, and experiences that have traversed the making and thinking through this project. This tactic will become apparent throughout this exegesis, as linkages are made between such philosophically divergent positions as neo-materialist and humanist ones, which in turn are redirected back towards an ontology that captures these positions within a politico-ethical-aesthetical encounter with the ecological subject as practice. They are non-linear in their transmissions and unreliable in regards to how and when they emerge

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<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990, European Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 125.

<sup>10</sup> “(Often mistranslated into English as ‘mediator’), which Deleuze describes as the conduit for expression.” Erin Manning, *Always More Than One : Individuation's Dance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 231.

<sup>11</sup> Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, 126.

<sup>12</sup> Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience* (2014), 68.

from the “outside... felt force[s] that activate the threshold between thinking and feeling.”<sup>13</sup>

From an historical perspective, I position Felix Guattari’s text *The Three Ecologies* as a stepping-stone to initiate provocations towards discussion. From his point of view, in 1989, the future already looked bleak. Guattari argued that unless profound shifts were made around human engagement with the natural environment and late-capitalist political, economic, and social structures, critical disturbance to the ecology and all life on the planet would be inevitable. “There is at least a risk that there will be no more human history unless humanity undertakes a radical reconsideration of itself.”<sup>14</sup>

Jane Bennett’s vital materialist position considers non-human vitality as an alternate approach for political response to “public problems,” such as threats to our environment.<sup>15</sup> She asks “how, for example, would patterns of consumption change if we faced not litter, rubbish, trash, or ‘the recycling,’ but an accumulating pile of lively and potentially dangerous matter?”<sup>16</sup> Her arguments are framed around notions of impersonal affect or the vibrancy of matter. Most relevant to the concerns of this project are Bennett’s narrative reflections on the affective power or quality of things – “thing-power.” She tunes her focus in this discussion to affective “catalysts” that exist “in non-human bodies,” as a post-environmentalist method of deprioritizing human agency over the vital materiality of things.<sup>17</sup>

Timothy Morton’s ‘Ecological Thought’ posits the end of teleology in the face of the non-human. For him “the end of teleology means the end of the world.” He asks: “what reality is it now that humans now inhabit?”<sup>18</sup> The argument is framed in a discourse that rejects nature/Nature as a dangerous mythological construction that is well past its use by date. The “aesthetics of Nature truly impedes ecology, [this is] a good argument for why ecology must be without Nature. His reading of the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>14</sup> Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pinder and Paul Sutton, 2008 ed., *Continuum Impacts* (London: Continuum, 1989), 45.

<sup>15</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, viii.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., vii, 21.

<sup>18</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, 95.

experience of living in the strange present spans ungraspable, or thinkable time, and space.”<sup>19</sup> For Morton there is an opportunity for intimacy in the “inbuilt uncanniness” of his notion of the “strange stranger.” In his more hopeful moments he acknowledges the interconnectedness of all things as “platform for compassion rather than condescending pity.”<sup>20</sup>

These writers and their arguments act as entry points into situating a position or platform to experiment in the field and in studio. Guattari has been a *friend* of the project from the outset, while Morton, Bennett and Butler, have made themselves known and threaded their way into the fabric of the making and thinking-making as the project fermented then distilled. Their writings have helped position the practice as a response to the subject of the ecological problem indexically, within moving image works, with an aim to agitate emotional or affective responses from the viewer, as an alternate approach to conventional media productions.

### **Guattari’s Ecosophy:**

The Earth is undergoing a period of intense techno-scientific transformation. If no remedy is found, the ecological disequilibrium this has generated will ultimately threaten the continuation of life on the planet’s surface.<sup>21</sup>

Guattari’s polemic text, *The Three Ecologies* (1989), implicates the dominant subjectivity of “Integrated World Capitalism” (IWC), also referred to in this document as neoliberalism, as the key cause and barrier to action in confronting issues threatening the Earth’s ecology.<sup>22</sup> He sets up his position through a survey of contemporary, and (predicted) future, environmental and social crises, proposing a need for a dramatic shift in perspective, which he calls “ecosophy,” an “ethico-political articulation” that operates between “three ecological registers (the

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<sup>19</sup> Morton insists that: “Sigmund Freud’s essay ‘The Uncanny’ is essential for thinking the ecological thought.” Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 52. The strange feeling of the familiar made unfamiliar, especially in regards to Morton’s application of it in his ecological project, is one that is harnessed as a tactic within the practice and is discussed at length later in this chapter.

<sup>20</sup> Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 80.

<sup>21</sup> Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Post-industrial capitalism, which I prefer to describe as *Integrated World Capitalism* (IWC), tends increasingly to de-centre its sites of power, moving away from structures producing goods and services towards structures producing signs, syntax and - in particular, through the control which it exercises over the media, advertising, opinion polls, etc. - subjectivity. *Ibid.*, 32.

environment, social relations and human subjectivity.”<sup>23</sup> *The Three Ecologies* is a human-centered call to arms for the salvation of society and the natural environment.

He problematizes the environmental crisis by identifying that it is connected to a breakdown of social and cultural relationships and of “human modes of life, both individual and collective.”<sup>24</sup> Societies are rapidly homogenising, and subjectivities are desingularising,<sup>25</sup> under the yoke of the IWC’s most powerful subjugating tool, mass media.<sup>26</sup>

Refusal to face up to the erosion in these three areas, as the media would have us do, verges on a strategic infantilization of opinion and a destructive neutralization of democracy. We need to ‘kick the habit’ of sedative discourse, particularly the fix of television, in order to apprehend the world through the interchangeable lenses or points of view of the three ecologies.<sup>27</sup>

The three ecologies, environmental, social, and mental, are separate but inseparable – *interchangeable* inside the “ethico-aesthetic aegis” that frames his discourse.<sup>28</sup> Bennett compares his method with that of Catholic doctrine that expresses “the mysterious unity of the three persons of God... There are three ecologies, says Guattari, or, as the Baltimore Catechism says, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three persons ‘really distinct from one another,’”<sup>29</sup> but interconnected and effected by their woven and disparate connections. With this in mind “nature cannot be separated from culture; in order to comprehend the interactions between ecosystems, the mechanosphere and the social and individual Universes of reference, we must learn to think transversally.”<sup>30</sup>

He asks us to question what it is that we value, or should value. A complex situation requires a complex reconfiguration, response, contemplation, and input, across the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> A singularity is “not an instance or instantiation of anything—it is not particularity or uniqueness. As Deleuze puts it, its individuation is not a specification; and indeed there exist individuations that are quite “impure,” mixing elements from many different species. But this not-fitting-in-a-class, this “indefiniteness” or “vagueness” is not a logical deficiency or incoherence, but, rather, as with what Peirce called “firstness,” it is a kind of power or chance, a “freshness” of what has not yet been made definite by habit or law.” Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*, 54-55.

<sup>26</sup> Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 33-34.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 114.

<sup>30</sup> Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 29.

spectrum of societies' subjectivities and *recognising differences and values beyond the values of market interests*. "What condemns the capitalist value system is that it is characterized by general equivalence, which flattens out all other forms of value, alienating them in its hegemony."<sup>31</sup>

For Guattari, environmental destruction cannot be addressed by "political groupings and executive authorities [that] appear to be totally incapable of understanding the full implications of these issues."<sup>32</sup> We find ourselves caught in a "nagging paradox" where technological and scientific responses to the ecology, which will probably be needed to help repair the problem, are not engaged by bringing "social forces" into action.<sup>33</sup> Progress is advanced through an acknowledgement of the complexity of the scenario. Rather than focus on single-issue fixes, such as "industrial pollution," a shift in "the reconstruction of social and individual practices," is required."<sup>34</sup> The notion that *it is no longer enough to save the whale/river/forest/ozone layer*, was a turn away from an *environmentalism* that he saw as increasingly fractious and ineffective. "Ecology must stop being associated with the image of a small nature-loving minority or with qualified specialists."<sup>35</sup> As Morton later observed, "Particularism can muster a lot of passion, but it can become shortsighted."<sup>36</sup>

Central to Guattari's argument is a call to contest the effects of capitalism, not via a consolidated consenting mass but rather by "scouting out the potential vectors of subjectification and singularization at each partial, existential locus."<sup>37</sup> The IWC seeks to control, define, and commodify (through hegemonic means) singular and existential reference points such as "childhood, love, art, as well as everything associated with anxiety, madness, pain, death, or a feeling of being lost in the Cosmos."<sup>38</sup> Hope is found by not succumbing to the hegemony of the IWC, but by transitioning from this "mass-media era to a post-media age, in which the media will be reappropriated by a multitude of subject-groups capable of directing its

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>36</sup> Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 5-6.

<sup>37</sup> Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 33.

resingularization.”<sup>39</sup> This is his transversal lens of interchangeable, divergent and convergent subjectivities, as an altered state of engagement. Bennett summarises it as “ways we might develop this newish self.”<sup>40</sup>

*The Three Ecologies* was written by Guattari at a time when he found himself “disconcerted [and] disgusted by traditional politics.” France’s Greens were ensconced in “party fractionalism” that eventually saw a splinter party, Génération Ecologie, break off from Les Verts, in the early 1990s.<sup>41</sup> He maintained membership in both parties moving “transversally between [the] two” groups.<sup>42</sup> Gary Genosko notes that “Guattari’s vision [at this time] recaptures the sense of the ecology ‘movement’ in general which would, if applied to party politics, allow its recomposition in a way that respected pluralism and diversity.”<sup>43</sup> *The Three Ecologies* emerged out of this context. It is refreshingly acynical, but also has the rose tint of a utopian dream that sometimes glosses over paradoxical cracks in his discourse. He critiques the self-interested elements of environmentalism that have simultaneously been appropriated and subjugated by the IWC, and how “capitalistic subjectivity seeks to gain power by controlling and neutralizing the maximum number of existential refrains. It is intoxicated with and anaesthetized by a collective feeling of pseudoeternity.”<sup>44</sup> He underestimates, perhaps hopefully, the tenacity, agility and adaptability of the neoliberal agenda, Jeremy Gilbert suggests that: “...if any function defines the machinic specificity of neoliberalism, it is the tendency to potentiate individuals *qua* individuals while simultaneously inhibiting the emergence of all forms of potent collectivity.”<sup>45</sup> Flexible labour and deregulation have not backfired as part of their “promoted themes” as Guattari suggested they might.<sup>46</sup> Rather the IWC co-opts sustainable practices, social design, crediting carbon, and producing green commerce, as a few examples, and essentially seeks monetisable problems to respond to as normal progressions and diversions in the market

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>40</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 116.

<sup>41</sup> Tensions increased by the early 1990’s as the Green vote found itself split going up against Le Pen’s far right Front National. Gary Genosko, *Felix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2002), 21.

<sup>42</sup> Gary Genosko, “The Life and Work of Félix Guattari: From Transversality to Ecosophy,” in *The Three Ecologies* (London ; New Brunswick, N.J.: Athlone Press, 2000), 153.

<sup>43</sup> Genosko, *Felix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction*, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 34.

<sup>45</sup> Jeremy Gilbert, “What Kind of Thing Is 'Neoliberalism'?” *New Formations* 80, no. 1 (2013): 21,

<sup>46</sup> Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*.

economy. As Morton reflects: “The capitalist language of deregulation, flow, and circulation masks the static, repetitive, “molar” quality of capitalist forms.”<sup>47</sup> At the same time these conditions have directed Green politics into economic policy decisions that often run counterpoint to their *base* social, ethical, and environmental positions, in order they are not rendered invisible and obsolete in the current political culture. For example the Australian Greens Economic Policy Statement deploys the terminology of, and is clearly framed within, a capitalist economic discourse. However, the Party maintains, as one of its core principles, that “measures of national progress should include indicators of ecological sustainability and social wellbeing.”<sup>48</sup> It is a perplexing and paradoxical position to be in and one can argue that they need to take the necessary exigencies in order to even remain in the conversation. This can be observed in the tools they propose for change, which are framed within the language of the Market Economy, as is demonstrated in principle seven:

Governments have an essential role in regulating markets and ensuring that any externalities are reflected in market prices of goods and services. In a mixed economy, markets that function well and are fair, efficient and competitive, have an important role in the allocation of resources.<sup>49</sup>

Ingolfur Blühdorn notes that the German Greens were also forced to make a policy turn, during their 2009 campaign in order they continue to *have* a constituency. Their “economic policy positions which appear diametrically opposed to their original [‘post-materialist’, ‘economic anti-politics’] stance,”<sup>50</sup> have been redrafted to acknowledge the current conditions. When the German Greens started, the landscape was totally different and neo-liberalism was in a youthful stage of its grip on world economies.<sup>51</sup>

Consideration of these current political and social conditions hones into the opening salvo of Guattari’s argument. Otherness [alterité] is smoothed off, drawn closer to

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<sup>47</sup> Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 86.

<sup>48</sup> “Economics,” accessed July 25, 2015. <http://greens.org.au/policies/economics>.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ingolfur Blühdorn, “The German Green Party’s Turn to Economic Policy: A Green New Deal for Sustaining the Unsustainable?” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Toronto, Canada, 2-6 September, 2009), 2.

<sup>51</sup> “[The German Greens] now believe that ecology and economy can be fully compatible, indeed mutually conducive. In a shift that can rightfully be called a paradigm change, ecology has metamorphosed from an obstacle to into a means for further economic development. And the Greens who were once vociferous critics of the capitalist consumer economy are now presenting themselves as the agents of economic recovery and employment growth.” Ibid., 4.



the centre, and normalized.<sup>52</sup> In a later text, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, he concedes, “the neo-liberal myth of the world market has acquired incredible powers of suggestion over the last few years. According to this myth, no sooner does an economic ensemble submit to its law than its problems dissolve as if by magic.”<sup>53</sup>

*The Three Ecologies* is of its time, yet it still has an evocative weight to it, and more than a few Cassandra moments that cause pause. Genosko argues that “[Guattari’s] most original contribution to the theorization of ecology [is his] concern with the quality of subjectivity... [It] is what holds together art and ecology.”<sup>54</sup> The theses his text proposes ripple out across art and theoretical practices that are situated in latter post-environmental and post-nature discourses that make up the next section of this chapter. *The Three Ecologies*, and his later writing in *Chaosmosis*, have incited approaches that seek alternate perceptions on the ecological subject, through the potential of cinematic affect. Also compelling to the ethos of this project is Guattari’s stance that “...artists have got nothing to teach anyone,” artworks are not pedagogy, rather, they are “toolkits composed of concepts, percepts and affects, which diverse publics will use at their convenience.”<sup>55</sup>

Guattari is a companion of the artist. He values aesthetic provocations as much if not more than that of quantitative or qualitative approaches.<sup>56</sup> In *The Three Ecologies* he articulates that ecological praxes “seek something that runs counter to the ‘normal’ order of things...”<sup>57</sup> Inside this statement is an agitation that is also a refrain throughout this research. It is not the intent of this project to merely show what is there, or present a logical argument or narrative. There is low-to-no stickiness in that approach, no contemplative silence to regroup and consider the strangeness of the present.

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<sup>52</sup> Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 19.

<sup>53</sup> Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 123.

<sup>54</sup> Gary Genosko, "Subjectivity and Art in Guattari's the Three Ecologies," in *Deleuze/Guattari & Ecology*, ed. Bernd Herzogenrath (Basingstoke England ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 106.

<sup>55</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 129.

<sup>56</sup> “Are not the best cartographies of the psyche, or if you like, the best psychoanalyses, those of Goethe, Proust, Artaud and Beckett, rather than Freud, Jung, and Lacan? In fact, it is the literary component in the works of the latter that best survives...”

<sup>57</sup> Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 30.

Being carried beyond familiar territories into alterities of all sorts permits the emergence of new valorizations, new social practices, new subjectivities. Artists can provide the means for these creative forward flights, these breakaways.<sup>58</sup>

To attain that breakaway moment, from a normal present of disengaged existence, demands, from the position of this research, a disrupting recalibration of the senses. “The work of art, for those who use it, is an activity of unframing, of rupturing sense, of baroque proliferation or extreme impoverishment, which leads to a recreation and a reinvention of the subject itself...”<sup>59</sup> As an alternate method of engagement with the world, the texts surveyed throughout this chapter, and in the exegesis as a whole, return repeatedly to the theme of disruption of the *normal* encounter or experience of the world.

### **Evocative Things or Vital Materialisms:**

A contrail is the ice that forms from the water condensation that is left over from the expulsion of a jet engine – a trace in the sky of a plane passing by. It is an everyday modern thing, not human, nor animal, just a temporary fleeting object in a cool blue sky. Yet there is something affective, contemplative and evocative in that thing for me.

To draw back in the human encounter is to imagine, within these lines in the sky, the narrative arcs of tightly packed distant passengers ten kilometres above enclosed in metal capsules. They are vacationers; business people; émigrés; those fleeing the past; those returning to the ones they love. To see the contrail itself is another encounter that catches you out of your normal traverses through the world. You are doing something, drinking coffee, talking to a friend, or taking a walk, and then out of the corner of your eye you see a line that ruptures the immediate, time, place, and action. You look up and think something else. A contrail is never encountered by itself. They are always accompanied by another thought or memory.

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<sup>58</sup> Genosko, "Subjectivity and Art in Guattari's the Three Ecologies," in *Deleuze/Guattari & Ecology*, 111.

<sup>59</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 131.



Fig. 3. Andrew Denton. [Film Still: *Flight*] Contrail #1, California, U.S.A. (2014).

It is my experience that objects or *things* can have the quality to bring about a pause in the everyday. This position supported an early decision to deprioritise the human in the images produced during this research. Morton may be lingering in the background of these thoughts of the affective, uncanny, quality of the non-human, with his reframing of the uncanny around the notion of the “strange stranger.”<sup>60</sup> Nicholas Royle describes “the uncanny is a crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper...”<sup>61</sup> Morton takes Freud’s lead in theorizing his own notions of the uncanny, as “...that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar.”<sup>62</sup> Freud builds his thesis, which by his own acknowledgement is an aesthetic one, through his psychoanalytical lens.<sup>63</sup>

In Morton’s ‘Ecology without Nature’ discourse, while “the strange stranger is us,”<sup>64</sup> it is *more* not us. Royle extrapolates that the uncanny is “a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was ‘part of nature’: one’s own

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<sup>60</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 80.

<sup>61</sup> Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>62</sup> Freud, *The Uncanny*, 121.

<sup>63</sup> He asserts, “...that every affect arising from an emotional impulse – of whatever kind - is converted into fear by being repressed, it follows that among those things that are felt to be frightening there must be one group in which it can be shown that the frightening element is something that has been repressed and now returns. This species of the frightening would then constitute the uncanny, and it would be immaterial whether it was itself originally frightening or arose from another affect.” Ibid., 147-48.

<sup>64</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 80.

nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world.”<sup>65</sup> Morton makes a similar historical link between nature and the uncanny, referring to Freud’s description of being lost in a high altitude forest.<sup>66</sup> “Forests are iterations of trees, and hence highly uncanny. Freud’s exemplary image of the uncanny is of being lost in one...”<sup>67</sup> Then, what does the uncanny look, or more accurately, *feel like* without its historical companion – Nature? What we are left with “is a vastly more complex situation that is uncanny and intimate at the same time.”<sup>68</sup> It is in this realization that the uncanny sensation of living without the mythology of Nature presents itself.

“Our encounter with other beings becomes profound. They are strange, even intrinsically strange. Getting to know them makes them stranger. When we talk about life forms, we’re talking about strange strangers.”<sup>69</sup> These thoughts reformed and regrouped during the production of the film project *Aspects of Trees*. As I recorded images, alone in the forest, thinking and feeling these non-human, living and dying things, the hair on my arms rose and tingled. Later this feeling returned as I filmed the tanker trucks leaving Fort MacMurray, with their loads of oil tar, heading south to the refineries in Edmonton. Things and non-human beings are capable of producing sensations, percepts of fragments, transformed into affects, of what Morton categorises as hyperobjects. He stresses: “The intensity of the hyperobject’s aesthetic trace seems unreal in its very luminosity.”<sup>70</sup> It is the non-human traces that have dominated camera frame during the collection of the recorded images, while the human form has lingered in the periphery.<sup>71</sup>

Jane Bennett’s vital materialist project has allegiances with Morton’s notion of the ‘strange stranger.’ She is concerned with the power of things, “thing-power,” that can evoke an affective response in the beholder, “the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle,”<sup>72</sup> and what that means to how we perceive and operate in the world. Her work has been a re-occurring

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<sup>65</sup> Royle, *The Uncanny*, 1.

<sup>66</sup> “One may, for instance, have lost one’s way in the woods, perhaps after being overtaken by fog, and, despite all one’s efforts to find a marked or familiar path, one comes back again and again to the same spot, which one recognizes by a particular physical feature.” Freud, *The Uncanny*, 144.

<sup>67</sup> Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 178.

<sup>68</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, 131.

<sup>69</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 15.

<sup>70</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, 32.

<sup>71</sup> The audio has a different role I will expand on in detail later in the exegesis.

<sup>72</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 6.

intercessor in this project's focus, which has concentrated on the things humans make, or with which we interface, and discard, in relation to post-industrial societal reliance on fossil fuel consumption. This dependence has an alienating force on social and ecological relationships with things human and non-human alike. Sensations of strangeness weave through Bennett's discourse as she problematizes subjective encounters with things (those that have the baggage of cultural and historical weight), with that of the vitality of matter itself. In *Vibrant Matter* Bennett turns "the figures of 'life' and 'matter' around and around, worrying them until they start to seem strange, in something like the way a common word when repeated can become a foreign, nonsense sound. In the space created by this estrangement, a vital materiality can start to take shape."<sup>73</sup> "Thing-power" has its lineage, for Bennett, in Spinoza's conatus,<sup>74</sup> Theroux's "the Wild or that uncanny presence that met him in the Conchord woods,"<sup>75</sup> and is also aligned with "what Hent de Vries, in the context of political theology, called 'the absolute' or that 'intangible and imponderable' recalcitrance."<sup>76</sup>

Bennett's affective experience of encountering discarded objects, on a grate over a storm drain, struck a chord with my own experiences of the objects and landscapes I film. Her discourse is a useful instrument to contemplate the affective quality of things. The narrative of her encounter with debris, which included a plastic glove, dead rat, pollen, a stick of wood, and a plastic bottle cap, provoked perplexing affects in her. She "was repelled by the dead (or was it merely sleeping?) rat and dismayed by the litter, but [she] also felt something else: a nameless awareness of the impossible singularity of *that* rat, *that* configuration of pollen, *that* otherwise utterly banal, mass-produced plastic water-bottle cap."<sup>77</sup> In the initial encounter, as with my example of the contrail, she wraps a human narrative around the objects as they transfer between debris and things. Thoughts of the success of the rat poisoner

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>74</sup> "Mind and body act in unison and are synchronized by what Spinoza calls conatus, that is to say the desire to become and to increase the intensity of one's becoming." Adrian Parr, *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Rev. ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 212.

<sup>75</sup> "Wildness was a not-quite-human force that addled and altered human and other bodies. It addled an irreducibly strange dimension of matter, an out-side." Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 2.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

(“human activity”) coexist alongside her repulsion of *that* dead rodent.<sup>78</sup> But Bennett feels something beyond *that* rat and the other things in its milieu. There is the interconnection between the materiality of the things and their surrounds: their “contingent tableau,” (including the weather, the street, and her) that “shimmer and spark.”<sup>79</sup> Together, as an assemblage, she caught a “glimpse of [their] energetic vitality,” as such they infer new meaning and new possible readings as things, “*objects* appeared as *things*, that is, as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics.”<sup>80</sup> The scales fall from her eyes, she is able to see the world anew, and to perceive the “items on the ground that day [as] vibratory – at one moment disclosing themselves as dead stuff and at the next as live presence: junk, then claimant; inert matter, then live wire.”<sup>81</sup> Bennett’s concerns go beyond the acknowledgement of the vibrancy of matter, helpful though this is to shift perception on the world. It is the interface between “human beings and thinghood” and “the extent to which the us and the it slip-slide into each other” that she finds a mode to reconsider the world and its threatened environment.<sup>82</sup> She reminds us that humans are also non-human and that things have their own agency, when we take this into account, “impersonal life that surrounds and infuses us, will generate a more subtle awareness of the complicated web of dissonant connections between bodies, and will enable wiser interventions into that ecology.”<sup>83</sup>

What is compelling about this provocation – to consider the interconnected vitality of us and things, and us as things interfacing with other things – is that it requires a re-thinking around human and non-human agency and how that can shift perception in regards to the ecological crisis. “In a knotted world of vibrant matter, to harm one section of the web may very well be to harm oneself. Such an enlightened or expanded notion of self-interest is good for *humans*.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 13.

Subjectivity is difficult to cast aside. Bennett has Thoreau, Plumwood, Guattari, Rancière, and a host of other intercessors zig-zagging through her thoughts, as well as the historical and cultural frameworks that have constructed her world-view. She also has the experience of being where she is when she is sleepy or alert, irritated or peaceful, and all the other feelings and filters that make up a person, and shift and change sensations and experiences.

This impulse toward cultural, linguistic, or historical constructivism, which interprets any expression of thing-power as an effect of culture and the play of human powers, politicizes moralistic and oppressive appeals to 'nature.' And that is a good thing. But the constructivist response to the world also tends to obscure from view whatever thing-power there may be.<sup>85</sup>

It is quite a trick then to be able to consider the world outside of human agency and ultimately it isn't *exactly* what Bennett is asking for when she proposes moments of "methodological naiveté, [and] for the postponement of a genealogical critique of objects."<sup>86</sup> It is about acknowledging and repositioning non-human agency, with the understanding that humans are also non-humans, and "a lot happens to the concept of agency once nonhuman things are figured less as social constructions and more as actors, and once humans themselves are assessed not as autonyms but as vital materialities." It is not matter of either/or or us and them but a meshing of the human with the non-human for mutual benefit and understanding.<sup>87</sup>

This project lays no claim to upholding a vital materialist position but there are aspects in Bennett's project that ally with the thoughts that inform the practice. Looking at things in the world differently – and not prioritizing the human subject – opens up new possibilities for understanding, and provides other tools for reading the networks of things that make up, influence and disrupt human and non-human milieus.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> "If human culture is inextricably enmeshed with vibrant, nonhuman agencies, and if human intentionality can be agentic only if accompanied by a vast entourage of nonhumans, then it seems that the appropriate unit of analysis for democratic theory is neither the individual human nor an exclusively human collective but the (ontologically heterogeneous) "public" coalescing around a problem." Ibid., 108.

## **The Strange and the Perplexing Feelings of Living in a Time of Ecological Emergency:**

To have ecology, we must give up Nature. But since we have been addicted to Nature for so long, giving up will be painful. Giving up a fantasy is harder than giving up a reality.<sup>88</sup>

Timothy Morton's project on the 'Ecological Thought' has intersected with the spectrum of concerns that have stimulated the thinking and making of the project outlined in this exegesis. At the core of his position is a rejection of the "mythology" of "Nature," as a capitalist, romantic, and ecocritical construction that subverts and blocks meaningful engagement with the ecological problem. Morton's assertions that "our continued survival, and therefore the survival of the planet we're now dominating beyond all doubt, depends on our thinking past Nature," opened an alternate pathway to consider the ecological crisis subject through the practice.<sup>89</sup> This adjustment in thinking, along with Rancière's politics of aesthetics and Judith Butler's writing on grief in *Precarious Life*, which I cover in Chapter Two, activated a shift from incapacitated melancholy to confronting through making, and a recalibration of eyes, and ears, to the strangeness of living in a time of ecological emergency. Morton's '*strange*,' and '*uncanny*' view of the current and future conditions profoundly intersected the project, while at the same time clicked into focus approaches for contemplating the ecological subject, visually and aurally, with an aim to harnessing these disorientating sensations as allies to the process of experiencing the world anew. In this section I identify and discuss significant strands, framed in Morton's 'Ecological Thought' that have woven their way through this project, as antagonisms to push up against, or considerations that have caused pause and led to experimentation.

The key elements of concern are his notions of the '*mesh*' and the '*strange stranger*', and as previously mentioned, contemplation, melancholy, and the '*uncanny*' experience living in and owning up to the ecological emergency. Other asides and thoughts are enlisted, and referred to as needed, throughout this chapter and the exegesis whole. Particularly evocative are his visually acute reflections on global warming and fossil fuel consumption.

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<sup>88</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 95.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



In *Ecology without Nature*, Morton hones his argument for discarding the idea of “Nature,” as a necessary step in forming a new method of ecological and aesthetic thinking that realigns how humans perceive and “experience their place in the world.”<sup>90</sup> He builds the foundation for his argument via a critique of art and literature that is rooted in Romantic traditions of “nature writing,” texts he refers to as “ecomimesis.” “Ecomimesis is a pressure point, crystallizing a vast and complex ideological network of beliefs, practices, and processes in and around the idea of the natural world. It is extraordinarily common, both in nature writing and in ecological criticism.”<sup>91</sup> This reflective approach, “accounts for the phenomenon of environmentalism in culture [by] delving into the details of poetry and prose, and stepping back to see the big picture, while offering a critique of the workings of ‘Nature’ at different levels.”<sup>92</sup> *The Ecological Thought* calls out nature as a ‘fantasy’ construction of ecomimetic art, ecocriticism, and post-industrial capitalism. To fantasise nature is to reify it, to make it an “object ‘over there,’” in the distance.<sup>93</sup>

Morton refers to his methods as ecocritique...

...a twofold process, consisting both in exuberant friendliness and disarming skepticism. The approach is not to be confused with nihilism. We are treading a path between saying that something called nature exists, and saying that nothing exists at all.<sup>94</sup>

His project is compelling as he not only interrogates the causes of the ecological emergency (capitalism), but also the representations (in art and literature), and responses (through ecocriticism and environmental activism), which have led to ineffective action. It is his proposal that the reification of nature in each of these contexts has exacerbated human impact on the natural environment.

The idea of nature is all too real, and it has an all too real effect upon all too real beliefs, practices, and decisions in the all too real world. True, I claim that there is no such ‘thing’ as nature, if by nature we mean some thing that is single, independent, and lasting. But deluded ideas and ideological fixations do exist. ‘Nature’ is a focal point that compels us to assume certain attitudes. Ideology resides in the attitude we

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<sup>90</sup> Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 2.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

assume toward this fascinating object. By dissolving the object, we render the ideological fixation inoperative.<sup>95</sup>

The initial encounter with Morton's work intersected with the production of the film, *Aspects of Trees* (2015).<sup>96</sup> The film is an early test project that emerged out of my personal experiences as a tree planter and reforestation manager, in Canada, from 1992 to 2003. The subject of the work is the Mountain Pine Beetle Epidemic in North America. Around the year 2000 the pine beetle returned to the US and Canada for its natural cycle of culling elder stands of trees. However, decades of warming winter climates, and forest industry practices that prioritise mono-species planting, means that the beetle has no adversaries and a surplus of food. The ecological disaster is a reminder of the complexity and fragility of our ecology under stress.<sup>97</sup> The film is an nascent attempt, in the research, to accentuate the tension between a realist representation of pine beetle infected dying forests of North America, against what is not seen and heard in a *neurotypical* experience of standing amongst the slowly rotting trees and on distant clear-cuts. The work experiments with cinematic affect to eschew factual or realistic modes of representation in favour of expressive contemplations, seeking to evoke an experience of being in an entropic forest. The structure of the film sets up a space of attenuated tranquility, then systematically dismantles this perception, and draws on the uncanny sensations of a loss of something not quite remembered, while at the same time seeking out sounds and images, through technology, that are usually invisible and unhearable, to seek ways to make them seen and heard as part of the overall accentuation of the subject. I discuss the production of *Aspects of Trees* in detail in Chapter Four. I introduce it here as an important point of convergence between the developing practical and theoretical frameworks.

The pine beetle crisis is devastating on any level – micro or macro. The scale is unthinkable; Morton might conclude it “a hyperobject.” As I write this chapter, under the fluorescent lights of Strathcona County Library in Alberta, Canada, in

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>96</sup> *Aspects of Trees* has been presented to date at *The New Zealand Film Festival (2015)*, and the *Jihlava International Documentary Festival (2015)*.

<sup>97</sup> “Over the past decade climate change has resulted in more area being disturbed by the ravages of insects, fire and disease than in any time since glaciation. In western Canada alone (British Columbia, Alberta and the Yukon) Mountain Pine Beetles have left some 20 million hectares of dead standing forests.” Dirk Brinkman, “Editorial,” *Silviculture Magazine* Spring 2012 (2012): 6.

August 2015, hundreds of pine beetle infected, and drought ridden, forests burn across the West Coast of North America. I know this because I keep getting push notices from CNN and NPR to view clips of water bombers futilely attacking the flames. Also – when I walk outside for fresh air I can't see across the street for all the smoke.



Fig. 4. Andrew Denton. [Photograph] Strathcona County and Forest Fire Smoke, Alberta, Canada (2015).

Fighting the fires is a twofold folly of saving mono-species plantation forests, and houses built on the tinderbox hillsides of a century of misguided *resource* management. The event articulately highlights the question that Morton raises around the capitalist fantasy of mythological nature.<sup>98</sup> The plantation forests and the beetle epidemic, like the National Park, are the coalescence of Morton's nightmares: "Wilderness areas are giant, abstract versions of the products hanging in mall windows. Even when we've tried to preserve an enclave of safety from the ravages of the modern age, we've been getting it all wrong."<sup>99</sup>

During this project there have been milestones where the contextual review of knowledge and practice, and the making of the work, have had activating moments of

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<sup>98</sup> "What if capitalism itself relied on fantasies of apocalypse in order to keep reproducing and reinventing itself? What if, finally, Nature as such, the idea of a radical outside to the social system, was a capitalist fantasy, even precisely *the* capitalist fantasy?" Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 125.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

connection. These are the exegetic pathways traversed in this document. The research discussed here emerged out of a hunch that the ecological subject is cast under a spell of multiple layers of invisibility that pushes it outside peripheral collective consciousness, a type of shared cognitive dissonance, perhaps invoked by overwhelming media coverage, subjectivities, and complexities of the subject, and/or by the social frameworks and consequences of late capitalism. “The logic of capital has made sure that the environment certainly isn't what we have been calling Nature any more.”<sup>100</sup> This, hunch, as I discuss later in the next chapter, directed the critical inquiry towards Rancière’s project on the politics of aesthetics, with particular attention to his description of the distribution of the sensible: that which is “capable of being apprehended by the senses.”<sup>101</sup> To that end *Aspects of Trees* was made under the simple emergent aegis of attempting to make the invisible visible and the unhearable hearable.

While filming pickups for *Aspects of Trees*, in Canada, these attempts crossed paths with critical engagements with Morton’s *The Ecological Thought* and his subsequent work *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. The text highlighted some unintentional paradoxes between the intent of the work and the film in progress. Early edits overworked the visual and aural material to meaningless abstractions. His discussion on ‘ambient poetics’ activated new experimentations with the visual and sound elements, and crucially led to a reshoot, and subsequent re-edit, of key elements in the work, as well as a significant rethink through the next direction of the research. Morton’s reflections on art, contemplation, melancholy, intimacy, the uncanny and his account of the ‘mesh’ and the ‘strange stranger’, have considerations, ethics, and politics that have alignments with the positions framed in this project. Morton reflects: “Nature as such appears when we lose it, and it's known as loss. Along with the disorientation of the modern world goes an ineffable sadness.”<sup>102</sup> I now refer to *Aspects of Trees* as a eulogy for the lost forests, but making the film also operated as personal loss of innocence that invoked a moment of clarity, and a potential way forward.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>101</sup> Jacques Rancière and Gabriel Rockhill, *The Politics of Aesthetics : The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2004), 85.

<sup>102</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 134.

“Modernity,” says Morton, “is the story of how oil got into everything.”<sup>103</sup> Look hard at that statement and it is difficult to refute. Complexity, interconnectedness, and interdependence are discursive elements of his ‘Ecological Thought.’ Oil and the infrastructures and social structures of fossil fuel-based capitalism are the focus of the creative outcomes exhibited for the purpose of this research project. Sometimes the references are direct, and sometimes they are tenuous, but look at any of the images or listen to any of the audio in the works and the links will fall into focus. The contextual, critical and theoretical positions reviewed in this exegesis cannot be compartmentalized as trigger mechanisms that incite the practice. They have operated together at most times, though harmonizing at different volumes, and punctuating different points or directions, and sometimes turning up long after the practice has started to experiment with the subject. Sometimes like couch-surfing friends they just turn up out of nowhere. The way Morton’s lens operates as an incitement to slow down, and contemplate a worldview that is interconnected, interdependent and complex, is a mediating influence on the methods of practice: “Aristotle asserted that the highest form of praxis was contemplation. We shouldn't be afraid to withdraw and reflect.”<sup>104</sup> The causes of the ecological emergency can get in the way of what we think we want, be tedious, obscure, and repetitive, and hence difficult to see. If Rancière helps thinking about the politics of aesthetics, and Deleuze offers tactics into expressive, sensational, and affective registers, Morton agitates what to look at and how to look at it strangely. Ecology without nature... what does this look like?<sup>105</sup>

### **A Turn in the Practice:**

The new direction of the project commenced within a few weeks of camera testing and reviewing the footage filmed around the Sherwood Park/Edmonton oil refineries, in Alberta, Canada. As the focus of the project moved towards objects, things, and landscapes that are interlaced with the structures and infrastructures of fossil fuels,

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<sup>103</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, 54.

<sup>104</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 9.

<sup>105</sup> “Ecology talks about areas of life that we find annoying, boring, and embarrassing. Art can help us, because it’s a place in our culture that deals with intensity, shame, abjection, and loss. It also deals with reality and unreality, being and seeming. If ecology is about radical coexistence, then we must challenge our sense of what is real and what is unreal, what counts as existent and what counts as nonexistent. The idea of Nature as a holistic, healthy, real thing avoids this challenge.” *Ibid.*, 10.

the field excursion methods shifted to spending hours, sometimes days, in the same locale and often in the same camera position. Repetition of image and subject became one of the site techniques. Because of the nature of the subject, I was regularly confronted by security services and had to adopt a range of methods to deflect their interest, from low key distant camera positions to the subject, filming from a vehicle, use of telephoto lenses, to adopting the fashion of the territory and donning a high visibility vest, work boots, and a hard hat – the latter is by far the most effective. The field excursions drew out several realisations and decisions that I will go into in depth in Chapter Four. However, it is helpful to briefly outline the context of the choices made in the practice as a sounding board for reflection on the themes and critical discourses that make up the rest of this chapter and segue through the exegesis. Rather than make blunt linkages between the theory and the practice, I prefer to present a nutshell of the production methods as a key to refer to, while I discuss the critical frameworks that have mediated those processes.

During the collection of the recorded materials the human form is deprioritised, moved to the side of or removed from the frame entirely, in favour of the non-human. The footage is filmed at very high speeds (slow motion) with very little camera movement from fixed positions or linear (tracking) movements, formal, very slow, moving compositions that unfold on the subject. Use of either extreme wide (12-16mm), or super telephoto (400-800mm) lenses, rather than lenses that replicate human perspective (35-55mm), is used to disrupt perspective. “Appreciating strangeness is seeing the very strangeness of similarity and familiarity. To reintroduce the uncanny into the poetics of the home (oikos, ecology, ecomimesis) is a political act.”<sup>106</sup> While there are images of the refineries in the film, as well as oil pipelines, highways and trucks, these are placed alongside ancillary connections to the subject, which range from shopping malls, golf courses in the desert, tourism, surfers, housing developments, LAX, Hollywood, Santa Monica, bird colonies, contrails, the homeless, the Salton Sea, garbage dumps, recycling centres, and the wind farms that punctuate the skylines of California.

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<sup>106</sup> Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 177.



Fig. 5. Andrew Denton. [Film Still: *Crude*] Palm Springs Airport and Wind Farms, California, U.S.A. (2013).

It was imagined at the time of production that shots would last for at least one minute and that the final works would be made up of a collection of long and extremely long takes of single but connected subjects – not montaged scenes – but fragments of the subjects to spend time with. Unlike a constructed scene that has multiple options for escape via cutaways, the shot has to work on its own terms before it releases into the next one. Sound was recorded using contact mics and a specially designed microphone set-up that captured a wide range of spectral sound. Specific sound elements were also collected to layer and construct depth and focus where needed. In addition a range of audio recordings were mined from the radio, television and the Internet as another core sample into the temporal space of the subject. From a subjective point of view (as the camera operator), I tried to assume a contemplative, languid, open and patient demeanor, however, I was also tired, depressed, too cold and too hot. The many months of shooting this subject took a toll on my mental health. Long stints of solo fieldwork are physically arduous, mentally stressful, and can be excruciatingly boring. But intense focus and concentration, when it appears that nothing is happening, can draw out and agitate the subject into the camera lens in a different way, sharpening an altered state of acuity. Things are transformed and new connections are made: “reframing our world, our problems, and ourselves is part

of the ecological project. This is what *praxis* means – action that is thoughtful and thought that is active.”<sup>107</sup>

Morton’s project is contemplative; it wants to take time to regroup, reflect and adjust perspective on the ecological subject. His position “takes seriously the idea that truly theoretical reflection is possible only if thinking decelerates. This is not the same thing as becoming numb or stupid. It is finding anomalies, paradoxes, and conundrums in an otherwise smooth-looking stream of ideas.” This can be read as a call to a certain kind of theoretical meditative state or receptive demeanour, one that is open to “thinking big” rather than “small is beautiful.”<sup>108</sup> This is his ‘Ecological Thought.’ It is vast in scope, brooding, drenched in melancholy and uncanny encounters. But it is also suffused with compassion, empathy, and affect. Situated inside these perplexing contemplations are his notions of the “mesh” and the “strange stranger.”

For Morton: “Life forms constitute a *mesh* that is infinite and beyond concept – unthinkable as such.”<sup>109</sup> The mesh is made up of entities that are simultaneously too little (like DNA), and too big (the Universe), to comprehend.<sup>110</sup> It is the interconnection of living beings, “strange strangers,” but this interconnection also “implies separateness and difference. There would be no mesh if there were no strange strangers. The mesh isn't a background against which the strange stranger appears. It is the entanglement of all strangers.”<sup>111</sup> It is not a holistic interconnectivity like that of a community; rather Morton prefers the analogy of a collectivity: “*collectivity* signifies the conscious choosing of a coexistence that already exists whether we think it or not.”<sup>112</sup> The mesh appears solid, but it is not. It is filled with holes and gaps and the “threading between them”<sup>113</sup> is what gives it purchase: “the interconnectedness of everything is a finely woven tissue that floats in front of

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<sup>107</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 9.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>109</sup> Timothy Morton, “Thinking Ecology: The Mesh, the Strange Stranger, and the Beautiful Soul,” *Collapse 6* (2010): 268.

<sup>110</sup> “Nothing exists all by itself, and so nothing is fully ‘itself.’ There is curiously ‘less’ of the Universe at the same time, and for the same reasons, as we see ‘more’ of it.” Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 15.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>112</sup> Morton, “Thinking Ecology: The Mesh, the Strange Stranger, and the Beautiful Soul,” 278.

<sup>113</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 28.



what elsewhere I have called strange strangers: all entities, from Styrofoam and radio waves to peanuts, snakes and asteroids, are irreducibly uncanny.”<sup>114</sup>

Jane Bennett and Timothy Morton overlap in some of their thinking. They both speak of the ‘enmeshed’ and the ‘collective’, and both ask us to think outside of an anthropocentric subjectivity in their arguments. For Bennett, “humanity and nonhumanity have always performed an intricate dance with each other. There was never a time when human agency was anything other than an interfolding network of humanity and nonhumanity; today this mingling has become harder to ignore.”<sup>115</sup> Morton would unlikely dispute this, however where Bennett is invested in a “distributed agency” across the human and the non-human, Morton is drawn more towards an acknowledgement, embracing, and confronting of the differences across the spectrum of human and non-human beings. For him, there is much to be gained from the strange feelings that these encounters can evoke when we face up to their differences. These encounters have notes of disconcerting complexity. The assertion that “the strange stranger is not only strange, but strangely so. They could be us. They are us,”<sup>116</sup> has similar implications to Bennett’s call to “give up the futile attempt to disentangle the human from the nonhuman.”<sup>117</sup> However both encounter their non-human beings from different nuanced interactions. For Bennett the non-human potential starts with an affective encounter. So too with Morton, however, her path diverges towards collaboration. She suggests that through these encounters we...

...devise new procedures, technologies, and regimes of perception that enable us to consult nonhumans more closely, or to listen and respond more carefully to their outbreaks, objections, testimonies, and propositions. For these offerings are profoundly important to the health of the political ecologies to which *we* belong.<sup>118</sup>

Asked to this, Morton rather wants to be ‘enchanted’ and ‘intimate’ with the ‘strange stranger’ than to team up and work things out. Indeed the “more we know about strange strangers, the more we sense the void...[and] the inbuilt uncanniness of strange strangers is part of how we can be intimate with them.”<sup>119</sup> He says: “we simply can't unthink modernity. If there is any enchantment, it lies in the future.

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<sup>114</sup> Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (2013), 75.

<sup>115</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 34.

<sup>116</sup> Morton, "Thinking Ecology: The Mesh, the Strange Stranger, and the Beautiful Soul," 275.

<sup>117</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 116.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>119</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 80.

The ecological ‘enchants the world,’ if enchantment means exploring the profound and wonderful openness and intimacy of the mesh.”<sup>120</sup> The aims of the practice, not to teach, tell, or, conclude, but to sense, feel, and fall under the spell of the subject, as a method of reconnection and recalibration of world-view, makes Morton’s position evocative. “We need to get out of the persuasion business and start getting into the magic business.”<sup>121</sup> With this in mind, ecological art practices, from his position, might have to drop “happy-happy-joy-joy eco-sincerity,”<sup>122</sup> and move towards the dark, ironic, and uncanny register of the ecological thought.<sup>123</sup>

Morton invokes notions of the ‘uncanny’ throughout his ‘Ecological Thought.’ Melancholy and fear can be resulting emotions that rise from the uncanny. It is this acknowledgement of the strange feeling of living now that has coursed its way through the creative outcomes discussed in this exegesis.<sup>124</sup> There are layers to the experience of the uncanny that Morton harnesses to argue his position. In his critique of ecomimetic texts he reveals the uncanny as an elemental aspect of those writers’ and artists’ experience of Nature. Thoreau’s *Walden Pond* and Coleridge’s poetry are examples of how the uncanny is acknowledged, even reified, across this type of environmental rhetoric. Morton points out that it is not only in the strange encounters with Nature, which these works describe, but also through Romantic poetic techniques that employ familiar language and repetition, introducing “a very strong rhythm of the uncanny.”<sup>125</sup> He says: “Strangeness is associated with rhythm because repetition evokes strangeness. Familiarity in poetics is repetition, rhythm; even imagery can have rhythm.”<sup>126</sup>

In the Romantic representational context, experiencing Nature is uncanny. After the departure of a mythological Nature, in the late industrial context, another type of

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>121</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, 101.

<sup>122</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 104.

<sup>123</sup> “The ecological thought is intrinsically dark, mysterious, and open, like an empty city square at dusk, a half-open door, or an unresolved chord. It is realistic, depressing, intimate, and alive and ironic all at the same time. It is no wonder that the ancients thought that melancholy, their word for depression, was the earth mood. In the language of humour theory, melancholy is black, earthy, and cold.” Ibid., 16.

<sup>124</sup> Morton takes his lead from Freud, who wrote on this affective state through a psychoanalytical lens in his 1919 essay *The Uncanny*, which he says, “is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed” ‘*Unheimlich*,’ from the original German, can be translated as unhomey or unfamiliar. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 148.

<sup>125</sup> Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 178.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

uncanny emerges from our sensate experience of what Morton calls hyperobjects. Hyperobjects are “things that are massively distributed over time and space relative to humans.”<sup>127</sup> They are inconceivable in their entirety, rendered unimaginable by their vast finitudes that measure in hundreds of thousands of years or more.<sup>128</sup>

Global warming is a hyperobject. It is part of the struggle of the practice to encounter and think about the global warming hyperobject – it is extremely slippery and cannot be captured as a whole.<sup>129</sup> And there are hyperobjects inside and around other hyperobjects. Tar sands, highway systems, radio, the Internet, and the sensations they evoke when experiencing or encountering glimpses of them, have translated into strange ways of seeing collections of fragments, and thinking about them. “We can only see pieces of hyperobjects at a time. The reason why they appear nonlocal and temporally foreshortened is precisely because of this transdimensional quality. We only see pieces of them at once, like a tsunami or a case of radiation sickness.”<sup>130</sup> Morton’s project has interested the practice nonlinearly. I film a heat shimmer on a road, maybe because I read Morton, maybe I read Morton because I filmed a shimmer, or maybe having filmed and read, the shimmer becomes evident to me as uncanny, as revealing the hyperobject. Making creative works up against the ecological emergency, in the new epoch of the Anthropocene, requires alternate methods of contemplation, methods that acknowledge that there is no going back to an environmentalism of saving a planet that can be thought without the notion of Nature. The point Morton is making through his non-anthropocentric (OOO) approach<sup>131</sup> suggests that thinking about the hyperobject means that ‘we’ are past thinking the “end of the world” as a concept. It is not helpful for the environmental discourse to situate around “the strongly held belief that the world is about to end

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<sup>127</sup> “These gigantic timescales are truly humiliating in the sense that they force us to realize how close to Earth we are. Infinity is far easier to cope with.” Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, 60.

<sup>128</sup> “A hyperobject could be a black hole. A hyperobject could be the Lago Agrio oil field in Ecuador, or the Florida Everglades. A hyperobject could be the biosphere, or the Solar System. A hyperobject could be the sum total of all the nuclear materials on Earth; or just the plutonium, or the uranium. A hyperobject could be the very long-lasting product of direct human manufacture, such as Styrofoam or plastic bags, or the sum of all the whirring machinery of capitalism. Hyperobjects, then, are “hyper” in relation to some other entity, whether they are directly manufactured by humans or not.” *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>131</sup> “(OOO): object oriented ontology. “an emerging philosophical movement committed to a unique form of realism and non-anthropocentric thinking.” *Ibid.*, 2.

‘unless we act now,’ [and that this] is paradoxically one of the most powerful factors that inhibit a full engagement with our ecological coexistence here on Earth.”<sup>132</sup>

Like science fictions, “hyperobjects are messages in bottles from the future: they do not quite exist in a present, since they scoop the standard reference points from the idea of present time.”<sup>133</sup> These messages from the future make us feel something. The feelings they evoke are as unsettling as the experience of living in the time of the hyperobject he describes: familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. Because hyperobjects are all around us and in everything they are sticky and hard to grasp at the same time.<sup>134</sup> By thinking about global warming in this way it releases the practice from a need to unpack the subject with honed narratives or polemic discourses, rather that there is a vein of political potential, for an art practice, not so much in reasoned argument, but in the affects of encountering the strangely familiar slivers of the ecological subject.

Reasoning on and on is a symptom of how people are still not ready to go through an affective experience that would existentially and politically bind them to hyperobjects, to care for them. We need art that does not make people think (we have quite enough environmental art that does that), but rather that walks them through an inner space that is hard to traverse.<sup>135</sup>

And it is not that we shouldn’t feel anger and guilt for what we have done to the planet, but rather that there are alternate responses to our predicament that are not as tied to the self, as much as to a collective process of recognition and contemplation that might offer an ethics and *praxis* forward. Judith Butler, whose writing on grief and affect are discussed in the next chapter, reminds us of this in her essays on 9/11 and the conflicts that ensued from that event: “open grieving is bound up with outrage, and outrage in the face of injustice or indeed of unbearable loss has enormous political potential.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>134</sup> Global warming is “viscous. It never stops sticking to you, no matter where you move on Earth. How can we account for this? By arguing that global warming, like all hyperobjects, is nonlocal: it’s massively distributed in time and space.” Ibid., 48.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>136</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London ; New York: Verso, 2004), 39.

## **Chapter Two – Grief, Sensation, and Dissensus:**

As a way to connect viewers with the ecological emergency, *Cinematic Affect in a Time of Ecological Emergency* has experimented with cinematic devices to produce an emotional response through the affect of sensation. This chapter positions the provocations for thinking through this objective theoretically. It covers the writers, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Rancière, Judith Butler, Brian Massumi and Erin Manning. Each has stimulated strands of thinking around political and ethical considerations and provided tools for iterative reflection on aesthetics that have informed the creative outcomes of this project.

From the position of the research outlined here, corporeal vulnerabilities, evoked from sensations of loss and sadness have influenced the thinking and the making. Throughout this process I have wrestled with the painful affects of melancholy, which then evolved into a kind of coping through making. Working on the creative outcomes and thinking through the critical frameworks has been an existential process of mourning the loss of an imaginary world, while recalibrating my senses through an even stranger, ambivalent experience of attempting to reimagine it again through *practice*. To capture the sense of melancholy that activated this project, a discussion on the political potential of grief serves as a way to understand the socio-political responses to the ecological crisis.

This argument has been motivated by Judith Butler's work on collective grief and the processes of mourning, as articulated in *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War*. She extends her discourse into the social experiences of affect and how "it disposes us to perceive the world in a certain way, to let certain dimensions of the world in and to resist others."<sup>137</sup>

### **Grief, Mourning, Vulnerability and Response:**

Butler's writing on the political potential of grief and mourning is drawn from the context of her post-9/11 experience of living in the United States. In the shadows of the wars that occurred in its aftermath, Butler asks: "Who counts as human? Whose

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<sup>137</sup> Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London New York : Verso, 2009), 50.

lives count as lives? And, finally, what *makes for a grievable life?*<sup>138</sup> Her expanded contributions on collective, affective responses in politics and conflict have supported my thinking about ethical and political positioning of this project.

*Precarious Life* and *Frames of War* are concerned with human responses—corporeal (affective), ethical and political—to catastrophic events. Butler asks in what ways do mediated political narratives and social experiences drive or deflect perceptions of loss? One provocation is her question: “Is our capacity to mourn in global dimensions foreclosed precisely by the failure to conceive of Muslim and Arab lives as lives?”<sup>139</sup> The politico-militaristic reactions to the attacks on America are rationalised in such away that the ‘Other’ lives (Palestinian, Iraqi, Afghani) are deemed of less value or not ‘lives’ at all, effecting social perceptions.<sup>140</sup> The State response to the violence incurred on the victims in New York in 2001 was more violence and revenge over reconciliation; “consolidating [the United States’] reputation as a militaristic power with no respect for lives outside of the First World.”<sup>141</sup> This reputation was exacerbated by the swiftness with which President Bush directed the country (just ten days after the attacks) to dispense with grief and move towards “resolute action.”<sup>142</sup>

Butler’s argument is that when we fear the act of grieving, such fear will push us to quickly resolve the grief and “banish it in the name of an action invested with the power to restore the loss or return the world to a former order, or to reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly.”<sup>143</sup> What we lose by doing this is the opportunity to be vulnerable under the painful spell of grief. To replace vulnerability with one of violence disallows a capacity to empathise, and in doing so we forgo “our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another.”<sup>144</sup>

Butler offers methods for thinking through responses to crisis subjects as collective responsibility. This position is a little different to Bennett’s and Morton’s presented in Chapter One and I understand the humanist approaches of Butler’s run counter to

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<sup>138</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, 20.

<sup>139</sup> Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, 12.

<sup>140</sup> “...not only organis[ing] visual experience but also generat[ing] specific ontologies of the subject.”  
Ibid., 3.

<sup>141</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, 17.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 30.

the neo-materialist philosophies of Bennett and Morton. Although they are each calling into question “ontolog[ies] of individualism,”<sup>145</sup> Butler remains wholly humanist in her approach. Where Bennett and Morton offer an alternate for conceptualizing the subject as just another vibration in the world,<sup>146</sup> deprioritising the human in favour of a more interconnected and interdependent material position. Essential to Butler is her stress on the collective good, filtered through the recognition of a Levinasian ‘Other’ who must be recognised as coming before the self-interest of a subjective ‘I’,<sup>147</sup> believing that the self cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world.”<sup>148</sup>

Central to Levinas’ theory of the other is the ‘face’, which Butler adopts as an ethical commitment in her essay “Precarious Life”, clarifying that his use of the face does not encompass the full recognition of the face, since the face of the other is never representable, but is the key to one’s moral obligation to the other’s otherness in the face’s its non-representability.

For Levinas... the human face is not *represented by* the face. Rather the human is indirectly affirmed in that very disjunction that makes representation impossible, and this disjunction is conveyed in the impossible representation. For representation to convey the human, then, representation must not only fail, but it must *show* its failure. There is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and that paradox must be retained in the representation we give.<sup>149</sup>

Thomas Claviez, in his attempt to reconcile an ‘ecocentric’ argument within Levinasian ethics, identifies the problem of situating the ecology as the ‘Other,’ because “in the context of [Levinas’s] philosophy [it] is a human other – as arising out of a moment of confrontation (of the face-to-face) that precedes all knowledge

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<sup>145</sup> Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, 33.

<sup>146</sup> I am using Deleuze’s notion of the vibration in relation to concepts as fragmentary irregular totalities. “Concepts are centers of vibrations, each in itself and every one in relation to all the others. This is why they all resonate rather than cohere or correspond with each other.” See: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, *European Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 23.

<sup>147</sup> In an interview Levinas explains his ethics on the foundational concept of the ‘Other’, saying, “My ethical relation of love for the other stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world... In ethics, the other’s right to exist has primacy over my own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardize the life of the other.” Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1986), 24.

<sup>148</sup> Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, 33

<sup>149</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, 144.

about this other.” My ethical position, in this context, relies on thinking the ecological emergency through a humanist lens that wants to take account of us (the humans), reconsidering the methods in which we encounter and respond to the world, and the other non-human entities we share it with. Claviez points out that any “ecocentric” environmental ethics demands that it be communicated in “anthropocentric” ways. As well as citing his position on what makes us “other than nature” and “nature our ‘other’:

Our abilities to love, to talk, to reflect, to plan, to dress, have all been drawn upon to distinguish us from animals, plants, microbes, and stones. These distinctions all point to what is different from us, that is, what makes us other than nature, or rather, what makes nature our “other”.<sup>150</sup>

Butler’s reworking of Levinas’ ethics calls on us to sense the loss of the ‘Other’ affectively, perceiving it and valuing it without knowing it.<sup>151</sup> Claviez argues, “if reason tells us that we should preserve nature, the prescriptive term ‘should’ in this formulation cannot, according to Levinas, be deduced from reason but has to precede it.”<sup>152</sup> The Earth cannot easily be reconciled as a Levinasian ‘Other’ in his strictly human-centred methodology. Christian Diehm concludes that the transgression of attempting a “Levinasian non-anthropocentrism” requires “developing aspects of Levinas’s thought in less strictly Levinasian directions.”<sup>153</sup> These approaches imply...

...another concrete way of ‘awakening to the precariousness of the other’. A world in which myriad others follow their own trajectories appears to be one in which there are myriad possibilities for ethical encounter, innumerable occasions for realizing that we ought to arrange our lives such that we do not leave others in disarray.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Thomas Claviez, "Ecology as Moral Stand(S): Environmental Ethics, Western Moral Philosophy, and the Problem of the Other," in *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism*, ed. Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer (Amsterdam ; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2006), 436.

<sup>151</sup> “Affect depends upon social supports for feeling: we come to feel only in relation to a perceivable loss, one that depends on social structures of perception; and we can only feel and claim affect as our own on the condition that we have already been inscribed in a circuit of social affect.”<sup>151</sup> Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, 50.

<sup>152</sup> Claviez, "Ecology as Moral Stand(S): Environmental Ethics, Western Moral Philosophy, and the Problem of the Other," in *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism*, 452.

<sup>153</sup> Christian Diehm, "Alterity, Value, Autonomy: Levinas and Environmental Ethics," in *Facing Nature: Levinas and Environmental Thought*, ed. Christian Diehm, James Hatley, and William Edelglass (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press., 2012), 22.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*



Butler says, “loss has made a tenuous ‘we’ of us all.”<sup>155</sup> We are all connected by loss in that we have all lost someone or something we care about. How we respond to this sense of loss is at the ethical core of what Butler proposes is the political potential of grief.<sup>156</sup>

To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself. The disorientation of grief – ‘Who have I become?’ or, indeed, ‘What is left of me?’ ‘What is it in the Other that I have lost?’ posits the ‘I’ in the mode of unknowingness.<sup>157</sup>

A physical register in the “mode of unknowingness” that Butler refers to, is a state of vulnerability that connects one to the world beyond the everyday experience of it. To feel loss of the ‘Other’ means an alternate thinking of it; one that reaches beyond rational registers and seeks out an emotional connection. To lose something we care about requires that we understand our own precariousness in relationship to it. “One mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly for ever.”<sup>158</sup> Eileen Joy, in her essay “Blue,” makes a similar connection to the social potential of these affects to join collective human perception to the ecological emergency, suggesting that the world is now steeped in melancholy, our experience of it now enmeshed with *its* sadness:

Is depression, sadness, melancholy—feeling blue—always only taking place within the interior spaces of individually bounded forms of sentience and physiology, or is it in the world somehow, a type of weather or atmosphere, with the becoming-mad of the human mind only one of its many effects (a form of attunement to the world’s melancholy)?<sup>159</sup>

From the position of this research feeling sad and grieving about the world is a good thing. Sadness is the emotion that emerges from the affective response to loss. There is, Butler notes something enigmatic in the experience of loss. It is a perplexing, ambiguous, one might say, heightened, but inexact corporeal state. “If mourning involves knowing what one has lost (and melancholia originally meant, to a certain extent, not knowing), then mourning would be maintained by its enigmatic

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<sup>155</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, 20.

<sup>156</sup> “What, politically, might be made of grief [?]” *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>159</sup> Eileen Joy, A, “Blue,” in *Prismatic Ecology : Ecotheory Beyond Green*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (2013), 213-14.

dimension, by the experience of not knowing incited by losing what we cannot fully fathom.”<sup>160</sup> As noted earlier, part of the potential for empathy lies in the recognition that we cannot truly know the ‘Other’ and that that is okay, since the unknowable is also respect for the other’s distance.<sup>161</sup> I am not suggesting that breaking free from a collective melancholy for the loss of natural environments, through a grieving process, will lead to an immediate shift in the polity to step up and stop the violent impacts contemporary modes of living have on the planet. The barriers that confront such a radical reassessment and reaction to how we act in the world are complex, and the forces that resist such change are powerfully entrenched in the current conditions of our economic and political systems. But maybe opening ourselves up to grief and owning up to a kind of unknowingness of the world, may present a hopeful shaft of light in the darkness.

Sadness, like other emotions, changes us physiologically in its affects. It potentially opens us up to thinking about our vulnerabilities and the vulnerabilities of human and non-human others. This is empathy. With empathy comes contemplation.<sup>162</sup> It slows us down, concentrates us, and alters the way we see the world and our place in it. Val Plumwood reminds us that the “moral reasoning” underpinning many “ethical theories” have “some version of empathy, putting ourselves in the other’s place, seeing the world to some degree from the perspective of an other.”<sup>163</sup> I view the way we are treating the planet as sadly confusing, induced by a state of collective, cognitive dissidence, provoked by the dominant capitalist systems under which we exist.<sup>164</sup> In short, as Levinas has already argued, it befits us, even if only selfishly, to adjust our worldview and by consequence our behaviours.

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<sup>160</sup> Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, 21-22.

<sup>161</sup> Another way of The ‘Other’ “...is not unknown but unknowable, refractory to all light. But this precisely indicates that the other is in no way another myself, participating with me in a common existence. The relationship with the other is not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion, or a sympathy through which we put ourselves in the other's place; we recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery. Emmanuel Lévinas, "Time and the Other," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Séan Hand (Oxford, UK B. Blackwell, 1989), 43.

<sup>162</sup> Empathy “entails an intellectual engagement with the plight of the other; when one talks about empathy one is not talking simply about emotion, but about contemplation as well. Alison Landsberg, "Memory, Empathy, and the Politics of Identification," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 22, no. 2 (2009): 223.

<sup>163</sup> Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture : The Ecological Crisis of Reason*, Environmental Philosophies Series (New York: Routledge, 2002), 132.

<sup>164</sup> Psychologists and social psychologists have described flawed cognitive and mental models that limit people’s ability to grasp what is going on, and sociologists have documented the manipulation of climate science (especially in the United States) and the media’s role in misinforming the public by

Butler notes:

To the extent that we commit violence, we are acting on another, putting the other at risk, causing the other damage, threatening to expunge the other. In a way, we all live with this particular vulnerability, a vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, a vulnerability to a sudden address from elsewhere that we cannot preempt.<sup>165</sup>

With these thoughts of the ‘Other’ in mind, the experience of filming the world during this project taught me some ways to see and feel it anew. It is not that I am out there diligently filming ecological disaster-sites as some kind of bearing witness, in fact I am resistant to this kind of representational mode. Rather it is my altered state of thinking that has directed the choices and consequently the recorded materials. Brian Massumi describes this as “a thinking of perception in perception, in the immediacy of its occurrence, as it is felt — a *thinking-feeling*, in visual form.”<sup>166</sup> From Butler’s perspective “one modality that defines the body,” and “animates responsiveness” is how we encounter our “unwilled proximity to others,” or “come up against the world.”<sup>167</sup> The potential of this responsiveness exists in the possible affects that it evokes, becoming “not just the basis, but the very stuff of ideation and critique.”<sup>168</sup> Affective encounters are transformative. To sense the world is more than just to see it. Through sensations our perceptions enter into another state, moving feeling, and thus, thinking that moves into a different register.<sup>169</sup>

Butler’s argument stems from a critique of how we interpret the world around us and therefore how we respond to it, as an experience “that depends on social structures of perception.”<sup>170</sup> The hegemonic forces that desire to mediate those responses have crafted the collective affect she describes, determined by dominant media. It is not enough to destroy these “interpretive frameworks,” rather we must challenge these forces in order to be able to perceive the importance of other lives. “Another life is

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magnifying the perception of uncertainty. Kari Marie Norgaard, *Living in Denial Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press., 2011), 64.

<sup>165</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, 29.

<sup>166</sup> Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts, Technologies of Lived Abstraction* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), 44.

<sup>167</sup> Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, 34.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> “Interpretation does not emerge as the spontaneous act of a single mind, but as a consequence of a certain field of intelligibility that helps to form and frame our responsiveness to the impinging world (a world on which we depend, but which also impinges upon us, exacting responsiveness in complex, sometimes ambivalent, forms).” *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

taken in through all the senses, if it is taken in at all.”<sup>171</sup> Our sense of loss is bound up in our interconnection to the ‘Other,’ our very survivability relies upon its survival, but we often do not to see it, or more specifically do not acknowledge, interpret, or respond to it. It has been rendered invisible. Inside this argument is a potent call to action. It is a call for social disruption and a reconfiguring of political ethics through redirecting our encounters with the world. “In creating new affects and powers of perception, percepts, monuments of sensation make us see and feel in a different way. Peter Canning writes on Deleuze’s project, “Ethics means discovery, rediscovery of the virtual; invention, reinvention of the possible.”<sup>172</sup>

Most people do not pass through their days in a heightened state of receptivity to the nuances and layers of time, space and action that unfold around them. Deleuze reflected that: “we perceive the thing, minus that which does not interest us as a function of our needs.”<sup>173</sup> Our minds edit what is important for us to perceive in order to navigate our way successfully through our actions. Manning and Massumi point out that things fall away during our neurotypical journeys through life that displace “experiential immediacy.”

The shortening of experience by habit and its reconstitution by reflection go neurotypically hand in hand with the greatest of fluidity. What falls out between habit and reflection, leaving a gap they work in concert to smooth over with the aid of language coming from the field of memory, is the coming alive of the field of experiential immediacy, in its emergent dance of attention.<sup>174</sup>

When I draw on Rancière’s project for support later, it is to find ways to agitate the “emergent dance of attention,” rupturing quotidian experiences of the world. As a method of connection it is central to the concerns of the practice. Similarly, Manning and Massumi use the experiences of an autistic dispensation to articulate the differences between those in a neurotypical state and those who encounter the world in what one might say is a heightened or differently alerted state. The “gap” that is “smoothed away,” *normally*, seems to me to be the affect that spills away and is lost in order to find our way through all of the noise of life. In the spilling away we are

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>172</sup> Peter Canning, "The Imagination of Immanence: An Ethics of Cinema," in *The Brain Is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, ed. Gregory Flaxman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 345.

<sup>173</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 63.

<sup>174</sup> Manning and Massumi, *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience*, 17.

directed to perceive of some things while blinded to others. In a state of autism we might experience the world in a constant “dancing of attention,”<sup>175</sup> but most people do not. Sometimes there is a physiological shift that affects subjective perception on the world. Sickness, sadness, happiness, pharmaceuticals, trauma, myopathy, tiredness, psychopathy, time of life, and on, all of these things can cause us to perceive of the world through an adjusted lens. This lens may sharpen or soften or bend our experiences of the world. One may feel more acutely connected to it, or radically alienated from it, by this shift in perception. Altered states of experience affect us and make us think differently.

### **Deleuze – Sensation and Cinematic Time:**

This project has sought approaches in the making that emphasise sensational encounters with the world through the material affects of cinema. For Deleuze “the work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself.”<sup>176</sup> It is the aim of art through the material to “to wrest the percept from perceptions of objects and the states of a perceiving subject, to wrest the affect from affections as the transition from one state to another: to extract a *bloc* of sensations, a pure being of sensations.” Each art form and artist will have their own methods to achieve these aims.<sup>177</sup>

Steven Shaviro takes his lead from Bergson’s and Deleuze’s projects to argue: “cinematic perception is primordial to the very extent that it is monstrously prosthetic. It is composed, one might say, of the unconscious epiphenomena of sensory experience.”<sup>178</sup> Percepts and affects are what are captured or made concrete in the material. They are not in themselves perceptions or affections rather they are “the two basic types of sensation, of which the artwork may be said to be a

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<sup>175</sup> Manning and Massumi describe a type of autistic encounter with the world: “To experience the texture of the world “without discrimination” is not indifference. Texture is patterned, full of contrast and movement, gradients and transitions. It is complex and differentiated. To attend to everything “the same way” is not an inattention to life. It is to pay equal attention to the full range of life’s texturing complexity, with an entranced and unhierarchized commitment to the way in which the organic and the inorganic, color, sound, smell, and rhythm, perception and emotion, intensely interweave into the “aroundness” of a textured world, alive with difference.” Ibid., 4.

<sup>176</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 164.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>178</sup> Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body, Theory out of Bounds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 31.

composite.”<sup>179</sup> What makes cinema unique in the arts is that its percepts and affects might be seen as continuously *becoming*, while being fixed in the material as each frame advances, leaving lingering moments or echoes in the retina, persistence of vision, to which the brain responds as it is continuously *becoming*. This quality of cinema is of significant philosophical interest for Deleuze’s project because “it is the form or rather the pure force of time which puts truth into crisis,”<sup>180</sup> and evidenced in his concept of the time-image, where for example, extended duration of shots, non-linear sequencing and irrational cutting evoke in the viewer a corporeal experience of time through the image.

Deleuze’s books, *Cinema 1* and *2*, understand the importance of time or duration (*durée*) in cinema. The books have allowed me to think more deeply about the material affects that exist in the construction of a cinematic image. After WW2, symbolised by the horrors that came into the world with the holocaust and the new perceptual complexities this wrought, there was in Deleuze’s thesis a “shattering” of the “sensory-motor schema” of the movement-image (the indirect image of time as movement) that located his discourse in *Cinema 1*.<sup>181</sup> This break opened cinema up to direct images of time, the time-image, which Deleuze focuses his attention on in *Cinema 2*. Correspondingly this resonates most closely to the intent of the practice outlined here. Contextually, I locate my discussion on elements concerned with qualities of duration, as well the power of the irrational cut (in sound and image) as an indexical element of temporal dislocation in the ‘image.’

Our experiences of duration in a cinematic context, indirect or direct, affect the capacity in which we register and think about the world. In this way, Rajchman notes, the experience of the cinematic “is a way of having ideas with images that introduces

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<sup>179</sup> Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*, 134.

<sup>180</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 135. See also: “Actual and virtual images are constituted around the splitting of time, and this indiscernibility, and our concomitant inability to designate either as the true image, is what Deleuze calls the powers of the false.” Dudley Andrew, “The Roots of the Nomadic: Gilles Deleuze and the Cinema of West Africa,” in *The Brain Is the Screen : Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, ed. Gregory Flaxman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 207.

<sup>181</sup> Deleuze says the time-image “perhaps suddenly appears in a shattering of the sensory-motor schema: this schema, which had linked perceptions, affections and actions, does not enter a profound crisis without the general regime of the image being changed.” Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, xii

a new ‘psychomechanics,’ a new way of affecting us and our nervous systems.”<sup>182</sup> The aspects of Deleuze’s thesis of the movement-image in *Cinema 1*, to which I have aligned my own concerns and practices, are focused on the transactions that occur in the transfer from perception into affection in the movement-image. For Deleuze, these are cinematic images that are consistent with the kind of perception available to a pre-WW2 European world. He provides examples of “great directors” practices of the classic era to articulate how the three parts of the movement image operate in cinematic contexts.<sup>183</sup> The *affection-image* operates as a pre-subjective interval between the *perception-image* and the *action-image*. Colebrook summarises the movement image thus: “what makes the machine-like movement of the cinema so important is that the camera can ‘see’ or ‘perceive’ without imposing concepts. The camera does not organise images from a fixed point but itself moves across movements.”<sup>184</sup> In short, it is an image of movement, and this image of movement is reliant on montages that collect the three parts of perception, affection, and action together in unbalanced combinations and concentrations of dominance. The dominant image of interest in this case is the affection-image with a particular focus on Deleuze’s borrowing of Pascal Augé’s notion of “any-space- whatever [espace-quelconques].”<sup>185</sup>

### **The Movement-Image:**

In the “universe” of the movement image,<sup>186</sup> three distributed avatars — the affection-image, the perception-image and the action-image<sup>187</sup> — “determine a representation

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<sup>182</sup> John Rajchman, “Deleuze’s Time, or How the Cinematic Changes Our Idea of Art,” in *Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze’s Film Philosophy*, ed. David Norman Rodowick (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 284.

<sup>183</sup> “In all these respects, it is not sufficient to compare the great directors of the cinema with painters, architects or even musicians. They must also be compared with thinkers.” Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 10.

<sup>184</sup> Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze, Routledge Critical Thinkers* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 32.

<sup>185</sup> “Augé would prefer to look for their source in the experimental cinema. But it could equally be said that they are as old as the cinema itself.” Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 109.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-64.

<sup>187</sup> Deleuze relies predominantly on Henri Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*, as a referent text to support his arguments. Henri Bergson, *Henri Bergson: Key Writings*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson and John Mullarkey (New York: Continuum, 2002). He also draws on Charles Peirce’s categories of *firstness*, *secondness* and *thirdness*, particularly in his descriptions on the affection-image. “The three categories constitute the foundation of Peirce’s body, work and thought, and all his other logical elements rest on his own threesome divisions...[of his] triad terminology, moving from undetermined to determined motifs in all realms and disciplines... There is a real connection between sign (Firstness)

of time, but it must be noted that time remains the object of an indirect representation in so far as it depends on montage and derives from movement-images.”<sup>188</sup> The perception image (the first material aspect of subjectivity) and the action-image (the second) make up two sides of a gap (the interval) of an indeterminate centre, which is the fleeting space occupied by the affection-image.<sup>189</sup>

Affection is what occupies the interval, what occupies it without filling it in or filling it up. It surges in the centre of indetermination, that is to say in the subject, between a perception which is troubling in certain respects and a hesitant action. It is a coincidence of subject and object, or the way in which the subject perceives itself, or rather experiences itself or feels itself 'from the inside.' <sup>190</sup>

All films contain a combination of the three parts. Although in every film, in its most elemental aspects, there is one type of image that dominates: “one can speak of an active, perceptive or affective montage, depending on the predominant type.”<sup>191</sup> Throughout *Cinema 1* Deleuze categorises and subcategorises the films and filmmakers he cites through these elements of the movement-image, identifying them by their most dominant characteristics. For example he defines Vertov’s as a cinema of the perception-image, Dreyer’s as affection, and Griffith’s as action. <sup>192</sup>

The acentring and haptic qualities of cinematic perception open up limitless possibilities for ways of seeing the world. Deleuze observes that one of cinema’s great advantages is “it lacks a centre of anchorage and of horizon, the sections which it makes would not prevent it from going back up the path that natural perception comes down.”<sup>193</sup> Because the cinema does not possess the capacity for “natural subjective perception...the mobility of its centres and the variability of its framings always lead it to restore vast acentred and deframed zones.”<sup>194</sup> The indeterminacy of its centre in relation to cinematic perception, the movement between bodies and objects (nouns),<sup>195</sup> is what constructs a perception-image.<sup>196</sup>

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and object (Secondness), but thought — the interpretant (Thirdness). Dinda L Gorlée, "A Sketch of Peirce's Firstness and Its Significance to Art," *Sign Systems Studies*, no. 1-2 (2009): 207.

<sup>188</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, ix.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>196</sup> “In fact, it travels the route in both directions. From the point of view which occupies us for the moment, we go from total, objective perception which is indistinguishable from the thing, to a



The ocular grasping of the perception and its transfer into action is imperceptible as it passes through the interval. “When qualities and powers are apprehended as actualised in states of things, in milieux which are geographically and historically determinable, we enter into the realm of the action-image.”<sup>197</sup> The world is perceived and then reacted to – but the amount of distance, lesser or greater, between the gap affects action. “The more the reaction ceases to be immediate and becomes truly possible action, the more the perception becomes distant and anticipatory and extracts the virtual action of things.”<sup>198</sup> In the interval sits the third material aspect of subjectivity, which is affection.<sup>199</sup> Flaxman reads Bergson’s description of the neuro-network of perception and action as the “sensory-motor schema...’ [where] images are recognized (as perception) and, in the interval (or affection), they are transformed (as action).”<sup>200</sup> Deleuze extrapolates on this by identifying the relationship between affection and movement as:

The movement of translation is not merely interrupted in its direct propagation by an interval, which allocates on the one hand the received movement, and on the other the executed movement, and which might make them in a sense incommensurable. Between the two there is affection, which re-establishes the relation. But, it is precisely in affection that the movement ceases to be that of translation in order to become movement of expression, that is to say quality, simple tendency stirring up an immobile element.<sup>201</sup>

In its foundational aspects, I have thought about the movement-image in the construction of the movement vocabulary when I am framing the images in my practice. For example, I have posited the questions, how does movement in the composition indirectly image time and to what purpose might that movement be harnessed or resisted to disrupt perceptual attention to that image, and direct affective responses through those disruptions? Techniques utilised have included the use of linear framing, compression in the photography, and high-speed cinematography, in line with Vertovian applications of the material elements of

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subjective perception which is distinguished from it by simple elimination or subtraction. It is this uncentred subjective perception that is called perception strictly speaking.” Ibid., 64.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Gregory Flaxman, “Introduction,” in *The Brain Is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, ed. Gregory Flaxman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 17.

<sup>201</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 66.

cinema.<sup>202</sup> In addition – I asked – how might the placement of dislocated content draw attention to the material by subtracting it from representational contexts?

### **The Perception-Image and the Theory of the Interval:**

Deleuze refined Vertov's theory of the interval, "the space or division between photograms, shots, sequences – and how the organization of intervals informs the spatial representation of time in cinema," conceptualizing it as a method to think about cinema as a kind of geometry.<sup>203</sup> He considered Vertov "the inventor" of a particular type of objective perception-image,<sup>204</sup> which he alternately referred to as the "'gramme', the 'engramme', [or] the 'photogramme'."<sup>205</sup> Vertov's methods were directed by his notion of the non-human *kino-eye*,<sup>206</sup> constructed through placing "together any given points in the universe, no matter where [he] recorded them."<sup>207</sup> Deleuze emphasises that the cine-eye is not just in reference to the camera, but also *crucially* it is the role of montage around the construction of cinematic perception. Claire Colebrook's tautology productively encapsulates this when she argues, "this liberation of the sequencing of images from any single observer, so the affect of cinema is the presentation of an 'any point whatever,'" is what makes "cinema cinematic."<sup>208</sup> Montage carries "perception into things, to put perception into matter, so that any point whatsoever in space itself perceives all the points on which it acts, or which act on it, however far these actions and reactions extend."<sup>209</sup> This carrying of perception into things and "gathering of any points in the universe" has been a consistent point of reference.

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<sup>202</sup> It is significant in *Man with a Movie Camera* that there are shots of editor Yelizaveta Svilova, splicing together celluloid as well as of cameraman Boris Kaufman filming.

<sup>203</sup> David Norman Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine, Post-Contemporary Interventions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>204</sup> "In the final analysis, we would have to speak of a perception which was no longer liquid but gaseous." Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 84.

<sup>205</sup> "*Gramme (engramme or photogramme)*: not to be confused with a photo. It is the genetic element of the perception-image, inseparable as such from certain dynamisms (immobilisation, vibration, flickering, sweep, repetition, acceleration, deceleration, etc.). The gaseous state of a molecular perception." *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>206</sup> "Kino-eye as the possibility of making the invisible visible, the unclear clear, the hidden manifest, the disguised overt, the acted non-acted; making falsehood into truth." Dziga Vertov and Annette Michelson, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1984), 41.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>208</sup> Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, 31.

<sup>209</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 81.

Vertov's is a materialist cinema of montage, where "the photogramme is inseparable from the series which makes it vibrate in relation to the movement, which derives from it." He composed "the differential of perception" in his cinematic constructions, putting "the three inseparable aspects of a single going beyond into effect: from the camera to montage, from movement to the interval, from the image to the photogramme."<sup>210</sup> Rodowick summarises Deleuze's reworking of Vertov's theory thus:

...the interval no longer simply marks the distance between two consecutive images. Rather, on the one hand it correlates two or more images whose distances are incommensurable from the standpoint of human perception; on the other, it figures variation as the power of the whole, matter reacting on all its facets and in all of its parts, regardless of distance.<sup>211</sup>

Thinking the interval continues to elicit considerations on the assemblage of the cinematic whole.<sup>212</sup> Vertov argued that the interval was the material transaction that emphasised the "art of movement."<sup>213</sup>

In Vertov the interval of movement is perception, the glance, the eye. But the eye is not the too-immobile human eye; it is the eye of the camera, that is an eye in matter, a perception such as it is in matter, as it extends from a point where an action begins to the limit of the reaction, as it fills the interval between the two, crossing the universe and beating in time to its intervals.<sup>214</sup>

Throughout my practice I have experimented with Vertovian methods of cinematography and montage, applying multitudes of filming techniques,<sup>215</sup> and rapid and/or rhythmic cutting as a way to hold the viewer's attention through carefully crafted cadences and graphic matches. However, focusing in on the technical aspects of his cinema is only skimming the surface of his thesis. Vital to understanding his cinema, is that it is more than a collection of special effects. The

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>211</sup> Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 60.

<sup>212</sup> "Montage is composition, the assemblage [*agencement*] of movement-images" as constituting an indirect image of time. Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 30.

<sup>213</sup> "Intervals (the transitions from one movement to another) are the material, the elements of the art of movement, and by no means the movements themselves. It is they (the intervals) which draw the movement to a kinetic resolution." Vertov and Michelson, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, 8.

<sup>214</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 39-40.

<sup>215</sup> Stanley Cavell points out that *Man with a Movie Camera* "...is at the least a brilliant anthology of the tricks a loaded camera and fixed and refixed film can play. It is a natural example for someone to appeal to who wishes to emphasize film's independence of reality. But it is fully open to me to say that what this film shows is precisely the inescapability of reality, its fixed point within every brilliance of technique." Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Enl. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 191.

“kino-eye, from the very moment of its conception, was not a matter of trick effects, or of kino-eye for its own sake...[but] the opportunity to make the invisible visible, the unclear clear, the hidden manifest...”<sup>216</sup> In 2012, while working on a project dedicated specifically to exploring these ‘techniques,’<sup>217</sup> I found myself perplexingly inoculated from their ‘charms’ and looked for other ways to reinterpret Vertov’s manifesto. On the one hand I was still interested in the capacity of placing discontinuous action together and by what means connections can be made, tenuous, imagined, intended or not, and contra to that subverting that placement either by the extended duration of shots where nothing much happens in them or between them, through irrational cutting choices, or the dissociative use of sound; methods more in tune with Deleuze’s concept of the time-image.

The gap between the images is the pre-subjective container for affective encounters with cinema’s materiality. This becomes more complex in the time-image, with the emergence of the irrational interval and temporal displacements through sound, which challenges what constitutes a cut or whether a cut is necessary at all for the theory of the interval to play out. Can there be stratified layers of intervals striking a range of overlapping chords? When I film and edit I think about how to bring together what I think of as the ‘weight’ (length in time) and the ‘consciousness’ (temporal register) of the shots as points of release and relief at their moments of contact. There are also sonic registers, which alter temporal-spatial experiences of the image. Deleuze contemplated: “Depending on the variations of the present or the contractions and dilations of the interval, one might say that a very slow movement realises the greatest possible quantity of movement...”<sup>218</sup> I understand him as acknowledging the potent capacities of the minimal to lock in the eyes and the brain to the image, and by consequence how images might affect each other by their composition of time. The relationship that the perception-image and the concept of the interval have with affect is contained in the pre-subjective moments of physiological contact with the material. There is no affection without perception and no action without either mental transaction, leading to thought.

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<sup>216</sup> Vertov and Michelson, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, 131.

<sup>217</sup> *Girl with a Movie Camera* (2012)

<sup>218</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 45.

## The 'Affection-Image' and 'Any-Space-Whatevers':

In *Cinema 1* Deleuze introduces the affection image through his discussion of the close-up or face. He says “it is the face, with its relative immobility and its receptive organs, which brings to light these movements of expression while they remain most frequently buried in the rest of the body.”<sup>219</sup> He is careful to underline that faces have “equivalents” and can be “propositions,” saying it is “the face – or the equivalent – which gathers and expresses the affect as a complex entity, and secures the virtual conjunctions between singular points of this entity.”<sup>220</sup> In other words, “there are affects of things.”<sup>221</sup> As noted, this project has specifically attended to drawing sensations of affect out of spatial-temporal disruptions in the world (landscapes and objects) rather than via human agents – the residue of us rather than the present us. In this regard, his ancillary discussions on the “affects of things,” and his notion of “any-space-whatevers,” through the categorisation of the “qualisign,” is the relevant territory for the practice to reflect on the ‘affection-image.’ “The qualisign is affect expressed in ‘any-space-whatever,’ that is, as a space that does not yet appear as a real setting or is abstracted from the spatial and temporal determinations of a real setting.”<sup>222</sup> Their significance in the composition of a type of ‘affection-image’ is Deleuze’s reminder that “affects are not individuated like people and things...they do not blend into the indifference of the world. They have singularities which enter into virtual conjunction and each time constitute a complex entity.”<sup>223</sup>

Deleuze’s notion of singularities runs throughout his writing. He uses them as part of a discussion on cinema to identify special types of images and how images operate with each other. For his methods of enquiry in this arena there are no “universals, only singularities. Concepts aren't universals but sets of singularities that each extend into the neighborhood of one of the other singularities.” Rajchman offers a distillation of how to think about a singularity. It is “...not an instance or instantiation of anything it is not particularity or uniqueness.”<sup>224</sup> It has “‘indefiniteness’ or vagueness is not a logical deficiency or incoherence, but, rather, as

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>222</sup> Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 63.

<sup>223</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 103.

<sup>224</sup> Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*, 54.

with what Peirce called ‘firstness.’”<sup>225</sup> From my perspective Deleuze’s description of ‘any-space-whatevers’ is irresistible to consider in light of how I compose the filmed elements in *Cinematic Affect in a Time of Ecological Emergency*, as an assembly of fragmented contemplations.

Any-space-whatever is not an abstract universal, in all times, in all places. It is a perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metric relations or the connection of its own parts, so that the linkages can be made in an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure locus of the possible.<sup>226</sup>

Deleuze presents Joris Ivens’ fragmentary montage films of the 1920s as “sets of singularities” that demonstrate a type of qualisign that draw out the ‘affect of things.’<sup>227</sup> Ivens produced a different kind of cinema; one concerned as much with the mechanics of film itself as with the *modern* context in which his films were produced.<sup>228</sup> *Die Brücke (The Bridge)*, “which follows the logic of its subject,”<sup>229</sup> a railway bridge in Rotterdam, constructs an assemblage of hundreds of shots of the bridge from different angles. The film is visually kinetic, rhythmic, and *acentring*,<sup>230</sup> with points of view that shift dynamically with each cut. The continuity of the bridge as subject holds the material together such that the radical spatial disruptions elevate experiences of sensation, through a different type of structure,<sup>231</sup> one that does not rely on narrative or conceptual continuity, but rather is in the affective qualities of the object of the bridge itself, or as Deleuze suggested: “Rotterdam itself as affect.”<sup>232</sup>

The rapid montage of seven hundred shots means that different views can be fitted together in an infinite number of ways and, because they are not oriented in relation

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<sup>225</sup> “Thus, as with Peirce’s talk of a ‘heterogeneity’ that comes first, Deleuze speaks of a logical ‘disparity’ that is neither a ‘diversity’ nor a simple disorder; he speaks of ‘disparation.’” Ibid., 55.

<sup>226</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 109.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>228</sup> “Because cinema itself is as inseparably a part of this modern world as these objects (cities, bridges, ocean liners, department stores, etc.) any of these films is at least implicitly a film about cinema itself and about the specific ‘new vision’ that is characteristic of it.” Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*, 55.

<sup>229</sup> Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back the European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture, 1919-1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 51.

<sup>230</sup> “Where the images vary in relation to one another and tend to become like the reciprocal actions and vibrations of a pure matter.” Vinzenz Hediger, Patrick Vonderau, and ebrary Inc., *Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media, Film culture in transition* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 391.

<sup>231</sup> Tom Gunning proposed that Ivens “came close to the architectural ideal of ‘visual simultaneity...[He] explores the reorganization of space, but he also shows its functioning, its processes and rhythm through cinematic time.” Gunning translated from the original Dutch and quoted in: Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 76.

<sup>232</sup> Hediger, Vonderau, and ebrary Inc., *Short Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media*.

to each other, constitute the set of singularities which are combined in the any-space-  
whatever in which this bridge appeared as pure quality, this metal as pure power.<sup>233</sup>

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 6. Joris Ivens. [Film Still: *Die Brücke/The Bridge*] Railway Bridge in Rotterdam (1927).

*Regen (Rain)* brings together the natural elements of weather with modern urban life. The film is structured by one event – that of a rainstorm arriving, then leaving the city of Amsterdam. Ivens shot the footage solo, with a hand-held 35mm camera, over many months. Deliberately poetic in its use and assemblage of impressionist imagery, and dislocated in its articulation of space and place, the anchor that is the storm forgives this disorientating approach, as it simply doesn't matter where we are. "The rain we see in the Ivens film is not one particular rain which fell somewhere, some time. These visual impressions are not bound into unity by any conception of time and space."<sup>234</sup> The concept holds together the complexity of the approach and the time and methods it took to construct the film.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 111.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> *Regen* took more than two years to make. "He designated 'rain spotters' to alert him to appropriate images and kept an oilskin, boots and two loaded cameras ready, so that he could tum out the moment the first drops fell." Hans Schoots, *Living Dangerously: A Biography of Joris Ivens* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000), 54.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 7. Joris Ivens. [Film Still: *Regen/Rain*] City Streets through Rain and Window of a Tram (1929).

His methods have informed my own practice of spending extended durations in chosen locations, to absorb the environment differently, see pieces of it and connections that you might not see in a superficial glance. Ivens composes the stratified layers of a city inside the shared experience of weather, allowing collective connection through his impressionist assembly of fragmented images, their movements against each other not organised by their relationship in time and place but by “rain as affect.”<sup>236</sup>

The rain in the film, Deleuze says, is not “the concept of rain nor the state of a rainy time and place.”<sup>237</sup> The film has mediated thinking about how to approach the cinematic other ways than representationally or narratively. As Rodowick points out “the affect would be lost by attributing a specific aim or narrative trajectory to the images.”<sup>238</sup> Ivens is considered one of cinema’s poets in that he is able to draw out affects from fragments of things discontinuously placed together. Deleuze holds his

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<sup>236</sup> “It is a set of singularities which presents the rain as it is in itself, pure power or quality which combines without abstraction all possible rains and makes up the corresponding any-space-whatever. It is rain as affect, and nothing is more opposed to an abstract or general idea, although it is not actualised in an individual state of things.” Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 111.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 65.



methods up against, the expressionists who work in the shadows, Dreyers' cinema of whiteness, and Antonioni's composition of colours as examples of different constructions of 'any-space-whatevers' inside 'affection images'. It is the "shadows, whites and colours which are capable of producing and constituting any-space-whatevers, disconnected or emptied spaces."<sup>239</sup>

For Antonioni, materials for construction were not fragments drawn together, but, rather, the application of colour in space. His frames extract the emptiness of a space, "the void," accentuated by a limited colour palette. "Colour elevates space to the power of the void, when that which can be realised in the event is accomplished. Space does not emerge from it depotentialised, but on the contrary, all the more charged with potential."<sup>240</sup> For Deleuze, Antonioni's cinema demonstrates two types of 'qualisigns', which operate simultaneously and are always implied within the other. They are the qualisigns of "disconnection and of emptiness."

The any-space-whatever retains one and the same nature: it no longer has coordinates, it is a pure potential, it shows only pure Powers and Qualities, independently of the states of things or milieux which actualise them (have actualised them or will actualise them, or neither the one nor the other – it hardly matters).<sup>241</sup>

What is alluring about Antonioni's construction of space in his cinema is that it provides a bridge for thinking about the coexistence of the movement-affection-image as an indirect representation of time with the affective qualities present in direct representations of time in the image. His is a cinema that contains both.

### **The Time-Image:**

Cinema changed the idea of art because of the new ways it invented to show or render movement and time, participating in a distinctive manner in a larger aesthetics of duration, connected not simply with new technologies or new forces, but also with new ways of thinking, new questions and paradoxes, new political uses.<sup>242</sup>

Rajchman elegantly summarises Deleuze's concept of the 'modern cinema.'

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<sup>239</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 120.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-20.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>242</sup> Rajchman, "Deleuze's Time, or How the Cinematic Changes Our Idea of Art," in *Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze's Film Philosophy*, 285.

A break away from the ‘sensory-motor schema’ of the movement-image opens the possibility for a direct image of time. Through this “emancipation of the senses,”<sup>243</sup> the ‘time-image’ offers “a pure optical, sound (and tactile) image,”<sup>244</sup> revealing new connections, making “time and thought perceptible, to make them visible and of sound.”<sup>245</sup> It is not that ‘movement-images’ disappear it is more that they fade into the background of perception when parcelled within the ‘time-image.’ Deleuze explains this release from the “sensory-motor schema” through his notion of the cliché, which “is a sensory-motor image of the thing.” Citing Bergson’s thesis on how the cliché functions, in relation to quotidian perception, he says:

...we do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather what it is in our interest to perceive... We therefore normally perceive only clichés.<sup>246</sup>

If there is a blockage or break in the schema then a different kind of “pure-optical-sound” image can emerge, which “brings out the thing in itself, literally, in its excess of horror or beauty, in its radical or unjustifiable character, because it no longer has to be ‘justified’.”<sup>247</sup> Given the aforementioned concerns of the practice around disrupting perceptual orders to draw out sensational encounters with the material, Deleuze’s articulation of the ‘time-image’ aligns richly with the intent of the practice, and provides helpful contemplations around the techniques deployed in the composition of images. He says: “What is specific to the image, as soon as it is creative, is to make perceptible, to make visible, relationships of time which cannot be seen in the represented object and do not allow themselves to be reduced to the present.”<sup>248</sup> In my current works I attempt to direct the viewer into an acute awareness of time, through extended duration and shot construction, aiming to activate contemplative or thoughtful states of engagement with the subject, contained in the image through its aesthetics. Rajchman says that “the cinematic lies in the distinctive ways filmmakers invented to disjoin the forms of sensation from the understanding, using them, instead, to give us ‘ideas’ and so new ‘personae’ in

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<sup>243</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 18.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

thinking...”<sup>249</sup> This reflection also produces an alternate way to think about montage in the ‘time-image,’ which can emerge from the image itself, rather than from its placement in relation or conflict with other images. “Sometimes montage occurs in the depth of the image, sometimes it becomes flat: it no longer asks how images are linked, but ‘What does the image show?’”<sup>250</sup> For example, by compressing the image through telephoto cinematography, the lens captures time that pours in from the distance of the shot in stratified layers. This is particularly apparent in compositions that draw on the movement of atmospheres in the frame, like heat or dust, which appear to move at different speeds dependent on the distance, close (faster) or far (slower), to the focal plane. This temporal rupture of atmospheres combined with the spatial compression of the landscape produce a strange *sensational* experience of the time in the image. Montage in this example “changes its meaning.”

[Montage] takes on a new function: instead of being concerned with movement-images from which it extracts an indirect image of time, it is concerned with the time-image, and extracts from it the relations of time on which aberrant movement must now depend.<sup>251</sup>



Fig. 8. Andrew Denton. [Film Still: *Crude*] Palm Springs: The Road to Desert Springs, California, U.S.A. (2013).

Necessitated by needs of the ‘time-image’, this change in how montage functions has meant moving my own thinking into different (albeit connected) territory. Deleuze best expresses this in his conceptualisation of the ‘irrational cut’. As part of the

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<sup>249</sup> Rajchman, "Deleuze's Time, or How the Cinematic Changes Our Idea of Art," in *Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze's Film Philosophy*, 286.

<sup>250</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 42.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

‘sensory motor’ crisis that emerges from the time image, the break from the indirect to the direct image of time means a change in the way images are contained in the cinematic ‘whole.’<sup>252</sup> Rodowick summarises:

The plane of consistency of the time-image is best characterized by seriality: the irrational interval assures the incommensurability of interval and whole. Succession gives way to series because the interval is a dissociative force; it "strings" images together only as disconnected spaces. The rational interval is a spatial conjunction since it belongs simultaneously to the end of one set and the beginning of the set that follows. But the irrational interval is autonomous and irreducible. It is not spatial, nor does it form part of an image. Rather, it presents the force that unhinges images and sounds into disconnected series, which can no longer form a whole.<sup>253</sup>

What has been nagging at the project from the beginning is how to construct an assemblage out of my collection of disjointed images and sounds, without falling into a succession of images, or classical montage, as Deleuze would understand it, and harmonic sound. My whole thinking needed to change around how to edit the sound and the visual materials. Without cutting on movement I think about the shot exhausting itself before dropping the next one in. I’m thinking also of the irruptive cuts that sit underneath in the sound and the cuts of information in the image itself that release from the composition as it unfolds. This means the thought that emerges from the image is not merely extracted from the visual composition. The ‘seriality’ of the images means that they do not work next to each other but rather they operate together collectively in the whole. “It is thus no longer a lacuna that the associated images would be assumed to cross; the images are certainly not abandoned to chance, but there are only relinkages subject to the cut, instead of cuts subject to the linkage.”<sup>254</sup> One of the ‘creative restrictions’ I applied to the making was to film everything at 200 frames per second. This slows down the world significantly in regards to what can be drawn out of these images that would not emerge in ‘real’ time capture modes. The compositions are in themselves compelling and have an aesthetic charm that affected me from the moment I began experimenting with them. The shots are not only slow but also long in duration, which also charges the footage

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<sup>252</sup> “Cinema, like everyday perception, connects a flow of different images into ordered wholes. However, there are also moments of cinema where by extending this very process cinema takes us away from actualised objects and wholes to the very flow of images. Instead of connecting or synthesising images into meaningful progressions, cinema can present images in their ‘purely optical’ form.” Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, 31-32.

<sup>253</sup> Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 178.

<sup>254</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 214.

with what Tarkovsky refers to as the “pressure of time” in the cinematic.<sup>255</sup> They are also rigorously formal in their framing. Because of the choices made in the collection of the shots I have had to think about their seriality rather than how they cut together next to each other spatially. “What the irrational interval gives is a nonspatial perception – not space but force, the force of time as change interrupting repetition with difference and parceling succession into series.”<sup>256</sup> One of the rules of editing is to cut on movement, when you remove that option the images have to work by adding to the whole regardless of their placement and without necessarily connecting as an elegant transition between spaces.<sup>257</sup>

The ‘time-image’ is the realm of the irrational cut, which is not as literal as it sounds. Deleuze explains that “...the cut has become the interstice, it is irrational and does not form part of either set, one of which has no more an end than the other has a beginning: false continuity is such an irrational cut.”<sup>258</sup> This is true of the sound as well, which can add another layer of information but also can adjust our temporal experience of watching. The most elemental example of this at work is when music is added to moving image.<sup>259</sup> Music adds meaning, emotion, and context to the shot even if it hasn’t earned them, it also changes how fast or slow time feels when we view it. Sound can also fracture and displace time, which makes it a potent tool for layering meaning and conceptual development in the image. The most basic example of this is the voiceover which can in its most simple deployment tell another story over an image (film noir), and in its most complex interrogate the reliability of the narrative and displace time and memory as a contemplation. This can be seen in the letter narrative constructed by Marker in *Sans Soleil* (1983).

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<sup>255</sup> “The distinctive time running through the shots makes the rhythm of the picture; and rhythm is determined not by the length of the edited pieces, but by the pressure of the time that runs through them.” Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 117.

<sup>256</sup> Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 178.

<sup>257</sup> “In the first place, the cinematographic image becomes a direct presentation of time, according to non-commensurable relations and irrational cuts. In the second place, this time-image puts thought into contact with an unthought, the unsummonable, the inexplicable, the undecidable, the incommensurable. The outside or the obverse of the images has replaced the whole, at the same time as the interstice or the cut has replaced association.” Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 215.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>259</sup> Tarkovsky reflects that “it may be that in order to make the cinematic image sound authentically, in its full diapason, music has to be abandoned. For strictly speaking the world as transformed by cinema and the world as transformed by music are parallel, and conflict with each other. Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, 159.

Environmental sound can also be used to throw time out of joint, in cinema as often seen in Tarkovsky's films. This is the sound of leaves on the spaceship in *Solaris* (1972), or the sound of lamps swinging over images of the lamps suspended in utter stillness, as seen in *Stalker* (1980). These examples extract a sensation of other time in the image, which disrupts our cognitive capacity to construct order out of it.<sup>260</sup> Specific care has been taken in the collection and editing of the sound elements, in my films, with consideration as to how the sonic compositions can perceptually disrupt the viewer into a strange experience of the subject. This is in order to think about the subject in other ways, therefore eliciting an audible world that one would not normally experience. As well as these elements, the collection of audio from radio, television and the Internet, acknowledges that at all times there is another frequency of sound activity around us, and in us. Stressing the sensational register is one of the key concerns of the practice. It provides perceptual recalibrations, sensed corporeally, which are then transacted into thought.

### **Dissensus, Politics of Aesthetics, and Art:**

Jacques Rancière's writing on *dissensus* (*disagreement*) and its formation inside a *politics of aesthetics* has provided a context for engaging with the ecological subject through art practice. His project helped develop approaches for thinking the political *potential* in art, as a companion to aforementioned OOO<sup>261</sup>/new materialist ecological (Morton, Bennett), and humanist (Butler) discourses. It is important to emphasise that Rancière's project is not set out as a series of guidelines on how to produce political works of art – it is not “art must do this.”<sup>262</sup> What it offers “is an account of art's political capacities.”<sup>263</sup> He states clearly “practices of art do not provide forms of awareness or rebellious impulses for politics. Nor do they take leave of themselves to become forms of collective political action.”<sup>264</sup> This positioning has assisted thinking around the aims of the practice, in seeking and experimenting with

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<sup>260</sup> “In itself, accurately recorded sound adds nothing to the image system of cinema, for it still has no aesthetic content.” Ibid., 167.

<sup>261</sup> OOO (Object Oriented Ontology)

<sup>262</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 111.

<sup>263</sup> “He achieves this by describing the way art alters the distribution of the sensible through the creation of experiences that are opposed to it.” Jacques Rancière et al., “An Exchange with Jacques Rancière,” *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 2, no. 1 (2008): 3.

<sup>264</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London Continuum, 2010), 157.

methods that disrupt recorded materials to evoke sensational affects, rendering the familiar unfamiliar; teasing out the *uncanny* in order to draw in the eyes and ears to the subject through a lethargic and ambivalent lens. “The politics of art is not oriented at the constitution of political subjects. It is much more oriented at the reframing of the field of subjectivity as an impersonal field.”<sup>265</sup> This view on the political in art releases the practice from frameworks of causes and effects, and the pressure of producing “a kind of calculable transmission between artistic shock, intellectual awareness and political mobilization.”<sup>266</sup> An alternate approach – one that disrupts the senses with political capacities that can spool from cinematic encounters with the ecological subject – becomes an iterative negotiation within the aesthetics of the work.<sup>267</sup> “Rancière maintains, “suitable political art ensure[s], at one and the same time, the production of a double effect: the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification.”<sup>268</sup> How this plays out in regards to practice is through an awareness of this untethered tension between these two effects, and an understanding that while there might be a political intent at work in the process, this is not where the political emerges from the aesthetics; “artworks can produce effects of dissensus precisely because they neither give lessons nor have any destination.”<sup>269</sup>

Rancière defines his concept of a *politics of aesthetics*, arranging this discussion around his notion of *les partages du sensible* (the distribution of the sensible),<sup>270</sup> which is “the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it.”<sup>271</sup> Rancière applies the word *sensible* to that which can be received and understood by the senses: “The ‘sensible’, of course does not refer to what shows good sense or judgement but to what is *aisthēton* or capable

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>266</sup> Jacques Rancière and Sudeep Dasgupta, "Art Is Going Elsewhere. And Politics Has to Catch It," *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* 1 (2008): 74.

<sup>267</sup> “In a certain way, the political interpretation of the uncanny in terms of effects is always a kind of negotiation.” Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 143.

<sup>268</sup> Rancière and Dasgupta., "Art Is Going Elsewhere. And Politics Has to Catch It," 74.

<sup>269</sup> Rancière and Rockhill, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, 63.

<sup>270</sup> “Aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense – re-examined perhaps by Foucault – as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience.” Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 140.

<sup>271</sup> Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. (London; New York: Continuum, 2006.) 12.

of being apprehended by the senses.”<sup>272</sup> Rancière’s deliberately fluid use of language and definitions makes his work a dynamic space to test out ideas around the making. He says of this fluidity that, “firstly that it is not his fault if some words span such a wide range of meanings, secondly that it is no accident that they do so.”<sup>273</sup> Davide Panagia notes that in French *partager* can mean either “to share” and/or “to separate,” which means the sensible are separated, though never independent, and connected at the same time; interdependent.<sup>274</sup>

For Rancière there is a blurry “dividing line” that squiggles inside the *distribution of the sensible*, delimiting those who have voice and those who do not.<sup>275</sup> “Politics breaks with the sensory self-evidence of the *natural* order that destines specific individuals and groups to occupy positions of rule or of being ruled.”<sup>276</sup> The visible exists alongside the invisible, but it is when the invisible disrupts the “police order” (the consensus, status quo, those taking part) that politics emerges. The “police order” can be defined as “the general law that determines the distribution or parts and role, in a community as well as its forms of exclusion, the police is first and foremost an organization of ‘bodies’ based on a communal distribution of the sensible.”<sup>277</sup> This disruption of the ‘police order’ is ‘dissensus,’ loosely defined as *disagreement*, but not in the sense of a subjective discourse, rather “it is a political process that resists juridical legislation and creates a fissure in the sensible order by confronting the established framework of perception, thought, and action with the ‘inadmissible’, i.e. a political subject.”<sup>278</sup> These ruptures in the normal order of things, the moments where silence became vocal and that the invisible reveals itself, are compelling because the position of the practice outlined here is not to present a

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<sup>272</sup> Jacques Rancière. *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>273</sup> Rancière and Rockhill, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, 13.

<sup>274</sup> Rancière’s conceptual innovation of a *partage du sensible* (variously translated as “partition” or “distribution” of the sensible); – a term that refers at once to the conditions for sharing that establish the contours of a collectivity (i.e. “partager” as sharing) and to the sources of disruption or dissensus of that same order (i.e. “partager” as separating). In every respect, a *partage du sensible* is a liminal term...” Davide Panagia, ““Partage Du Sensible”: The Distribution of the Sensible,” in *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty (Durham: Acumen, 2010), 95.

<sup>275</sup> “A *partage du sensible* is thus the vulnerable dividing line that creates the perceptual conditions for a political community and its dissensus.” *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>277</sup> The sensible: “a system or coordinates define modes of being, doing, making, and communicating that establishes the borders between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the sayable and the unsayable. Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. (London ; New York: Continuum, 2006), 89.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.



didactic view of the world. Instead it aims to unsettle viewers' encounters through tempered perceptual disruptions and affective encounters with the material. Resisting representational registers that seek to *define* a problem are, for Rancière, the "strategic aims" of art.

Such strategies are intended to make the invisible visible or to question the self-evidence of the visible; to rupture given relations between things and meanings and, inversely, to invent novel relationships between things and meanings that were previously unrelated.<sup>279</sup>

One of the ways this surfaces in the works produced for *Cinematic Affect in a Time of Ecological Emergency* is the notion that visual and aural core samples, captured with imposed formal restraints, emphasising "their proximity rather than their differences,"<sup>280</sup> anywhere at anytime, can render strange feelings (discomfort, confusion, disorientation, dread, boredom, irritation etc.) that do not rely on a deliberate ironic connection, or rhetoric, to evoke a state of contemplation about the selected theme. In this case the theme is the notion that *oil*, as a thing and as a metaphor, has made its way into everything. By filming the world I saw as awash in the affects of fossil fuelled capitalism I hope that the sensations already present in the images rupture the frame; that they are sensible and therefore thinkable. In regards to how we perceive the 'real world,' Rancière argues there isn't one. "Instead, there are definite configurations of what is given as our real, as the object of our perceptions and the field of our interventions. The real always is a matter of construction, a matter of 'fiction.'"<sup>281</sup>

It may be that a work that does nothing more at the level of reception than evoke a gently subversive vibration through the viewer—with its affects being a stickiness that weaves into the body—is enough. Like an earworm caught in the elevator, or listening to the radio on a long cross-country journey, alternate frequencies begin to penetrate from the outside as your distance from the transmission constantly changes. The voices of others not intended to be tuned into ripple across the airwaves leaving snippets of their thoughts between the crackling and the pops; imbuing memories of things not intended. From my early experiments with different

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<sup>279</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 139.

<sup>280</sup> "Constituting what Godard calls a 'fraternity of metaphors.'" Ibid., 141.

<sup>281</sup> Jacques Rancière, interviewed by Sophie Berrebi, "Jacques Rancière: Aesthetics Is Politics," *Art & Research* 2, no. 1 (2008): 3.

camera techniques I searched for methods to make images of the world aesthetically alluring rather than violently arresting. It is my position that the collection of smaller ruptures distributed over extended forms of duration can develop accumulative affects that can redistribute thought. This is what drew me towards the subtle nuances of slow-motion cinematography.

A less subtle but appropriate supporting example for this discussion is Richard Mosse's hyper-aestheticised images of conflict. He is a practitioner who deploys experiences of strange "beauty" to engage with the ugly subject of war. The video installation *Enclave* (2013) uses discontinued infrared film stock, designed for surveillance, to record images from war stricken Congo that pop with colour and render the landscape as lush magentas. The camera is also mounted on a Steadicam rig framed with wide-angle lenses, giving the compositions a floating effect of subjectivity that is accentuated by extended shot duration. He says of his work, "Beauty is one of the mainlines to make people feel something. It's the sharpest tool in the box... If you're trying to make people feel something, if you're able to make it beautiful, then they'll sit up and listen."<sup>282</sup> But the work isn't merely about making something difficult attractive to the eye in order to hold attention. The double effect of a *politics of aesthetics* is at work in the construction of a beautiful image of something as horrific as human suffering. It "creates an ethical problem in the viewer's mind," a disorientating confusion or anger that causes them to "think about the act of perception, and how this imagery is produced and consumed;"<sup>283</sup> Although as Rancière cautions, "there is no straight path from the viewing of a spectacle to an understanding of the state of the world."<sup>284</sup> However, in the rupture that the spectacle evokes there is the potential for a recalibrated worldview that is infused with political capacities.

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<sup>282</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 148.

<sup>283</sup> John Mahoney, "Richard Mosse's Hypercolor Congo, Now in a Short Film," accessed July 19, 2015. <http://www.americanphotomag.com/richard-mosses-hypercolor-congo-now-short-film>.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 9. Richard Mosse. [Film Still: *The Enclave*] Soldier in Long Grass (2013).

Chantal Akerman understood that her film *D'Est (From the East)* (1993) was not an answer to the horrific memories of Eastern Europe, nor an attempt to arrange some kind of meaning of it through making a political statement.<sup>285</sup> She says, “I was just looking around, I didn’t know exactly for what, but as soon as something was telling me something — I don’t mean with words, just when I was feeling something — I would say “Stop! Put the camera here, and shoot.”<sup>286</sup> Her work, for me, demonstrates how Rancière’s notion of a *politics of aesthetics* can manifest in the cinematic. “The film has its own way of looking, not only in terms of aesthetics, the way it looks as a film, but in respect to the active engagement of its (visual) subjects, the way it looks at its subject.”<sup>287</sup> The long duration shots, of strangers in strange lands, change the way we encounter and therefore see these images. It is a corporeal experience of the material; an extended stare into another world that is familiar in its human presence, yet unfamiliar in its rendering of that humanity. As Alice Lebow puts it, “there is an intensity in the manner of looking; but at the same time, there is a sense of looking

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<sup>285</sup> Akerman says, “in my films I follow an opposite trajectory to that of the makers of political films... They have a skeleton, an idea and then they put on flesh: I have in the first place the flesh, the skeleton appears later.” Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 143.

<sup>286</sup> Steven Ball, “D’est: Spectres of Communism,” accessed October 30, 2015. <http://sensesofcinema.com/2013/cteq/dest-spectres-of-communism/#7>.

<sup>287</sup> Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 4: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2005), 261.

beyond what one sees to the unseen.”<sup>288</sup> Akerman says of her working methods on *D’Est*, “the only way to film that reality was to proceed by a form of stuttering, a slow hesitant approach.”<sup>289</sup> The experience of watching the film evokes sensations of waiting for not very much to happen.<sup>290</sup> This captivating, hypnotic register holds attention intensely on its subject to draw the viewer deeper into her cinematic milieu. “[Her] long takes have been likened to blocks – distinct, separate scenes that follow a linear progression, like the compartments of a train.”<sup>291</sup> The sensations that emerge from her reframing of the ‘real’ comes both from the durational pressure of the images and the way she pieces those images together.

Rancière suggests artists’ strategies that reframe the ‘real’ through this type of practice “might be called the labour of fiction,” but that we need to reconceive the meaning of the word *fiction*, as “far more than the constructing of an imaginary world, and even far more than its Aristotelian sense as ‘arrangement of actions’”. It is not a term that designates the imaginary as opposed to the real; it involves the re-framing of the ‘real’, or the framing of a dissensus.”<sup>292</sup> This redefinition of the word ‘fiction’ crystallizes Rancière’s conceptual arguments, in regards to approaches I have identified in my own practice. He identifies the slippery paradox that faces all artists when they attempt to engage their practices with the world as it happens in front of them. If we agree with Rancière that all forms of the real are a construction, this also displaces our understanding of a *documentary* practice as one that can expose reality as it is. That is why the attempts of an essayist form to negotiate around notions of the real are so compelling to my interests. The univocal “mainstream fiction of the police order” is an edifice, which “draw[s] a clear-cut line between what belongs to the self-evidence of the real and what belongs to the field of appearances, representations, opinions and utopias.”<sup>293</sup> This is consensus, or the sensory configured as a single voice – the drone of mainstream agreement. What ruptures

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<sup>288</sup> Alisa Lebow, “Memory Once Removed: Indirect Memory and Transitive Autobiography in Chantal Akerman’s *D’est*,” *Camera Obscura* 18, no. 1 (2003): 45.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>290</sup> “There are endless lines of people waiting indefinitely for the bus or train that never seems to come. Some take note of the camera, curious or indifferent; others ignore it completely, continuing their conversations or contemplations.” Ivone Margulies, *Nothing Happens : Chantal Akerman’s Hyperrealist Everyday* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 211.

<sup>291</sup> Lebow, “Memory Once Removed: Indirect Memory and Transitive Autobiography in Chantal Akerman’s *D’est*,” 44.

<sup>292</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 149.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

consensus are “political and artistic fictions [which] introduce dissensus by hollowing out that 'real' and multiplying it in a polemical way.”<sup>294</sup>

There is a certain letting go of a calculated ethic to be factual or actual, in favour of contemplative ethics that seek to tighten the knots for a bumpier, more perplexing line into the subject. Mosse provides an arresting example of a labour of fiction at work in a single (or was it?) shot in *Enclave*. A soldier slings his rifle over his shoulder turns and walks into Lake Kivu. The water goes over his head, the camera, it seems keeps rolling and rolling and we never see him emerge. The image is simple in its construction but arrestingly affective in its crashing of ethics and perception of a quiet, potentially violent act. There is only sensation and then thought rushes in. You hope that it is a camera trick, but doubt keeps feeding back.

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 148-49.



## Chapter Three – Contextual Review of Practice:

The longer we look through a camera or watch a projected image the remoter the world becomes, yet we begin to understand that remoteness more. Limits trap the illimitable, until the spring we discovered turns into a flood.<sup>295</sup>

As a way to contextualise *Cinematic Affect in a Time of Ecological Emergency* in its field of practice, this chapter offers a close examination of a range of creative works that have influenced my own decision-making as a filmmaker. They are examples taken from both cinematic and sculptural practices, in particular sculptural earth works and environmental artworks. The films could be loosely bundled into categories such as poetic, subjective, or essayist, sitting inside the conflicted territories of the documentary genre (Chris Marker, Werner Herzog, Chantal Akerman). The artworks were chosen for the way they engage poetically with the earth itself (Robert Smithson), or for the way they offer poetic possibilities within practical solutions for resolving ecological degradation (Buster Simpson, Agnes Denes). I view all of these makers as theorist-practitioners, so where possible I have drawn from the filmmakers' and artists' own discussions on their works.

Each practitioner, to some extent, ruptures our everyday experiences of the world by favouring affective registers over factual registers as a method of enquiry, seeking out complications in their subjects, and producing images as rich territories to locate 'truth' beyond statistical facts. They also take a political and/or ethical position in their work. Thus, these works that influence my own, are not works that try to distance or detach the viewer's emotional response. They are not purely conceptual or aesthetical experiments; rather they immerse the viewer into intense encounters with the world through the intricate fabrications of their cinematic languages.

### Land and Environmental Art – Influences:

Buster Simpson engages with social and ecological crisis as subject matter. His site-specific installation, *Hudson River Purge* (1992), is part of a series of installations Simpson has been mounting since 1983, in which he seeks out rivers and waterways

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<sup>295</sup> Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack D. Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 141.

that have been affected by acid rain that has increased acidity in their pH levels, thus threatening the ecosystems they support. The series is both evocative and active, ever changing and decaying as it heals (albeit temporarily) a poisoned waterway.

Simpson's method is to drop limestone tablets, sixty-one centimetres in diameter, into the river – “tums for rivers,” deposited as impermanent sculptures that “sweeten the acidic water for a limited time.”<sup>296</sup> His performance of the work has a ritualistic quality to it that ties science, art and politics together.<sup>297</sup> The act is a simple one, and yet it cleverly highlights the complexities and sometime absurdities of the ecological problem. The acid in the water is invisible to the eye – the river still looks like a river – but is it? Human intervention has fundamentally altered the ecology, a folly that can only be responded to through another kind of pointless folly – that of a temporary band aid.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 10. Buster Simpson. [Photograph] *Hudson River Purge* (1992).

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<sup>296</sup> Jeffrey Kastner and Brian Wallis, *Land and Environmental Art*, Abridged, rev., and updated. ed. (London: Phaidon Press, 2010), 166.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*



“We have,” as Bill McKibben points out “changed the atmosphere, and thus we are changing the weather. By changing the weather, we make every spot on earth man-made and artificial. We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning; without it there is nothing but us.”<sup>298</sup> Simpson’s work is playful and political at the same time. “As a metaphor it dramatizes the crisis of person and planet as one; acid indigestion, acid rain – a connection the media picked up on when they coined the titles ‘River Rolands’ and ‘Tums for Mother Nature.’”<sup>299</sup> The political dimension of the work emerges in the painful realisation that this river is no longer a river any more in our normative memory of what a river once was. The problem is communicated through the alien limestone object. The work washes into the consciousness forcing a recalibration of the notion of river and nature. The crystal clear water imbued with new meaning disrupts perceptions of what and how the world is.

Similarly playful and political at the same time are the large-scale environmental works of Agnes Denes. Her earth work, *Wheatfield – A Confrontation*, was mounted in Battery Park in Manhattan in 1982 on a piece of property made from rubble accumulated during construction of the World Trade Centres, then dumped into the Hudson Bay. The reclaimed land was valued at 4.5 billion dollars at the time. For several months Denes, and a small team of irregular volunteers, cleaned the rubbish covered land, ploughed, seeded, irrigated and tended to a two-acre plot of wheat, which was eventually harvested.<sup>300</sup> Denes’ intent was for the harvest to be ground, made into bread, and fed to the homeless and poor, but unsurprisingly, the site was deemed too toxic for the wheat to be eaten.<sup>301</sup> “Some of the grain travelled around the world in an exhibition entitled ‘The International Art Show for the End of World Hunger.’”<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1989), 54.

<sup>299</sup> Buster Simpson, "Hudson River Purge," accessed December 9th, 2011.  
<http://www.bustersimpson.net/hudsonriverpurge/>.

<sup>300</sup> See: Kastner and Wallis, *Land and Environmental Art*, 160.

<sup>301</sup> Michael Lailach, *Land Art, Basic Art Series* (Germany: Taschen, 2007), 40.

<sup>302</sup> Kastner and Wallis, *Land and Environmental Art*, 160.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 11. Agnes Denes. [Photograph] *Wheatfield: A Confrontation* “Harvester and Twin Towers” (1982).

As a reference for my own work it serves as a reminder of the potent potential of a practice that is visually compelling, simple and complex at the same time. As a metaphor it operates as a reminder of the gap between rich and poor, the fed and the unfed, and notions of value as a critique on capitalism, as well as the reversal of the urban encroaching on farmland. Despite only seeing the work as documentation, I have always been captivated by Denes’ loaded images that are so compelling in their blunt trauma impact on my senses. As a practitioner she is a constant reference for me because she manages to harness, through ambivalent visual linkages, a shock moment of politics as I encounter the work. As a practitioner Denes is acutely aware of the political and ethical agenda that locates her work: “wasting valuable precious real estate, obstructing the machinery by going against the system, was an effrontery that made it the powerful paradox [Denes] had sought for.”<sup>303</sup> The documentation of the project is striking in its graphic juxtaposition of well-known landmarks of New York’s skyline, set against the romanticism of the agrarian past from which the United States emerged. The familiarity of the Towers and the Statue of Liberty are pushed up against a landscape tradition, eschewing expectations with an uncanny acuity that is arresting and perplexing in its encounter.

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<sup>303</sup> Denes, as cited in Lailach, *Land Art*, 40.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 12. Agnes Denes. [Photograph] *Wheatfield: A Confrontation* “and Statue of Liberty” (1982).

Robert Smithson’s *The Yucatán Mirror Displacements* (1969) comprised of a series of mirrors mounted in sites along the Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico. This area is a significant cultural, social and geographical location, but Smithson frames his project as a travelogue essay, retracing the movements outlined by John Lloyd Stephens in his book, *Travels in the Yucatán* (1843). The mirrors, as with the traveller, intrude upon the landscape, albeit momentarily, to be returned to be stored somewhere in New York.<sup>304</sup> “Nothing remains of these works but two dozen or so images ‘entombed’—Smithson’s term—in his Instamatic camera.”<sup>305</sup> His art and writing have orbited this project from the beginning. From one perspective his work and essay documentation of the *Yucatan Mirror Displacements* initiated my intensive field excursions, helping me to construct ways to approach sites of interest for my own project. From another perspective, Smithson’s descriptions and photos of the temporary works, offered fragmentary contemplations, situated outside of cinematic discourses, which guided me towards further experimentation with the material aspects of my project.

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<sup>304</sup> “Smithson made his first mirror displacements in the spring of 1969 while he was traveling in Mexico. By repeating some of the activities of a nineteenth-century predecessor to Mexico, the explorer and travel writer John Lloyd Stephens; by repeating many of his own previous artistic practices; and by consciously anticipating some of the actions soon to be performed by the first explorers of the moon, Smithson attempted to provide his own artistic postcards of an indisputable present tense in between the ‘before’ and ‘after’ of Mexico’s Yucatan peninsula.” Ann Morris Reynolds and Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 172.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

The placement of the mirrors in the landscape is a moment for perceiving concepts of time, space, light, colour and memory. Also, "Smithson exemplifies the tendency to engage in a reading of the site, in terms not only of its topographical specifics but also of its psychological resonances."<sup>306</sup> Along with Smithson, I find the experience of the time travelling between sites a rich contemplative space for conceptualising my subject.<sup>307</sup> As he gazes at the horizon, through his windshield, he thinks as he travels to each site, that "a horizon is something else other than a horizon; it is closedness in openness, it is an enchanted region where down is up. Space can be approached, but time is far away. Time is devoid of objects when one displaces all destinations."<sup>308</sup> At the end of each journey Smithson constructs another 'displacement' of the site, and through the nine mirror installations he says he has "sabotaged perfection" and "rationality" through a dozen, sometimes dirty, mirror reflections of skies, water, forests, and landscape.<sup>309</sup> "The pictures they show are fragmentary by nature, and when placed in the landscape, they add more fragments to an already broken world, producing a montage without boundaries."<sup>310</sup>

I imagine the mirrors as slices of real time unfolding alongside each other, linear temporally, displaced spatially, never able to be absorbed fully, then dismantled and moved elsewhere, gone forever except as ghosts in the archive of Smithson's descriptions and photographs.<sup>311</sup> "The mirror itself is not subject to duration, because it is an on-going abstraction that is always available and timeless. The reflections, on the other hand, are fleeting instances that evade measure."<sup>312</sup> Perceptions of time and space are altered through both the fragmentary nature of the reflecting surfaces and the weight of real time, that is, lived duration. Nothing or very little appears to happen; yet small things happen, then the objects move on. The

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<sup>306</sup> Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (1980): 71.

<sup>307</sup> Robert Linsley, "Mirror Travel in the Yucatan: Robert Smithson, Michael Fried, and the New Critical Drama," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 37 (2000).

<sup>308</sup> Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, 119.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>310</sup> Linsley, "Mirror Travel in the Yucatan: Robert Smithson, Michael Fried, and the New Critical Drama," 7.

<sup>311</sup> "If you visit the sites (a doubtful probability) you find nothing but memory-traces, for the mirror displacements were dismantled right after they were photographed. The mirrors are somewhere in New York. The reflected light has been erased. Remembrances are but numbers on a map, vacant memories constellating the intangible terrains in deleted vicinities. It is the dimension of absence that remains to be found." Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, 132-33.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

displacements are thought experiments on time that are not beholden to the structures of the film frame. But they do hint at the cinematic in their capacity to evoke sensations of memory and in their capacity, like cinema, "to take perception elsewhere."<sup>313</sup>

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 13. Robert Smithson. [Photograph] *Seventh Mirror Displacement: Yucatán* (1969).

In 2013, I made a pilgrimage to Smithson's earthwork *Spiral Jetty* (1972), as part of my investigations; I was struck as much by the location as by the monumental structure itself. The site, as Smithson himself noted, "gave evidence of a succession of man-made systems mired in abandoned hopes."<sup>314</sup> Finding it requires a map. Invisible on GPS, it is situated at the end of the Great Salt Lake, in Utah, 17 miles south of the Golden Spike Monument.<sup>315</sup> According to Clive Owens, site selection is part of Smithson's allegorical inclinations.

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>315</sup> The point at which the transcontinental railways first joined, connecting the East to the West.

The site-specific work often aspires to a prehistoric monumentality; Stonehenge and the Nazca lines are taken as prototypes. Its 'content' is frequently mythical, as that of the *Spiral Jetty*, whose form was derived from a local myth of a whirlpool at the bottom of the Great Salt Lake...<sup>316</sup>

*Spiral Jetty* reaches out into a toxic, salt-baked wasteland, surrounded by abandoned rotten piers and jetties from the past, rusting machinery, debris from industry, the obligatory predator crows, and a few anonymous other pilgrims wandering around and on the sculpture.

The mere sight of the trapped fragments of junk and waste transported one into a world of modern prehistory. The products of a Devonian industry, the remains of a Silurian technology, all the machines of the Upper Carboniferous Period were lost in those expansive deposits of sand and mud.<sup>317</sup>



Fig. 14. Andrew Denton. [Photograph] Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, Utah (2013).

The landscape shimmers and hums in the heat of the day. It is impossible to look out at the lake and the sculpture without squinting. While I silently filmed, a young couple debated with each other on the safety of stepping out onto the lake and climbing onto the sculpture. They were not concerned about falling off the rocks, but rather with the toxicity of the lakebed itself, which is riddled with poisoned tailings from a copper mine on the opposite shore. It was here in this place, eavesdropping

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<sup>316</sup> Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," 71.

<sup>317</sup> Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, 144-45.

on a private conversation, that suddenly all of my wanderings and lengthy landings on my chosen sites of enquiry started to congeal. *Spiral Jetty* emphasises the context of the space around it. Everything penetrating into the spiral and out from it had meaning related to the placement of the object in this space. Counter to this, I started to think about the camera and how I was pointing it out to the world into “*any-space-whatevers*,” as Deleuze has conceptualised such places.<sup>318</sup> From the perspective of the camera and the collection of all of these discursive elements, all places had meaning to the subject I was chasing. From my experience looking out and listening from *Spiral Jetty* I decided, finally, that it didn’t matter where I pointed my lens; I was receiving the same message. My receptors were attuned to reading, and making *linkages*, in a world awash in the encoded symbols of oil and capital. I had started to see everything in this light.

Smithson produced a film about the process of making and installing the work. In his writing on *Spiral Jetty* [the film] (1970) he reflected thoughts on the cinematic thoughts that stick to me, probably evoking twangs of nostalgia for celluloid, but also eliciting insights about his thinking-making approaches, and how I think about mine.

The movie began as a set of disconnections, a bramble of stabilized fragments taken from things obscure and fluid, ingredients trapped in a succession of frames, a stream of viscosities both still and moving... a span of time unfinished, a spaceless limbo on some spiral reels... outtakes overexposed and underexposed, masses of impenetrable material. The sun, the spiral, the salt, buries in lengths of footage.<sup>319</sup>

### **Cinematic Influences:**

It is no accident that I was drawn to *Lessons of Darkness* (1995), Werner Herzog’s film about the burning oil fields of Kuwait just after the first Gulf War. Herzog focuses his camera on the destruction caused by the war in an expansive and deliberately weighty treatment that soaks the screen in the destructive capacity of humanity, in a brutal context of oil and national disagreements about who ‘owns’ resources. The film highlights/critiques ethical challenges or considerations about

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<sup>318</sup> “A perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metric relations or the connection of its own parts, so that the linkages can be made in an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure locus of the possible.” Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 109.

<sup>319</sup> Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, 150.

the documentary form in its complete disavowal of documentary as the presentation of some kind of factual truth. Herzog asserts, "we have known for a long time [that] the poet is able to articulate a deep, inherent, mysterious truth better than anyone else."<sup>320</sup> He backs this position by opening the film with a falsified quote:

The collapse of the stellar universe will occur – like creation – in grandiose splendour.<sup>321</sup>

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 15. Werner Herzog. [Film Still: *Lessons of Darkness*] Burning Oilfield, Kuwait (1992).

The line attributed to Blaise Pascal was actually made up by Herzog, one sleight of hand of many, in a film that is an expressive exercise in artifice.<sup>322</sup> For him there is not much *truth* to be mined from the factual, referring to it as an "accountant's truth."<sup>323</sup> He says: "We must ask of reality, how important is it, really? And: how important, really is the Factual? Of course, we can't disregard the factual; it has normative power. But it can never give us the kind of illumination, the ecstatic flash, from which Truth emerges."<sup>324</sup> *Lessons of Darkness* brings to light the problem of

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<sup>320</sup> Werner Herzog and Paul Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog* (London ; New York: Faber and Faber, 2002), 253.

<sup>321</sup> *Lessons of Darkness*, directed by Werner Herzog (Anchor Bay Entertainment, 1992, DVD 2004).

<sup>322</sup> "What the Pascalian pseudo-quote does is lift you from the first minute of the film to a level that prepares you for something quite momentous. We are immediately in the realm of poetry – whether or not the audience knows the quote is a fake - which inevitably strikes a more profound chord than mere reportage." Herzog and Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog*, 243.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>324</sup> Werner Herzog and Moira Weigel, "On the Absolute, the Sublime, and Ecstatic Truth," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 17, no. 3 (2010): 7.



representation when working with the ecological crisis subject. The film agitates an ethical debate about how this type of destruction should be presented. The images are deliberately seductive in their capacity to aestheticize the violence on the landscape. Aside from the linkages that can be made with the ecological subject in Herzog's film, the technical filmmaking in *Lessons in Darkness*, is also a lesson in mastery over the mechanics of cinema. "We are meant to be impressed, awed, and seduced by the scale of the oil disaster, its stark colours (red on black, white on black), and the dynamic visual energy of shooting flames and roiling clouds of smoke."<sup>325</sup>

Herzog has been criticized for this approach, accused of being "dangerously authoritarian," specifically by his German critics, who are likely sensitive to the potential fascist aesthetics in the imagery. At times he has been accused (I believe unfairly) in recalling the spectacles of Leni Riefenstahl.<sup>326</sup> He defiantly opposes this critique, citing Dante, Goya, Brueghel, and Bosch as equivalents in their practices,<sup>327</sup> falling back on his position that "in the fine arts, in music, literature, and cinema, it is possible to reach a deeper stratum of truth – a poetic, ecstatic truth, which is mysterious and can only be grasped with effort; one attains it through vision, style, and craft."<sup>328</sup> Baroque images, supported by an operatic score, guide the viewer into the shocking, aestheticized, landscape of the decimated Kuwaiti oil fields. "The stylization of the *horror* in *Lessons of Darkness* means that the images penetrate deeper than the CNN footage ever could."<sup>329</sup> Herzog cuts the night-scope bombing news footage, alongside his own.<sup>330</sup> The speckled dots and grain, spliced against panoramic aerial footage, highlight the subjective abstractions that can emerge out of the many possible representations of war. "The film progresses as if aliens have landed on an unnamed planet where the landscape has lost every single trace of its

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<sup>325</sup> Imre Szeman, "The Cultural Politics of Oil: On *Lessons of Darkness* and *Black Sea Files*," *Polygraph* 22 (2010): 40.

<sup>326</sup> Timothy Corrigan, *The Films of Werner Herzog: Between Mirage and History* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 169-70.

<sup>327</sup> Herzog and Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog*, 245.

<sup>328</sup> Herzog and Weigel, "On the Absolute, the Sublime, and Ecstatic Truth," 9.

<sup>329</sup> Herzog and Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog*, 245.

<sup>330</sup> Butler notes that the US media's own "'shock and awe' strategy seeks not only to produce an aesthetic dimension to war, but to exploit and instrumentalize the visual aesthetics as part of a war strategy itself. CNN has provided much of these visual aesthetics." Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, 148.

dignity."<sup>331</sup> Herzog narrates the film's eye-of-God helicopter shots that dominate the photography with a fictionally constructed voiceover that lurches from an alien "struggl[ing] to make sense of what it sees,"<sup>332</sup> to biblically weighted references:

And the fifth angel sounded and I saw a star fall from Heaven onto the Earth. And to him was given the key to the bottomless pit, and he opened the bottomless pit, and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace. And the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it, and shall desire to die... And Death shall flee from them.<sup>333</sup>

In *Lessons of Darkness*, wide-angle establishing shots of burning oil fields contrast with intimate images of fire fighters compressed into their surroundings by telephotography. The wide-open desert *any-space-whatevers*,<sup>334</sup> as seen through Herzog's lens, render his characters as alienated within a claustrophobic frame.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 16. Werner Herzog. [Film Still: *Lessons of Darkness*] Fire Fighter and Burning Oilfield, Kuwait (1992).

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<sup>331</sup> Herzog and Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog*, 249.

<sup>332</sup> Szeman, "The Cultural Politics of Oil: On *Lessons of Darkness* and *Black Sea Files*," 40.

<sup>333</sup> Herzog, *Lessons of Darkness*.

<sup>334</sup> Any-space-whatever: "...a space that does not yet appear as a real setting or is abstracted from the spatial and temporal determinations of a real setting." Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 63.

In contrast, half a century earlier, in a similar mode but with a different intent, Robert Flaherty's ethnographic *Man of Aran* (1934), created an intimate portrait of an isolated island community, through its use of telephoto cinematography. Flaherty continues his "romantic quest for an ahistorical past unpolluted by modernity,"<sup>335</sup> attempting objectivity, and a sense of authenticity,<sup>336</sup> through the distancing and compressing effects of long lenses. In doing so he fuses the landscape to the people, accentuating both its threatening qualities and their reliance on it for survival. The images are perplexing because they are both wide, in the sense that they capture the expanse of the ocean and the landscape, and they are tight in that they use long lenses to close in on the human subject, suturing the background to the foreground. I applied this technique throughout the construction of images that include human presence for the same aesthetic effect as Flaherty, but with an alternate intent, which emphasizes human alienation from the landscape instead.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 17. Robert Flaherty. [Film Still: *Man of Aran*] Woman Collecting Seaweed (1934).

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<sup>335</sup> Sharon R. Sherman and Mikel J. Koven, *Folklore/Cinema: Popular Film as Vernacular Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2007), 68.

<sup>336</sup> Flaherty's "contract to deliver rare and presumably authentic images, increasingly difficult to fulfill, led him to take shortcuts, staging or restaging the lives whose authenticity he had originally sought." Andrew, "The Roots of the Nomadic: Gilles Deleuze and the Cinema of West Africa," in *The Brain Is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, 223.

Flaherty worked in the field, as did I. He "followed his subject rather than roping it in where it could be filmed in controlled conditions."<sup>337</sup> This approach undoubtedly added to the authenticity he sought, which is strangely amplified by his use of the telephoto lenses to construct the film's notorious artifice. "He encouraged the islanders to revive activities that they no longer practiced — such as the use of harpoons in the shark hunt depicted in the film."<sup>338</sup> The film offers, through its aesthetics, an expressive experience of the island community. The ocean seems to press into the island's rocks, its ever-present presence menacing and central to life and existence on this isolated locale. Shots of islanders collecting seaweed and layering it on the rocks, as a bed to grow their potatoes demonstrate how Flaherty slowly stratifies his images until a larger picture of the community and the island emerges.<sup>339</sup>

In *Lessons of Darkness* and *Man of Aran*, the filmmakers are not enlarging their subjects through the lens for amplified distorting effects, nor do they assume the close-up or tight framing is only applicable to the human face, since they use it on landscape to great effect.<sup>340</sup> The nature of telephotography is that it compresses space in relation to the foreground versus the background, but the human figures and faces, in Herzog's and Flaherty's films, are still recognisable as human and the landscape as landscape. Their images are not the abstracted fragments of locations, faces, or pieces of the body that you may see, for example, in Hiroshi Teshigahara's *Woman in the Dunes* (1964). Here the lens alienates the viewer through a disengagement with the location, the body and the face to the point that it is rendered as abstracted form; landscape as skin, the body as landscape, the hand as genital; subject and object confused. "During [the] sand-centred montage sequences [in *Woman in the Dunes*], the viewer is often not sure exactly what material he or she is

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>338</sup> Sherman and Koven, *Folklore/Cinema: Popular Film as Vernacular Culture*.

<sup>339</sup> "On the Aran Islands, a minimal ecology links people, land, and the surrounding ocean: the ocean washes up seaweed that the islanders gather into soil beds just thick enough to hold the roots of the potatoes on which they subsist. But potatoes are unheroic, and their growth undramatic; and so Flaherty focused instead on the ungovernable sea, and on a complex assemblage involving men, boats (with oars, harpoons, and nets), and the great sharks that intermittently feed off the coast." Andrew, "The Roots of the Nomadic: Gilles Deleuze and the Cinema of West Africa," in *The Brain Is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, 222.

<sup>340</sup> "The close-up is not an enlargement and, if it implies a change of dimension, this is an absolute change: a mutation of movement which ceases to be translation in order to become expression." Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 96.

looking at; it shifts and changes form so steadily that even the material properties are put in flux."<sup>341</sup>

To further emphasize the ever-encroaching threat of the natural world on the human, and to isolate visual motifs in the interior space of the woman's cave, Teshigahara adjusts the alienating effect that his wide-angle cinematography achieves in the open spaces of the desert to another alienating device, the use of telephoto lenses. As the sand continuously drifts into the woman's house, the layering of repeated or similar shots underlines one of the film's themes. The male etymologist, Niki, trapped by the woman, engulfed by the landscape, grapples for some "coherent understanding about the properties of the universe. This discursive theme is deeply environmental and concrete-material in its descriptive aspects."<sup>342</sup> Yet this is achieved through dislocating and disorienting the viewer from time, space and character through collected interior fragments isolated by the long lenses in contrast with the vast exteriors. The opposite is the case in both Herzog and Flaherty's films where the human and the landscape are simultaneously isolated and connected to their surroundings — compression as method of expressing links between the human and non-human, rather than that of nature suffocating the human, as horror.<sup>343</sup>

*Lessons of Darkness*, *Man of Aran* and *Woman of the Dunes* present ethical provocations for my own practice. I am drawn, as others have been, into the *shock and awe* aesthetics of Herzog's film, which elevate my sensations but also makes me queasy at the same time. Therefore, for me, the film operates as an influential work of cinematic craft that prioritises the poetic over the factual. This aligns with the positioning of my practice. At the same time, the work provides a cautionary counterpoint to my own intentions by submerging the viewer in the distractions of spectacle. *Man of Aran* pulls me into its subject through its aesthetic manipulations, which perplexingly make me feel closer to the subject, despite knowing the artifice. *Woman in the Dunes* presents the female form and subject in tight, closed off frames so we only get pieces of the body, with the landscape filmed likewise, to unravel in

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<sup>341</sup> Nina Cornyetz, *The Ethics of Aesthetics in Japanese Cinema and Literature: Polygraphic Desire*, Routledge Contemporary Japan Series (London: Routledge, 2007), 77.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>343</sup> In a way, because *Lessons of Darkness* exists already, I could resist temptations to look for *the horror*, and choose rather to search out the traces of oil, the banality of it, rather than be drawn into its brutal spectacle.

our reception of the images. Nina Cornyetz argues that this articulation of a technological gaze deflates erotic readings of the film, arguing it is a “distortion” of Japanese erotic cinema of the time. “The woman's body is simultaneously decentered as spectacle and spectacularized as landscape to be viewed with disinterest – that is, severed from ethical or utilitarian (hence also erotic) interest.”<sup>344</sup> The film is a reminder of the power of selective framing to excise information in order to invoke a constant quiet terror of the ‘Woman.’ It remains a lesson in composition through its evocative constructions of *mise-en-scène*, and its use of lens compression to tease out visual metaphors.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 18. Hiroshi Teshigahara. [Film Still: *Woman in the Dunes*] Close-up of the Woman's Eye (1964).

Chris Welsby's film *Sky Light* (1988), wields its politics with gentle sadness that also refracts and complicates notions of nature in a post-nuclear world. The work is a turn from Welsby's earlier 'structural' landscape films, which relied on direct environmental influences on the material as participants in the production of the works, and are influenced by complex systems theories.<sup>345</sup> A fluid deprioritizing

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<sup>344</sup> Nina Cornyetz, "Technologies of Gazing in "Woman in the Dunes"," *U.S.–Japan Women's Journal*, no. 26 (2004): 40.

<sup>345</sup> “The structural film insists on its shape, and what content it has is minimal and subsidiary to the outline. Four characteristics of the structural film are its fixed camera position (fixed frame from the

exchange between mind, material, and landscape drive films such as *Seven Days* (1974), and the *Windmill III* (1974).<sup>346</sup> The “landscape was not secondary to filmmaking process or filmmaking process to landscape, but process and structure, as revealed in both, could carry information and communicate ideas.”<sup>347</sup> *Sky Light* breaks away from these structural works sharply in a number of ways. It was filmed soon after the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster, in the Ukraine in 1986. The images are made up of lush *nature* images, such as reflections in pools, montaged against optically printed, colourfully enhanced, cobalt blue skies and magenta clouds, intercut with rocky landscapes covered in snow. The soundscape is a combination of landscape sounds of wind and water, radio frequencies and a gradually emerging Geiger counter. At the end of the film we are left with dust speckled end roll and the sound of the Geiger counter penetrating across the material emptiness of the reel spooling out. It is a haunting and agitating work when held up against Welsby’s earlier canon. One senses the pain in the artist who for the first time is using the splicer and the edit suite to construct a nightmare glimpse of a post-Chernobyl world,<sup>348</sup> forced to break with the self-imposed constraints of a method that resisted montage. It was a pivotal moment in his practice.

As new father living in Great Britain, Welsby stood under the drizzle thinking, ‘that isn’t safe anymore.’ Abandoning his teaching jobs, he spent a year roaming Great Britain, shooting the film and behaving so ‘irresponsibly’ that his marriage fell apart. Echoing Adorno’s famous dictum that ‘after Auschwitz, it is impossible to write poetry,’ Welsby declared after an early screening of the film, ‘It is not possible to look at landscapes in the same way after Chernobyl.’ The next year he moved to Canada, where he lives today.<sup>349</sup>

The film is both a rupture in his process and an evocative eulogy to the now absent notion of nature. The *landscapes* that informed his practice are no longer. It is

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viewer’s perspective), the flicker effect, loop printing, and rephotography off the screen. Very seldom will one find all four characteristics in a single film, and there are structural films which modify these usual elements.” P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 348.

<sup>346</sup> “Seven Days may be described as an emergent property, a result of the continuous interplay between the cinematic process and the environment.” Chris Welsby, “Films and Installations: A Systems View of Nature,” in *Experimental Film and Video: An Anthology*, ed. Jackie Hatfield and Stephen Littman (Eastleigh, UK: John Libbey Pub., 2006), 31.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>348</sup> Welsby’s structural works are constructed using single cans of film with no cuts to the material actual; in camera cuts only.

<sup>349</sup> Fred Parker, “Blowin’ in the Wind: Films by Chris Welsby,” accessed 2011. <http://www.fredcamper.com/Film/Welsby.html>.

here in the work where the invisible emerges. The poisoned snow and the forever-altered skies are irradiated and articulated in the film by the click-clack modem-like sound of the Geiger counter. “The visible is no longer a guarantee of absolute knowledge.”<sup>350</sup>

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 19. Chris Welsby. [Film Still: *Sky Light*] Cobalt Blue Sky and Cloud (1988).

Welsby draws the viewer into a contemplative state of engagement with both the subject and the technical construction of his works. They are neither kinetic nor frenetic by design, nor are they constrained by narrative structures; rather the works afford “the viewer the time and space to consciously engage with the moving image, with its production and its presentation.”<sup>351</sup> His installation, *At Sea* (2003), resonates with concerns that are woven through this exegesis. The film is made up of long shots of fog on the sea and sound recordings of the surrounding activity in Vancouver harbour. “The incomprehensible vastness of

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<sup>350</sup> Manohla Dargis, “Chris Welsby,” *Village Voice* (April 25 1989), accessed December 9 2011, <http://www.sfu.ca/~welsby/Voice.htm>.

<sup>351</sup> Welsby, “Films and Installations: A Systems View of Nature,” in *Experimental Film and Video: An Anthology*, 35.



the ocean, may be read as a metaphor for cognition,”<sup>352</sup> challenging spatial orientation, raising questions as to what is visible at all. Is that the ghostly outline of a cargo ship or do I just think it is because I hear a foghorn? Where is the horizon? Meditative and languid, extended duration shots, and use of repetition in the construction of the image, the images force a perceptual shift in the viewer that alters an experience of time and opens the mind to other thoughts. “Viewers are encouraged to slow down, take back control of their own thoughts and perceptions; forget about the constraints of beginnings, middles and ends, and enter instead, a state of mind in which reverie and contemplation can play a creative role in the process of conscious thought.”<sup>353</sup>

Chantal Akerman’s works also induce contemplative states of engagement with her subjects. Of specific interest to [this project] is her film *D’Est*, which drifts its lens across the people and the landscape of Eastern Europe, soon after the fall of the Berlin wall. The film is made up of a series of long duration cinematic tableaux, which capture quotidian life in the recently emancipated from totalitarian communist ruling forces. Tracking shots across landscapes and faces of people in landscapes unfold in extended duration takes that pick up fragments of everyday life during this portentous historical moment in time. One of the film’s identifying features is its capacity to engage with a distinctly political and social topic without explicitly focusing in on facts to tease out another kind of *truth* of the moment. Rancière argues that the “political impact” of her work emerges “in the way it turns an economic and geopolitical issue into an aesthetic matter.”<sup>354</sup> Akerman says of her approach:

I will not attempt to show the disintegration of a system, nor the difficulties of entering into another one, because she who seeks shall find, find all too well, and end up clouding her vision with her own preoccupations. This undoubtedly will happen anyway; it can't be helped. But it will happen indirectly.<sup>355</sup>

I encountered the film late in my research, long after the majority of my footage had been shot, and my decisions on the creative restrictions had been formed.

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 150.

<sup>355</sup> Kristine Butler, "Bordering on Fiction: Chantal Akerman's *D'est*," *Postmodern Culture* 6, no. 1 (1995): 7.

However, Akerman's methods have provided a reflective sounding board from which to consider those decisions and a reminder to be faithful to the original intent and tacit sensations of the making that are embedded in the work. In short, her work is a call to be brave, and to continue to try and harness the feelings I attempted to capture during the shooting phase into the post-production phase. In addition the work has a hybrid quality in regards to its distribution, which has seen it screened in cinemas, as well as installed alongside other works she made to accompany the film. This is a likely scenario for the creative outcomes developed for this research. While I don't find it helpful to categorise other filmmakers' methods as having a direct relationship to my own choices, I think it is helpful to cite the identifying factors in Akerman's film that resonate with my own practice as well as to define the core differences in my intents and approaches. The material choices will be further fleshed out in the following chapter, so I will focus on the conceptual choices with limited reference to actual techniques, except in order to illustrate points.

Akerman's use of extended duration takes is one of her aesthetic tropes. She says of this approach: "I don't want it to 'look real', I don't want it to look natural, but I want people to feel the time that it takes, which is not the time that it really takes."<sup>356</sup> In her work "one has the sense of passing time, of waiting, and of the uncertainty born of daily life that continues in the midst of despair."<sup>357</sup> In *D'Est* the camera rolls and rolls either in static portrait or landscape compositions or in long tracking shots across people lining up for trains and buses or food. The toil of the day-to-day unfolds at the social and political indicator of this time and place. The images are also steeped in the memory-images of historical Europe, strange and familiar at the same time, in colour when they could as easily be monochromatic.<sup>358</sup>

The film has its own way of looking, not only in terms of aesthetics, the way it looks as a film, but in respect to the active engagement of its (visual) subjects, and the way it looks at its subject. The look in the film, as opposed to the look of the

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<sup>356</sup> Chantal Akerman, "Chantal Akerman: In Her Own Time an Interview with Miriam Rosen," in *The Cinematic*, ed. David Company (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004), 195.

<sup>357</sup> Butler, "Bordering on Fiction: Chantal Akerman's *D'est*," 5.

<sup>358</sup> "Dreams of the past pervade the air, and it is not entirely clear where the dream ends and the waking present begins." Lebow, "Memory Once Removed: Indirect Memory and Transitive Autobiography in Chantal Akerman's *D'est*," 45.

film, is more penetrating than a glance and less entranced than a gaze. There is an intensity in the manner of looking; but at the same time, there is a sense of looking beyond what one sees to the unseen.<sup>359</sup>

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 20. Chantal Akerman. [Film Still: *D'Est*] People in Snow at Dusk (1993).

Akerman uses the duration of the shot rather than extending captured time. If she shows five minutes on the screen it has been filmed in five minutes. I have been more interested in extending experiences of time through the slowing down of captured time, although when it comes to the edit, the inherent rhythmic choices of when to cut in relation to the tone and composition of the shot make themselves felt in either approach. The time to cut is a felt and subjective experience. Counterpoint to earlier approaches in my work I wasn't looking for the graphic moment in the frame as an opportunity to move on, rather allowing the shot to run its course or feeling the moment rather than seeing it.

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

She says: “When you're editing, something happens that tells you this is the moment to cut. It's not theoretical, it's something I feel. Afterwards, explaining it is always very difficult.”<sup>360</sup>

As in her other films, Akerman directs the camera in *D'Est* at landscapes and material objects; taking time to relish in their banality and temporal fixedness in order to draw out meaningful digressions. Fundamentally though, her films are always about people. The extended duration of her shots of things are in the service of extracting contextual tensions and historical memories. She explains how this works in a description of a shot from *Sud* (1999) set in the American South. The shot of “a tree evokes a black man who might have been hanged. If you show a tree for two seconds, this layer won't be there – there will just be a tree. It's time that establishes that, too, I think.”<sup>361</sup> In another film *De l'autre cote* (2002) Akerman uses the fence that crosses the Mexican/American border as a metaphorical reference point to return to the social impact it has as an object, without resorting to factual analysis.

“Sometimes she has the camera move along the fence, making us feel its inhuman strangeness, especially under night lighting. The rest of the time, however, she uses it to present either the hopes, attempts and failures on the Mexican side, or the concerns and fears on the American side.”<sup>362</sup> In *D'Est* the landscape seems to evoke, metaphorically, the struggle of the people. The rugged rocks, snow covered, cities, wheat fields and lonely roads recall both another time and the passing of the present.<sup>363</sup> Alisa Lebow captures the essence of how people and landscape populate the frame in *D'Est*:

In her scanning pans, the people are treated as landscape, part of the scenery, as the camera passes by. As such, the landscape becomes human; it adopts a corporeal form. It is this embodied landscape that reveals aspects of its face to us, at first appearing homogeneous, presented as unspecified terrain. Yet as the long takes unfold, this living landscape yields an expressiveness more commonly associated with the portrait than the landscape.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Akerman, "Chantal Akerman: In Her Own Time an Interview with Miriam Rosen," in *The Cinematic*, 195.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>362</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 150.

<sup>363</sup> “*D'Est* is almost a surrealist work, as it engages time in a way that pertains to our daily experience yet is not of that time.” Lebow, "Memory Once Removed: Indirect Memory and Transitive Autobiography in Chantal Akerman's *D'est*," 45.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

In the case of my project I approach the human in the landscape as alienated rather than connected. Rather than faces I prioritise silhouettes, as suspended contemplations that cannot be seen via expressive emotion, rather through postures and movement vocabularies pressed against their milieu. The affective is drawn out of the suspension of things. Where “Akerman meditates on images of the landscape as a bridge for memory”<sup>365</sup> I am more interested in the clues the landscape holds for the ghosts of our future rather than the ghosts of our past.

Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil* (1983) returns to his themes of history and memory, their unreliability and the unreliability of the image to represent them.<sup>366</sup> The film is grounded by the letters of an itinerant cameraman, Sandor Krasna, sent to his friend, narrated by the actress Alexandra Stewart. This structural device of filtered subjectivities scaffolds the overall concerns of Marker’s stratified film. The cameraman wanders the globe commenting on what he sees, using the literary convention of the letter narrative. His alien-like observations are post-colonial and post-modern – social, political, philosophical – open questions on the state of the world as he sees it at this time of touch down for him. The artifice of cinema is further critiqued, in *Sans Soleil*, as Stewart languidly reads his words, selectively digressing over what may or may not be his images, “offer[ing] her own reflections on the letters she is receiving, becoming more than a dutiful mouthpiece and subtly placing the viewer at a distance from the cameraman,” thus adding another layer of “tension” and unreliability to the narrative.<sup>367</sup>

Rancière’s *partage du sensible* and his writing on the *politics of aesthetics* provide some insights into *Sans Soleil* through a lens that informs the process discussed in this exegesis. *Dissensus* emerges from the aesthetics through the blurry “lines of division,”<sup>368</sup> which develop over the length of the film. For Marker it is the tiny stories of the unheard that intrigue his lens. He reveals, and revels in, stories of the common people, uncommonly perceived, and dreams of their dreams and aspirations on celluloid. This is subjective cinema, with unreliable subjectivities, seeking an inner *truth* through external means, via the filmmaker’s wandering between the

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>366</sup> “...one of the widely acknowledged triumphs of the [essayist film.]” Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, after Marker*, 8.

<sup>367</sup> Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 156.

<sup>368</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 98.

“locating poles” of Japan, Bissau, Iceland, and San Francisco. Names on a map that only come alive when their *dēmos* is pondered upon and montaged into a dynamic and rhythmic non-linear trajectory, constructed by the practitioner as a locus for him to negotiate his observations on the human condition. The fictional character Krasner summarises this intent through his letters to his friend. The emergence of the “invisible” – that which is not normally represented – finds its way into the film through the layering techniques of image, voice over and sound; kaleidoscope impressions of the world that collapse onto each other.

Over images of WWII warplanes we hear:

He spoke to me of Sei Shonagon, a lady in waiting to Princess Sadako at the beginning of the 11th century, in the Heian period. Do we ever know where history is really made? Rulers ruled and used complicated strategies to fight one another. Real power was in the hands of a family of hereditary regents; the emperor's court had become nothing more than a place of intrigues and intellectual games. But by learning to draw a sort of melancholy comfort from the contemplation of the tiniest things this small group of idlers left a mark on Japanese sensibility much deeper than the mediocre thundering of the politicians.<sup>369</sup>

Marker cuts to street celebrations in a Tokyo suburb.

Shonagon had a passion for lists: the list of 'elegant things,' 'distressing things,' or even of 'things not worth doing.' One day she got the idea of drawing up a list of 'things that quicken the heart.' Not a bad criterion I realize when I'm filming; I bow to the economic miracle, but what I want to show you are the neighbourhood celebrations.<sup>370</sup>

The economic powerhouse, social and cultural moment that is 1980s Japan, pushed up against a core sample of macro-history. But Marker's attention cannot hold on this for long. He prefers the micro-history of the commoner. Through this layering he is able to parcel feelings of memory and at the same time ask: what is memory? In the film he cuts away from the imperialist warplanes from another time. A broad-brush stroke of history then descends into the Tokyo streets and into the rituals of the Japanese people. We are told, in voiceover of a common woman in the employ of an imperialist ruler from another time and place. She makes lists to structure her perceptions of her existence. Krasna is touched by her list of “things that quicken the heart.” In a short sequence a thousand years is collapsed into a conceptual cinematic crystal of memory. Rancière says of Marker's techniques: “[He] is not just having a

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<sup>369</sup> *Sans Soleil*, directed by Chris Marker (Criterion Collection, 1983, DVD 2007).

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*

little FUN by confounding those well established temporal systems, the simple chronological order or the classical narrative told in flashback. He is working out a narrative structure that creates a memory in the present as the intertwining of two histories of the century.”<sup>371</sup>

“The real must be fictionalised in order to be thought,” Rancière argues, then qualifies, “it is not a matter of claiming that everything is fiction. It is a matter of stating that fiction of the aesthetic age defined models for connecting the presentation of facts and forms of intelligibility that blurred the border between the logic of facts and the logic of fiction.”<sup>372</sup> In the opening of the film we see a shot of the three children from Iceland and hear Krasna’s thoughts about the strip of film: “One day I’ll put it at the beginning of a film with a long piece of black leader – If they don’t see happiness in the picture at least they will see black.”<sup>373</sup> In a single sentence the Marker’s intent and mechanics are framed for the viewer. Krasna shot the film and so he has his memory of the circumstances, as read by another. The mechanism of cinema, and its central relationship to time, is rendered through musings on the instability of memory. And *Sans Soleil* is traced with tailings of his own memories and processes from the genealogy of his other films, “fleeting glimpses of the trademark signs and obsessions that signal Chris Marker.”<sup>374</sup> The cat and the owl make a return, this time reframed against a Japanese cultural context.

The film enacts a process of sorting things out and linking them together, while continually addressing itself to the nature and function of this process. Some passages of the film unfold in the form of logical argument and exposition, others via associations motivated by the cameraman’s playful and incisive intellect, and others still through the haphazard drift of memory.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables* (Berg Publishers, 2006), 161.

<sup>372</sup> Rancière and Rockhill, *The Politics of Aesthetics : The Distribution of the Sensible*, 38.

<sup>373</sup> Marker, *Sans Soleil*.

<sup>374</sup> Lupton, *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future*, 181.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 21. Chris Marker. [Film Still: *Sans Soleil*] Lucky Cats (1983).

In *Sans Soleil*, filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, and the Zone from *Stalker*, are adduced alongside contemplations on history and memory. In a sequence where Krasna describes the experience of witnessing a Japanese protest march, as he watches “his pal,” Hayao Mananeko, process the images of sixties protesters rioting in the streets, on his visual synthesiser, “claiming that [processed images] break down the illusory presence of the past normally created by archive film, and allow the depiction, in ‘non-images’, of things that either do not officially exist in history, or have ceased to exist.”<sup>376</sup> The actress Alexandra Stewart reads Krasna’s letter over the footage:

[Hayao] has found a solution. If the images of the present don’t change, then change the images of the past. He showed me the clashes of the sixties as treated by his synthesiser. Pictures that are less deceptive – ‘he says’ – with the conviction of a fanatic – ‘than those you see on television. At least they proclaim themselves to be what they are. Images. Not the portable and compact form of an already inaccessible reality’. Hayao calls machine’s world the Zone – a homage to Tarkovsky.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>377</sup> Marker, *Sans Soleil*.



Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 22. Chris Marker. [Film Still: *Sans Soleil*] Hayao Mananeko's Processed Image of Man (1983).

Marker allows images and sounds to breathe in differing registers. He understands when to adjust the rhythm of his cinematic temporal space and allow his audience to take pause, pleasure, and reflect on “what it is all about?” During a hypnotic, even tiring sequence, *Sans Soleil* gently draws us into the day-to-day world of Japanese workers as they travel to work by train. In the scene he is referring to in *Stalker* the protagonists slip away into their thoughts, as they are absorbed into the Zone on a rail car. In *Sans Soleil* the Japanese drift to work, en masse, into their own zone, and Marker imagines their dreams, nightmares, and memories as constructed from images drawn from the television screens of the nation. There is no voice-over. “The tension between the ‘images that speak for themselves’ and the words that make them speak is, when all is said and done, the tension between the idea of the image and imaged matter.”<sup>378</sup> *Sans Soleil* is about the possibilities of cinema as a form, as an influence on our memories and on our perceptions of the world we live in. *Sans Soleil* is not closed down by concrete resolutions, rather it circles and layers its topics and ideas so that they converse with and provoke each other. The making of the work is as important as the underlying philosophies of the film. It is mischievous and serious at the same time, thought provoking and poetic.

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<sup>378</sup> Rancière, *Film Fables*, 170.

*Sans Soleil* and the other works discussed in this chapter have all drawn strands into the thinking-making processes behind *Cinematic Affect in a Time of Ecological Emergency*. The Earthworks opened up pathways to meditate about the poetic in art, Welsby initiated thinking about how to draw out the invisible, Akerman encouraged sustained modes of duration in relation to the recorded materials, as well as inciting a call to hold true to course. While, as a constant refrain, Marker lured me into his essayist methods of filmmaking, which have most richly informed the practice, outlined in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four – Positioning of Practice:

The project *Cinematic Affect in a Time of Ecological Emergency* was initiated from a deep sense of melancholy about our world in the face of climate change. These feelings accumulated during the filming of the project, predicated by lumps in the throat, a chill in the bones – nausea. Trucks, trailers, roads, parks, shopping malls, contrails, oceans, pipelines, golf courses, clear-cuts, entropic forests, modern ruins and construction sites are the motifs that make up the dominant visual assemblage of this project. The people that do intermittently populate the frame are filmed in the distance, their faces turned away or outward, heads down, not connected, not looking. The creative works are more tuned to the human traces, lines, and scratches of us. They are instants of imperfect memories about our presence in the world. In these images there is sadness, illness, depression. Through the feeling and thinking of these instants, in the field and in the studio, this project emerged, fragment-by-fragment, sensation-by-sensation, as a collation of visual and aural samples, informed by living in a time affected by the production and consumption of oil.

Since I had also been thinking around these terms, Matthew Gandy's reading of Antonioni's *Red Desert* (1964) triggered an insight for me. I had also been trying to work out how to produce a "romantic motif of individual alienation" expressed through a "heightened sensory experience", as a way to make up for the "privations" of the moments of affective capture that have emerged during the practice.<sup>379</sup> Gandy proposes that one of the "consequences" of the psychological state of Giuliana (Monica Vitti) as she recovers from a car accident is an accentuated sensitivity to the world: "she has become much more aware of the aesthetic characteristics of her surroundings." Antonioni applies a rich, but limited, range of colour to the film's *mise-en-scène* to articulate Giuliani's "visual acuity" elicited by her psychological trauma. In doing so he "deploy[s] an established romantic trope of illness and suffering as a means towards heightened states of creative insight."<sup>380</sup> The outcomes in this project have been constructed through a metaphorical lens of sickness and

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<sup>379</sup> Matthew Gandy, "Landscapes of Deliquescence in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28, no. 2 (2003).

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

sadness.<sup>381</sup> The camera and the practice have emerged as much as a method of coping with the conditions as a way of seeing again; a subversion of ‘neurotypical’ encounters with the world as method. “The neurotypical always has at the ready a kind of experiential shorthand with which to abridge the event, as habit”<sup>382</sup>, or cliché, in the terms outlined earlier by Deleuze.

Through material experimentation, and extended field excursions, which focus on contemplative and concentrated engagement with the ecological emergency, a range of approaches have been distilled to produce the recorded materials for the exhibited works. This chapter critically reflects upon methods implemented during the testing phase and production of the creative outcomes.

Practice-based filmmakers that moved from an emphasis on form to one of affect paved the way as intercessors for the thinking orbiting this project. However, in saying this, these are springboards only from which to confront the subject of a contemporary ‘ecological emergency.’ They are aligned with the early avant-garde cinema (1920s to 1930s) of Joris Ivens and Dziga Vertov, and Post-WW2, experimental film (particularly the later work, 1980s to 2000s, of British structuralist Chris Welsby).<sup>383</sup>

The move from historical influences to contemporary demands, both theoretical and aesthetic, presents an array of questions and problems. I am, for instance, apprehensive about aestheticising the subject and turning it into a *pleasurable* experience. Nor do I want to produce fact-based or cynical encounters. My position,

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<sup>381</sup> Eileen Joy noticed this element of Giuliana’s acute sensations of insanity in the world in her essay “Blue.” “...only she, suffering from feelings of anxiety and dreams of drowning in quicksand, seems to understand how sick the landscape is, and wants to flee from it, saying at one point, ‘I can’t look at the sea for long or I lose interest in what’s happening on land.’” Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory Beyond Green* (2013), 217.

<sup>382</sup> See Chapter Two for more detail on this: “The neurotypical has at the ready a procedure for reconstituting something after the fact from the phases of experience’s fielding whose immediate entertainment was skipped: the procedure of reflective consciousness. The shortening of experience by habit and its reconstitution by reflection go neurotypically hand in hand with the greatest of fluidity. What falls out between habit and reflection, leaving a gap they work in concert to smooth over with the aid of language coming from the field of memory, is the coming alive of the field of experiential immediacy, in its emergent dance of attention.” Manning and Massumi, *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience*, 17.

<sup>383</sup> “Mediators are fundamental. Creation’s all about mediators. Without them nothing happens. They can be people – for a philosopher, artists or scientists; for a scientist, philosophers or artists-but things too, even plants or animals, as in Castaneda. Whether they’re real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, you have to form your mediators.” Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, 125.

as stated in the introduction to this exegesis, is that I consider these approaches to be the agents for polarising popular opinion and stagnating discussion about the level of ecological threat that we face and our role in bringing it about. These considerations led me to investigate the possibilities of what are known as essayist films,<sup>384</sup> identified in Chapter Three as those by Chris Marker, Werner Herzog, and Chantal Akerman. However, for my own work, the ‘essay film,’ with its emphasis on the personal or subjective design of the filmmaker is an overly broad classification. This also accounts for my decision to include as many competing voices as possible, in the design of the sonic elements, in how they relate or not to the images in the films.

The application of digital moving image technology deployed in the production of the films has been essential to the production techniques, providing means to open up the subject for closer, clearer, or alternate perceptions.<sup>385</sup> Cinematic devices that were tested include: monochrome, inverted channels, high-contrast and saturated colour, time-lapse, and manipulated location sound recording and non-diegetic sonic elements. These methods and their efficacy, in relation to the aims of the project, are discussed through the film project *Aspects of Trees*. Conclusions reached during the making, testing and analysis of this work led to experimentation, and eventual application of creative constraints or restrictions.<sup>386</sup> In the end, I limited the techniques to long duration takes, extreme telephoto and high-speed (slow motion) cinematography. These formal devices now dominate the visual frameworks of both

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<sup>384</sup> Laura Rascaroli offers a definition of the essay film drawn from Hans Richter’s seminal ‘Der Film Essay, eine neue form de Dokumentarfilm.’ [In the 1940 text he] announced a new type of intellectual and emotional cinema, able to provide ‘images for mental notions’ and to ‘portray a concept’. ‘In this effort to give body to the invisible world of the imagination, thought and ideas, the essay film can employ an incomparably greater reservoir of expressive means than can the pure documentary film. Freed from recording external phenomena in simple sequence the film essay must collect its material from everywhere; its space and time must be conditioned only by the need to explain and show the idea’” Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London Wallflower Press, 2009), 24.

<sup>385</sup> “This constant interaction and transfer of analogue to digital and vice versa is changing the relation the filmmaker has with his tools. Do the tools he uses affect the filmmaker’s subjectivity? Obviously they do, and the films made now reflect these new tools. In this change, what have we filmmakers gained, and what have we lost? And is it a question of gain or loss? Or is it that the new technologies and market forces that shape what the future holds for us constitute an historical change that other forces try to reverse?” Annette Michelson et al., “Afterward: A Matter of Time,” *Camera Obscura, Camera Lucida Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson, Film culture in transition* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 262.

<sup>386</sup> “The idea that creativity can be stimulated by constraints that may be imposed, invented, or chosen.” Paisley Livingston and Carl R. Plantinga, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, Routledge Philosophy Companions (London Routledge, 2009), 631. See an example of this in action in: *The Five Obstructions*, directed by Jørgen Leth, Lars von Trier, and Carsten Holst (Koch Lorber Films, 2003).

the exhibited video outcomes of the research. Application of sound design through accentuated location recordings,<sup>387</sup> as well as layers of data-mined TV, radio and Internet sources for discursive content is utilised as a method of subverting the subjective position often present in essayist cinema, and to draw out the networks of noise and voices that surround us wherever we are, even if we can't see or hear them.

The questioning that initiated the projects and activated experimentation with video and audio materials was formulated into the following propositions: (1) if working from the belief that fear-inducing or fact-based documentary polarises popular opinion, alternatively might a poetic and affective mode or register act as a provocation for progressing debates about anthropogenic climate change?<sup>388</sup> (2) Might cinematic affect, through sensation, recalibrate our perceptions of the world at this moment of ecological crisis? I hypothesised that my feelings of sadness about the crisis might be a common experience for people who were attempting to grapple with the complex problems that face our planet's ecology. I felt, and still feel at times, incapacitated by the enormity of the problem and wanted to address it through my practice, supported by a range of research methods that would allow me to not only see the world as it is, but also to sense it more acutely.

What I subjectively know, from planting trees and managing plantation reforestation is that human impact on the ecology is destructive, vast, and moving at a rapid rate.<sup>389</sup> The destruction is, however, predominantly invisible, hidden up long logging roads in places that people rarely visit or see. Distant clear-cuts and diseased forests have the same cloak of invisibility as the methane in our air, the plastics, acids and toxins in our water, and the oil sands and mining operations that exist far away from our cities and imaginations.

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<sup>387</sup> "Sound design is the careful composition of three main types of film sounds—spoken words, music, and sound effects. While some of these sounds are produced while the camera is rolling, most are recorded after a scene is shot and then synched with the visual track in postproduction." Jon Lewis, *Essential Cinema: An Introduction to Film Analysis* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2014).

<sup>388</sup> As Brian Massumi notes: "Philosophies of affect, potential, and actualization may aid in finding counter-tactics." "The Autonomy of Affect", 106.

<sup>389</sup> From 1992-2002 I worked as a tree-planter and reforestation manager in British Columbia and Alberta.



Fig. 23. Andrew Denton. [Photograph] North American Pine-Beetle Epidemic: Dead Forest, British Columbia, Canada (2012).

The first completed experiment of my research comprised of a multi-screen film, *Aspects of Trees*, which looked at environmental issues through a range of cinematic and photographic media, seeking to engage with these in an evocative and affective register (which I contextualised in Chapter Two).<sup>390</sup> The work documented the barely visible or invisible, but ultimately destructive, mountain pine beetle epidemic in North America, brought about by human interference in the ecology of the region.

In 2012 and 2013 I conducted fieldwork in Williams Lake, and the Merrit Region, in British Columbia, in the Rocky Mountain Ranges in Alberta, and in the Pinyon forests in the Gila in New Mexico. These locations are at the heart of the pine beetle infestation in Canada and the USA.<sup>391</sup> The fieldwork utilised a variety of documentation techniques, including cameras placed remotely across locations (sometimes in unusual places, under a ditch or inside a log or under the forest floor). The cameras ran for long capture times in a variety of frame rates. These shots worked as ideation sketches that uncovered subtle changes in the location, across a

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<sup>390</sup> “Around Williams Lake, the whole country dissolved into a ghostly red hue.” Andrew Nikiforuk, *Empire of the Beetle: How Human Folly and a Tiny Bug Are Killing North America's Great Forests* (Vancouver: David Suzuki Foundation: Greystone Books, 2011), 73.

<sup>391</sup> The beetle, as with forest fire, is a natural part of the forest ecosystem – but now it is acting in a way not seen before. Usually it comes and goes every 30-40 years to cull out the older trees – thus opening up the forest for second storey species or juvenile stands to emerge. When the beetle's job is done it is killed off by a combination of fire and at least one winter that has extended temperatures of -25°C temperatures. The bark beetle's blood acts like anti-freeze. It hasn't been that cold for more than a decade so the beetle hasn't died off. From an interview with Bill Layton, a local (William's Lake) forester, who has worked in the backwoods of BC for 30 years and now works with First Nations bands on forestry and pine beetle projects in the area. June 19 2012.

range of macro and micro perspectives, temporally and spatially. It is a method developed through close readings of Dziga Vertov's polemic and poetic notion of the 'kino-eye' as applied in his film, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929).<sup>392</sup> Vertov worked with his cameraman Mikhail Kaufman to construct inventive cinematic language, using material devices to extend and shift perspective,<sup>393</sup> through expressive use of camera and methodological applications of montage developed with editor, Yelizaveta Svilova.<sup>394</sup>



Fig. 24. Andrew Denton. [Photograph] Pine-Beetle Damage, British Columbia, Canada (2012).

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<sup>392</sup> "Kino-eye makes use of every possible kind of shooting technique: acceleration, microscopy, reverse action, animation, camera movement, the use of the most unexpected shortcomings – all these we consider to be not trick effects but normal methods to be fully used." Vertov and Michelson, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, 88.

<sup>393</sup> "I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine show you the world as only I can see it... Now and forever, I free myself from human immobility, I am in constant motion, I draw near, then away from object, I crawl under, I climb onto them. I move apace with the muzzle of a galloping horse, I plunge full speed into a crowd, I outstrip running soldiers, I fall on my back, I ascend with an airplane, I plunge and soar together with plunging and soaring bodies. Now I, a camera, fling myself along their resultant, manoeuvring in the chaos of movement, starting with movements composed of the most complex combinations. Ibid., 17.

<sup>394</sup> Vertov and "his editor Yelizaveta Svilova, who later became his wife, and his brother Mikhail Kaufman formed a 'Council of Three.' The Council of Three gathered around them a group of devotees, calling themselves kinoks, or cinema-eyes." Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction, Very Short Introductions* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 40.





Fig. 25. Andrew Denton. [Photograph] Underwater of Sky and Moth Landing, British Columbia, Canada (2012).

Sometimes unexpected results emerged from the sketches. Happy accidents either directed me into another way of filming or became raw material for post-production experimentation. Once time was taken to absorb and contemplate the location, I looked for material that reflected the sensations of being there. The possibilities for post-production pathways were also considered at this stage and noted. Methods uncovered on the field trips informed the development of new material. Most shots were eventually discarded or their use altered though multiple iterations of reviewing and editing. An example of a technique I have used in the past, but that proved to be an unexpected challenge in this case, was the application of time-lapse cinematography.<sup>395</sup> Although I discarded most of the shots I recorded, I found at times its economic application in extended shot sequences revealed aspects of the subject that would not otherwise emerge if filmed in real time.<sup>396</sup> When time-lapse cinematography is utilised in *Aspects of Trees*, it is to make visible unexpected patterns, movements, or connections in the images that speak to the complexity of the ecological subjects. A process of testing, and elimination, favoured less dramatic temporal registers. It worked most effectively when footage was sped up slightly, five to ten frames per second, rather than one frame every minute, which produces a

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<sup>395</sup> Reflection on this method found that in recent times it has become a trope of high-end fact based nature films such as those made by the British Broadcasting Commission (BBC). It is also used as a transitional device in narrative TV shows such as *Breaking Bad*, or in titles sequences such as in *House of Cards (USA)*. In such context, in most cases aesthetically, it was not deemed appropriate as a technique that aligned with the aims of the project.

<sup>396</sup> Long takes which take many hours to capture.

more subtle effect on the material, while still disclosing previously invisible motions.<sup>397</sup> If you stand or lie down under the trees in a large dead forest you can hear the wind and sense the trunks and branches moving but not really see their inter-relationships. The entropic forest is heard moving in the wind but this movement is not visible to the human eye. In this section of the film, time-lapse footage (shot once every five seconds) was collected in very high-definition.<sup>398</sup> The temporal compression, and the sharp level of photographic detail, captured the movement vocabulary of the distressed trees, producing images that speak to the rhythm that emanates from the forest.

Rhythm in cinema is conveyed by the life of the object visibly recorded in the frame. Just as from the quivering of a reed you can tell what sort of current, what pressure there is in a river, in the same way we know the movement of time from the flow of the life-process reproduced in the shot.<sup>399</sup>



Fig. 26. Andrew Denton. [Film Still: *Aspects of Trees*] Entropic Forest, British Columbia, Canada (2015).

Many hours of time-lapse material were recorded during the production of *Aspects of Trees*, but very little of it ended up in the final project. What the technique taught me was how to look more closely at the subject and how to search where possible for other less invasive cinematic rupturing techniques. I discovered, over time, affective moments in the slowly immersive, personal experiences of the instants of capture. I came to favour these compositions over abrasive digital manipulation of the images; fast cuts to graphically divergent frames, and disjuncture through screen placement, which I had experimented with in the past. An example of the latter is Ryan

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<sup>397</sup> This process at work can be seen in a composition of recently attacked pine stand in the Merritt Region (see fig. 26).

<sup>398</sup> 18 megapixels on a Canon 5D MkII DSLR.

<sup>399</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, 120.

Trecartin's and Lizzie Fitch's, *untitled*, multi screen installation at the 55<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (2013). The hyper-intense affective register of the work fits its subject, disaffected youth culture, by “conjur[ing] alternate realities and warped futures populated by a motley cast of unstable characters, played by Trecartin and a rotating cast of friends and collaborators.”<sup>400</sup>

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 27. Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch. [Film Still: *Untitled*] Performers with Costumes and Paint, at 55<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (2013).

The contemplative register at work in *Aspects of Trees* can be demonstrated in a slow motion, long take midway through the film. The final composite was developed through multiple experiments and iterations in the field and later in post-production. The purpose behind the shot was to evoke the dislocation that unfolds while traversing a dead forest and then that moment of emptiness as the trees disappear and the landscape opens up to the endless tree stumps of a clear-cut.<sup>401</sup> The durational pressure, due to the length of the take, and the nauseating skew of the dead trees as they warp across their disrupted vertical linearity, opens into a lonely and perplexing instant of negative space. Encountering the filmed world as it slows down affects a different state, inducing a forensic element of discovery in the languid

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<sup>400</sup> “As if in an internet fever dream they inhabit liminal spaces between races and genders, switch guises fluidly and double themselves with hallucinatory abandon through a cacophony of digital effects, hyperactive editing and candy colored face paint. Communication occurs in text-message style non-sequiturs.” Massimiliano Gioni, *Il Palazzo Enciclopedico: Biennale Arte 2013/The Encyclopedic Palace*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Venice: Marsilio, 2013), 417.

<sup>401</sup> I walk with the camera to my eye through the forest and then out into the clear-cut.

quality of movement. The experience of alienation in the filmed site is underlined by the monochromatic image and the technical failure of the low-resolution images.<sup>402</sup> At this stage of the production, I was unaware of the importance this moment would have on the practice in the latter stages of the research.



Fig. 28. Andrew Denton. [Film Still: *Aspects of Trees*] Dead Forest and Clear-cut Sequence, British Columbia, Canada (2015).

The potential for high-speed cinematography was further revealed while filming a clear-cut, in Merrit, British Columbia. Days on site trying to capture the scale and intensity of the violence that had been exerted on the landscape proved fruitless. Attempts with high-resolution cameras, time-lapse, and other filming techniques,

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<sup>402</sup> “Following Bergson we might say that as beings in the world we are caught on a certain spatio-temporal register: we see only what we have already seen (we see only what we are interested in). At stake with art, then, might be an altering, a switching, of this register. New (prosthetic) technologies can do this. Switching temporal registers: time-lapse photography producing firework flowers and flows of traffic; slow-motion film revealing intricate movements which otherwise are a blur. And switching spatial registers too: microscopes and telescopes showing us the molecular and the super-molar. Indeed, at this point the new media coincide with art: indeed, the new media take on an aesthetic function (a deterritorialising function).” Simon O’Sullivan, “The Aesthetics of Affect: Thinking Art Beyond Representation,” *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 6, no. 3 (2001): 127.

were ineffective in ‘connecting me’ emotionally with the subject.<sup>403</sup> Finally, by filming handheld with a Casio FH-20 at 240 frames per second,<sup>404</sup> along a deer barrier, which circles the clear-cut logging for many kilometres, I observed that the fence operated as a formal structure to the chaos of the shattered landscape behind the wire. The images evolved into a simultaneously languorous and kinetically jarring sequence.

The compositing of the images into a triptych amplified the tension between the kinetic movement, yet slow motion images of the clear-cut through the fence. Offsetting the timelines of the three screens accentuates this. The result is a sequence that unfolds on multiple visual levels. Frenetic and violent, its fractured horizon is tethered by the slow-motion cinematography, and then disrupted by the motion parallax effect of the close foreground in relation to the deep background.<sup>405</sup> The shots slip in and out of synch, in and out of chaos, and the horizon drifts away and then reconnects with itself. Sensations of time, space, and distance move through registers of familiarity and strangeness.



Fig. 29. Andrew Denton. [Film Still: *Aspects of Trees*] Clear-cut and Deer Fence, British Columbia, Canada (2015).

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<sup>403</sup> Despite spending many years working in thousands of clear-cuts I am still struck by their effect on me. Each time I am in one I am taken back to the very first time I looked out across the landscape to see only stumps on the ground reaching all the way to the horizon.

<sup>404</sup> On site time-lapse experiments of the clear-cut were recorded and rendered on a laptop for review. These shots did not convey the trauma or scale of the place. The technique was not working the way I hoped and decided to play with the Casio FH-20. I discovered the Casio, a consumer camera that shoots very high frame rates (240-480 frames per second) at very low-resolution (640x480 or 320x240) on a collaborative live dance and projection project, *Girl with a Movie Camera* (2012). It is small, cheap and lightweight. The intimate footage that emerged from recording dancers is compelling. Later experimentation with land and cityscapes for connecting sections of the show reminded me that slow-motion cinematography could have an alluring quality.

<sup>405</sup> The three shots composite into an extreme cinematic aspect ratio of 4:1. This is a very wide presentation format. As a comparison, *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) has an aspect ratio of 2.20:1.



Taking advantage of the lightweight camera led camera tests, which drew on erratic and kinetic shooting techniques.<sup>406</sup> Composition of several dozen shots into single frames drew results that were interesting abstractions, but were not compelling over long durations of playback. More often than not they disintegrated into visual noise, rendering the subject unrecognisable. This particular technique was eventually rejected as not synchronising with the aims of the project, though I noted during the testing that the abstracted shots were more captivating when they contained an identifiable visual element in them. There was something compelling about the isolated recognisable elements in the image that I reflected back on when I started collecting databases of images of contrails, as if our eyes search out the familiar as way make sense of the what is difficult to grasp.



Fig. 30. Andrew Denton. [Film Still: *Aspects of Trees*] Discarded Camera Test of Compositing Pinyon Forest After Fire, New Mexico, U.S.A. (2015).

The decision to construct *Aspects of Trees*, in its first iteration as a multi-screen work, came from extensive testing and review of the images during the post-

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<sup>406</sup> Off-the-shelf camera models, like the Casio, fit into the palm of your hand. Their portability allows for a unique and fluid capability. This quality redirected my experimentation, temporarily, down a pathway reminiscent of early avant-garde visual music works. "The notion of 'visual music' can be seen as a useful way of understanding the significant number of abstract animated films produced in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. For each filmmaker the term can be understood in a slightly different manner: for Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling music served purely as an analogy of interrogating the qualities of visual media without recourse to representation. In contrast Walther Ruttmann integrated music into his film in attempt to synthesise them, to cross sense boundaries in a manner analogous to the medical condition synaesthesia." Malcolm Cook, "Visual Music in Film, 1921-1924: Richter, Eggeling, Ruttmann," in *Music and Modernism, C. 1849-1950*, ed. Charlotte De Mille (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2011), 220.

production phase of the film.<sup>407</sup> The challenge for the work was to integrate the scale and complexity of the subject with the subjectivity of the affective experience of encounter. The multiple high-definition composited screens allowed for a certain acuity in the images, which was then complicated by temporal disjuncture, repetition, and material distortion. Later however, I came to find the constant fragmentation of the frame distracting in its busyness. I re-edited the film into a mostly mono-screen work, which I found to be a more successful iteration.<sup>408</sup> From fevered melancholy to nausea, grief and then clarity, *Aspects of Trees* evolved into a eulogy of the entropic forests its composition traversing a single to a dozen screens.

At this point of the research, my plan was to develop visual material that emerged from my subjective experience of observing, and then to complicate this subjective response through the process of temporal and spatial disruptions of images and sounds. It was Tarkovsky's writing on his cinematic process and theories that served as a 'friend' to consult in this regard.<sup>409</sup> "Naturalistically recorded facts are in themselves utterly inadequate to the creation of a cinematic image. The image in cinema is based on the ability to present as an observation one's own perception of an object."<sup>410</sup> His writing and work has also had an influence on cinematic construction of sound.

On reflection, after many iterations with different soundtrack elements, I decided that one of the creative constraints that I would apply to the final exhibited works was to not use a musical score, and to think about the sound in a similar way to the images. That is, to use the recording technology itself over post-production methods to shift perceptual encounters of the objects and locations. I engaged a sound designer to help produce the sound for the film.<sup>411</sup> As in past projects we have worked on together, we utilised a mixture of location recordings (for this work the sound of bark beetles, fences, trees), manipulated in post, which then also conversed

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<sup>407</sup> Installed as an installation at the *Balance-Unbalance* (2013) conference in Noosa, and projected with a live performance of the sound and music at the Toronto Electroacoustic Symposium (2013).

<sup>408</sup> This version of *Aspects of Trees*, which screened at *The New Zealand International Film Festival*, and *Jihlava International Documentary Festival*, is included as an appendix on DVD at the end of this exegesis.

<sup>409</sup> Published in Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>411</sup> Teresa Connors.

with the score.<sup>412</sup> Raw audio materials were fed into a variety of MAX MSP patches, in order to create immediacy in the work. Live improvisational recordings of a cello influenced these elements in the final outcome.<sup>413</sup> In 2012, I met with electronic composer, sound designer, and science artist, David Dunn while I was in New Mexico. David has been recording pinyon pine beetle sounds in the damaged forest of New Mexico and Colorado for over two decades.<sup>414</sup> He offered to donate his recordings to the project, which can be heard in various iterations on the soundtrack. These are the clicking crunching sounds on the track of the beetles eating the trees.

*Aspects of Trees* traverses a range of evocative and temporal registers. Through the process of making the work, a subjective resistance built up to producing images that are spectacular or focused on the aesthetics of human interaction with “Nature”,<sup>415</sup> seen in such films as *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) and *Baraka* (1992). During refinement of the collection methods, extreme high-speed and high definition cinematography, as well as super-telephoto lenses, were trialled with increasing frequency. I concluded that subtle ripples and ruptures in the image were more contemplative in their form, as methods of locating an enhanced clarity or acuity in the material engagement with the subject. A decision to establish filming techniques with limited formal restrictions, in order to anchor the images with certain perceptual elements, was arrived at due to reflections on the many material experiments conducted. Further consideration of works such as those by Buster Simpson, Agnes Denes, and Richard

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<sup>412</sup> Eduard Artemyev’s scores for *Solaris* and *Stalker* have been influential in their application of non-diegetic/diegetic sound elements that merge into score elements. “Tarkovsky was interested in Artemyev’s electronic music, believing that it was the way to dispense with a conventional score altogether, which he felt that films did not really need.” Sean Martin, *Andrei Tarkovsky* (Harpenden, Herts, England: Kamera Books, 2011), 33.

<sup>413</sup> “...software programs such as *Max/MSP/Jitter* have been used widely as real-time interactive systems to respond minutely to the actions and voices of actors (or interactive installation users), transforming the data into metamorphosing video projections and sonic effects.” Baz Kershaw, Helen Nicholson, and ebrary Inc., *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance, Research methods for the arts and humanities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 44.

<sup>414</sup> Dunn became a tree whisperer after New Mexico started to lose half of its famed pinyon trees to an unprecedented beetle outbreak. Anxious landowners wanted a clear diagnosis on their trees before they pulled out their chain saws. Because Dunn had the listening tools, he got recruited to do the job. Whenever the sound engineer heard noises that resemble running water or creaking winds in a pinyon he’d give the tree an all-clear for beetles. Such a diagnosis inevitably invited two possible prescriptions: the landowner could water the tree more often, to build resin resistance, or he or she could spray the pinyon tree with the pesticide carbyryl. If Dunn heard squirrel-like pops and clicks, that meant the beetle had taken up residence and was now building its own magical sound universe. Such a diagnosis inevitably resulted in someone pulling out a saw.” Nikiforuk, *Empire of the Beetle: How Human Folly and a Tiny Bug Are Killing North America's Great Forests*, 144-45.

<sup>415</sup> “To have ecology, we must give up Nature. But since we have been addicted to Nature for so long, giving up will be painful. Giving up a fantasy is harder than giving up a reality.” Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 95.



Mosse, discussed in Chapter Three, convinced me that simplifying and limiting the possibilities of the media can agitate, counter-intuitively, a complex, contemplative, engagement with the subject.

### **Attempts:**

Halfway through the research the emphasis of *Cinematic Affect in a Time of Ecological Emergency* shifted from a focus on natural entropy, to subjects that are linked tenuously or specifically to fossil fuel production, energy, and consumption. This choice was elicited from observations made during my fieldwork in Canada, and through scoping out current socio-politico-ecological conditions during the contextual review process (see Chapter One and Two). In North America, in the context of the oil sands production, the infrastructure of this industry is *everywhere*. Its iconography of tankers, pickups, helicopters, power-lines, refineries, and seemingly endless pipes, and highway construction is so commonplace that it is rendered benign in the everyday, unless you take time to concentrate on it, or come to it with new eyes.

This is Morton's uneasiness as he contemplates the uncanny 'weirdness' of our 'ecological emergency.'<sup>416</sup> They are the fragments or signs of the hyperobjects of oil and climate change. "From [his] point of view oil is what makes America look the way it does: it covers the plains with highways while weeds grow through the rotting wood on a railway track."<sup>417</sup> Rather than shocking us by dramatically altering the familiar, the uncanny encounter gently shifts the commonplace into discord. I imagined that through approaches of contemplative disruption of the quotidian, the lens could tease out the invisible elements that elude daily capture. Perhaps, in our current circumstances this could be a method of reconnection, drawing out the unseeable and altering perception. This could be a way for the world to present itself differently; for us to feel its strangeness against our own.

Deleuze reflects on our spiritual disconnection with the world: "The modern fact is that we no longer believe in this world. We do not even believe in the events which

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<sup>416</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, 54.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

happen to us, love, death, as if they only half concerned us.”<sup>418</sup> If we have lost our belief in the world then are we incapable of a meaningful encounter with it? “Only belief in the world can reconnect [humanity] to what [he and she] sees and hears.”<sup>419</sup>

### **Filming and Thinking:**

Sherwood Park, near Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, is home to the refineries that process the oil sands material that is transported from far northern strip mines such as those at Fort MacMurray. Steam, smoke, fire, and dust pour from machines, cloying the air; haptic entry points into this landscape. The brutal objects of tank farms, depots, train yards, and truck stops are where I first set up my camera and waited and filmed day and night over many months thinking and feeling through what I was seeing. This was accompanied by excursions to Fort MacMurray to witness the town and the phenomenon of the sands. It is a science fiction vista reminiscent of the scarred landscapes in *Lessons of Darkness*. Having visited these awful sites, I think I now understand why Herzog chose to assemble his cinematic ‘*inferno*’ with Wagnerian scoring, artifice in the imagery, false quotations and otherworldly narration. I believe he was caught up in the alluring horror of the aesthetics of that place, and overwhelmed by the human transgressions that caused these toxic landscapes to happen.

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<sup>418</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 171.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-72.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 31. Garth Lenz. [Photograph] Oil Sands Operation, Fort MacMurray, Alberta, Canada (2013).

I have certainly felt awe in the face of the destruction I have witnessed during this research project. Despite this, I knew at my core I needed to resist a spectacular encounter with the subject; to take a deep slow breath and look at the vibrations and pulses that were radiating from the source. This conclusion led me away from the sources of oil and out into the world of its consumption. I drew a line on the map that started at the refineries in Edmonton and finished at the golf courses and wind farms of Palm Springs. This was followed by an epilogue excursion that took me to the farms and toxic waters of the Salton Sea, where the residue our wants leaves visible traces of what our future might be.

The spatial and temporal scale of climate change makes it an imperceptible entity of enormous finitude. As Morton notes: “We can only see pieces of hyperobjects at a time. The reason why they appear nonlocal and temporally foreshortened is precisely because of this transdimensional quality. We only see pieces of them at once, like a tsunami or a case of radiation sickness.”<sup>420</sup> Those fleeting glimpses we catch are clues to the strangeness our world is becoming. As I stood alone filming I imagined each drop of oil as pebbles striking a pond, sending ripples of affects out into the

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<sup>420</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, 70.

world. Some dynamically present, some elusively slippery; fragments of our day-to-day to direct a lens towards, in order to perceive them and sense them in ways only a camera can extract. Landscapes, infrastructures, and structures, under the close scrutiny of cinematic devices can show us that our eyes would otherwise not see. Film essayist Patrick Keiller articulates the complex perceptual and emotional possibilities residing within the encounter of landscape, which links the viewer with objects in them as well as the geography itself:

...the viewer is always surrounded, and so the business of picturing is infinitely more complex both technically and conceptually. This, and it is this distinction between modes of viewing that differentiates the parallel analogies between an object and an idea, and between one's surroundings and a mood, atmosphere or state of mind. Landscape functions in all these ways in the cinema, perhaps more so that anywhere else. The tragic-euphoric palimpsest; the reciprocity of the imagination and reality; pace seen in terms of other place; setting as a state of mind – all are phenomena that coincide in films.<sup>421</sup>

### **Affective Cinematic Devices:**

As noted throughout this exegesis, I have set formal constraints on the collection and final distribution of the recorded materials. Part of the reason for this was to apply a structure of visual and aural continuity, as a method for encapsulating the disjointed collected imagery. Of course, as with the fraction of a moment with the blinking eye in *La Jetée* (1962), and the deviations seen in most *Dogme 95* films,<sup>422</sup> even one's own rules are made to be broken. Thus, I marginally pushed the edges at times. I leave it to the viewer to work out where. The limitations imposed were:

- Extreme telephoto lenses
- Slow motion cinematography
- Linear camera movement (horizontal and vertical) with wide-angle lenses
- Extended duration of shots (a resistance to classical montage)
- No post-production effects
- No composed music

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<sup>421</sup> Patrick Keiller, *The View from the Train: Cities and Other Landscapes* (2013), 31-32.

<sup>422</sup> "Dogme 95 is a rule-governed, manifesto-based, back-to-basics film initiative that was intended from the outset to generate a movement. More than a decade later, the official Dogme website (<http://www.dogme95.dk/menu/menuset.htm>) provides evidence of the successful realization of von Trier's intentions, with more than two hundred films...". Livingston and Plantinga, *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, 483.

For the compositions, I wanted the images to have consistency so they would cut together elegantly and not appear out of kilter with the other formal choices. As well, because I film alone, I needed ways to get in and out of sensitive sites quickly, before being ejected. Therefore, as much as it being an aesthetic choice, the linear compositions developed out of a practical need for consistency and expediency. One solution was to mount a small wide-angle prime lens to the camera so it looked like a consumer video camera. On location, I could then place it on solid objects for stability instead of using a more conspicuous tripod. Alternatively, I would shoot handheld where necessary. For instance, I used this method in commercial locations such as the West Edmonton Mall. Another solution was to mount the camera inside my vehicle and drive into restricted areas, such as train depots and refineries, while recording. By the time Security got to me I was usually rolling up my window and heading out. I framed the images with strict horizontal lines using wide-angle lenses to capture expansive compositional elements, but also to absorb camera shake caused by the rough surfaces on which I was often travelling.

A telephoto image is a compression of space. The longer the lens the more compact that space appears between distance and the closeness. Further distortion occurs through the shallowness of the focus. The camera operator must choose where to align the soft with the sharp and where to find in the image that spot where those elements are most in harmony with the intent of the image. Placement of the camera is also a factor. The further away the camera is from the subject the wider the focal plane and, therefore, the deeper the focus around that subject. The quality, amount and direction of the light determine not only the depth of focus achievable, but also the atmospheric elements in the image. These lenses force the viewer to look at the subject in the image from a different spatial perspective and it makes visible elements that are invisible such as dust, heat, moisture, colour and texture. These all effect how light reaches and shapes the image as it connects with the film or the chip in the camera, presenting an image of the subject that cannot be seen by the naked human eye.



Fig. 32. Andrew Denton. [Film Still: *Crude*] I5 Highway, California, U.S.A. (2013).

High-speed cinematography slows the world down, producing a contemplative register in the images. There is something about its capacity to change the way we see the world, providing clarity but also a languid quality, which is compelling to view and draws the eye into detail. While filming the shots and sequences I found my whole demeanour had to adjust to a different temporal state of being. These affects on me not only became apparent in the material but also, as I filmed, my acuity for seeing the subject sharpened. Some examples: rolling camera at an oil train passing by, I saw the bugs flying between the cars, a helicopter circling above, and heat shimmering off the black tanks carrying the crude and surrounding power lines. Hisses and clanks from the refineries interrupted my thoughts. Months later I filmed rubbish sticking to weeds in an empty lot behind Wal-Mart, intensifying my sense of strangeness. Something moved in the grass and I realised there were people living and sleeping in this lot. I had not noticed this before I rolled the camera. A few weeks earlier I shot mirages on a Mojave Desert road and looked up for a fleeting moment to see a contrail. I filmed it, and then hundreds more over the following year. They become symbolic gestures for the whole project. Each captured moment in the field takes about ten seconds, which results in a take of about 90 seconds when rendered. Walter Benjamin said that movement is extended in slow motion cinematography...

And just as enlargement [in telephotography] not merely clarifies what we see

indistinctly ‘in any case,’ but brings to light entirely new structures of matter, slow motion not only reveals familiar aspects of movements, but discloses quite unknown aspects within them—aspects ‘which do not appear as the retarding of natural movements but have a curious gliding, floating character of their own.’ Clearly, it is another nature, which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye.<sup>423</sup>



Fig. 33. Andrew Denton. [Film Still: *Crude*] Jetliner and Contrail, California, U.S.A. (2013).

The companion works, *Crude* and *Flight*, use telephoto lenses and slow motion in two divergent but collaborative ways. The compression of the image in *Crude* is essential for extricating the forensic perceptual elements I seek to draw from the image. The collapsing of space and elongation of time extract compositional cacophonies of converging visual data, which because of their contained slowness allow viewers to absorb them and therefore think them.<sup>424</sup> In landscapes, stratified lines of space are accentuated so that linkages between geography, subjects, and objects, with implied ambivalent meanings emerge. These “haptic visualities”, as theorised by Laura Marks, via Deleuze and Guattari, “graze across” the frame;<sup>425</sup> a child playing in water,

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<sup>423</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael William Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 37.

<sup>424</sup> This type of cinematography is popular in sports and nature reportage for this very reason.

<sup>425</sup> “While optical perception privileges the representational power of the image, haptic perception privileges the material presence of the image. Drawing from other forms of sense experience, primarily touch and kinesthetics, haptic visibility involves the body more than is the case with optical visibility. Touch is a sense located on the surface of the body: thinking of cinema as haptic is only a step toward considering the ways cinema appeals to the body as a whole.” Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 162-63.



during an excruciating heat wave, becomes a vibrating image of play turned in on itself; the Thanksgiving traffic gridlock from Palm Springs to Los Angeles exudes boredom in waves of exhaust fumes, and a lonely figure working on a construction site embodies the brutal toil of it all.



Fig. 34. Andrew Denton. [Film Still: *Crude*] Child Playing in Heatwave at Drought Affected Lake Mead, Nevada, U.S.A. (2013).



Fig. 35. Andrew Denton. [Film Still: *Crude*] Heading Home After Thanksgiving, Palm Springs California, U.S.A. (2013).





Fig. 36. Andrew Denton. [Film Still: *Crude*] Worker on Construction Site, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada (2013).

This hapticity in the image also emerges in the video installation *Flight*, but operates into the realm of minimalist-abstraction rather than the spatial-temporal compression that bends a subject out of shape in order to think it differently. The contrail lines that rupture the clear blue skies are repetitions of the same act over and over rendered ever so slightly differently. In this way it drifts more towards what Deleuze infers is a cinema of the body than of the brain. The two video works are designed to transmit across and through those opposite poles, interdependent yet reaching towards the same discourse. The essayist mode of *Crude*, scans the world capturing an array of images, while in *Flight*, the almost same image of the contrails plays out over and over again. Both films are made in exactly the same locations and at the same time, yet they transmit their messages in dynamically different ways interdependently.

Body or brain is what cinema demands be given to it, what it gives to itself, what it invents itself, to construct its work according to two directions, each one of which is simultaneously abstract and concrete. The distinction is thus not between the concrete and the abstract (except in experimental cases and, even there, it is fairly consistently confused). The intellectual cinema of the brain and the physical cinema of the body will find the source of their distinction elsewhere, a very variable source, whether with authors who are attracted by one of the two poles, or with those who compose with both of them.<sup>426</sup>



Fig. 37. Andrew Denton. [Film Still: *Flight*] Contrail #2, California, U.S.A. (2014).

While the road unfolded beneath me between my sites of interest, I found myself listening to radio. In a time of satellite the regions of thought tend to blur. NPR bleeds into Fox and out into CNBC via CNN. The discursive conversations and discourses, sometimes breathless in their efforts to make something out of nothing radiate out from a plethora of anonymous strangers. The experience made me think about how I might weave these other subjectivities into the creative outcomes as both a critique of the reasons we continue to talk instead of do, and as a method of breaking away from the subjective voice of the essayist form. I decided to eschew the usual trope of voiceover, to instead to use the sounds and voices of these strangers. To accompany these abstracted threads of commentary and commercial interests, location sounds were recorded using devices to alter perceptual experiences of the places filmed and imagined. The sound was collected using contact microphones to

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<sup>426</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 210.

record the earth and the objects filmed. Droning ambiences were resisted over a mode that captured layers of sound in the environment across a range of distances, replicating aurally the thinking behind the visual methods. In post-production these elements were constructed to weave across the images as languid companions, drawing the video works together and away from each other as a shared sonic composition.

When I started filming the project I imagined a large-scale multi-screen installation.<sup>427</sup> However as I started to collate the footage I was reminded of my intent to draw out affects into contemplations. This required a softer touch, which was already organically arising from the collected materials. Eventually I thought about two types of encounter with the subject. One, constantly searched and sampled the world for more and more slivers and clues, the other fixated on a single symbolic element reiterated.

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<sup>427</sup> Influenced no doubt my experience of seeing Richard Mosse's *Enclave* at the 55<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale.



## Conclusion:

“We are not in the world, we become with the world; we become by contemplating it.  
Everything is vision, becoming.”<sup>428</sup>

One of the hunches that activated the creative practice is that the ecological emergency is a crisis of perception; that in our day-to-day experience it is invisible to us. I hear about climate change on the news, or watch a documentary about it but for the most part it appears ‘over there’, not in my sphere of existence, or it feels statistically abstracted in its mode of representation.<sup>429</sup> Maybe I feel like I am being told off but do not know what for, which shuts me off to the world and the problems. What cinema has the potential to do is to draw out the image in such a way as to actively connect with the viewer through the uncanny experience of seeing a familiar object rendered slightly but jarringly unfamiliar. There is in the cinematic experience an encounter with objects captured in the frame by the mechanics of the form that is at once sensational while at the same time non-human.<sup>430</sup> “Only with cinema can we think of a mode of ‘seeing’ that is not attached to the human eye. Cinema, then, offers something like a ‘percept’: a reception of data that is not located in a subject.”<sup>431</sup> In this way, “affective techniques mobilise gaps and fissures in image content.”<sup>432</sup> Affection is what happens in the “interval” between the perception, or action, and reaction. The moment between seeing and thinking is what occurs in our unfolding encounters with the world.

As a filmmaker I think about time more than anything else. I time my shots and cut after a time; I adjust exposure because of the time of day or because of the frame rate that alters the temporal register of the recording; depending on the lens I am using I have to time my breathing and slow it down so it does not ruin the shot; sometimes

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<sup>428</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 69.

<sup>429</sup> I’m referring to a style of documentary that has emerged in recent years from the British Broadcasting Corporation, which find *interesting* ways to present climate change, but in doing so the subject gets further abstracted, or sometimes breathlessly trivialised by the treatment. See as examples: Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 149. And *Climate Change by the Numbers*, (BBC, 2015).

<sup>430</sup> I can’t help but think of Vertov’s vision of cinema here: “The main and essential thing is: The sensory exploration of the world through film. We therefore take as the point of departure the use of the camera as a kino-eye, more perfect than the human eye, for the exploration of the chaos of visual phenomena that fills space.” *Climate Change: A Horizon Guide*, directed by Ben Wilson (BBC, 2015).

<sup>431</sup> Vertov and Michelson, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, 14-15.

<sup>432</sup> Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, 29.

the limitations of the material only allow me to film for a certain amount of time. In the edit suite the rhythm of the film is made by thinking through the temporal register of the film and knowing how to find it through cutting or not cutting the shot.

Reading theory and theorising about climate change also make me think about the world differently. Contemplating and concentrating through someone else's lens affects my mode of perception — this in turn is activating. Morton helped me think about the thing we tend to ignore in our day-to-day existence, that is the weather: it is never just weather anymore.<sup>433</sup> Bennett made me to think about non-human vitalities and I drifted into intermittent modes of seeing things in this light. I don't need to agree with their positions absolutely because they, like the other theorists and practitioners discussed in this exegesis, all worry about the world we live in and want to make it better, which is common ground enough to start with.

These are the intercessors to the creativity. The theorists and theorist-practitioners who have activated the investigations dancing across my senses as I make the work; the melancholy, then grief, which has seeped into the sounds and images of the works as a mode of acuity and reflection; and of course the subjects too. The dying forests became looking glasses into a present past. The rotting stumps already dispersed, gone from the present, but still able to be seen, their absence burning a negative hole on the retina. This led to the final phase of the study, an investigation into the present-present and the present-future of our ecological emergency the creative outcomes a collection of networks and visual databases, of our current circumstances, as seen through a concentrated lens.<sup>434</sup> However, what Butler allowed me do was to move beyond a disabling state of melancholy by encouraging me find a potential political and artistic activation in grief.

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<sup>433</sup> "In any weather conversation, one of you is going to mention global warming at some point. Or you both decide not to mention it but it looms over the conversation like a dark cloud, brooding off the edge of an ellipsis." Anna Powell, *Deleuze, Altered States and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>434</sup> They are the intercessors of thought that come from the outside, "complex singularit[ies] that activates a process, a force that acts as a differential within an ongoing movement of thought. The intercessor: the felt force that activates the threshold between thinking and feeling." Manning and Massumi, *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience*, 65.







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