

Artefacts of the Anthropocene:

And Ways of Thinking Beyond

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Abstract

Artefacts of the Anthropocene is a body of work and a research paper exploring the disconnection between the human and non-human world. Through my research and artistic practice I explore the ways in which the climate crisis has been manifested through anthropocentric ideologies. My work embodies a way forward that navigates our tumultuous reality, tempered with a sensibility of hope. My practice involves making sculptures from metal and clay - materials that are both from 'nature' and altered for human use. The works do not make overt political statements but I use my practice to personally process some of the issues we are facing in contemporary society. This project is in its essence an exploration into ways of thinking and existing beyond the Anthropocene.

This paper places my art practice in the context of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's philosophy of 'the Rhizome' and Timothy Ingold's notion of 'thinking through making'. These concepts are used to frame my process of making and also my approach to research and writing. My aesthetic process includes imagining alternate futures as depicted in science fiction, with an exploration of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a metaphor for the Anthropocene. The subversion of failure has been formative in allowing me to use the materiality of metal and clay to process both personal breakdown of binaries as well as systemic ideals of 'progress'. Along with this, the concepts of Third Nature as imagined by social ecologist Murray Bookchin and the Wiradjuri notion of 'Yindyamarra' are used as tools to inform an ecocentric sensibility in my work. It is my aim to depict the reality of these times but also to capture a sense of hope that acknowledges the potential for regenerative transformation.

Acknowledgement/s

I recognise the Aboriginal peoples of Australia as the Traditional custodians of Country and would like to state that sovereignty was never ceded. I live and work on Bidjigal and Gadigal land and I pay my respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. By acknowledging the shameful past of this country, I attempt to lay groundwork for a future based on mutual respect and shared responsibility for this beautiful land we call home.

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Last but not least, my beautiful partner Kiran Kashyap - your support, inspiration and patience is immeasurable.

Declaration

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

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

Signed:

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Introduction

The Anthropocene¹ unofficially defines Earth's most recent geological time period as being human influenced, or anthropogenic, based on mass extinctions of plant and animal species, polluted oceans and an altered atmosphere, among other lasting impacts.² The word *Anthropocene* refers to the human-centric perspective which has led to this current ecological crisis. An anthropocentric viewpoint in environmental ethics is the belief that only humans have intrinsic value and that the non-human world is seen as a means to human ends. Humans are seen as separate and superior to nature. This belief has permitted the exploitation of plants, animals and natural resources for the benefit of humankind. This is a concept that is embedded in many Western religions and philosophies. On the other hand, ecocentric environmental ethics (as well as some religions and other belief systems) hold the view that the value of nature cannot be reduced to what only promotes human well-being.

Through my research and artistic practice I explore the ways in which anthropocentric ideologies have manifested the climate crisis. My work embodies a way forward that navigates this tumultuous reality, tempered with a sensibility of hope. My practice involves making sculptures from metal and clay - materials that are both from 'nature' and altered for human use. The works do not make overt political statements but I use

¹ Coined by Paleo-ecologist Eugene Stoermer and atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen in 2000.

² Tom Cohen and Claire Colebrook. "Critical Climate Change". In *Art in the Anthropocene*, edited by Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin. London: Open Humanities Press, 2015, i.

my practice to personally process some of the issues we are facing in contemporary society. This project is in its essence, an exploration into ways of thinking and existing beyond the Anthropocene.

In the first chapter 'Context', I examine how anthropocentric perspectives have manifested the climate crisis, as well as reflecting on the neoliberal influence on governance and economic systems. I introduce the terminology of eco-anxiety and climate related depression and contextualise my processes of making and doing research in the present world of social and ecological disruption.

Chapter 2: 'Ways of Thinking and Making', describes the underlying groundwork of my making and writing process. Firstly, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's philosophy of the Rhizome is considered as an effective framework for destabilising circumscribed thought. Camille Henrot and Tino Sehgal are used to outline the ways in which the rhizomatic concept can be applied by artists. My own practice similarly exemplifies how it can be applied to the process of making. Secondly, I discuss my adopted process of 'thinking through making', as defined by social anthropologist Tim Ingold. The art practice of sculptor Aneta Regal and the research of artist/academic Sandy Lockwood are used to illustrate this idea. Ingold's notion is a rethinking of traditional ideas of making, where the artist brings their intention to a medium, working with the transformation of material and a sensory awareness.

The chapter 'Future Remains' further explores the intention of this body of work to critique the Anthropocene through evoking dystopian narratives. I draw from visual representations and themes found in science fiction as a way to bring attention to present day struggles. A key text I draw upon is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* which I see as an apt metaphor for the Anthropocene. The work of dadaist Raoul Hausman and the ecocritical poem *Misanthropocene #24* are used to discuss elements of my body of work. I reflect upon these two precedents and provide insight into how my material explorations evoke a critique of unhinged progress.

In Chapter 4 'Exploring Notions of Failure' I critique contemporary mindsets around 'progress' and endless economic growth. This forms an important theme in my artistic practice. I also unpack notions of 'failure' as experienced personally. Through the artistic collaboration of Carabello/Carceller I discuss the queer use of 'failure' as subject matter and as an aesthetic, which is also present in my own work.

In the final chapter 'Third Nature', Murray Bookchin's utopian philosophy by the same name is described as an envisioned human evolution that combines the nature of biology and society into a third 'thinking nature'. This is explored in my art practice with regards to searching for a semblance of hope amongst a critique of anthropocentrism. I have included ways in which Third Nature has already manifested in societies and ecological movements. The work of artist and academic Dr. Jonathon Jones is discussed with regards to his inclusion of the Wiradjuri way of 'Yindyamarra' into his

research practice. Yindyamarra is a practice of deep respect, slowing down, listening and connecting - an approach that has been meaningful for me through my Masters studies. Finally, this chapter describes my effort to manifest a sensibility of hope through my work.

Chapter 1: Context

This MFA project started in a very different climate to where we find ourselves now in 2020. Bushfires ravaged Australia over the summer of 2019/2020 in an apocalyptic fashion and the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront globally systemic nature of our shared social and ecological upheaval. It is near impossible to say that it has not changed human sensibility profoundly. I can though, only speak for myself.

The bushfires were a time of solastalgia. This is a newly coined term to represent the emotional or existential distress caused by environmental change. This is specific to the psychological impact on people while they are directly connected to their home environment. For the first time, the direct impacts of the climate crisis had reached city folk and mainstream recognition in Australia. It was not only right in our face, we were literally breathing in world heritage areas as they combusted. It was front and centre every day in the news, in conversation and in full view for everyone to see and literally occupying our bodies.



Plate 1: “Smoke haze across Sydney Harbour on Tuesday morning. More than 50 bushfires are still burning across NSW.” Photograph: Jessica Hromas/The Guardian

The bushfires were unprecedented and created an apocalyptic furnace throughout much of the country. These catastrophic circumstances pushed local communities and national concerns toward acknowledging a need for change. People were dying, risking their lives, losing homes and losing hope. In the aftermath, scientists have said that nearly three billion animals were killed or displaced. Over 12.6 million hectares went up in flames and 434 million tonnes³ of CO₂ was emitted into the atmosphere. Surely this could not be ignored. Then the Covid-19 pandemic really gained momentum and in a similar fashion became the centre of all news, conversation and fears. Unlike the bushfires which raged through the country, the pandemic grew slowly and continues to linger in such a way that navigating the pandemic is part of everyday life.. The bushfires of 2019/20 have in no way been forgotten but it seems that the adrenaline and immediacy of the necessary change in climate action has been swallowed up by the

³ Reported by Joel Werner and science reporter Suzannah Lyons for ‘Sum of All Parts’ *ABC Science*, Thur 5 Mar 2020.

uncertainty and the instability of these times of Covid-19. This period might come to be known as The Great Pause⁴; the time of quarantine, isolation, fear, loss of jobs, loss of social connectivity, a time in which many people have begun taking stock of their lives and what is important to them. A time for me, in which eco-anxiety and melancholy has taken further root. These terms refer to the severe anxiety stemming from systems of human impact on the environment and a feeling that it is implausible to enact meaningful change. Psychologist Dr Patrick Kennedy-Williams, is an example of mental health practitioners who have seen increasingly cases of climate related anxiety and depression in climate scientists and researchers. As Patrick said, “people who were essentially facing a barrage of negative information and downward trends in their work ... and the more they engaged with the issue, the more they realised what needed to be done – and the more they felt that was bigger than their capacity to enact meaningful change,”⁵ . This is precisely how I have felt as an activist and an artist engaging with climate issues. According to Dr Kennedy-Williams, “The positive thing from our perspective as psychologists is that we soon realised the cure to climate anxiety is the same as the cure for climate change – action. It is about getting out and doing something that helps”.⁶ As this project has threaded into my personal life through eco-anxiety and climate depression, it seems fitting that my recovery has been woven into the making of this body of work.

⁴ Albert Bates, *The Great Pause Week 14: Complexity And Covid*, 2020 [online], Accessed 22 November 2020.

⁵ Mathew Taylor and Jessica Murray., 2020. ‘Overwhelming And Terrifying’: The Rise Of Climate Anxiety. (online) the Guardian, Accessed 12 October 2020.

⁶ Mathew Taylor and Jessica Murray, *ibid.*

This project started with a driving force of frustration and feeling let down by the people who have the power to act on the environmental crisis; leaders like coal-wielding Scott Morrison refusing to acknowledge the destruction of life sustaining earth systems - the very thing we need to survive! Pressure has been put on Australia by countless international leaders including Jacinda Ardern, Frank Bainimarama, Joe Biden and even Boris Johnson to no avail. Scott Morrison has declared that his stance on climate has not changed. In December 2020 it was announced that Scott Morrison has been denied entry to the Climate Ambition Summit because his 2030 targets are too low. This doesn't just put the human and non-human world at risk, his inaction isolates Australia from constructive global collaboration and makes a mockery of our limited commitments.

Ironically, the non-human world is being sacrificed in the name of perpetual economic growth despite being a critical foundation for responding to the climate crisis. According to environmental activist and academic, David Suzuki, ecological impact is seen as an externality from an anthropocentric economic perspective.⁷ In contemporary economics, costs and impacts on the non-human world are considered externalities and hence are unmitigated and unregulated. An example of this in manufacturing is when air pollution is created but not accounted for - this air pollution is likely to occur at a far greater level than without regulation. Neoliberal economic systems ignore the interrelations between

⁷ David Suzuki, *The Challenge of the 21st Century: Setting the Real Bottom Line*. Commonwealth Lecture in London, England, hosted by the inter-governmental organisation the Commonwealth Foundation, 2008.

humans and the non-human world including the countless reciprocal relationships and services that exist.

The etymology of 'eco' originates from the Greek word 'oikos' meaning home. Broken down in this way, ecology is the study of home and economics is the management of home. A major part of ecology is discerning what it is that allows the natural world to flourish and survive. In an ideal world, ecology would not only be considered in the economic and political world. Unfortunately this is not the case. The disconnection is apparent as 2020 has seen sacred Aboriginal trees bulldozed by our government to make way for new roads and gas and coal mining taking precedence over environmental health, animal survival and the longevity of sacred sites.



Djab Wurrung tree: Sacred Aboriginal tree bulldozed for highway in Victoria 2020.

Plate 1: Sean Paris (left), Plate 2: Djab Wurrung Heritage Protection Embassy (right).

Over the past few years I have experienced climate anxiety and depression so intensely that I could not get out of bed let alone spend more than a few minutes in my ceramics studio. This was due to a combination of climate activism burnout as well as an increased focus on eco-anxiety and depression as a key element of my Masters project.

It all came to a head at the time of the 2019 Australian federal election with Scott Morrison securing Prime Ministership. Based on the Liberal party's policies, I had zero faith in them taking any meaningful action on the climate crisis. I had been campaigning against the Liberal party, especially in the weeks leading up to the election and burnt myself out and sunk very low after the results. I felt very disconnected to my art practice during this time. Out of desperation I took a break to re-centre myself and come back to the studio afresh. One of the things that helped me move through this difficult period was the simple act of making with clay without any conceptual agenda. This involved making small objects at first which were unrelated to my Masters project - this was a way to reconnect to the material. Focusing on the tactile nature of clay was an active alternative to being overwhelmed and paralysed. After some time my socio-political research started to manifest once again in my making practice. I reintroduced metal and started building towers in an attempt to give physical weight and form to my exasperation with prevailing ideas of 'progress'. The towers attempt to capture and critique notions of progress as realised by neoliberal capitalism. Since the 1980's Western societies have been guided by wealth accumulation and exploitation.

Who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first.' - Margaret Thatcher, 1987

This statement by Margaret Thatcher highlights neoliberal sentiments prioritising individualism over all else. This notion has been systematically embodied by Western

societies. It is simultaneously a cause for the current climate crises, as well as being a roadblock in eliciting radical change. This mentality pits the individual to tackle climate injustices, rather than collectively taking on corporate power. It is after all a mere 100 corporations which make up 71% of global greenhouse gas emissions⁸. It's no wonder that the individual is rendered to feel helpless.



Plate 4: Wimbledon, London, UK. 27th April, 2015. A waste management company named Dirty Harry uses a poster of Lord Kitchener to urge the public to recycle. Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/Alamy

Whilst re-engaging with my art practice after acknowledging anxiety and depression, I had very low energy and was not able to be consistent. I unconsciously altered my studio practice to not let this affect my progress. Thankfully I had already done a lot of testing and experimenting with clay and metal interactions. Playing with different types of metal allowed me to think of it as armature that I could fire inside the kiln. I was

⁸ As recognised in the Carbon Disclosure Project's *Carbon Majors Report 2017*.

experimenting with different types of metal including wire meshing (eg. chicken wire) and metal rods to join clay parts. I

began building towers by rolling out thick slabs of clay onto the wire meshing and forming it into cylinders. The use of metal meshing has allowed me to construct quite quickly with slabs of relatively soft clay. I then use metal rods to join the cylinders. This has taken away the need to wait for the right moisture conditions to join the cylinders.



Plate 5: Jade Court-Gold, tower test pieces post firing, 2020, fired clay, metal rods and metal meshing

Instead I can work intermittently and relish the cracking because the work is structurally sound. This act of haphazardly building has helped to channel the frustration and despair as I make these towers to highlight the injustices of perpetual growth as an economic paradigm. I have envisioned a dystopian cityscape to be walked through. My hope is that through this project I will be able to find a meaningful way through these difficult times; a line that appropriately balances between hope, despair and determination.

Chapter 2: Ways of Thinking and Making

The first part of this chapter presents the concept of the Rhizome which is a common foundational ideology for many artists that are carving out their place in a world fraught with systemic issues. This ideology helps to release oneself from linear prescribed thought that works to uphold patriarchal, colonial and capitalist modus operandi.

A rhizome in botanical terms is a plant with a continuous, horizontal, underground root system like the ginger plant. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Felix Guattari adapted the concept of the Rhizome in the late 1980's to encourage alternative approaches to theory and research. It can be applied to a diverse range of study including science, ecology, mathematics, politics, economics, art and music. The rhizome can be contrasted to arborescent (tree-like) thought, present in traditional epistemologies, homogenous schemata and historical framework.⁹

A very elementary example of arborescence is the neatly wrapped up terminology of the 'universe'. It is a totalistic unification of basically everything. Rather than narrating and categorising, the Rhizome on the other hand, presents history and culture etc. as divergent, map-like infrastructure with ever-changing connections. A more nuanced and rhizomatic way of conceptualising the world and our existence is the terminology 'Multiverse'.

⁹ Felicity J Coleman, ed. Adrian Parr, *The Deleuze Dictionary*. Edinburgh, SCT: Edinburgh University Press, 2005: 231.

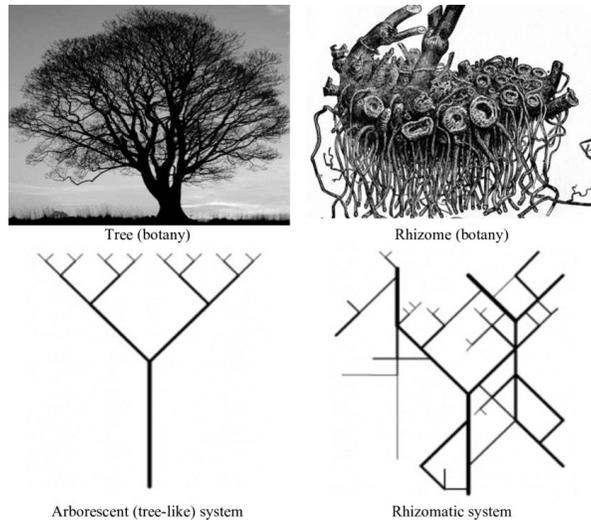


Plate 6: Noel Gough, Arborescent vs rhizomatic diagram, 2015.

The theory of the Rhizome is comprised of six principles as specified in Deleuze and Guattari's publication *A Thousand Plateaus*. (1) Connectivity and (2) Heterogeneity, mean that any point can be connected to any other and that the structure is markedly non-homogenous in essence. (3) A multiplicity is neither subject nor object. It is a magnitude or dimension that goes through a metamorphosis of sorts, changing in nature as it increases in number. In this context, it makes a clear distinction from the singular, emphasising growth and change. (4) A signifying rupture means that any point of the rhizome can be broken off and will continue to grow either in existing lines or by creating new lines. The rhizome resists territorialisation by breaking outside its own boundaries and is able to reassemble or reconnect itself, sometimes with new or altered characteristics. (5) Cartography and (6) Decalcomania reference the act of mapping; a "map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible,

susceptible to constant modification”¹⁰. This allows for multiple non-hierarchical entry and exit points. Decalcomania references a method that requires negotiation and adaptation to context through experimentation. Putting these six values together, a rhizomatic way of thinking is to question the simplicity of an arborescent linear trajectory. It places value on the breadth that complexity brings and signifies that there is no one way of looking at anything.

The concept of the Rhizome has not only come to reflect the theoretical thought or approach for an artist, it has taken on a whole other dynamic within the artmaking process and execution of work. Below I discuss three artist’s work (including myself) and how they utilise the Rhizome in very different ways to further encapsulate the power and freedom of unconventional thought.

Camille Henrot is a French multidisciplinary artist creating work that can be described as inherently rhizomatic through both concept and visual display. Her practice stems from analyzing systems of visual information and a curiosity in ethnography. Her interest lies more in the compulsive acquisition and systematic categorisation of knowledge, than the actual information itself. Henrot’s 2013 video work *Grosse Fatigue*, made during a residency at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington. She set herself the challenge of telling a story of the creation of the Universe. A bold and ambitious task undertaken with a keen awareness of the infinite mass of information. Henrot does not

¹⁰ Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press

claim to project any objective truth, but rather to highlight issues of categorisation. As Camille said, “[big systems and totalising structures] compel me to wonder how to dismantle them and rebuild them for myself”¹¹. Henrot’s telling is an intuitive rhizomatic unfolding of information, shown on the backdrop of a computer desktop.



Plate 7: Camille Henrot, *Grosse Fatigue*, 2013
Color video, with sound, 13 min. Dimensions variable.

¹¹ Camille Henrot, “The Grasp of Totalizing Systems”. *Art in America*, (June/July 2013): 44

Another way of looking at a rhizomatic approach is in the execution of a work. Tino Sehgal is a performance artist who choreographs performative works for the museum setting that are ephemeral in nature. The performances are constructed interactions, using bodies and connection, human voice and language as medium. They are recorded only in the memories of the audience and the conversations that are had during and after the event. In 2010 Sehgal held the work *The Progress* at the Guggenheim in New York City. The great spiraling rotunda of Frank Lloyd Wright's iconic building [Plate 8] was hollowed out.



Plate 8: Tino Sehgal's setup the Guggenheim for his work *The Progress*, 2010

On first approach not an artwork was in sight. Visitors of the museum were greeted by a child who after introducing themselves asked something along the lines of "This work is called *The Progress*. Will you follow me?" and "Can I ask you a question? .. What does progress mean to you?". It was entirely up to the audience member as to how and whether they wanted to engage. If the visitor was willing, the interaction would continue around the ramping path of the museum. At some point the child would pass the audience member onto a young adult and the conversation would continue; an

engagement regarding society and development. Eventually an adult would take over the conversation from the teenager and somehow what they had to say would make sense, despite the breakups in conversation. Lastly at the top of the building an older adult would appear and reveal something with insight to the conversation. All the while “progress” was the ambiguous topic of conversation. They would then finish the conversation by saying “This piece is called *The Progress*” and simply walk away. Sehgal spoke of the work as referencing the blurred understanding of what progress means today. In the 19th and 20th Centuries the definition was clear; industrial and technological development to increase gross national production.

Whilst this narrative is noble and important, Sehgal has given over his agency on the topic to both the audience members and the guides. Whilst they rehearsed timing with Sehgal, the work is unscripted, save for the opening and closing statements. Each audience member’s experience was completely unique based on multiple factors, such as the visitor’s mood and willingness to engage, the guides that they interacted with as well as the combination of guides they received. Even the timing of the interstices would make a big difference to the overall engagement. Visitors likely had a sense of the overarching theme but they would have all understood it in various different ways. Progress was simultaneously discussed in both positive and negative lights. The nuances were highlighted by the roundabout approach to the topic. Through this work Sehgal embraces complexity and diversity of ideas through divergent conversation.

There is no one right way to have a discussion. The rhizomatic experience constitutes the artwork.

In relation to my own work the process of making and the ethos behind it are both rhizomatic in character. The inclusion of metal elements has allowed a strong element of immediacy. This immediacy has allowed dynamic 'play' which signifies rupture. There is a negotiation with materials as metal and clay parts are added and removed only to be placed somewhere else in a nonhomogeneous manor. This trying and testing is present throughout my building process. It mirrors the connectivity and heterogeneity as well as decalcomania present in rhizomatic thinking.



Plate 9: Jade Court-Gold, elements from the installation *In the Name of Progress*, 2020.
Fired clay and metal rods, dimensions variable.

This key body of work [Plate 9 - above] contains elements of multiplicity as defined by Deleuze and Guattari. Combining numerous structures together, creates an interactive environment with implied meaning. Building more towers and experimenting with them as objects in an environment, there is an element of mapping them in space. Placing them as objects to walk through interrupts the natural flow of a room. By doing this, I attempt to interrupt the traditional viewing of an art gallery/museum space and simultaneously question the mainstream perception of growth and progress.

The second half of this chapter engages with Tim Ingold's concept of 'thinking through making' which is inherently rhizomatic and is embodied in my own artistic practice, as well as artist and academic Sandy Lockwood and multidisciplinary sculptor Aneta Regel.

Ingold's work seemingly runs parallel with Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of the rhizome; with connections running through his writings and the referencing of Deleuze and Guattari on a number of topics throughout his book *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. Tim Ingold is a significant contemporary voice in social anthropology holding the position of Chair of Social Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. In his book *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, Ingold takes a radically different approach to conventional anthropologies and archeologies of art and architecture. Traditionally, art and

architecture can be seen as objects simply for analysis. Instead, Ingold advocates for a way of thinking through making in which the disciplinary boundaries of the four A's (Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture) are blurred and rather the disciplines work together to enhance approaches of engagement and learning from the world. Throughout the book, when Ingold speaks of making as an activity, it is a broad notion that spreads from knowledge-making to art objects, using basket weaving and knot tying as examples (amongst others). It is written in such a way that it is not only relevant for anthropologists and archeologists, but anyone who engages with making and connecting with their surroundings.

In the chapter 'Knowing from the Inside', Ingold speaks of his time spent in northeastern Finland working with the Skolt Sami people as a novice fieldworker. He uses the term participant-observation to describe a process of learning from within. As innately curious beings, humans are enmeshed in the world and will always learn about it from the inside. He was taught the power of learning through observation, rather than being told what to look for or what it was that he was 'supposed' to learn. Ingold says "To know things you have to grow into them, and let them grow into you, so that they can become a part of you"¹². He proposes that there is a deeper understanding if you know something for yourself rather than just being told. This means being open to the infinite avenues of learning through discovery. Participant-observation lays the groundwork for his inquiry into the process of 'thinking through making'.

¹²Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2013, 1

In this inquiry, Tim Ingold compares two key modes of making; a hylomorphic and a morphogenic practice. A hylomorphic approach as an example, might be used by a purely conceptual artist or perhaps an industrial designer. They make through a process of thinking and creating a plan to execute. ‘Hylo’ meaning matter and ‘morphic’ meaning form. To say it simply, a thought is projected onto a material. A morphogenic practice on the other hand, flows and transforms with the material, with movement of the imagination and sensory awareness.¹³ Making becomes an interactive process of growth; of thinking through making. In Ingold’s words, it places the maker from the outset as a “participant in amongst a world of active materials”¹⁴. My studio methodology is greatly informed by Ingold’s notion of a morphogenic practice. It encourages a rejection of an envisioned outcome, rather allowing the process to be transformative, led by intuition and material relationality.

*There is a tension between the reach of imagination that always wants to pull us off into the distance and a drag of material that is always holding us back... The art of the maker -who thinks through making- is to keep his or her eyes trained on the horizon whilst still engaged in the labours of proximity.*¹⁵

- Timothy Ingold

¹³ Ingold, *ibid.*, 21.

¹⁴ Ingold, *ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵ Tim Ingold, *Thinking Through Making*. Lecture in Lapland, Finland for the Pohjoisen kulttuuri-instituutti (Institute for Northern Culture), Oct. 2013.

Adopting this way of making I have been able to synthesize ideas about the social world in real time through the making of objects. Objects, artefacts, aberrations made from found metal and clay; a continuation from one to another, without a specific desired outcome. Many of these small experimental objects combining metal and clay have become formative works that guide my practice at large. It is my intention to display these alongside the larger body of work.



Plate 10: Jade Court-Gold *Conversations (Artefacts of the Anthropocene)*, 2020.

Fired clay, metal wire, nails and volcanic rock, dimensions variable



Plate 11: Jade Court-Gold *Artefact VII*, 2020. Fired clay, metal meshing, spray paint. 10 x 8 x 10



Plate 12: Jade Court-Gold *Artefact V*, 2019. Bicycle gear and fired clay. 12 x 12 x 8

I see similarities in the way Deleuze and Guattari compare an arborescent structure to a rhizomatic structure, with Ingold's comparison of a hylomorphic vs. morphogenic way of thinking. Both theories are alternative ways of approaching knowledge. An arborescent structure is tree-like in nature, with a traditional vertical approach, much like hylomorphism. Both systems have a conventional beginning and ending. In contrast, a morphogenic way of thinking and a rhizomatic structure are both heterogeneous; having no specific direction, start or finish. They are both models of working that unveil the multitude of ways in which one can approach a thought or activity, setting a precedent

to question mainstream thinking patterns, hierarchies and binaries. They challenge the 'rational' approach of a linear trajectory; which focuses on hierarchy and categorisation. My sculptures are intended to highlight the injustices of conventional arborescent views around growth and progress through their form while simultaneously using a rhizomatic or morphogenic practice to embody an alternative approach.

Ceramic artist and academic Sandy Lockwood proposes in her PhD thesis¹⁶, a critical approach to materials based on an understanding of 'thinking through making' and 'knowing from the inside', as discussed by Tim Ingold. When describing this approach as an experience, much like Ingold's notion of participant-observation, Sandy outlines noticeable characteristics that strongly align with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the Rhizome. These experiential understandings include "that they are emergent in character"¹⁷ - emblematic of the metamorphosis qualities she speaks of throughout the paper which also link to the qualities of a multiplicity. The fact that "they consist of patterns and relationships that arise from within the process"¹⁸ works in parallel to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of decalcomania which in turn references a method that requires negotiation and adaptation to context through experimentation. Finally, the experience being "not derived by rules"¹⁹ resonates with rhizomatic theory's delineation from binaries and categorisation. Lockwood speaks specifically about the metamorphic "transformations and subsequent affective resonances of materials such as clay and

¹⁶ titled *Metamorphosis and Morphogenesis: Explorations of weathering in woodfired ceramics*

¹⁷ Sandra Mary Lockwood, "Metamorphosis and Morphogenesis: Explorations of weathering in woodfired ceramics", PhD Diss., University of Wollongong, 2017, 2.

¹⁸ Lockwood, *ibid.*, 2.

¹⁹ Lockwood, *ibid.*, 2.

stone”²⁰. In the context of her PhD theses she was regarding them as separate mediums; discussing relationships between her own ceramic practice, neolithic artefacts and the metamorphic tendencies of weathered stone. For the context of this essay I will speak of Aneta Regel’s use of clay and stone together. Whilst our mediums differ slightly, Regel’s approach to materials is mirrored in my own practice.

Aneta Regel is a Polish sculptor, based in London, working predominantly in the field of ceramics. Through her practice there is an emphasis on experimentation with materials; playing with the tension between clay and rock (volcanic and other unprocessed materials). Regel’s work is inherently abstracted; with anthropomorphic qualities present amongst the formal language and variegated surfaces evoking natural landscape. Growing up in Northern Poland, Aneta was constantly aware of the beauty in the natural occurrences of the earth. Particularly excrescences on trees which are distinct outgrowths, formed as effects from glacier action. Regel not only references the beauty and effects of nature but also the affect; the awe and emotional response that they evoke within her.

²⁰ Sandra Mary Lockwood, “Metamorphosis and Morphogenesis: Explorations of weathering in woodfired ceramics”, PhD Diss., University of Wollongong, 2017, 2



Plate 13: Aneta Regal, 'Duo', Clay, rock and glaze, dimensions unknown, location unknown

Present in Regal's work are metamorphic qualities, reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a multiplicity. Aneta's sculptures are layered in transformation; "Multiple layers of the same elements in different states are repeatedly dried and re-fired, telling a story of constant metamorphosis, of conflict and change,"²¹ says Regal. Her interest, much like my own, lies as much between the interaction of materials as her own corresponding interaction with them.²² Regal speaks of these interactions as conversations²³, resonating with Ingold's concept of a morphogenic practice. On this topic, Sandy Lockwood said "the maker and material enter into a kind of dance or correspondence over time where each contributes to the flow of becoming"²⁴. As well as

²¹ Aneta Regal: Second Nature - Exhibitions - Jason Jacques Gallery, 2020

²² Aneta Regal, "Masterclass with Aneta Regal", for *Ceramic Review*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vpkmk3t6XLA>

²³ Regal, *ibid.*

²⁴ Sandra Mary Lockwood, "Metamorphosis and Morphogenesis: Explorations of weathering in woodfired ceramics", PhD Diss., University of Wollongong, 2017, 133

morphogenic qualities, this insinuates rhizomatic notions of decalcomania present in both Regel's and my own process of negotiation of materials and self. These ideas of the Rhizome and 'thinking through making' run parallel through Aneta's work and my own but that is where it ends. A key difference in our work is not the how, but the why and therefore the intent whilst making. Aneta's work is referencing the awe and beauty she finds in her own experience with the non-human world. In contrast my perspective is instead pondering the effects that some humans have had on the rest of the living and non-living world.

Chapter 3: Future Remains

It is with the materials of metal and clay that I have been able to create a visual language to comment on this time often defined as the Anthropocene. These materials are not simple metaphors for human and nature, but as materials both of 'nature' and altered for human use. They are common materials in building and signify advancements of human technology - a reading which is far more complex than simple binary metaphors. Many of the technologies we use are complicit in the erosion of ecological stability. I look around me right now at my desk and superficially I see paper cut from trees, energy used for a source of light, my computer containing lithium and other metals extracted from the Earth. Ecological collapse is such an existential threat reinforced by humans who have been made to be complicit. Present is a "western melancholy"²⁵ as used in the poem *#Misanthropocene: 24 Theses* by Juliana Spahr and Joshua Clover. This is a feeling of distress and helplessness due to an awareness of the injustices brought on by capitalism in the west, whilst simultaneously benefiting from the system. Looking around my desk and reflecting, I feel a weight on my shoulders - just by existing I am complicit in systems with which I disagree. This is likely why denial and ignorance are so appealing to some. *#Misanthropocene: 24 Theses* is a contemporary eco critical poem which explores the deterioration of the condition in the west and reads like a contemptuous stream of thought that builds in frustration. It is an

²⁵ Clover, Joshua and Juliana Spahr. "#Misanthropocene: 24 Theses". In *Art in the Anthropocene*, edited by Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin. London: Open Humanities Press, 2015.

expressive study in disgust for the rise of capitalism and the chasm of consequent inequalities with emphasis on the environment.

*Our minds feel small and inert. Once every fragment seemed to bear within it the whole.
Now the whole being too large for the mind to see stands before us always as a
fragment.*²⁶

This quote from the poem has stayed with me throughout this Masters program and eloquently describes the weight and despair brought on by the current state of the climate that propels my studio practice.

Here is a good place to note that the 'Anthropocene' has been criticised as terminology for this time because it paints all humans as wrongdoers against the non-human world. I use the word Anthropocene lightly and acknowledge that there are many people in the world who for a variety of reasons are not complicit or rather have had their societies and cultures colonised or similarly altered against their will. It's important to highlight that consumer culture is largely at fault for ecological instability. It is not necessarily the consumers whom we should be looking at, but rather the systems in place and those benefiting from and perpetuating ecological/economic corruption. When I speak of artefacts from the Anthropocene, I am not looking at the literal debris from this time that might be dug up in the future. I am instead attempting to give physical form to the

²⁶ Clover, Joshua and Juliana Spahr. "#Misanthropocene: 24 Theses". In *Art in the Anthropocene*, edited by Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin. London: Open Humanities Press, 2015.

unseen and intangible. Imagine an apocalypse on Earth and all that we know is buried under layers of sand and desertified soils. The internet and computer media as well as books and all written ways of sharing understanding are no longer available. What might be found through objects? Specifically objects imbued with the ethos of a particular time. I don't mean the ethos of a particular perspective, but rather the contrasting and conflicting ideologies and approaches of a time of great turmoil. I in no way claim to have achieved this, rather it is a continual pondering that does not have a means of completion. It has been a morphogenic process - both the making as well as the research and writing - working to understand some greater truths of our time.



Plate 14: A Still from *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) used as inspiration for my work.

The aesthetic and premise of my ceramic and metal works are drawn from elements of science fiction. The genre of science fiction is a powerful tool. It is a bridge between fantasy and reality which allows us to question the current day and imagine possible futures. It can be as much about the present, as it is the future. Looking into the future requires looking at the current world; the state of technologies, the priorities of politicians and the mindsets and ideologies of the time. It is unsurprising in our current predicaments that science fiction creators have long been using environmental factors as a premise for imaginary futures. It's hard to imagine any future without the state of the climate being a catalyst.

Simplified, there are two overarching takes on future fiction: the imagining of utopian or dystopian civilisations. Both utopian and dystopian outlooks of the future work to make issues of the present explicit. This can be seen through the downfalls of society and inequality run rampant as envisioned in Alan E Nourse's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and the consequent *Blade Runner* films which are examples of a dystopian vision. Conversely, utopian speculations highlight potential societal improvement by allowing people to see alternatives. An example of this is Earnst Callenbach's 1975 novel *Ecotopia*, where the citizens share a common aim to balance their own needs with the non-human world. As an example from the book, there is just one type of towel available to the residents of Ecotopia. This exemplifies a resistance against material goods and a critique of consumerism - there is no need for excess. Earnst Callenbach said, "It is so hard to imagine anything fundamentally different from

what we have now. But without these alternate visions, we get stuck on dead centre. And we'd better get ready. We need to know where we'd like to go"²⁷. I hope through my works to acknowledge the limits we face in the Anthropocene and to encourage deeper thought towards symbiotic cultures.

For the purpose of this research project, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is an appropriate analogy for the Anthropocene; a cautionary tale highlighting a patriarchal pursuit of technological and economic advancement taking a higher priority than its attentiveness to culpability. The story follows Victor Frankenstein's experimentation with playing God to create life from death. Shelley was keenly aware of the contemporary scientific developments of her time and incorporated them into her story. When Victor succeeds in his quest he is not prepared for the reality of his creation and flees in horror, taking no responsibility for his creation at any point. Shelley created a 'monster' with humble curiosity and pathos - and a creator with hubris greater than his concern for other living beings. As Victor's creation said, "Unfeeling, heartless creator! You had endowed me with perceptions and passions, then cast me abroad an object for scorn and horror of mankind."²⁸ Victor's creation eventually starts acting out in revenge towards the Frankenstein family after being forced into an isolated existence; unprepared for the world. Here lies a parallel to the unforeseen effects of climate change. It is arguable that Dr. Frankenstein's greatest fallacy is not his quest for knowledge, but rather his

²⁷ Callenbach, Ernest; Heddle, James. "'Ecotopia Then & Now,' an interview with Ernest Callenbach". Retrieved 12 November 2020.

²⁸ Mary Shelley. *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998. p116

avoidance of it. This sounds awfully similar to the selective ignorance around climate denial and corporate accountability. Shelley's story is not warning people of the pursuit of science itself. It instead reads as a tale of ethics based around Victor's failure to attempt to anticipate and take responsibility for the results of his pursuit.

An influence of Frankenstein's 'monster' is visible in my ceramic and metal works. I am intrigued by the 'grotesque' and encourage a sense of uncanny and strange in my artefacts [see plate 15 and 16]. I enjoy inciting curiosity and intrigue with my work. My favorite feedback is often laced with confusion and even disgust, as well as viewers who feel the urge to touch the work in an attempt to understand it.



Plate 15: Jade Court-Gold *Artefact I (Future Remain)*, 2018.
Fired clay, metal scraps, bolt and wire cable. 20 x 22 x 18



Plate 16: Jade Court-Gold *Artefact III (Future Remain)*, 2018.

Fired Steel braided cable hose and clay. 22 x 8 x 8

Early on in this degree, I was thinking about the way humans use natural resources in a very utilitarian and anthropocentric way, as if it is just there for the sole purpose of supply and demand. Some humans seemingly have no regard for ruptures in the environment; affecting ecosystems and often obliterating land that is sacred. I was attempting to embody this ethos through making. Upon forming a simple vessel [Plate 17 - next page], I felt an urge to use one of the taps that I had waiting in my studio. This was about the fourth time I had tried to use this tap, each time feeling too literal or too forced. There was something about the size and shape of the form that simply allowed it's inclusion. Pulling the tap apart, the spout and handle were used as intuitive entry and exit points for viewing the piece. There came a point at which it began to resemble a teapot. The object emerged and I followed the urge to complete the teapot by adding

a handle. Perhaps coming to an end point every now and then is a natural way to keep the rhizomatic method from spreading too far.



Plate 17: Jade Court-Gold *Dada Teapot* (*Spirit of our Time*), 2019. Fired clay, metal tap and found scrap metal.



Plate 18: Raoul Hausmann *Mechanical Head* (*Spirit of our Age*), 1920. Found material including wig dummy, ruler, pocket watch mechanism and glasses case.

Whilst reading Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, I kept visualising Raoul Hausmann's 'The Spirit of Our Age' [Plate 18]. This is something that I must have compartmentalised - only upon completion of my piece did a likeness of Hausmann's 'Mechanical head' become apparent. Connections between these works can be made both aesthetically and conceptually. For some context, Hausmann was a member of the Berlin chapter of the dada movement, who formed in response to the disillusionment felt shortly after WWI. They were known for their photomontage and assemblage works with an anarchist iconoclastic edge; rejecting the logic and reason of enlightenment and the

nationalism present in their time. Using a wooden dummy head, Hausman references the human mind, rather than an anatomical head. With no pupils, hair, or ears, there is no sense of the individual, rather a man that encapsulates Hausmann's view of the modern man; perhaps a soldier. Attached to the head are common devices of measurement and information; a ruler, parts of a watch, a typewriter and a glasses case. This merging of the human with technology creates a blind automaton without the impetus of creative or independent thought. My own work *Dada Teapot (Spirit of Our Time)*, references both Hausmann's sculpture as well as my mirrored disillusionment with contemporary society, with particular emphasis on its overconsumption of natural resources. Both these works respond to the plunderous use of technology through mechanistic worldviews. In Hausmann's case it was the nonsensical war, whilst my iteration highlights the cruel and self-sabotaging exploitation of the natural world. The tap exists as a part of the landform with a vague facial quality that symbolises the very structure of society existing upon the domination of nature.

My adopted style of a dystopian aesthetic helps to evoke a narrative which I hope will incite curiosity and provocation amongst viewers. The material fissures and interaction between metal and clay lend themselves well to portraying the social and environmental upheaval of our current time in a strange and uncanny manner. One of the driving forces of my project has been an attempt to highlight contemporary notions of failure - something that my emerging dystopian aesthetic strives to represent.

Chapter 4: Exploring Notions of Failure

Whilst building my towers I have thought a lot about failure. Failure of governments to recognise the severity of the climate crisis and failure to do anything about it. Failure to take necessary long-term steps rather than short-term political gains. The failure of this iteration of capitalism that has created endless consumption. Failure to protect the Earth we need to thrive, ancient trees and forests, Indigenous sacred sites, as well as the integrity of oceans, atmosphere and ecosystems. My making practice continues to be a way to channel frustration and helplessness with the nature of this reality. The motivation behind creating a ruined cityscape is to highlight fraught notions of progress for the sake of progress. A layover from the Industrial Revolution has instilled the societal belief that technological advancement and economic liberalisation are key proponents of progress. This has led to social inequality for the sake of private wealth, economic growth at the expense of everything, including the integrity of the environment; and the assumption that mechanised innovation and consumption is always a positive thing. Through the display of my ruined towers it is my intent to draw attention to the potential for self-destruction and the resistance that exists to any attempts to redirect towards new foundational ideologies.

Whilst making work in response to system failure, I started considering my own relationship with the notion of failure on a more personal level. One aspect of this is my perceived shortcomings in womanhood. I grew up comfortable with aspects of femininity

but always felt like there was something missing, like I wasn't feminine enough and was somehow failing with respect to imposed expectations. I've gone through fluxes with femininity and gender expression but at times felt like a fraud or an imposter - like i was performing. Only recently I acknowledged myself as gender diverse (gender queer), living outside the binary of man and woman. In doing so, I accepted that it is the structure of the gender binary that failed me, rather than any failure within myself.

Failure to most people is a negative concept. In an individualistic neoliberal paradigm many people grow up amongst simple binaries around success and failure which the system is built around. For example if something is not good it must be bad, if you're not winning then you are losing, if you're not being successful then you are failing. In the American context, queer theorist Jack Halberstam speaks of "a mass delusion [of toxic positivity] that emerges out of a combination of American exceptionalism and a desire to believe that success happens to good people and failure is just a consequence of a bad attitude rather than structural conditions"²⁹. This mirrors Scott Morrison's views in Australia that if you "give a go, you get a go". This perspective completely ignores systemic prejudices around race, class, ableism, sexuality and gender. It is an example of neoliberal thinking which places the individual at fault rather than acknowledging the tilted scales of systemic privilege and disadvantage. There are similar dynamics at play with respect to the environmental crises - seen through the focus on individual action rather than corporate and government responsibility.

²⁹Jack Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*. Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 2011. 3

Through my personal journey of thinking beyond gender binaries I have increased my understanding of the restrictive nature of many dualisms that exist in Western cultures. With regards to failure and success, I argue that taking risks that generate failure is important for personal growth, innovation and creativity. If failure is the end of the road in some instances, it can instead be a prosperous new opportunity in others. To quote Jack Halberstam, “failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well; for queers failure can be a style, to cite Quenton Crisp, or a way of life, to cite Foucault, and it can stand in contrast to the grim scenarios of success that depend upon “trying and trying again”³⁰. Particularly when those scenarios of success exist in heteronormative frameworks which many queer people actively resist against.

Cabello/Carceller (a collaboration between Helena Cabello and Ana Carceller) have been making work informed by feminist and queer theories since 1992. They have a multidisciplinary practice which questions the hegemonic means of representation, and suggest critical alternatives to them. In a series of photographs titled ‘Sin Titulo (Utopia)’ [Plates 19 and 20] Cabello/Carceller link queerness to a style of negativity; of emptiness and a sense of abandonment. The images of vacant swimming pools hold a longing and melancholy which contemplate the function and meaning of such a space.

³⁰ Halberstam, *ibid.*, 111



Plate 19: Cabello/Carcella, *Sin Título (Utopia) #27*, 1998-99. Colour photograph, 70 x70.

Swimming pools often speak of abundance and wealth; a fetish and saturated symbol of luxury. They are synonymous with relaxation, leisure, hedonism and domestic glamour. The striking contrast of the abandoned pools instead represent a perversion of desire and decay of the commodity. “When the pool no longer signifies a marker of wealth and success it becomes available to queer signification as a symbolic site of failure, loss, rupture, disorder, incipient chaos, and the desire animated by these states.”³¹ There are strong parallels to my own work ‘In the Name of Progress’ [Plate 21] which sets a scene of urban decay as failure due to unhinged growth. The hollowed out spaces (of pools and a cityscape) in the absence of people demand that the viewer fill in the blanks.

³¹ Halberstam, *ibid.*, 111



Plate 20: Cabello/Carceller, *Sin Título (Utopía) #29*, 1998-99. Colour photograph, 70 x70.



Plate 21: Jade Court-Gold, mock up installation of 'In the Name of Progress', 2020.

Fired clay, metal rods, metal meshing and volcanic rock, dimensions variable.

The works take the viewer to a site of emptiness and futility, leaving them there to contemplate what has been lost and what remains to be seen. As Halberstam says, “The works strive to establish queerness as a mode of critique rather than as a new investment in normativity or respectability or wholeness or legitimacy”³². Like the work of Cabello/Carceller, my cityscape critiques mainstream ideals of success by subverting imagery of success in order to highlight decline.

Another way in which I have subverted ideas of success and failure through my work is by embracing the emerging abnormalities that result from the interplay of clay and metal.

Within the field of ceramics there is often a struggle to avoid the imperfections of materiality. Clay has a natural tendency to crack when appropriate measures aren't taken - mostly due to uneven drying times and lack of care taken when joining multiple parts. Much of ceramics involves working against these tendencies in order to achieve structurality and unmarred surfaces. When I began experimenting with combinations of metal and clay, some incongruence of materiality very quickly became apparent: clay shrinkage whilst drying around metal meant cracking was hard to avoid. I navigated this with a very slow and even drying environment but my interest increasingly began to lie in how the mediums interacted with minimal interference. Building my towers became an exercise in embracing the fissures and faults in the clay [Plates 22 and 23]. This lent itself well to my ongoing conceptual explorations of unpacking and subverting notions of failure. I had been liberated by my use of metal rods as structural components which

³² Halberstam, *ibid.*, 110

enabled me to loosen up my approach to the materials. It allowed a freedom to play intuitively with an adopted naivety and curiosity. This in turn permitted both the rhizomatic and morphogenic approach within my practice. All of these elements have allowed me to break through negative thoughts and persistent ideas around completion which stunt my practise.



Plates 22 and 23 Jade Court-Gold, details of 'In the Name of Progress', 2020

Another aspect of 'failure' in these works occurs during the firing procedure. The process of transforming the clay into a hardened and vitrified form heats up the metal components, softening and weakening the structural junctures. This creates movement in the tower forms and gives the impression of instability [Plate 24]. The result of which embodies my conceptual narrative - that our societal and ecological systems are sitting on the precipice of collapse.



Plate 24 : Jade Court-Gold, detail of *In the Name of Progress*, 2020.
Fired clay, metal meshing and metal rods.

Through my making practice I have been able to unpack notions of failure through both personal and systemic lenses. My morphogenic practice has allowed me to break down binary ideas around success and failure. I have redefined 'failure' through my practice by subverting its notions to portray a narrative of systemic breakdown which is quite literally leading to societal and ecological collapse. Through acknowledging the failures of this time, my artistic practice works towards opening up a space for transformative potential - exploring opportunities to rebuild society.

Chapter 5: Third Nature

Third Nature is a 'social ecology' concept created by American social theorist, political philosopher, author and historian Murray Bookchin (1921–2006). He helped to define ecology as an issue of radical politics and demonstrated that our present ecological problems are derived from deep systemic social issues. Bookchin proposed that the exploitation of nature is mirrored by the domination of minorities. Social ecology is based around the idea that nature can provide us with the ethical principles needed to create a flourishing moral society. Bookchin envisioned a holistic 'ecological sensibility' to encourage diversity, creativity and freedom. His concept of Third Nature draws from these ideas and is presupposed upon the existence of a First and Second Nature. To understand these concepts, we must ignore the prevailing anthropocentric idea that humans are separate from the 'natural' world. According to Bookchin, First Nature refers to the shared evolutionary history that binds together human beings as merely highly intelligent primates with the rest of Earth. Second Nature stems from the social nature of humans and their unique self-awareness giving them "an impressive capacity to restructure their environment purposefully according to their own needs"³³. Whilst being unique to humans, the development of technology and science, language and aesthetics and the formation of towns and cities, would not have been possible without the evolution of biological human attributes. Third Nature merges the biotic and social

33 J. Biehl and Murray Bookchin., 2020. *The Murray Bookchin Reader*. (online) The Anarchist Library, 1999.

Available at: <<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-janet-biehl-the-murray-bookchin-reader>>

(Accessed 19 September 2018) p48.

worlds of First and Second Nature; a utopian concept based on the ethics of complementarity. It is an aim of mine to reflect the underpinning ideas of Third Nature in my ceramic practice through materiality, form and installation. My practice seeks to evoke an interplay between the reality of ecological collapse and a longing for a symbiotic future; a sense of hope grounded in reality.

In Selena de Carvalho's 'Shell Phones' [plate 25], I have found tentative links to Bookchin's Third Nature. Carvalho merges seashells (First Nature) and headphones (Second Nature) to aesthetically explore the consequences of climate change and the inevitability of the rise in sea level. These headphones combine natural and manmade materials to imagine the potential of humans listening to and learning from nature.



Plate 25: Selena de Carvalho's *Shellphones (Souvenirs from the Ending of the World)*
Mixed Media, Shells and Wire, 2017

The shells were collected from a shoreline in South India which lies next to a large scale controversial nuclear reactor, to which Australia supplies uranium. Shells used were also purchased from street stalls within the nuclear exclusion zone. She calls them “Souvenirs from the ending of the world”³⁴.

Murray Bookchin created his concept of a Third Nature, integrating the ‘natural’ and the ‘social’ as a means to heal the illusionary split between First and Second Nature. Third Nature captures the essence of a world in which humans and their systems are regeneratively integrated with the rest of Earth. I look to Third Nature as a moral philosophy and a premise with which to critique and improve societal and industrial systems, particularly in relation to the more than human world. It is a call to arms and a way to conceptualise an ecocentric world.

An important part of my process has been the reuse and recycling of clay - through which I found a strong link to Third Nature. There is a lot of ceramic work that I have made over the last few years that has not been fired. The dried works are crushed and soaked to be reconstituted as a mongrel mix - an amalgamation of clays that I have used. Through the recycling process I have learnt a lot about clay and have enjoyed the contemplative labour without the pressure to create. Whilst taking steps to recycle clay I

³⁴ Alice Prize 2018 Finalist Exhibition Catalogue.

discovered some moss growth [Plate 26]. The moss growing out of the clay seemed to me to represent Third Nature notions of symbiotic integration.



Plate 26: Moss found in my recycled clay, 2020

I leant into this fortunate discovery and began experimenting with growing moss on the surface of my ceramics. My adoption of moss as a material is not only as a literal metaphor for the non-human world. It is also a metaphor for emotive transformation which references regenerative and resilient practices. Such practices have always been present on the peripheries (much like moss) of mainstream cultures, but are now increasingly being recognised as crucial to navigate through this time of ecological

instability. Some examples of these practices are co-ops and rebuilding the commons - so that cultural and natural resources are accessible to all members of a society. Another prime example is the quest to grant legal personhood to forests, rivers and non-human species. Just like these niche movements, moss is subtle yet rebellious and grows out of the cracks barely being noticed. It is my aim to display the towers in an intentionally narrative-driven way, with the installation starting without the addition of moss and as viewers walk through the sculptures, peeps of moss appear and steadily grow, signifying change.

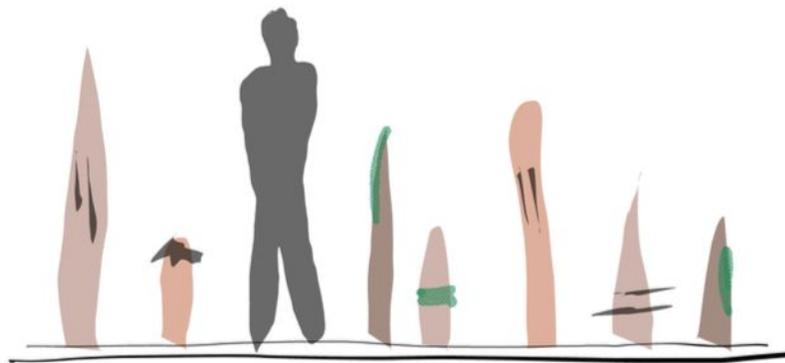


Plate 27: Diagram of installation of *In the Name of Progress* with the inclusion of moss. Digital drawing,

2020

The plan is to set up my installation as a breakup of the conventional viewing space. The works being similar to human size is a means to create a figurative connection to the viewer and enhance the immediacy of the issues at hand. Rather than walking through the space and eyes being allowed to glaze across the work, the viewer will

negotiate space through the towers³⁵. Being forced to walk through the work is an intentional way to slow the viewing process down.

I appreciate that my work could be understood in diverse ways, but would like the underpinning social and environmental ideas to be grasped. To address this I have been considering the inclusion of an audio element as a means to highlight the interconnectedness of the human and nonhuman world. The audio would transition between the sounds of an Australian summer with cicadas and birds and the sounds of work on a building site. The cylindrical forms of the towers work to evoke more than just a ruined cityscape; there is also a reference to trees and forests. The sounds would overlap in the middle of the track, exemplifying the need to progress with all elements of nature together.

These elements of moss and sound are both new inclusions in my work and require some more experimentation and time to develop. Upon reflection, there is still an element of me attempting to wrap the project up to make it somewhat neat. Whilst contemplating the concept of Third Nature I have considered ways in which it already exists in the world. A very significant example that comes to mind is Aboriginal undertakings as custodians of the land. Australian Indigenous societies are built around a complex and sophisticated system called kinship. This form of social organisation establishes a person's position in relation to other people and the universe. Traditional

³⁵ Allowing space for wheelchair accessibility

kinship structures remain important in many Aboriginal communities today, prescribing roles and responsibilities towards one-another, non-human animals, land and natural resources. This societal structure is the closest thing that I have encountered to a Third Nature in practice. Another poignant and deeply connected way of living is through the Wiradjuri people's way of *Yindyamarra*. It is a way of living with respect and honour. Yindyamarra is about taking responsibility in and of the world and understanding that all of our actions have impacts beyond the immediate³⁶. As Bernard Sullivan said in his film about Wiradjuri way of life,

*Yindyamarra is a way of living with kindness, gentleness and learning to do things slowly.. Look to see, listen to hear, learn to understand.*³⁷

Artist and academic Dr. Jonathon Jones is a member of the Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi nations. A large portion of the research for his PhD (*Murruwaygu: Following in the paths of our ancestors*) was centred around the ornately and intricately engraved shields, which so clearly distinguished them as being South-East Australian. Jonathan approached this inquiry using the principles outlined in Yindyamarra. He has practised patience and respect, spending hours at a time rendering detailed drawings of these shields [Plate 28] some of which had never been on display. Carefully documenting size, shape and engraved designs Jonathon gained far more detail than he was able to capture with a camera.

³⁶ Jonathan Jones, 'Murruwaygu: Following in the paths of our ancestors' PhD thesis, 2018.

³⁷From Bernard Sullivan's film 'Yindyamarra Yambuwan' as part of his PhD thesis 'How may cultural wisdom be understood and shared?'

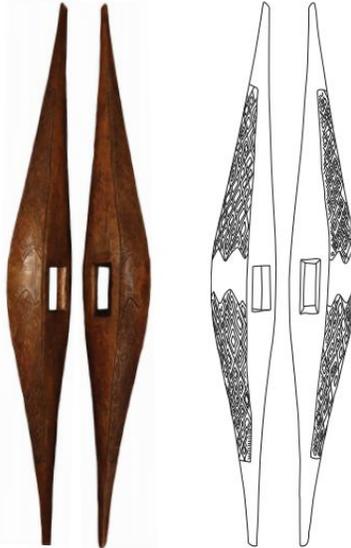


FIGURE 4.23.
 FIGURE 4.24.
 Parrying shield, 1897
 William Barrak, Wiradjuri, South-east region, Australia, c.1824–1903
 Wood; 94.5 x 12.5 x 5 cm
 Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne, AH1434
 Image courtesy KHT

Plate 28: Jonathan Jones, photograph of William Barrak’s original shield (1987) and Jones’ drawing found in his PhD thesis, ‘Murrawaygu: Following in the paths of our ancestors’, 2018

Through his detailed practice, Jonathan was able to recognise key similarities between an unnamed shield to one made by well known leader, William ‘King’ Barrack from 1897. The shields were brought together for Jonathan’s exhibition *Murrawaygu* (2015/16) at the Art Gallery of NSW, where it was confirmed that they were indeed a match. This merit is of great significance, as it doubles the current number of known shields by an important Australian artist. When Dr. Jones asked Wiradjuri elder Uncle Stan Grant, why no-one had made the connections he was now seeing, his mentor told

him it was because of Yindyamarra - by spending time with the shields Dr. Jones was going slow and respecting them, so eventually the shield would “share” with him.³⁸

I have actively pursued a semblance of Yindyamarra characteristics within my own artistic practice. Particularly with regards to viewing ceramic works post-firing, the notion of Yindyamarra encourages a slowing down to view and experience the work. It is very easy when first removing works from the kiln to see how they are different to your expectations. By spending time with the work and experiencing what they are (rather than what they are not) I am able to gain a greater understanding of both aesthetic aspects and greater meaning within the work. I do this not only by looking but also drawing the work and experimenting with how certain pieces sit together - how they converse. My understanding of Yindyamarra has allowed me to further grasp the concept of a Third Nature with regards to my practice. Rather than it being something that needs to be cultivated and visually signified, upon greater reflection I have found that the concept has already manifested. Through the act of making and investing in these works I have in a way found my own sense of Third Nature. I have been building scaffolding made from metal and clay but it's also the scaffolding that is rebuilding my sense of self whilst coming out of a place of anxiety and depression. This is seen through the surface of my sculptures - none of the marks made whilst constructing are removed. These instinctive and constructive markings [Plate 29] give a distinct and

³⁸ University of Technology Sydney. *Drawing A Line Under Koori Artistic Practice*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/our-research/social-futures/our-research/drawing-line-under-koori-artistic-practice>> [Accessed 13 November 2019].

personal element to the work. Investing time and energy into this project has been a way of negotiating through fear and desperation whilst building a sense of hope and connection.



Plate 29: Jade Court-Gold, detail of installation *In the Name of Progress*, 2020
Fired clay and metal rods.

Conclusion

Whether or not the Anthropocene becomes an official geological epoch, its advent has already altered the way humans conceptualise and inhabit the world at this time.

Artefacts of the Anthropocene is an investigation into theories and ideologies which function outside the mainstream Western rhetoric, that can work to rectify social and ecological dissociation. My research engages in discourse that can challenge hegemonic thought and foster a reconnection to nature. Not a romantic connection, but a deeper understanding of the inherent worth of the ecological world outside of human-centric utilitarianism.

The concept of the Rhizome and Ingold's process of 'thinking through making' ground my research by challenging prevailing ways of thought. They both inform my studio practice by directing intuitive and transformative material-based making processes. This is prevalent in my negotiation of metal and clay components. I am able to switch off direct analytical thinking and allow my hands to explore the materials, unhindered by traditional methodologies or strictly logical connections. Without this approach, my work becomes forced and disingenuous. This process of writing has similarly been guided by a morphogenic approach which has pushed me to define how these modes of thinking and making are blended with my artistic sensibility.

In this paper I have identified how the genre of science fiction is often used to question and critique the present. This is embedded and aesthetically present in my main body of work through the use of dystopian narratives. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was used as an analogy for the Anthropocene and again was used to guide some aesthetic principles in my clay and metal 'artefacts'.

The body of work that accompanies this paper engages with notions of failure on a few levels. My work is a direct critique of the structural failures of anthropocentrism and mainstream ideas of progress. These ideas are captured through my material explorations of failure. I have also worked to unpack my personal relationship with perceived gender 'failure'. The redefining of which has been greatly facilitated by my morphogenic artistic practice and has allowed the use of failure as an aesthetic language. My explorations of queer theory have allowed me to more acutely subvert notions of failure and success.

Bookchin's vision for a Third Nature has given me the premise of social and ecological symbiosis to negotiate in my artistic practice as well as in my vision of future possibilities. It has become the most poignant aspect and driving force of my developing practice and has lent itself strongly to the concepts and metaphors manifested in my work. Moving forward I am eager to further explore different ways in which a Third Nature sensibility could be evoked through my artistic practice.

The nature of this kind of morphogenic practice which lends itself to rhizomatic principles is one of ongoing curious investigation. I feel as though I have only just asserted my own visual language and I look forward to pushing it further. The inclusion of moss in particular is a new element and I will continue to experiment with it as a medium to symbolise transformation.

The research undertaken for this Master's degree has enabled me to engage in social and environmental issues with the confluence of writing and making. The writing in particular has pushed me to formulate and tighten my ideas and I plan to continue doing so in the future. Interestingly, after writing the chapter 'Future Remains', I have had a longing to get back into writing fiction which I have not done since my late teens. My stepfather is a writer and dabbles in fantasy/science fiction and we have long spoken about writing together. Perhaps I can steer him towards the genre of ecofiction.

Of everything that has come out of this Masters project, the most significant is my sense of self that has emerged out of my personal battle with eco-anxiety and depression. As psychologist Dr. Kennedy Williams encouraged, the most logical path through eco-anxiety is taking action towards climate justice. There are so many diverse ways of doing this. Currently mine is through research and art making, but I am looking forward to having the capacity to engage with more direct climate activism. Moving forward, I hope to conduct my artistic practice in an inclusive way that engages with others in climate activism.

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