

A Warming Inhale

Ecology and Capitalism in the Site of the Body

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Attestation of Authorship	3
Index of Images	4
Abstract	5
Introduction	6
<u>Chapter 1: Methodologies</u>	7
1.1: Somatic Enquiry	7
1.2: The Feldenkrais Method	7
1.3: Anatomy Trains	7
1.4: Strength Training	8
1.5: Permaculture	9
1.6: The Heuristic	9
1.7: Connectedness	10
<u>Chapter 2: Activism</u>	10
2.1 Activism and art-making overview	10
2.2 Protest:TPPA Signing	12
2.3 Protest: ANZ Divest	13
2.4 Protest: Weapons Expo	14
<u>Chapter 3: Politics & Performance Art</u>	15
3.1 Performance: E:NDTIMES	15
<u>Chapter 4: The Body, Ego and Eco</u>	17
4.1 Performance: Creating Positive Illusions in the Mind's Eye	17
4.2 Artistic Territory: Rest, Sleep/Lessness, Work, Performance	19
<u>Chapter 5: Soil Matters, Edible Matter, Objects Matter</u>	20
5.1 Performance: Market Pathway to Sustainability/Footprints of Futility	20
5.2 Edible Matter	21
5.3 “Regular flat white to takeaway thanks...”	22
5.4 Thats recyclable, don't throw it in the rubbish!	22
<u>Chapter 6: Fence Sitting Series - Integrations and Iterations</u>	23
6.1 Performance: Fence Sitting 2: Even in Absence I Am	24
Conclusion	28
References	29

Attestation of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published by another person nor material which has to a substantial extent been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.”

Index of Images

1.	Overload Principle in Nature 1	8
2.	Overload Principle in Nature 2	8
3.	Overload Principle in Nature 3	8
4.	TPPA Protest	11
5.	Weapons Expo Protest	14
6.	E:NDTIMES Currency 1	15
7.	E:NDTIMES Currency 2	15
8.	E:NDTIMES Interactive Capitalism Escape	16
9.	E:NDTIMES Secrecy	16
10.	Creating Positive Illusions in the Minds Eye	17
11.	Market Pathway to Sustainability/Footprints of Futility	20
12.	Sculptural Iterations 1	22
13.	Sculptural Iterations 2	22
14.	Sculptural Iterations 3	22
15.	Wall Additions	23
16.	Fence Sitting Series Design	23
17.	Direct Address in Even in Absence I Am	25
18.	Help Wanted – Participation in Even in Absence I Am	26
19.	New Life Begins	26

Abstract

Is my art anything? Is my politics nothing?

This exegesis plays with ideas found in somatic research, literature on ecology and capitalism, activism and performance; it acknowledges theoretical research, bodywork and body rest, object-making, and participation, with the intention of avoiding the foregrounding of any of these over others. This egalitarian approach to art-making requires openness to the benefits of theoretical discourse and physical practice however that manifests, and to this end, content can be drawn from many sources.

Within the context of late capitalism, ecological collapse and egoistic entitlement, I openly include methods of uncertainty and clutter in both body practice and mental/emotional processes that question my own hypocrisy within capitalism, and guilt as a participant in planetary demise. My research project uses a participatory performance model to attend to political issues through research on the intersection between the embodiment of personal trauma and planetary ecological trauma. I develop themes in my work through strands that cross activist, performative and participatory modalities, and bring these together in an ecologically-invested performance.

Introduction:

In which I explain the process of bringing strands of interest and knowledge, my personal history, and a performance practice together as co-participants in a territory of connected understanding. My personal voice will be clear and present, albeit meandering, and there will be more conventional academic sources woven throughout the text.

There is much discussion on the capitalism and climate change correlation, how “privatization of the public sphere, deregulation of the corporate sector, and the lowering of income and corporate taxes... form an ideological wall that has blocked a serious response to climate change for decades” (Klein, 2014, p. 72)

I am exploring this relationship in conjunction with literature surrounding the body, and activism through participation in performance. In this regard, I am in the territory of many arts practitioners in this global discourse, however my focus is not breadth of practice, but my practice-led research, emanating from somatic practice. My work culminates in performance installation events, using processes that are both technological and object-art based, including both human and non-human participation. These events are developed from explorations in physical bodywork (a spectrum from complete rest to physically demanding weightlifting), trauma on a personal and ecological level, as well as activist performances and prior iterations of performances themselves. I link my process to Rosi Braidotti's nomadic ethics to this end. Braidotti (2010) proposes;

The nomadic ethico-political project focusses on becomings as a pragmatic philosophy that stresses the need to act, to experiment with different modes of constituting subjectivity and different ways of inhabiting our corporeality. Accordingly, nomadic ethics is not about a master theory but rather about multiple micropolitical modes of daily activism. It is essential to put the active back into activism. (p. 209).

Whether or not my daily activities can be considered activism is questionable, as is to what extent activism can produce change, especially if that activism is not in the public sphere, but I agree with Braidotti, that daily micropolitical positions influence our behaviour; and through constant, fluid intersections our influence extends through our social interaction. Out there, we meet everybody else, and so on balance, the positive vibratory spaces we create have the potential to be politically enlightening, if our actions appeal to ethical values of care, tolerance, and interspecies compassion.

I will begin with an overview of my interests and how these can be seen as the methodologies I utilize, then focus on individual performances to elucidate certain themes in my practice. Links between theory and performance in one chapter could very easily fit into another, as in my life practice I don't greatly distinguish between theoretical modes of enquiry or methods of practice.

Chapter 1: Methodologies

1.1 Somatic enquiry

Methodologically my research model is primarily the engagement in somatic practices and I begin by defining my current understanding of somatic practice: a felt understanding of the body, through sensation and attention to breath, through pain and healing processes, through strength training, through transmission of physical, physiological, and anatomical information. It is here from this felt perspective within the body that the ideas of the work come.

1.2 The Feldenkrais Method

I will begin by specifically discussing Moshe Feldenkrais and his *Feldenkrais Method* as this system of awareness through movement is an influential somatic practice. This method allows the experiencer space and time to explore how their body moves in relation to aural instruction. Feldenkrais practitioner Pauline Sugine (1993) describes it as “a synthesis of physics, biomechanics, neuroscience, psychology and child development. ... It is based on an understanding of how people learn to move and how that knowledge can improve movement skill” (para. 2) Many of the movement pathways involve the body horizontally rolling, as this is a crucial part of our developmental movement pattern as a child. Often participants will be asked to reverse the action just completed, a complex neurological task which “reminds the body and mind about the body parts that are not integrated or dysfunctional during their functional movements or habitual actions.” (Henry, 2016, para. 1) In my performance practice I use this reversal process during rehearsals for my *Fence Sitting Series*, whereby climbing, clambering and traversing movements are trialled back and forth to develop dexterity and ease.

1.3 Anatomy Trains

Another body-centered practice is Thomas Myers' *Anatomy Trains*. This work stems from a scientific mode of enquiry into the fascial system and its qualities, then takes a physical and experimental approach in developing a practice around fascia. Myers (2009) suggests that: “a grasp of the *Anatomy Trains* scheme will lead to a more three-dimensional feel for the musculo-skeletal anatomy and an appreciation of whole-body patterns distributing compensation in daily, and performance functioning” (p.2)

This alternative view of the body extends and expands the more conventional single-muscle action approach to human physiology, which maintains more simplistic causal links between origins and insertions of muscles on the skeleton, and subsequent movement response in the body. The *Anatomy Trains* system follows functional pathways of movement through the body, and as a practitioner it allows me to view my holding patterns due to habits and previous injuries, and my functional strength as multiple networked pathways to be investigated. In my work I trace lines of fascia in the body, utilizing the patterning in my body to have a felt sense of my whole being in my movement decisions, I attempt to express this to my spectators, sometimes visually, and at other times aurally describing the action in different ways. The

participants then have an opportunity to tune in to the fascial relationships in their bodies at the same time as they can see the patterns in action in mine.

Anatomy Trains is focused on objectification and analysis whereas the *Feldenkrais Method* attends to awareness and experience, and whilst these modalities influence my practice, I do not hold rigidly to their forms, understanding their market requirement to maintain a point of difference to other somatic practices eg. *Yoga*, *Pilates*, and *Alexander Technique*. In the marketplace of body practices, all training forms are sellable, finding their self-sustaining economic niche within capitalism. Adhering dogmatically to one can create imbalances in strength, flexibility and fitness, so I would be remiss if I didn't also detail my strength training.

1.4 Strength Training Protocols

In relation to this experiential training modality I employ strength training, utilizing progressive overloading, muscle chain specificity, and rest protocols. Sports physiologist Cedric Laurent (2016) writes: "To be effective, a strength training programme should manipulate adequately many factors such as the intensity, volume (number of sets and repetitions), duration of the rest interval between sets, movement velocity, order of exercises and training frequency" (para. 1)



In overload training, the need for uncomfortability to create change is important, as discomfort in the body allows for a breakdown of the sarcomeres, creating tearing of the minute muscle fibres, that consequently get rebuilt, larger in size. One must take a long term approach, with 30-48 hours rest between sessions important for muscle repair and attempts to shortcut the process will usually damage the body. There is also evidence that within a training session a "short rest interval might provide a superior stimulus for hypertrophy due to the greater acute elevation in growth hormone following the training session"(para. 1) Progressive overloading protocols of minimal load increases (1- 2kg) per session maintain safety while enhancing benefits. This spectrum from complete rest through *Feldenkrais* and *Anatomy Trains* principles, to overload training form a broad stroke of modalities crucial to my somatic research methods. This ongoing diligent attention to the body is a considered attempt at decentering of the persistence of Western dualisms and their prioritization of mind over body, also evident in

assumed prowess of male over female, human over animal, and animal over vegetable. It is also relational to ongoing tending of the local ecology in permaculture which I will discuss next.

1.5 Permaculture:

Another methodology I have embraced since 2005 while working at Rainbow Valley farm in Matakana is Permaculture. Bill Mollison's work beginning in 1968 is an agricultural design system harnessing natural ecological processes and using them to create food production with less inputs and greater outputs. One very integral principle is that there are no waste products in nature, just assets to be reused, recycled, and rematerialised. This, and other permaculture principles have influenced my art and life practice for many years now, and I will expand on this with reference to my object-making process of capturing recyclable food packaging in plaster. Through processing the materiality of object art, I must psychologically grapple with the awareness that left over and unwanted art materials have not magically vanished but are still in existence somewhere. Richard Brambrey (2006) describes this within Permaculture thusly:

The designed system should also have a high degree of inter-linkage; "waste" outputs from one part of the system being used as inputs for another part. The ideal is a closed cycle, where outputs become inputs, requiring no primary inputs and producing no waste products. (Bambrey, 2006, para. 7)

To this end, I explore how an ethics of a material and performance art practice can be investigated through Permaculture principles, through reusing materials, whether a disposable coffee cup, or a set of physical performance movements recontextualized in a future iteration.

1.6 The Heuristic:

I inhabit a heuristic approach in which a trial and error method of performance creation is iteratively performed and then reflected upon. The term heuristic has many different manifestations, dependent on its context, though it generally refers to gaining knowledge through intelligent guesswork, rather than predetermined planning. My creative process for this project has been a series of performances which have been experimental and questioning, with no single goal in mind, I have a hunch as to the way it should feel to perform it with audience present, and head in that direction. This iteration/reflection cycle is crucial to the rationale of the performance, for in reflecting on what has happened in the performance, and in conjunction with participants offering up their experiences, I develop the work further. Evfa Lilja views this in a similar vein to me in her book *Art, Research, Empowerment*, stating "methods grow out of the process generated by the work and contain the tools needed in work logistics"(Lilja. 2015, p 56) Lilja suggests the work, process, methods and tools are all entwined in such a way that they are the nuts and bolts of the project. I choose to understand this in the sense that the methodology is the art project, as is the performance, as is the meditation practice, as is the sculptural creation, therefore any delineation between art practice and performance is primarily cosmetic.

1.7 Connectedness:

I attempt to balance the aspects of life requiring attention, and move forward with them simultaneously so as to avoid overstressing one faculty and devaluing another which has previously happened when focusing on theoretical research exclusively and being not physically performance-ready, resulting in debilitating injury. This requires a sense of time that is often not analogous to timescales in a tertiary institutional setting, which demands prioritizing faculty-specific requirements, even when one's multi-disciplinary approach requires the 'little and often' consistency of practice-led research. This is connectedness in an ecological sense, in that in not prioritizing one part of life over another is a chance to learn mindfulness, awareness, and presence in the face of outer life demands. In my performance practice I nurture connectedness through spectator engagement, which allows for a co-created work in real time. In offering the audience a participatory role, I acknowledge in a very visceral and embodied sense their existence, their worth, and their necessity to the performance.

I also engage with nonhuman performers such as flora, fauna, objects, technology, and through felt connection I attempt to express this to any human observers. I convey this through sound, by listening with intent to the plants and asking my participants to listen also; by touch, asking them to choose a plant and to repot it in new soil, and by breath, connecting their breath to the plants and acknowledging the symbiotic gas exchange happening. This process requires an openness in my aesthetic and performance choices, through stream-of-consciousness movement and vocalization creation. In an overall sense, my performances become structured improvisations that I weave my conceptual framework through. I enjoy the risk and potential for failure that comes with audience participation. On both physical and psychological levels, acceptance of failure in front of an audience allows my vulnerability to present itself, providing a layer of connection that physical competency cannot. New performance options emerge from this, and a forced rethink and re-embodiment of my practice spontaneously emerges, which then evolves an ensuing iteration in a process of emergence, recycling, and updating of ideas.

Chapter 2: Activism:

2.1 Activism and art-making overview

In order to question the concept of activism in art, I outline some of my performative activist actions, framing them as methodologies. Politically activist performances are experiential and embodied attempts to challenge state and corporate power, three examples from 2016 are the TPPA, the ANZ Divest, and Weapons Expo protests. Cultural critic Boris Groys suggests:

Art activists do not want to merely criticize the art system or the general political and social conditions under which this system functions. Rather, they want to change these conditions by means of art—not so much inside the art system but outside it, in reality itself. (Groys, 2014, p. 1)

I am doing this through questioning where performance and activism fit, and to what extent they can be effective participants within the neoliberal and wider Climate Change context.

2.2 Protest: TPPA signing

Dancing with the Devil was a costumed Contact Improvisation (CI) dance, performed in conjunction with fellow performer Matthew Gibbons on February 4th 2016, the day of the TPPA signing. I will begin with a bit of background on CI, which is a partner dance form created in 1972 by Steve Paxton. It is based on a rolling point of contact between bodies emphasizing touch, momentum, and shared weight. Gibbons and myself especially utilized the unconventional movements of rolling, falling and lifting, presenting physical prowess and responsiveness to our street protest surroundings, hence delineating ourselves from those around us in pedestrian mode. As Gibbons states:

Our duet may not have been the standard face of protest, but I think the police saw something not illegal, yet confronted their norms of protest and protesters, while other protesters saw a less aggressive form of physical engagement, so for me it injected the possibility of interaction in a way other than an 'us and them' stance.

(M. Gibbons, personal communication, 02 08, 2016)



In the TPPA signing protest, Gibbons was dressed as a corporate devil in a red lycra bodysuit, business suit-jacket and flame-haired wig, while I represented the military industrial complex in a blue lycra bodysuit, white sailor pants and a sailor hat. We had *TPPA ! CORPORATE GIVEAWAY!* written on our costumes and handed out the fake currency, announcing to people that this would be our new currency after signing the TPPA. These costumes of corporate power and geopolitical militaristic aspirations of the US were unmistakably entangled and entwined through the physical nature of CI as we danced in front of the police cordon barring the entrance to the sky city convention centre where the signing was being held. This we contrasted with a salesman-like approach and through absurdly confusing and actively miseducating passersby we were engaging in the same coded incomprehensible language used by politicians in their attempt to sell the unpalatable erosion of sovereignty, as a palatable exchange for potential gains. On a purely physical level, CI is an act of resistance to capitalist strategies of corporate strategizing and hierarchy as its “belief in spontaneity also seemed to generate a sense of egalitarianism” (Novack, 1990, p. 195)

The absurdity of my contradictory situation regarding my activist tendencies within capitalism was profoundly clear while I was protesting in front of one of the literal pillars of Auckland's capitalist edifice – The Sky Tower, acutely aware that I had been performing in exactly the same

place just recently for Chinese New Year. I was dressed in Chinese acrobat, the cultural inappropriateness of which is a prime example of the mercenary aspect of being a professional entertainer, which I expand on during in this chapter. Paid for by Sky City Casino, we entertained crowds of predominantly Chinese people, personally some of the the casino's most valued customers – while politically China's economic ascendancy was presented as a motivating reason for the necessity of the TPPA.

The scaremongering around China is related to the expansion of the TPPA, intended to create an economic bloc of countries around it for the benefit of U.S. interests as Barak Obama openly states in a Wall Street Journal interview: “If we don't write the rules, China will write the rules out in that region” (Seib, 2015, para. 2) The TPPA was at the behest of multinational, (primarily US) corporations in order to facilitate greater control over a wider geographic area through enforcement of ISDS (Investor State Dispute Settlement) legal process, opening the potential of legal action against our government for regulating in the public interest. New Zealand currently has a lucrative bilateral free trade agreement with China, and the TPPA negotiations were in the hope of gaining access to the heavily protected US market, primarily for the same agricultural products it sells to China. That the TPPA was signed on the private property of a casino, rather than a government building, seemed fitting, as it was essentially gambling public funds for corporate profits. On a personal level, I am aware of my need for corporate support for my line of work as a circus and dance performer, which facilitates a constant reshuffling of values around performance as entertainment for the wealthy. The engagement in Contact Improvisation was also an appropriate form of protest as historically CI practitioners are not usually paid to perform CI and therefore “feel the constraints of that market and need also to operate outside of it in some way in order to survive as artists” (Novack,1990, p. 213) This problematic is summed up by Groys (2014):

Art activists do want to be useful, to change the world, to make the world a better place—but at the same time, they do not want to cease being artists. And this is the point where theoretical, political, and even purely practical problems arise. (p. 1)

Seen through an ecological lens, I have a specialized set of skills that I have developed, and consequently I have been developed by the niche in the economic ecology, which I fill. The practical problem of financial and artistic survival requires a flexible way of embodied fluid values, so perhaps Groys (2014) is right commenting that in terms of art activism: “only self-contradictory practices are true in a deeper sense of the word.”(p. 10) In corporate entertainment I balance my values and needs in a way both overt and apparent, more so than if I was receiving government arts funding through Creative New Zealand, or through the education system. In the latter funding sources of creative activity, the structures of the state facilitate a more removed sense of arts/activist values in relation to the income stream, at least outwardly appearing freer from this contradiction.

I will now discuss two other actions in 2016, referencing artist and activist John Jordan, founder of Reclaim the Streets, CIRCA (the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army), and co-founder of Labofll (Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination).

2.3 Protest: ANZ Divest

In May 2016 a group of demonstrators wearing costumes with a portable speaker playing high energy pumping music danced their way into the ANZ bank in downtown Auckland. The protest was to highlight the ANZ bank investments in the fossil fuel industry. We were dressed as beach partygoers and marine animals, holding comedic placards with pictures of shellfish and octopus on them saying “Don't be shellfish! Divest now!” and “Octupi Queen St! Physically and playfully embodying the suggestion that the site of this particular bank would actually be under water in the future. The financial industry seems a good target because their investments are broad and diverse, and their influence extensive. If we, as activists can get media attention then perhaps change is possible, especially if customers are persuaded to switch banks, or at least threaten to, because of it. The banking industry also seems relevant owing to its very tenuous link to reality: through granting a mortgage as an IOU from a customer to themselves for money that does not actually exist in their vaults. In reality, banks are remarkably divorced from a productive economic system, and should people to decide to draw their money out at the same time they are remarkably close to collapse. The intention of this protest was to show in an absurd fashion the reality of where the banks money was invested globally, the outcome of which would be sea level rise if greenhouse gas emissions continue unabated, as well as endangering marine life through resulting ocean acidification. Jordan (2005) describes this irony as:

civilisation's great conjuring trick: the act of forgetting its dependence on the natural world, a trick which has caused the downfall of many an empire. From the Romans to ancient Mayans, Polynesian cultures of Easter Island to the Anasazi pueblo builders of the American South West, all were partly brought to their knees by over-reaching their ecological capacities. (para. 6)

Jordan describes an action called “*Unearthing the Walbrook*”, a central tenet in the *Carnival against Capitalism* in London on 18th June 1999.

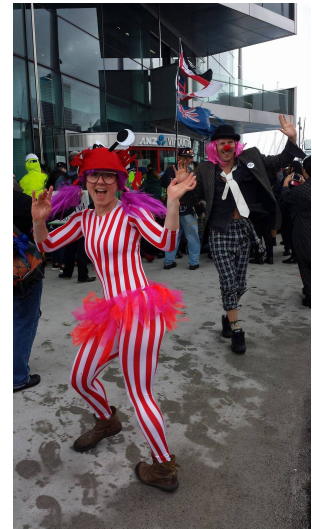
In the valley of the now buried river Walbrook, the small fast flowing river around which London was built. Buried in the 13th Century... was given a new lease on life when it was symbolically released during the carnival by opening a stand pipe and letting mains water burst twenty metres into the hot summer sky. (Jordan , 2005, para. 7).

Although not on the scale of *Carnival against Capitalism* in which a critical mass came to the streets bringing to the fore issues of capitalism and the hidden environmental processes that prop it up, our protest did bring attention to Capitalist disregard for the enormity of the

environmental crisis. There was the usual combination of surprise and confusion, from both the employees and customers, but for a brief moment at lunchtime we provided a chance to remember what is outside our everyday is sometimes more important than the everyday. It was also a chance to offer up frivolity as a counter to Capitalism's serious sense of productivity and efficiency. As protesters, we were viewed as 'rent-a-crowd', who were almost certainly unemployed and definitely in the way of the functions of people 'just trying to go about their business'. These are often the media representations put forward by politicians to deflect conversations away from issues we are there to protest, and steer it towards the assumed confirmation bias of their mainstream audience. This is an advantage of live performance in activism, that people in situ and affected by the protest can actually enjoy the entertainment experience, which can temper their thinking away from the mediated presentation of protestors, and towards a more enjoyable lived experience of protesting.

2.4 Protest: Weapons Conference

The final performance protest in November 2016 was a clowning performance at the Weapons Expo in Auckland performing along with fellow performer Monica Evans. We carried long bubble-making swords, chanted 'bubbles not bombs!' and sent forth bubbles over the front line between police and protesters. The intention of the clown costumes was to present a familiar figure of both joy and foolishness to everyone around. Rhythmically we decided to move at a speed completely different to everyone around, dancing very quickly and bouncing continually, often acrobatically upside down on our hands as well as our feet. We employed partner acrobatics, such as standing on shoulders and high partner lifts, requiring high levels of skill and inspiring admiration as well as affording a safe performance perimeter around us. This vibrant speed, joy, and embodied skill was a protest in itself to the stillness of the standing police barricade, and the seated protestors. The overall intention was to prevent delegates entering the conference by means of an early morning blockade, to make the general public aware, and also to uphold New Zealand anti-war civil disobedience traditions.



Clowning has many precursors internationally, in 2003 Jordan's CIRCA developed methodologies introducing clowning play into political activism. CIRCA clown protesters have walked directly through a line of riot police who were laughing so much they were unable to maintain their barricade integrity, illustrating the efficacy of play within Non Violent Direct Action. However, the personal journey was not to be left out either, as Jordan states: CIRCA viewed both "soul and street as sites of struggle"(Jordan, 2003, para. 4). The focus on the individual's inner life using the tools of improvisation for personal and artistic development is a holistic approach beneficial for the longevity of a movement through avoiding activist burnout. My fellow clown in the Weapons Expo, Evans speaks of the struggle through more than a decade of activism in how to embody authentic resistance. She notes that "through the feelings of

vulnerability and presence that clowning engenders, I can transform and perform the confusion, fear, hope and love that run through our resistance to corporate control and environmental destruction” (M. Evans, personal communication, 11 29 2016)

Though there are wider benefits to protest clowning as it keeps things family-friendly, defuses tension and creates positive media images, on a personal level it has allowed me to maintain a sense of human empathy while directly facing systematic injustice. Therefore it is in effect, transformational, in allowing me to process internalized grief for the world. The absurdist humour and some of the paradoxes that were developed within activist performance flow over into the performance art events that I will describe in the next chapters that form the main body of my Masters project research.

Chapter 3. Politics and Performance Art

I will now link activism to the evolution of my art projects within a tertiary art institution context, beginning with the overtly political issue of the TPPA. In a tertiary institution there is time and space for art-making and reflection on art and political issues. Thus the institution can afford performance temporality that inspires contemplation and invites subtlety, as well as a captive audience unlikely to halt performative actions that present a disruption to the status quo. With this in mind, my work E:NDTIMES allowed audience time to participate in a game-like event around the media, money, capitalism, and the TPPA in which they had agency to explore, direct and resist activities.

3.1 Performance: E:NDTIMES

My research project E:NDTIMES (Exegesis on Neoliberal Digital Temporal Intersectional Media Expo Sale) was performed on the 11th & 12th of November 2016. The audience could pay what they liked to get in, exchanging this money for ENDTIMES dollars, and new currency in hand, were immediately forced to pay a door opening fee, this simple symbolic gesture setting the tone for the rest of the event.



Some participants were instantly disenfranchised and forced to do physical work to pay their debts, others were 'randomly selected' to go through one of two doors; this was not actually random but discriminated against people who had less currency on them. They went through a security screening process, interacting with technology in which their task was to escape from a politically-mainstream media environment, through contorting their body and allowing the

interactive technology to respond by giving them an alternative commentary on the TPPA.



Once in the event they explore the multi-roomed space at their leisure, choosing different activities (a meditation room, cafe with social games, finding Julian Assange giving an interview in a toilet, paying for a VIP experience, and being interviewed on a live-capture talk show). The audience engagement was crucial because they were providing content for the show, thus breaking traditional boundaries between stage and spectator. However, the agency for the audience to make choices meant that some of the audience didn't explore all the performance sites which resulted in limits on the potential experiences within an art/performance context. After about 40 minutes, a structured performance began which culminated in a suggestive change-the-flag pole dance, whilst performers forced non-VIP participants to exit. This final task contrasted the backroom deal quality of the TPPA negotiations with public deflection. It also tested audience resolve and resistance to authority, and many participants responded physically, proclaiming their right to resist, whilst others offered financial bribes to stay.



E:NDTIMES related to the secrecy, privilege, and media manipulation around the TPPA and allowed the participants the experience of the game of capitalism that we are all beholden to. Within capitalism we find our niche, and like an ecological process run rampant, it plays out a game of value-added desire and contrived scarcity, and we end up with ecological price gouging throughout the globe. Capital is maximized through the use of nature as resource, a nature considered valueless in and of itself. This relationship between Capitalism and the natural world begets the Climate Change crisis we face, and thus I began my Masters project in 2016 which I will expand on in the next chapter.

Chapter 4. The Body the Ego and the Eco

In 2016 I continued with a participatory performance model with attendant political issues, through research into Climate Change, shifting focus towards the intersection between the embodiment of personal trauma and planetary ecological trauma.

4.1 Performance: *Creating Positive Illusions in the Mind's Eye*



Creating Positive Illusions in the Mind's Eye performed in May 2016, began with my prone and immobile body verbally instructing the participatory body of the mobile and upright audience. This performance mode had come about through bodily injury sustained earlier in March. A bony growth in cervical vertebrae five and six limited the space for the nerve to pass through, creating nerve sheath inflammation, extreme pain, muscle weakness and atrophy down my neck, thoracic spine, left shoulder, arm and hand. The vagus and plexus nerves were greatly affected, which in turn affected my parasympathetic nervous system which the vagus nerve controls. With this damage, my adrenal glands were overactive creating excess cortisol and adrenalin and manifesting in chronic sleeplessness, anxiety and depression. This was rapid physical and accompanying psychological downward spiral which caused my thinking and actions to present subconscious negativity to the world outside.

By reciting positive affirmations, immersing myself in cold and hot water interchangeably, spending time in nature, as well as going on imaginary mythical journeys to uncover fear-based egoistic feelings and thoughts I went deeper into myself, finding my way through this trauma. I felt it important to follow up this period with work that can connect with others, and investigate the trauma of this experience and how it links in with my ecological and political views.

Framing this theoretically, political activist Micah White (2016) argues:

Activists of the future thus must be *mental environmentalists*, as concerned with the health of our interior world as we are about the natural world. Mental environmentalism means working from the assumption that there is a connection between the level of pollution in our minds and the prevalence of pollution in the world. (p. 172)

Recontextualizing the nights of lying awake, feeling, and experiencing through my art creation I was able to question the reality I was enveloped in, so different to my previous life; if this sensation is the world felt inside, then how does this manifest in the outside world? For me it manifested as a garden, a return to authenticity through the soil, and so I created my garden out of two bread crates, organic soil and seedlings, and added solar panels, a spotlight and glitter ball representative of both the spectacular performances that were currently unachievable to my injured self, and a metallic sun powering an artificial ecology.

During *Creating Positive Illusions in the Mind's Eye*, I lay in a darkened room, dappled by the light of the glitter ball spinning with eyes closed, naked, shaved from head to toe and enshrouded in black polyurethane, with my head in one garden and feet in another. The audience entered and after a few minutes I spoke, asking them to decide upon four participants amongst themselves, and for these participants to find a takeaway coffee cup in the corner of the room. Once I have aural confirmation of this, I asked that all others must leave. I heard laughter and disgruntlement at this authoritarian direction and people leaving, but sensed more than four participants remaining. I was happy to have others stay, but disenfranchisement was to be a part of the event in order to influence their desire to remain and participate through contrived situational scarcity.

Next I lead them on a meditative journey, asking them to look at the arrangement of the space and the objects, not to judge or analyze, but instead to breathe with my breath and let their mind wander as their eyes trace pathways through the space. I suggested the contemporary view before them was literally *con temporary* – with time, and I described past and future potentialities of this space, trees and people that have gone before, and ask them to think about what will come after we ourselves depart. Next I instructed the four participants to gather a plant from either garden and repot it into their coffee cup with a socket soldered into it, then to find the cables that attach the coffee cups to the solar power. Once plugged in, a pixel LED light on the cup was activated by the solar panel, supposedly drawing energy from the reflected light from the glitter ball in a process I called photovoltaic-assisted photosynthesis. The participants were then asked to begin a process of gas exchange with their plant by holding it near their lips and breathing in and out over it. This transfer of life energy between oneself and this other life-form we share that planet with is on the surface-level parodic and absurd but below this it is about mental, emotional and spiritual connectedness. This pseudo-scientific oxygen/carbon dioxide transfer, and assisted-photosynthesis are both farcical and earnest

attempts of human-assisted nature in the geoengineering vein. Political Scientist Elmar Altvater (2016) writes:

Now the geoengineers enter the stage of capitalist modernity. ...they must create necessary resources on the input side of the planetary social and geological systems at a time when they can no longer be easily extracted from external nature. (p. 151)

On a macro level, this performance is talking to the capitalist relationship to our means of survival, it looks at our connection to other entities we share the planet with, and the priority of technology in each of our lives. On a micro level, it is a working through of the processes of healing in the body, and the trauma from a past event which can reveal and reassert itself as bodily sensation in the present.

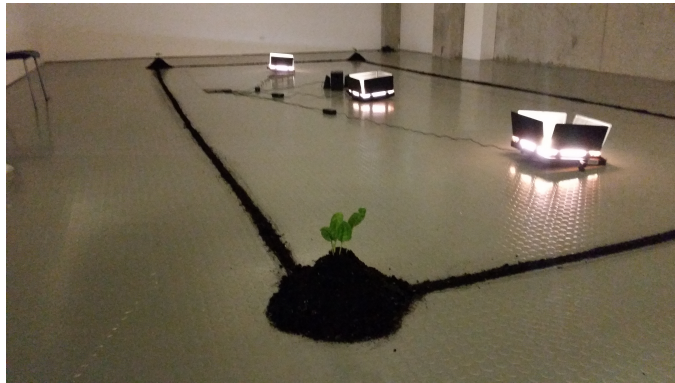
4.2: Artistic Territory: Rest, Sleep/Lessness, Work, Performance

Formally *Creating Positive Illusions in the Mind's Eye* is in the territory of resting performances intersecting dance and performance art as exemplified by Trajan Harrall's 2009 work *Tickle the Sleeping Giant #9*. In this work trained dancers take sleeping tablets, and for the next 8 hours of performance their bodies remain relatively motionless, while unconscious twitches become the movement motifs of the performance. Their bodies are being unproductive, in the sense of the neoliberal ideal of performance which is "linked to the implementation of "efficiencies" in state, institutional, corporate, and industrial environments" (as cited in Lepecki, 2016, p. 8) Sleeping can therefore be viewed to some degree as resistance to productivity within the neoliberal capitalist mindset where the virtue of working hard, and always, is socially respected.

In sleep, though we are healing our body and mind we are unproductive to capitalism, and we can also no longer consciously control our performance of the self which is shaped through our immersion in capitalism. Through this understanding, performance has come to be interpellated by the individual as "an ongoing process where the subject can only find self-realization, emotional self-assurance, and social integration through endless re-presentations of self-performances" (Lepecki, 2016, p. 8)

I link this to my nightly prostrate sleeplessness self-performances as an egoic entity whose injury meant an inability to self-perform as desired, and how the self-loathing around this reflected my internalized guilt as a creative artist whose mere existence contributes to the planetary ecological crisis. This paradox I feel, where doing less can be more beneficial to the environment than doing more, and this not knowing if anything I do creatively can have an effect, was drawn out more intensely through my injury and became a feeling of being lost in life generally. The ensuing investigations of the ego and its worldly manifestation in capitalism, climate change, and the systematic resistance to positive change culminated in *Creating Positive Illusions in the Mind's Eye*.

Chapter 5: Soil Matters, Edible Matter, Objects Matter



I turn now to the process of production and ingestion of edible matter, from its intentional production in the care for soil and plants to its intentional consumption.

5.1 Performance: Market Pathway to Sustainability/Footprints of Futility

In *Market Pathway to Sustainability/Footprints of Futility* I created a thin rectangular pathway of soil with a leafy green plant in a mound in each corner. This linearity and minimalist aesthetic offers no benefit to the soil itself, exposing it to the elements in the way tilling does, losing valuable moisture and nutrients as a result. This work touches on physical resource limits, embodied stewardship of plants, and soil exhaustion which Ecologist and Philosopher Maria Puiga de la Bellacasa describes as being “blamed across the board on industrialized and unsustainable forms of agriculture” (Puiga de la Bellacasa, 2016, p.693). I am therefore presenting a performance which sacrifices soil quality for aesthetic sensibilities.

My initial plan in this was to ‘air walk’ above the soil pathway, brachiating from hand to hand until completely exhausted, raining water upon the soil by way of the audience piercing needles through water-filled plastic bags contained inside my lycra bodysuit. The reality was different, however, as whilst hanging and waiting for the audience arrival I compressed a nerve in my underarm and lost feeling to my hand. In order to perform I improvised a slow meditative walk revealing unpredicted experiences such as the water weight in my legs making slow-motion surprisingly easy, and residual water-shaped footprints due to surface tension meeting the texture of the floor.

The resultant work therefore has two names to show both intention (*Market Pathway to Sustainability*) and outcome (*Footprints of Futility*). Due to its physical strenuousness the brachiating pathway was always going to be unsustainable, as is industrial agriculture's reliance on inputs such as irrigation, palm kernel imports and chemical enhancement; this is delineated by straight lines on bare soil without mulch. Therefore my strenuous human attempts would have only held out for a short time before I would need to change the fashion in which I was doing it. The resulting futile footprints presented as water loss from unsustainable practices such as using groundwater irrigation for lucrative dairy farming in a naturally arid area. When

considered as a sculptural object, these water footprints become a symbolic hyper-object of our collective footprint on the earth, opening up imaginative pathways in the mind of the participant as to the scale of meaning in the event. Philosopher Timothy Morton expands on concepts similarly:

thinking on a planetary scale means waking up inside an object, or rather as series of “objects wrapped in objects”: Earth, the biosphere, climate, global warming. Ecological being-with does not mean dusting some corner of an object so one doesn’t feel too dirty. (Morton, T. p151)

The human footprint is an oft used metaphor, such as our ecological footprint or our carbon footprint, and in this case our collective water footprint, which gets performatively revealed over time. Contrastingly, Bill Mollison recognizes the footprint as a preeminent metaphor for positive human impact, beginning his chapter on soil with this Chinese Proverb: “the best fertiliser is the footsteps of the gardener” (as cited in Mollison, 1988 p. 182), suggesting that the care of the gardener to the soil maintains the care of the soil to the garden.

5.2 Edible Matter

Moving on now to the consumption side of food, Jane Bennett (2010) describes eating as “a series of mutual transformations in which the border between the inside and the outside becomes blurry: my meal both is and is not mine; you both are and are not what you eat” (Bennett, 2010, p. 49).

On an academic and philosophical level, Bennett’s conceptualizing of food as matter interacting with the matter we identify as ourselves. This sense of the oneness of all things on an atomic level and what she espouses ontologically what permaculture does practically through understanding the web-like connections between multiple actants within a system, whether that be the gastrointestinal tract or a block of land. My journey to recovery from my injury involves attention to that which is ingested, due to the inherent properties of edible matter. Ontologically there is a “productive power intrinsic to foodstuff, which enables edible matter to coarsen or refine the imagination or render a disposition more or less liable to resentment, depression, hyperactivity, dull-wittedness, or violence”(Bennett, 201, p. 49)

Natural foods such as kombucha (which I brew myself), salmon, hemp oil, turmeric (taken in conjunction with black pepper), tart cherry extract, and leafy green vegetables from my garden; as well as supplements, particularly magnesium, B6 and B12 were active co-participants in my journey, through their bioflora-enhancing, anti-inflammatory energetic properties. These have been enmeshed in my life since injury along with other practices such as intermittent fasting and my physical training, becoming a body protocols assemblage that I consider somatic practice.

5.3 Regular flat white to takeaway thanks...

My practice uses disposable coffee cups, reconfigured as planter boxes for seedlings and technologically upgraded with pixel LED lights soldered into them. Part of the process of doing this was to comprehend the overall amount of coffee cups I use, and to see this as a consumption and waste iteration cycle. The first task is to limit consumption, and the second is to actively start to reuse all the coffee cups I have purchased, re-tasking them within a system to create greater outputs. Language provides another justification for their use due to the enigmatic language we use to describe coffee, it is a need, a fix, it recharges me. It is addictive and speeds up my productivity, and in a similar way to petroleum globally it is a tangible poster-boy for capitalism in my life. The cups then are recontextualized as performative agents relating to the participants, and through interacting with technology they fraudulently appear to increase the productivity of the plant growth. These objects are important contemporary Western (assumed) necessities. In common parlance we feel like we are continually in need of recharging - 'i need my coffee!', 'where is my charger?', but both are thrown away, or enmeshed in an easily lost/replaced cycle, and they maintain social capital in that these object-situations are easily empathized with by peers. In doing this, I am in some small way replicating the processes that have been demarcated as the push towards to what is generally assumed to be sustainability. My questions around sustainability and renewable technology are again cycling through an approach to the ecological crisis from within the capitalist worldview.

5.4 That's Recyclable! don't throw it in the Rubbish!

I began to develop sculptural assemblages from recycled materials in plaster casts in parallel to my practice. There is food production and preparation process to my sculptural creations through dyeing the plaster with food colouring and turmeric and adding grapefruit and silverbeet



from my garden. I reuse containers previously housing somewhat 'ethical' consumables of organic origin: milk, rice milk, soy milk, and cans of organic beans, into the setting plaster.

My first iterations were relatively unsuccessful, being weak in structure and breaking easily, as well as somewhat bland in appearance. These I just smashed and wove back into future iterations, and by repeating this process, they began to take on a life of their own. Tin cans began rusting, colours began changing as the plaster drew more dye into it, turmeric perfumed some while encapsulated fruit and vegetables began rotting and breeding fruit flies, so that different sculptures took on distinct waste and toxicity aesthetics depending on their inputs.



Finally satisfied with the aesthetic direction of the objects, I needed to feel them as performance participants and so I placed them in the site in preparation for my *Fence Sitting series* (site and performance discussed in detail below). They presented as conscious rubbish in a courtyard site already cluttered with unconscious rubbish and so I began plastering them to the wall for *Fence Sitting 2: Even in Absence I Am*. Positioning was crucial and I matched sculptures with colours already in place on the walls from mould, stagnant water, and remnant paint. I placed certain sculptures beneath drainage pipes to disintegrate somewhat appearing as warty appendages to the wall itself, bubbling boils of rubbish residue. Some sculptures developed plants growing in them, others were lit by pixel LED lights charged by solar power. This sculptural activation of this dank courtyard space foregrounded it as an end point for discarded things by drawing wind into a gyre depositing plastic bags and cigarette packets in its corner. As the light wind-borne objects congregated, they lay over the drain backing up the water and sediment creating a swamp ecosystem, complete with resident mosquitoes.



Chapter 6: Fence Sitting series – Integrations and Iterations

The *Fence Sitting* series of site specific performances are situated in an inner city courtyard framed by high rises, native bush, a fence, and a shipping container background structure. In

this exegesis I will focus primarily on *Fence Sitting 2: Even in Absence I Am* as it integrates elements of my practice developed throughout the year.

6.1 Performance: Fence Sitting 2: Even in Absence I Am

With *Even in Absence I Am* my performance focus was an emboldened animist physicality, vocalizations, participation, musicality, and an earnest emotional and spiritual connection. To this end I began the piece lying down, slowly breathing and feeling my place in the site for about 30 minutes prior to audience arrival. A musical cue from audio collaborator Stephen Riley, who interacted with my visual cues as I with his aural cues, told me it was time to start. With eyes still closed, I curled my body towards a small kawakawa plant as one would embrace a lover upon waking in the morning. I inhaled and tried to breathe in its essence whilst tracing the leaves with my fingers, brushing them against my lips and microphone thus allowing them to aurally respond to me should they choose to. Vocally I sounded out high pitched polyphonic tones by creating a resonating chamber in my mouth, allowing the harmonic frequencies to be heard foregrounding the connectedness between the notes as I move slowly towards verticality. This was “counterposed with the soundscape of crashing scaffold sounds, sporadic chaos stabs and an increasingly heavy atmosphere”(Stephen Riley, personal communication 04 01 2017). I travelled to the fence, opening my eyes incrementally with each step and in an almost sloth-like manner I began to climb up and traverse the fence. This slow tempo meant that fascial tensegrity was required to locomote momentum-free on the terrain of this unconventional apparatus, integrating my strength training and *Anatomy Trains* practice. The slowness also allowed me to make real-time decisions on where to place my foot, hand, knee, elbow or armpit, and to utilize *Feldenkrais* principles to move with ease forwards or in retrograde. Audience participant Lisa Greenfield articulated this: “I could see the movements were physical improvisations so I felt like I was participating by almost figuring out physical solutions with you, instead of just being performed at, I was discovering with” (Lisa Greenfield, personal communication. 28 11 2016)

This attention to fascial connections as points of connectedness through the performance was maintained as I came to stillness and looked up over the fence horizon to the audience. After making eye contact with them all one by one, I began to speak.

Thank you....
for your care.....
for being somebody for whom art exists....
in their top 5 things to do on any given.....
day....

When I took a breath to begin a new sentence I moved a body part, as minimal as my eyes, or a whole body shift, then came to stillness again while I quietly and intentionally acknowledge the site, or the sky, or the people watching, before continuing on vocally again.

I ask you in your observance of this to settle in and allow the gentle
intensity of intersectional art in.
Intersectionality of humans building scaffolds for building more buildings
and birds building nests to build more birds.

we must stay wide awake
now in the midst of this art project,
it will take us.....
somewhere.... some...time
it will be slow at points, there might be some drama, it might appeal..
these symbols and their obscure meaning, these things before our eyes - back and forth
photons philosophising

Each particular thought begins, then questions itself, before trying again to explain something.
Audience participant Tejo van Schie commented that this vocal performance mode:

relates to our general inability to talk about climate change, or any new fact, green economics, ice sheets, or methane production with any real certainty, so we are in limbo with lots of conversational beginnings without anywhere to go. (Tejo van Schie, personal communication, 28 11 2016)



There's a quote... I think its a quote or... a misquote...
amissthings are amiss
it is when quoting someone
quoting ghandi..... having the change

being the being having the having, changing the change

i wanna question our ability to participate

in this performance if it would happen without us, or with us...

search the space, what can you learn from the space
from the hidden places what can we see when we look at the details
and..

what do we still see when we look away...

This self-referential reflectivity is amplified by audio distortion, repeat and delay functions of the mixing desk, which adds eerie echoes and soapbox-preacher loudspeaker qualities to speech, giving a sense of knowledge of issues, but few solutions.

Jodi Dean speaks to this when she says: “Those of us who follow the reports of emissions, extreme weather, and failed states enjoy being in the know. We can't do anything about climate change, but this lets us off the hook when we stop trying” (Dean, J. 2016)

As a practitioner confused about their artistic ability and entitlement to properly debate or make a difference to our changing climate I am literally sitting on the fence about it, talking loud and saying nothing. This initiates getting down off the fence, I climb over it and tentatively sidestep along a wall in the manner of a suicidal jumper on a high rise. Then I suggest to the audience I need to hide and take shelter in a large kawakawa bush. With only my lower legs remaining visible it resembles a huge comedic oversized green head with tiny legs, and as I begin throat-singing I begin to morph into what I call a 'humaniflora' creature. By dislocating my face I attempt to deanthropocentrize this performance through anthropomorphizing this kawakawa bush into an animist spirit, a thing to be heard and to be reckoned with. In locating my nature spirit, this section briefly offers a contrasting and less egoic focus to the work, before breaking this by returning to my self-performance and asking this plant if I may ingest some of it.

As I integrate the kawakawa and myself through ingestion I ask for the audience's help and begin sorting out different sized audience members to lower me to the courtyard. From here I engage them in a plant potting ritual similar to *Creating Positive Illusions in the Mind's Eye* whilst musically the soundscape “drops to a void of atmospheric silence, a point to give up or protest what has past” (Stephen Riley, personal communication 04 01 2017).

The audience participation consisted of a diverse group collectively helping me down from the wall, and then a female, a male and a baby, (appropriately named 'pixel' as it so happens) to ritualistically repot the plants into the pixel LED cups. These remained very potent images of hope that we collectively can work together through connectedness and small gestures.

As Braidotti says: “Hope is a sort of “dreaming forward” it is an anticipatory virtue that permeates our lives and activates them. It is a powerful motivating force grounded in our collective imaginings indeed” (Braidotti, 2010, p. 214)



To finish the work, I relied on improvising within the situation to offer an answer, which was eventually facilitated by the all-pervasive sound of an invisible airplane. This was full of noise and presence, and as we all looked up to watch it, it never appeared. After spending some time with this invisible sound, the noise dissipated, leaving only the wind in the ponga fern remaining.

I felt like this iteration was very successful at integrating my particular form of performance modalities. I used the dexterity that I developed through somatic methods such as Anatomy Trains to maintain ease and an unusual movement vocabulary up on top of the fence. At the same time I honoured the theatrical performativity and lightly absurdist humour of direct text address to my audience about the forces at play in the piece, and to a larger extent, in the world. The integration of the elements in this work having been developed over the year allowed this piece to flourish. This is especially true of the audience participation, which began from the very first moment when I looked at each person in turn, allowing each audience member to become a performer. This continued to the final moment when we all became performers and audience at the same time, looking up to the sky together in a silent sensorial perceiving of the space.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as an artistic exploration on multiple fronts, my practice is another iteration of how one lives a life, not a prescription, but a description and a writing back to oneself. My art practice can be seen as a journaling exercise, one in which the updates overwhelmingly develop from previous iterations of my life. However, still the question as to *why should I do it all?* recurs.

Owing to the fact that I can more easily write with reference to a performance, I will address this question through a situated relationship between myself and a sparrow, which joined me in *Fence Sitting 1: Escaping Responsibility*. I ended this piece walking in slow motion carrying a glitter ball in one arm whilst parting the audience in two, when a sparrow flew into my path and sat still and looked up at me. Feeling very much in flow as if this was the most natural occurrence, I lowered my body with each step and eventually reached a hand out to it, it did nothing for a moment and then stepped onto my hand briefly before flying away.

The sparrow had almost certainly hit a window earlier and was probably stunned, and in this way it embodied the struggle of the urban environment and the reaction of the body's system to this. Shock, disarray, and wonder were all present, from the sparrow, myself and the audience. There was also an overt presence and awareness of being a focus, a thing-to-be-looked-at, that the protagonist had shifted away from me to this creature, so that in this one moment, my human ego took a step back to allow the natural world to take centre stage. This connection across species and the nature of performance to allow spontaneous occurrences to create magical moments in the world became realized.

When I question myself as to why make performance at all, confronted with the gravitas of looming environmental collapse, I think about this shared connection between all actors in that moment: my co-performing sparrow, objects infusing the space, the vitality of the wind, my audience participants, and my integrated histories of bodywork, producing and consuming edibles, and healing. In this regard, I wonder if the answer is as simple as Braidotti says:

Against the general lethargy, the rhetoric of selfish genes and possessive individualism on the one hand, and the dominant ideology of the melancholic lament on the other, hope rests with an affirmative ethics of sustainable futures, a deep and careless generosity, the ethics of nonprofit at an ontological level. Why should one pursue this project? For no reason at all. Reason has nothing to do with this. Let's just do it for the hell of it and for love of the world. (Braidotti, 2010, p. 214)

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