Artist with Axes- The making of a resource as a contemporary environmental aesthetic

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A thesis submitted to the School of Creative Arts and Humanities, Faculty of Law, Education, Business and Arts, Charles Darwin University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master of Fine Arts by Research Degree
June 2011
Declaration

"I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts by research of the Charles Darwin University, is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree."

Signed:

Date:
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This exegesis uses the metaphoric portrait of “artists with axes” to depict the artist as both creator and destroyer. As such, my position as an artist is established as residing between and within these societal binary opposites. Using the philosophical trajectory of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I have established a practice which embraces the making process as an event and ongoing resource. This resourcing responds to multiplicity of envisioned Natures and a learning trajectory which includes materials found; materials produced, and an events based practice ‘(n)onsite’, in studio or gallery.

Making a resource as a contemporary environmental aesthetic includes the ecological phenomenon of waste and the relational activity of recycling, the integration of past or present artistic production, and acts of graffiti which mimic or acknowledge processual concepts of environment. I directly respond to ecological thoughts about our environment within my local context, identifying my materials as a milieu relational to environmental conditions and responsive to change.

Focus is given to my learning trajectory of paper/pulp. Using the materiality of paper I am able to explore the interface between the creation/destination binaries, resulting in metaphoric dissolution or flow as each event dictates. As a resource paper is destined to be recycled but also has an association with its original organic properties which equally identifies it with environmental damage. For me, the physicality of paper combines with environmental conditions to express a direct connection with Nature.

Throughout this candidature I have focused on several projects which I will discuss within this exegesis. These include: Names on Trees (NOT Project); an ongoing intervention with taggers of Eucalyptus trees at the Jingili
Watergardens of Darwin, *Temporary Fence Hire (TFH)* an ongoing project using the common temporary fence to consider change within the environment. And be careful how you develop an installation at the Wesleyan Church, George Brown Botanic Gardens. In addition to these events I refer to my past projects such as *Helen’s Wreath* and *LOW* to emphasise the processual context past events have with future project.
INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

Throughout this exegesis I explore a consistent theme given different identities by the various poststructuralist thinkers\(^1\) who have used Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s philosophy. Here ‘machinic thought’, ‘active experimentation’ and ‘ecological thinking’ all seek to expose our subjective understanding and expand our thinking about culture-nature nexus. Using this philosophical framework enables me to reflect on a contemporary artistic practice that grapples with the mythology of sustainability in an inclusive way; neither claiming one right practice nor suggesting solutions to the multiplicity of viewpoints meeting a multiplicity of Nature.

Establishing a dialogue between artist and Nature, I begin this exegesis with the chapter Artist with Axes – a composed chaos. I acknowledge the historical perceptions of a human Nature nexus while confronting the persistent constructs that contain and define Nature into a static manageable entity. Here ‘naming’ Nature is acknowledged as a powerful structural device which establishes how we process and impact upon the natural world. In this chapter I discuss artists who attempt to address a chaotic nature. By thinking complexly about our environment I negate fixed notions and disrupt the existing dichotomies of order/chaos or human/nature. Many of the artists I selected, including John Davis, Gerda Steiner and Jörg Lenzlinger, address Nature through the materiality of artistic practice and the understanding that this resource constitutes a continuous process or participation with Nature.

Within my chapter entitled Naturing Nature, a reflective study is undertaken to explore some of the envisioned Natures that establish our criminological views and are persistently utilised as agents for contemporary thought. Using four theoretical viewpoints: the classical mimetic view, the positivist view, the critical criminology perspective and finally the poststructuralist Naturing or

\(^1\) There are many writers and artists who use and follow poststructuralist philosophy as defined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Significant to this exegesis are the writings of Mark Halsey, Simon O’Sullivan, Elizabeth Grosz, and Gail Hawkins.
becoming Nature position; I creatively develop a perception of Nature out of historical and current cultural acts. Using examples of my past artworks and recent methods, I outline how interdisciplinary thoughts perform within my art making process and how these in turn provide grounding for an environmental aesthetic which is responsive to change and alert to the paradigm of relationality and connectivity.

Different elements within my artistic practice are related in the remaining chapters *The Making of a Resource* and *Producer Product*. *The Making of a Resource* contextualises all my seemingly disparate activities, from studio practice - involving elaborate making processes using the materiality of paper as resource, to relational artworks - responding to observed phenomenon and found objects within my local environment. The importance of local experimentations, which create an environmental aesthetic affective to a becoming Nature, provides a resource for new images of thought. While this chapter relates to a changeable Nature it also highlights the learning trajectories that I undertake as an artist and invite from my local community. These learning trajectories are often timescale based using repeatable observations or experimentations. ‘Resourcing’ is about acknowledging all facets of use within our environment and in so doing admits how we use and relate to Nature. There is a cautionary conclusion to *The Making of a Resource* as learning trajectories risk a shutting down of multiplicities so that our views become fixed and resistant to change.

This challenge is further explored within my final chapter *Producer Product*. One method I use to inject difference within my learning trajectory is to integrate humans and Nature within the one ecological thought. The artist as both creator and destroyer is one and the same essential reality with Nature, the producer-product. Removing the binaries to construct a natural world which is inclusive, requires me to stress certain practices within my artistic processes; namely the ecological phenomenon of waste.
and the relational activity of recycling. These activities impact on the corporeality of ecology and result in labour intensive and timescale related projects. There is both a reuse within my material production and a reuse of artworks - as artefacts of past events and metaphors for states of becoming. Through ecological thinking I accept my existence as a producer of waste – I am a product of waste through my actions, body and thought.

The Appendices includes essays written in direct response to individual projects, providing critical readings of my practical application of envisioned Natures. They reflect the starting point of many continuous thoughts, expanding my personal leaps as I traverse ‘(n)onsite’, studio, gallery and thought. Significantly, these essays place my work within a poetic discourse concerning the problems and wonder of a tangible Nature.
ARTISTS WITH AXES — A COMPOSED CHAOS
ARTISTS WITH AXES – A COMPOSED CHAOS

In The Colonial Earth, Tim Bonyhady refers to ‘artist with axes’. In doing so he references the artistic process of resourcing and restructuring Nature through removal of trees to create a ‘picturesque’ environment for a colonial Australian aesthetic.  

This historical placement of the artist within the environment emphasises the complicated and often complicit involvement artists have with the shaping of our world-view and engagement with Nature. An artist with an axe identifies his or her resource as tangible and malleable to interpretation or manipulation; interpretations of beauty or the picturesque serve justifiable and explainable alterations to the natural environment. As Henri Bergson accounts,

we perceive only that which interests us, is use to us, that to which our senses have, through evolution, been attuned (Grosz 2008 p.6).

The metaphoric portrait of ‘artists with axes’, depicts the artist as both creator and destroyer defining a dual character played out within a greater socio-environmental arena. Artists both order and derange Nature to extract a resource which is “consistent, composed and immanent” (Grosz 2008 p.9). Societal use of binary opposites such as “culture/Nature, men/women, science/opinion, capitalism/communism, ecologically significant/ecologically insignificant” (Halsey 2006 p.35) suggests a preoccupation with order and an optimistic handle on universal structures. This order implies a “discontinuous multiplicity of elements, inert and juxtaposed” (Bergson 1988 p.134) substituting that which is living reality, continuously in flux, constantly becoming or metamorphosing into something else. For Deleuze and Guattari this ‘becoming’ is an immanent process of differences (Deleuze 1994). This disjunction between art and Nature’s living reality and continuous becoming, is a constant and vital struggle to meet the disorder or chaos of Nature; to “detect the form and

2 “Another way in which art might be made to assist nature would be to cut down trees and so disclose to view scenes of beauty which are now hidden from the eye. It is disappointing, to say the least of it, to climb some thousands of feet and find oneself hemmed in by timber. The trees, doubtless, are magnificent, and much to be admired, but the absence of a few here and there would make all the difference between a grand view and none at all.” (Bonyhady 2000 p.208-209)
pattern of its irregular dispersion” (Žižek 1991 p.39), or as Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze 1994) assert, to make it “sensory”.

Art indeed struggles with chaos, but it does so in order to bring forth a vision that illuminates it for an instant, a Sensation... Art is not chaos but a composition of chaos that yields the vision or sensation, so that it constitutes, as Joyce says, a chaossoma, a composed chaos – neither foreseen nor preconceived... Art struggles with chaos but it does so in order to render it sensory (Deleuze 1994 p.204-205)

Deleuze and Guattari define art by “sensations”, “affects” and “intensities”; art does not produce concepts but rather addresses problems, which support and relate to concepts (Grosz 2008 p.1). One of the more pressing problems art faces when addressing concepts of the natural world, lie with the many codes of behaviour which are assigned to different modalities of Nature. Within our societies a multiplicity of thresholds and categories are used to define Nature for economic, social and cultural use.

Artistic practice exists within conditions of environmental regulation, policies and struggles. This is a framework placed alongside the artistic impulse to compose ‘sensations’, ‘affects’ and ‘intensities’ out of Nature. It is a framework which seeks to suspend an ‘immanence of differences’ in favour of a ‘representation’ which conforms to the concept (Halsey 2006 p.58). To walk in the bush today requires you to undertake changes of lexicon from Nature Reserve, to Conservation Area, Remnant Forest to State or National Park (to name but a few). In considering the processes, impacts and ethics of naming Nature we are considering the structural relations of power in society and the significance of this on our relationship to notions of use and resource. In contrast to this, artists are seeking a contemporary environmental aesthetic which assigns value to the immanent processes of a chaotic Nature; that is Nature as multiplicities, flows of matter-energy. (See chapter on Nature (Conley 1997)43

3 “Nature is not the handmaiden for humans, but humans none the less organise it, through their social organisation, though everyday life, that is, primarily through a function of the agency offered by language.” (Conley 1997)43
A Contemporary Environmental Aesthetic that dismantles certainties

...that dismantle the strata in their wake, break through walls of significance, pour out of holes of subjectivity, fell trees in favour of veritable rhizomes, and steer the flows down lines of positive deterritorialisation or creative flight (Deleuze 1987 p.190).

Many artists, including myself, acknowledge environmental concerns as conditional to their material production. Whether through tracking a carbon neutral footprint\(^4\) or practicing Slow Art goals, regulation and organisation of materials require self-imposed constraints and use moments of subjectivity associated with singular experiences to enable materiality to resonate in the metaphoric and allegoric.

As Latin American artist Guillermo Calzadilla states,

...a material is never simply self-evident in its meaning; it is always marked with histories, cultures, and politics that are at once irreducible to and indissociable from the material in question. Any material is going to have the weight of history inscribed in it. The time of the world is there; geologically, geopolitically, there is always an allegorical dimension to materials (McKee and Mansoor 2007 p.44).

Material production is therefore a powerful temporal framing device which demarcates and territorialises problems such as environmental sustainability. The struggle for artists in this context exists in the need to push beyond their territoriality and associationism\(^5\) into an artistic practice which provides ‘positive deterritorialisation’ or ‘creative flight’. However, for many artists their territoriality and habitual associations result in an artistic production which extracts as resource, notions of sustainability which are composed and understood; sustaining a symbolic nature that is regular and rhythmic in process. As Slavoj Žižek forewarns,

...we must learn to accept the real of the ecological crisis in its senseless actuality, without charging it with some message or meaning (Žižek 1991 p.35).

For artists wishing to be environmental, there is often an intellectualised disjunction between ideas and reality.

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\(^4\) I first became aware of artist using carbon neural assessments when I reviewed an artwork by Melissa Hirsch. An assemblage of gardening tools woven out of New Zealand flax, “Hirsch identifies her practice within the paradigm of sustainability and has gained climate neutral status from Climate Friendly, a government accredited Climate Impact Company.” (Pirrie 2007)

Another example is Australia Council for the Arts & Tipping Point Australia offering a Climate related art commission, “on the quality of the idea, the experience of the team and the project’s carbon neutral status...the project offers a framework for exploration of the issues surrounding low carbon and the concept of carbon neutrality.” (Council 2010)

\(^5\) For Bergson associationism relates to a host of perceptions that we collate. These habitual associations are inexplicable and include how recollection remains with the perception
Transfer Station 2 (TS2) (Fig. 1) produced by the Slow Art Collective (SAC)\(^6\) was made using truck loads of e-waste materials collected from two recycling companies in Melbourne and the Moonee Valley City Council Waste Transfer Station. The material extravagance of TS2 allegorised the extravagance of society. The artists did this through intercepting a waste recycling regime. The sheer glut of material production within this project affected both a sensual delight akin to Aladdin’s Cave and a morning after hangover. Installed as an island landscape this ‘new world of e-waste’ represents the problems of consumption and production.

The contemporary fad of “slow” movements, practice a critique of the alienation of the modern world. It is the philosophy of Slow Art to regress time and use. Similar to Adorno’s philosophy on Utopia, at some level Melbourne’s SAC abandons what exists and seeks a standpoint of redemption. I critique SAC’s project TS2, for idealising a Utopian Nature through an artwork framed by the negative dialectic of ‘utopian blink’ - art as the promise of another world; a better future (O’Sullivan 2007 p.55). Once the exhibition is finished the materials are again returned for recycling. Are we left with new thought about our changing world or simply with a melancholic desire for a better one? SAC and their artwork TS2 reveal yet again the problematic discursive of associations and representations of human/Nature nexus.

If Slow Food promotes locally grown produce, organic materials and long Sunday afternoon lunches, Slow Art is the artistic equivalent. Processes are privileged over finished products; materials are sourced from the immediate environment and surroundings. Life and art are both regarded as durational, ephemeral experiences that coalesce over time.(Douglas 2009)
As a group of artists working within an environmentalist agenda, SAC presents contemporary environmental concerns while dreaming of a better future.

The confusion artists’ face with the environmentalist role partly lies in an inescapable inclusion in modern society and partly through the artist identity as distinct from scientist, philosophers, and politician; and within our own artistic paradigm, maker or participant.

Tasmanian sculptor, Marcus Tatton, works in a forest marked for logging; Nature as ‘logging coupe’ or ‘Forest Operation Zone’.

![Image of Marcus Tatton working on sculpture in South West Tasmania.](image1)

**Fig 2**
Marcus Tatton working on sculpture in South West Tasmania. *Creature Being #1*. Image courtesy of artist

![Image of Incendiary Ball, South West Tasmania.](image2)

**Fig 3**
*Incendiary Ball*, South West Tasmania. Image courtesy of artist

In Figure 2 we see Tatton at work as he builds his sculptures on the site of a clear-felled forest in Southern Tasmania. Tatton makes it hard for us to distinguish him
from the stereotypical binaries of people in this habitat. It begs the question, is he a Logger or a Greenie? Does Tatton condone the practice of clear-felling by utilising remains/waste after the logging process; in a sense filling a similar niche to SAC as an artist who recycles industry waste? Or is the integrity and power of the tree, the forest, the logging coupe and eventually the clear-felled site effecting and affecting a transforming Nature through Tatton’s sculptural in memoriam? (Fig. 3) The identity crisis of this artist dismantles the assumed binaries. Tatton’s artworks and his participatory actions create a deterriorialisation of this logging coupe through the process of transformation, both materially and metaphorically.

**The artist’s sense of Nature**

Yet as a participant in the paradigmatic shift away from an earlier version of nature, the artist’s sense of nature was, like everyone else’s, a particular kind of political economy, and with its own kind of ramifications (Graziani 2004 p.60)

Within the Post industrial landscape of the 50s and 60s many artists and art movements emerged to an activist agenda. Axes’ were replaced with bulldozers and placards. Some put away the axe altogether and started planting trees. In 1982 Joseph Beuys orchestrated the planting of 7000 oak trees.

This act was directing humanity towards a “Sun State” in which instinct, ancient lore, mysticism and union with nature [were] integrated (Weintraub 1996 p.183)

The terms Land Art or Environmental Art emerged to encompass a large collection of art practices,

Site-specific sculptural projects that utilise the materials of the environment to create new forms or to adjust our impressions of the panorama; programmes that import new, unnatural objects into the natural setting with similar goals; time-sensitive individual activities in the landscape; collaborative, socially aware interventions.(Kastner 2005 p.12)

The picturesque aesthetic gave way to an environmental consciousness; one which recognised a new ecology that intricately linked humans and Nature.
Regional movements like Art Povera reacted against global trends within the art world in rejection of minimalism and Pop-art (Krauss 2008), hailing a shift not only in the way artists considered their environment but also in their engagement with their community (Christov-Bakargieiev 1999). Fluxus art practice suggested process rather than a finished object as a new goal for artists. Fluxus artist George Bretcht in 1959 named his first solo exhibition Towards Events, announcing a renewed interest in performative concepts and participatory art (Ed. Levine 2008 p.13). Here participatory art invited thoughts and actions through collective and individual experiments.

American artist Robert Smithson captured the junction between the conceptual frames of the artwork made and the mobility of environmental discourse. As a Land or Earthworks artist Smithson’s material production resonates as a still image within art history.

![Spiral Jetty](image)

Fig. 4
*Spiral Jetty* (Smithson 2006)

The ‘problem’ which directs Smithson’s conceptual framework resides within a travel practice which dislocate the traditional sites of artistic production, complicate the authorial function of the artist, violate disciplinary boundaries and obscure the distinctions between the visual and the verbal (Roberts 2000 p.544).

Smithson’s ‘travel practice’ signals to a future environmental aesthetic which dismantles certainty.
about our sense of Nature in time and place. How do we travel - as a tourist or as a local? And in the context of environmental aesthetics are these states one and the same? In a globally determined environment, local sites often provide an opportunity to rethink relationships to the environment while expressing interconnectivity with the rest of the world. Smithson’s creation of the ‘(n)onsite’ (Smithson 1996) is realised by many contemporary artists as effecting a tangible expression of the environmental problem. As a site overlooked or a site of difference, the (n)onsite is often a point of demarcation: a direct history and interface between the people who are, who live within, who cherish, or have forgotten, are using or abusing nature. In this context, the gallery or studio functions as an incubator, acknowledging an off-site orientation which provides distance both physically and metaphorically. These offsite spaces are learning sites but in a different context to the (n)onsite reality. Transferring found resources, naming these resources and renaming them through the process of event or exhibition; (n)onsite and the offsite gallery or studio maintain a connection through use and reuse.

The coalescence of ‘art and Nature’ following on from Land Art and the practice of artists such as Joseph Beuys and Robert Smithson, reveals a continuation of constructed views of Nature while expanding notions of artistic practice. Nature is a consistently extracted resource, composed and immanent. At the same time, Nature is providing deterritorialised zones of uncertainty both in aesthetic value and environmental significance. For contemporary artists, this paradigm shift suggests artistic practices which are investigative: valuing time related activities and ‘becoming’ process. It also requires an acknowledgement of local places as conditional to meaning and the importance of addressing Nature through the materiality of an artistic practice.

Austrian artists Lois & Franziska Weinberger allowing their artistic practice to take the form of an open-ended process of investigation, rather than production for display10 (Fig. 5) (Trevor and Kay 2007 p.4)
Here the natural world is,
...neither mysterious nor veiled; it offers itself to our
cognition, which it sometimes leads astray, only in so far as
superimposition necessarily includes a slight degree of non-
coincidence between the resemblances (Trevor and Kay
2007 p.66).

For Lois & Franziska Weinberger ‘investigation’ is not
about discovering something unknown but rather an
acknowledgement of a present Nature which is disguised
or hidden by our cognitive agendas. Here a critical part of
what characterises ‘becoming’ is the practice of
‘superimposition’ and it’s continual in/out process of
recognition. The implied game or ‘trick of Nature’
referenced within the above quote is a continual process
of deterritorialisation. I identify with this
‘superimposition’ process when envisioning Nature. Not
only do I come to the Northern Territory from another
part of Australia but I frequently visit and use sites around
Darwin which are both familiar and alien to my previous
experience and knowledge. My ‘cognitive agenda’ of
these sites is often the first ‘fixed’ element I consciously
dismantle.

A repertoire of materials
I too am an artist with an axe. I struggle with art as a
sensation of Nature’s living reality and continuous
becoming. Smithson’s art practice eventually saw
dissolution into nature; an entropic process. I take from
Smithson this important asyntactic retreat but seek a
more ecological and material relationship to my
environmental problems. I draw inspiration from the
history and art of Australian John Davis. A conceptual
thinker, Davis’s early practice considered notions of
weight as an inverse of portability.

With portability comes the idea of the gift, the exchange.
For Davis this relates to the artist’s body11 (Fig. 6). From
this point Davis began to exchange small sculptures for
services; an alternative mode of social relations in art;
that implying different methods of exchange. This process

11 Unrolled, 1973 is
“Composed of sixteen
rods in pockets along
a similar length of
canvas... Material
connotations: one
painterly, the other
sculptural; one light,
the other
weighty...compact,
portable nature of the
work... [Allowed]... the
work to be able to
traverse both gallery
and non-gallery
spaces- both inside
and outside.”
(Hurlston 2010 p.116)
established a repertoire of materials; calico, paper, twigs, synthetic bitumen (tar). Davis’ visual language is light and transportable, understood for what they are as well as what they become. Davis’ repertoire provides a relationship between materiality and continuous process.

In 1989 he states,

In reality, I make one work over my life, so that when it’s all finished, there are a number of parts or contributions to an overall piece, each linking to another in some way (Hurlston 2010 p.58).

Swiss artists Gerda Steiner and Jörg Lenzlinger also have a relational practice to their material. Working with a global resource these artists use and collect materials from around the world to employ in their large scale ephemeral installations. Significantly their repertoire of materials is listed to assist with sourcing allegories and metaphors.

Fig 7
Falling Garden. San Stae church on the Canale Grande. 50 International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, 2003(Steiner 2005 p.14)

The installations invite interpretations that are at once experiential and participatory, as past and present are simultaneously discovered. Included in the material list for their installation Falling Garden¹² (Fig. 7) are the exotic (pig’s teeth from Indonesia), misplaced exotic (wild boar quills from a zoo), common (nylon blossoms from
the one-dollar-shop), culturally specific (virility bark from the Caribbean) to the materials found on site (pigeons’ bones found at San Stae). This inventory is reflective of historical and present day constructs of the natural world; from medieval reconstruction of the world since pagan and Roman ruins to present day mediation of nature through symbolic orders.

For medieval scholars, to create a list of artifacts of past civilizations was to find answers to the realities of the universe (Eco 1989 p.8-9). Later, Claude Lévi-Strauss interprets ‘primitive thought’ in La Pensée Sauvage, so that an arranged world was, …according to taxonomy that builds coherent wholes through the techniques of bricolage, reconstructing a form by utilizing the parts of no longer existing forms (Eco 1989 p.9)

Steiner and Lenzlinger make us realise that this thinking is very much part of our contemporary thought processes. By suspending disparate things together Steiner and Lenzlinger make a new work which is transformative in nature. In so doing, hierarchy or the value of any given material is made relative to the artwork itself. Things are reconstructed from parts of ‘no longer existing forms’ but not to emphasis an end point, rather to mark a continuum.

The Steiner and Lenzlinger installation I saw in Melbourne resulted from their time in Australia where the country was in drought and Melbourne experienced strict water restrictions. As a part of their research, they visited Lake Eyre and Melbourne’s Upper Yarra water storage reservoir. Within their 2008 installation/event The Water Hole (Fig. 8) at Melbourne’s Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), many of the materials used grew, morphed and decayed over the period of the exhibition. This fantastic environment resonated with life and became part of an ongoing sense of nature. The re-use of materials such as the brightly coloured crystalline pools of fertiliser held both a corporality of existence and a metaphoric renewal.13 The walking trail established throughout The Water Hole environment lead

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13 Crystals formed from artificial fertiliser urea are used by Steiner and Lenzlinger in most of their installations. The crystals grow and develop during the exhibitions and are then reuse in the future. Crystals also have direct relational use with bodily functions (the human body produces urea as an end product); contributes to use of fossil energy and is used as a supplement in animal feed, cosmetics, glue and chewing gum. (Steiner 2011)
participants to the meeting place at the end of the installation; a Viewing Hut. The all-consuming emersion of the environment is left behind to be viewed at a ‘safe’ distance within a tourist perspective. The final contemplation of The Water Hole was assisted by a cup of bottled water.

There is an obvious environmental message within Steiner and Lenzlinger work and perhaps a new form of environmental aesthetics. The materials they resource direct a way of thinking about our interconnection with Nature.

These artists provide me with an understanding of how a material production can resonate with the immanent processes of a chaotic Nature, as multiplicities and flows of matter-energy. Considering Davis drew my attention to the importance of a repertoire of material as a way of striving for an ecological existence - one which is self perpetuating but sensitive to change. What I understand from Steiner and Lenzlinger is the significance of acknowledging found material in all their histories, uses and associations. I believe that being conscious of materiality and its use, invites new thoughts about our engagement with the natural world.
NATURING NATURE
In order to address concepts of Nature, I relay my encounter with Mark Halsey’s criminological schematic, found in his book *Deleuze and Environmental Damage - Violence of the Text*. As a creative exercise, I expand on an envisioned Nature from a non-art perspective to think beyond normal representation of Nature in Art. To challenge and disrupt systems of knowledge, I affirm new thoughts and trajectories through examples in my art making practice. My practice is an exercise in ‘Machinic’ thought. I take into consideration a multiplicity of envisioned Natures – from the classical mimetic view, the positivist view, the critical criminology perspective and finally the poststructuralist Naturing or becoming Nature position. In my next chapters I will expand on my art making practice by referring to artworks which put in motion a number of affects towards an expansive resource for a contemporary environmental aesthetic.

Significantly, views of Nature vary greatly and have done so since the beginning of humankind. The phrase ‘returning to nature’ provokes the obvious questions: ‘What does nature look like?’ and ‘What is the nature we return to?’ In a time when natural cycles can be made redundant through technological innovation, human interaction with the environment appears to be increasingly defined by the dichotomies between nature and culture, science and politics. Notions of Nature and Naturing (becoming nature) are critical to our definitions of self and our subjective choices as individuals of a global environment. Understanding the Nature/Naturing paradigm allows me to understand my audience/viewer as a practicing artist. It centralises the importance of community engagement with my artwork and places my research at the point of interaction and understanding with our natural environment.

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14 Affect here is understood, via Deleuze-Spinoza, as “the effect a given object or practice has on its beholder, and on its beholders ‘becomings’” (O’Sullivan 2007 p.38)
The mimetic relationship

According to Halsey, the classical view sees Nature as the original, primordial sign – something which can be copied by humans both in the laws it posits and the concepts of the body it holds (Halsey 2006 p.53). There is an order and hierarchy in this perception of Nature. Nature can be read as a method for understanding ourselves. Medieval Christian Europe believed God had bequeathed two books to humankind: the book of scripture and the book of Nature (Mills 1982 p.239). In this way Nature was instructional and intelligible, read not to learn about Nature itself but rather the meaning of life, as God intended.15

The notion of imitation and copy of Nature has an expansive definition when considering the mimetic faculty. For example, biological semantics consider survival mechanisms such as camouflage, while Freudian analysis offers identification and projection though theories on Totem and Taboo (Huyssen 2000 p.66). Michael Taussig’s book Mimesis and Alterity looks at the two mimetic forces which intertwine human nature with imitation,

like produced like, or that effect resembles its cause (Taussig 1993 p.47)

and secondly,

that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed (Taussig 1993 p.52-53)

These principles of ‘copy’ and ‘contact’ are found not only in shamanic magic and mimetic machines - such as the camera, but are also realised in Marxist theory through the notion of ‘commodity fetish’.16 The mimetic discursive of commodity identifies with an objectification of Nature and reductive practices. From landscape paintings which control and create a view, to the collection of specimen or found nature, the act of controlling or taking is about the removal or

15 NOT (Names on Trees) Project takes its title from the book by R. W. Lee entitled Names on Trees, published 1977. In Chapter 1, the writer explains the Latin Middle Ages idea that every creature of the world is a book and a picture which in turn is a mirror of God’s mind. The evolution of this idea develops into the Renaissance and is evident in Shakespeare’s As You Like It. Here, it maintains a sense of medieval metaphor through the lovers’ act of carving the name on the bark of the tree. Nature literally becomes a book on whose pages names can be recorded combined. (see NOT Project in chapter The Making of a Resource and in Appendices)

16 Michael Taussig discusses Sympathetic Magic as described in James George Frazer’s The Golden Bough, 1911. For Taussig this “notion of copy, in magical practice, affecting the original to such a degree that the representation shares in or acquires the properties of the represented” (Taussig 1993 p.47-48)
reconstruction of context. To objectify Nature is also to see it as a given, a discrete entity that is always ‘there’ (Halsey 2006 p.14). Contemporary environmental aesthetics is entangled in notions of ecological sustainability and the assumption that we can arrest the nonhuman, the inorganic, the inert — in short, the so-called ‘natural world’ (Halsey 2006 p.15). These assumptions dismantle the hierarchy between us and them/human against nature; embracing biodiversity principles including low impact on natural environments. However, the desire to create equilibrium between humans and Nature is enabled by the belief that what we seek is an “original” Nature to imitate and guide.

One aspect of my practice which attempts to wrestle with the perceived mimetic force of Nature is my relationship with collecting. I resist the urge to take when on ‘Nature walks’ and this manifests in the making of multiple forms which I call ‘paper cells’ (Fig. 9 & 10). My assemblage of paper cells is as much a collection as it is a repulsion of collecting. My desire to own and objectify Nature is consuming enough to mimic not only the natural object but also the act of desire. In this way the magnetic paper cells are made as a form of propaganda for the environmental notion of ‘leave all untouched’ and are also a promotion of the taking.

The act of amassing Nature, either to display as capital or to use up as resource is exposed in Walter Benjamin’s ‘true collector’ who liberates ‘things from the bondage of utility.’ What is decisive in the act of collecting is,

...that the object be dissociated from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest possible relationship with its equivalents. This is diametric opposite of use, and stands under the curious category of completeness (Krauss 1999 p.38).

When considering this paradigm within the context of environmental aesthetics, utility is related to us and not the full function of the collected natural object i.e. a shell

17 The mimetic capacity found especially in artwork pre 1920, pre Marcel Duchamp’s Readymade, rendered the notion of artistic value as intimately linked with the original. (Roberts 2007 p.2) For an envisioned Nature this included preservation of the environment but for an environment which was idealised, fixed, a mimesis in painted form. Tim Bonyhady gives an example of this in Eugene von Guérard’s painting Tower Hill, 1855. In the 1960s Tower Hill’s preservation involved referencing von Guérard’s painting as a restoration guide. This ‘re-landscaping’ of an over-quarried, over-grazed and generally neglected and abused site reflects a prevalence of a Mimetic view of Nature echoed in a lack of ecological understanding and political will to change.

18 Paper Cells are also referred to as paper concealed rare earth magnets. See chapter “Making of a Resource” for examples of these works in installations such as Temporary Fence Hire (TFH)
from a beach collected and placed on a living room shelf has a commodity value equalled to the other objects on the shelf rather than its role within a marine ecosystem. It is this mimetic relationship with Nature that is characterised in liberal democracy and the laws of Walter Benjamin’s ‘commodity production’.

This structure in which two opposing forms of equivalence can converge in the object-that of exchange and that of “proximity” – is a dialectical condition in which everything within capitalism – every object, every technological process, every social type – is understood as invested with a double valence: negative and positive, like an object and its shadow, or a perception and its after-image (Krauss 1999 p.41).

The Positivist View

The second kind of envisioned Nature can be seen in the positivist viewpoint - as understood in social and psychological theory, in criminology and as influenced by notions of evolution and science. Positivism focuses on the ‘given’, a scientific given based on experience. There are no ideal constructions or metaphysical presuppositions or theories- beyond the elements of the given (Sinha 1963 p.563).

Nature is not distinct from humans as evolutionary biology explains. It follow that if humans and animals are subject to the laws of nature like all other animals then; humans are subject to internal or external factors which determine their behaviour and trajectories. This is Nature as a malevolent force which summons people to do irrational and problematic things. Nature here is a dangerous and uncontrollable force and humans are at its mercy - individuals are predestined to act criminally (Burke 2005 p.9). In criminology the positivist model is characterised as the ‘predestined actor model’ (Burke 2005). It is a condition I explored in an installation held previously to this Master’s Candidature LOW (Left Over
Wreath) in 2008 at the Box Set space of 24 HR Art: Northern Territory Centre for Contemporary Art, Darwin (Fig.11-13). The artwork playfully ‘punctured’ through a large glass window onto the outside walkway and market venue. As such it was exposed to the probability of interference or participation from the general public. As expected, in this busy venue, regular ‘vandalism’ occurred. Not two blocks away, parts of LOW were discovered at a bus stop; fragmented parts of what once was a paper umbilical cord connecting the ‘artwork’ with the outside world. The Nature explored here is the Nature within; the uncontrollable urge to take, to play or to destroy.

LOW raised fundamental issues about what constitutes ‘audience’ participation, and what enticement or constitutions determine a criminal act. Whether considering nature within or external Nature, my art practice uses the ‘possibility’ of action to create events. This encompasses external elements as such as climatic conditions and regenerative natural cycles (see chapter The Making of a Resource for more examples of current practice).

**Nature from a Critical View**

Critical criminology developed in the 1960s as a radical review of power relationships in the making of Laws;
criminal behaviour is related to a social context that is structurally determined by the general allocation of societal resources (Burke 2005 p.173).

The structural relations of power in society, impact on an envisioned Nature in several ways and have a significant relationship to notions of use and resource. A critical Nature is a politically powerful aspiration. It aims to be viewed on an equal footing to class, gender and race as an issue of concern and agent for social change (Wolfe 1991 p.65). However, the totality that is Nature, the sheer complexity and infiltration of it into every element of our lives, does not guarantee its visibility. Nature here is the ‘discursively absent other’ (Halsey 2006 p.54). Both Marxist and Feminist theory expound critical perspectives, identifying the often hidden links between dominant institutions or ruling class interests and concepts of oppression and marginalisation in context of social relations and political economy.

Feminist critical theorists, such as Donna Haraway question representations of Nature through the construct of accounts from science to history. Everything we do and use has a hidden Nature - a reoccurring absent ‘other’ which shapes and influences our conduct in all social contexts (Asdal 2003 p.67). Timothy Morton talks of “hyperobjects” such as Global Warming; a phenomenon so huge its invisibility is embedded in our inability to comprehend them in time and scale (Morton 2010).

In my practice, invisible Nature can be found in the materials I use, such as Rare Earth Magnets. Literally concealed within my ‘paper cell’ this resource exposes my practices as an exploitation of raw minerals such as neodymium, iron and boron. The majority of Rare Earth Magnets are produced by China, news worthy due to China’s 2010 embargo on overseas export. This is a global resource with a devastating local impact according to the New York Times;

Across China, rare earth mines have scarred valleys by stripping topsoil and pumping thousands of gallons of acid into streambeds. The environmental costs are palpable here in Baotou, a smoggy mining and steel city in China’s Inner
Mongolia, where the air this week had an acrid, faintly metallic taste (Bradsher 2010).

All my artworks that utilise Rare Earth Magnets disguise their presence or attempt to absorb them into the organic mechanisms of the installation/graffiti. These artworks reference the substructural use of Nature where both its occurrence and its effects can never be completely represented in one artwork. This is also significant for an understanding of environmental crisis (habitat loss, global warming, species extinction etc.). If Nature were wholly subject to all the structures we make and understand then there would be no natural crisis to speak of (Wolfe 1991 p.89).

**Naturing**

So far I have discussed several ways of envisioning nature using examples of my artworks to emphasise the various interpretations I place on such ideas. The following fourth and final envisioned Nature refers directly to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s work on Ecology and Machinic thought. It considers processes, impacts and ethics of naming Nature and makes a distinction between an ‘object of encounter’ and an ‘object of recognition’.(O'Sullivan 2007 p.1) It is through this notion of encounters that I challenge my world view and disrupt the systems of knowledge comfortably relied upon. Through this disruption comes a sense of affirmation which opens up access to thought.(O'Sullivan 2007 p.1)

During my Masters Candidature there have been two ongoing projects which notably explore a naming of Nature through encounters with ‘trace’ *(Names on Trees)* *NOT Project* identifies a ‘trace’ encounter with unknown taggers and the natural process of growth & re-generation of a pathway of Eucalyptus trees (Fig.14). While *Touch Project* encounter trace elements in the form of discarded bottles and dumped cars on the site of Casuarina’s Mangrove ecosystem and uses these found inorganic materials within the site of the gallery space (Fig.15).
I am attracted to the idea of the ‘cluelike’ and ‘contingent status’ of the art object/event (Rugoff 1997 p.17). This encounter with a ‘trace’ acknowledges a history of prior actions and motivations. My response to these trace elements attempts to go beyond recognition to revelations of how time and natural systems are part of human occupation.

Crimes [...] are nothing less than moments in the expression of power, such that those who are subjected to them are denied their own contribution to the encounter and often to future encounters, are denied their worth, are simultaneously reduced and repressed in one or several ways. Crime [...] is the power to deny others [Nature/trees] their ability to make a difference [regenerate] Henry, S. and Milovanovic, D. (1996), Constitutive Criminology; Beyond Postmodernism, London: Sage (Halsey 2006 p.54)

In Henry and Milovanovic’s definition of crime there is sensitivity to the fluid character of the concept ‘harm’ - who or what is capable of being harmed from one moment to the next. This flow is captured in both NOT Project and Touch Project. Each time they are presented - made into an event or intervened upon - they identify human occupation in order to question the changing state of harm within expansive milieus of environmental sustainability.

Many terms such as ‘Nature’ ‘sustainability’, ‘value’, ‘right’ etc. have been spoken of, imagined and destroyed over time. This coding, decoding and recoding threaten the meaning and value of such language and calls for thinking beyond the current confines and categorised pathways (Halsey 2006 p.2-3).

My artistic practice aims to be expansive with modes of envisioning the Human/Nature nexus to include an environmental aesthetic which is responsive to change and alert to the paradigm of relationality and connectivity. It is here that binaries exist within the one thought. It is here that we can consider what a contemporary environmental aesthetic may look like.
THE MAKING OF A RESOURCE
THE MAKING OF A RESOURCE

The common challenge is to introduce a learning trajectory that actually engenders the local. In other words, the local is not opposed to the universal but instead offers a handle on a collective and individual experiment; it is both a risk and a resource - a milieu (Falguières 2007 p.33).

Patricia Falguières’ essay about Latin American artist Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla contextualises the making of a resource within a local register. This is about making your local familiar and providing a mechanism for both ‘milieus’ and ‘rhythms’ to occur (Deleuze 1987). The value of local for a contemporary environmental aesthetic20 is about the ability to engender local thought and actions though collective and individual experiments. This is not a fixed entity - rather it is about repeatable or reusable condition that invites changing viewpoint and expansive ways to think about our world. It is a resource for ‘new’ images of thought.

Learning trajectory

The notion of learning is directly aligned with the process of meaning. For Deleuze and Guattari this process is an encounter, an event, dynamic in its working towards a real transformative relationship (O'Sullivan 2007 p.1). Meaning is not based on ‘identity thinking’, but rather a “material process, the expression of one force on another” (O'Sullivan 2007 p.21). The creation of a learning trajectory is critical to both my making process and the development of participants and community thought. With this new thought comes the idea that ‘to make’ is ‘to participate’ and that the resulting resource or product is the continuous event of this making process. (See chapter on Producer-Product)

The specifics of my material production can be discussed in at least two interactions; the resource of studio production - particularly the material processes of paper - and my use of found sites or observed phenomenon
within the natural environment. These relationships resource the tangible uses and experiences of materiality in our everyday involvement and through studio experimentation. Both fictionalise the layers they reside in, or allegorise their self-differential conditions. Never in isolation, material productions and their subsequent project productions, are relational as they overlap with each other and to others again to form multiple milieus.

The learning trajectory of Paper/Pulp

All learning is an understanding as well, and understanding requires a sensitivity to ideal destinality (Ed. Patton1996 p.78).

As a resource paper is destined to be recycled but also has an association with its original organic properties which equally identifies it with environmental damage. For me, the physicality of paper combines with environmental conditions to directly connect with Nature though process. Paper’s ‘ideal destinality’ provides an environmental aesthetic which is continually becoming and performative. Paper has multiple transformations which ultimately signal its own organic fragility and eternal state of change.

Paper can be abused, discarded and identified as waste and with this the message or identity it holds becomes transformed. There is also a familiar tactility to paper that allows transformative acts. When we crush a piece of paper we are conscious of its resistance to the act but are equally aware of its transformation from a sheet to a ball. In context of my art practice, paper provides a ‘plane of immanence’ for an environmental aesthetic of ‘becoming’. There are two amorphous stages within the milieu of paper; the dry paper and the wet pulp. Both are unfixed states with the potential to become each other; to become pulp, to become paper. The creative dynamic of pulp is its ‘collaboration’ with environmental conditions and chemical reactions with colour dyes21.
Significantly, the colour used within the paper process is embedded within the ‘wet’ phase, making the colour part of the organic structure rather than applied onto a surface.

The liquidity of paper pulp greatly dependent on the viscosity of the mixing agent (water or water mixed with methyl-cellulose). Paper’s rigidity depends on correct environmental conditions in order to maintain a static structure. In my studio practice the participatory act of pulping provides me with a new ecological thought. This new ecology acknowledges geophysical properties of paper as a material process; the expression of one force on another.

What do I do with the paper/pulp and its eternal interrelation and interaction between properties and habitat? In the studio, pulp is literally placed on a plane (plastic floor sheet/strata). As pulp it resists stratification; slippery and moving, seeking a way out of the plane it has been placed on. Once dry the paper adheres to the plastic and requires force to peel it away. Off the plastic the paper reveals two sides. One side is shiny and slick, reminiscent of its once wet status and reflective like a wet leaf while the other side is saturated and soft, absorbing light and wet air.

The learning trajectory of paper is, by its very nature, one of fluidity. It is a changeable material both physically and conceptually. It can be solid and liquid, hard and soft, wet and dry. It can be folded, crushed and dissolved. It can hold and cover, be dyed and printed on.
Figures 16-20 reveal some of the technical processes used to generate works such as *Temporary Fence Hire (TFH)*, *Sculptural graffiti Projects*, *be careful how you develop* and *Touch Projects*. All these projects incorporate several resources including paper. Paper is used in *TFH* and *Sculptural graffiti Projects* as a cell-like structure which conceals the Rare Earth Magnets but which also acts as a temporary graffiti on the surface of temporary fences and other found structures. Mimicking nature these paper cells invite participation through acts of desire or through the process of taking and collecting. *Temporary Fence Hire* was initially realised within Wood St Gallery Darwin Visual Arts Association (DVAA) in Darwin. (See Appendices for Gallery Essay) Since then the paper cells have been reused on temporary fences around Darwin and have been individualised by a collecting process where people are invited to take from the fence and later provide stories or images of the Paper cell they collected. The decorating and placement of these cells onto temporary fences and the ongoing life of the paper cell in the hands of the collector becomes a form of active participation and “practical memory” (Krauss 1999). My own decoration of the fences attempts dissolution of territories or deterritorialisation. To temporarily graffiti a fence which denies access and signals change, invites individual and community thought about participation in and awareness of, the local environment.

In the installation resource *be careful how you develop* cotton rag paper not only transforms into organic sculptural structures reminiscent of weedy and leafy marine life but also has an engagement or exchange with changing humidity and air quality within the environments it inhabits.

*be careful how you develop* consists of a continually expanding and morphing collection of sculptural forms. This resource was first installed in the Wesleyan Church which is situated within the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens. Darwin’s climatic ‘build-up’ conditions and the unique materiality of the church combined to provide a temporary habitat which changed the
proprieties of paper forms between wet and dry. The precipice of change is an allegory for ecological fragility.

The learning trajectory of found sites or observed phenomenon within our natural environment

Environmental monitoring is a method of obtaining familiarity with a site and its ecology. To observe over a season creates a different learning trajectory to one which takes place over a year or a lifetime. With familiarity comes a certain kind of knowledge which invites further exploration and experimentation. Throughout this whole process decisions are being made about appropriate use and care of the site.

The use of repeatable observations or experimentations to deepen understanding and familiarity is an important process for my art practice and engagement with the environment. The learning trajectory of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical ‘Refrain’ is present in all my collective and individual experiments on the various (n)onsites I have used around Darwin. This philosophical Refrain suggests a kind of ‘production of territory’ or ‘resourcing’ which creates both Milieus and rhythms; “Territory is the product of a territorialisation of milieus and rhythms” (Deleuze 1987 p.314). While deteritorialisation removes both function and origin to be free of “place, purpose, rhythm and force” (Grosz 2008 p.53). Making something ‘my own’ involves divorcing and embracing it from its origins to generate a territory. To make a new ‘image of thought’ from this territorialisation involves a struggle to release in order to create new sensations, new images of thought.

My ongoing projects such as Temporary Fence Hire and Sculptural graffiti Projects engage in several images of thought including the notion of reclaiming sites deemed inaccessible through the barrier of the fence and the thought of a temporary graffiti which is at one given time, a gift, marker on the environment and a thought in its own right. There is a sense of Deleuze and Guattari’s

22 These sites include a number of temporary Fences erected on ovals, street corners and construction sites. They also include Casuarina Coastal Reserve- particularly along the perimeter of Charles Darwin University and the Rapid Creek/Nightcliff foreshore.
“transcoding or transduction” (Deleuze 1987 p.313) as one resource is absorbed or constituted into the other.

For graffiti to be temporary (an important aesthetic dimension for a ‘becoming’ processes) I used rare earth magnets which are embedded within small paper cells. These paper cells hold an organic identity; their singularities work as one to complete an image or make a new bigger sense of self. Not unlike the butterflies’ camouflage instinct, these paper pieces link together to form a new image of self, one which is part of a greater whole. They exist to colonise, expanding into the Casuarina Coastal Reserve and occupied sites within the Mangroves alongside Charles Darwin University. This is a place of abandoned cars, fishing, crock traps and long-grass camp; as an occupant and temporary graffiti artist I also claim my place as user of these mangroves. Several bodies of work have been instigated through re-looking at seemingly abandoned sites or obvious evidence of human/nature activity which questions the notion of returning to nature (See Appendices and Image Appendices for Touch Project, and Sculptural graffiti Projects including Metal Detection Walking Trail and Abandoned Cars in the Mangrove).

Touch Projects uses fragmented metal remains and discarded bottles found within the mangrove to create installations and assemblages which follow the aesthetic of the discarded and reclaimed. Touch Projects draws attention to the moment of contact between found pieces of metal, plastic, paper and magnets.

A tactic or handle on collective and individual experiments

Experiments are traditionally conducted within the realm of science providing a consistent method for ‘pattern, measurement, ratio or formula’ (Grosz 2008 p.62). In contrast Art seeks the force and impact of life to enable ‘sensations’. Michel de Certeau makes a distinction between the ‘strategies’ used by institutions and power
structures and the “tactics” used in the everyday life to negotiate strategies (de Certeau 1984). In many ways these tactics are ordinary experiments people consciously or unconsciously engage in. They provide imaginative ways of circumnavigation.

Richard Wentworth in the documentary “After Modernism- the Dilemma of Influence” (Blackwood) observed the street act of puncturing a used polystyrene cup onto a wrought iron fence point and commented on the awareness the coffee drinker has of the softness of the cup and the piercing quality of the fence. This act of litter could be likened to a form of sculptural graffiti. Not because it is an unconscious act of waste mismanagement but because it provides the maker with a profound personal link with his/her environment and creates a statement about function which others may read and instantly understand.24

Many of my works express an interest in participation through a temporary interface with Nature. *Names on Trees (NOT Project)* (See Appendices for Essay) is an ongoing observation and experiment with local taggers of Eucalyptus trees. By attaching a temporary lighting system to trees which have been previously tagged, I illuminate the act of tagging for a general public who might otherwise walk by. This intervention is framed within timescales; the indefinite time of my intervention, the time related to the events of tagging and the timescale of regeneration - as the trees over time shed their bark and provides a ‘clean’ surface on which to graffiti again.

There is also a need for the individual experience within this project. Allora & Calzadilla appreciate that for each person to obtain a handle on the event:

> the event is grasped from the standpoint of each person’s experience of it, never in an overview that might claim to tell the truth or expose their illusions (Falguières 2007 p.33).
Within every resource there is a risk

The risk with a local resource is the shutting down of multiplicities which are universal. Hyperobjects, such as the multiplicity of global warming, are globally recognised problems with a timescale beyond local imaginings. This risk challenges the artist to compose within the continuum; allowing endpoints which trigger new beginnings but significantly enabling these to exist within bigger systems over time and space. Here ‘rhythm’ describes the event/exhibition; the in-between of different milieus. Rhythm acknowledges multiplicity innate in the existence of environmental milieus and distinguishes difference while moving from one milieu to another. Rhythm acknowledges the “mesh” in which all life forms and dimensions of life are entangled (Morton 2010). Rhythm is a critical concept for a contemporary environmental aesthetic as it disrupts a notion of progression which is necessarily fixed to an end point. This notion of progression often determines how we view and qualify the natural world. Progression has a reductive quality as it establishes binaries and hierarchies such as old/new, before/after. This in turn places problematic values on experiences and events within a continuous system.

![Image of Helen's Wreath](image)

**Fig.21**  
*Helen's Wreath, 2008 DVAA Wood St Gallery, Darwin*

One method I use to negate progression is the practice of reuse. Reuse in my material production and reuse of artworks in their state of becoming. This is not about
touring shows but rather an engagement with the changing state of the artwork through multiple events; the artwork’s history; its relationship to space, place and time and its interaction with environment and participants in the event.

Fig. 22
Helen’s Wreath, (Detail) 2008, DVAA Wood St Gallery, Darwin

The material production and project production of my Memorial Wreaths and be careful how you develop events (Fig. 21-24), focus on the making and reuse of both matter and thought. Memorial Wreaths are paper forms inspired by Balinese wreaths and roadside memorials. I originally made these artworks in 2007 for an outdoor ephemeral exhibition. Their varying degrees of deterioration were then used as a purpose for restoration, to experiment with notions of rhythm within the refrain. “Drying up, death, intrusion have rhythm” (Deleuze 1987 p.313).

In their next ‘life’ the ‘transcoded’ wreaths were included in an installation called Helen’s Wreath (Fig. 21-22), made after the 2008 Cyclone Helen which hit Darwin earlier that year. Using an uprooted tree to signal cyclonic force, wreaths were placed within the active expansion of the root system.

In 2010 two of the Wreaths were ‘remade’ and used again within the greater installation of be careful how you develop, 2010 at the Wesleyan Church, George Brown Botanic Gardens, Darwin (See Appendices for images and essay related to this installation)(Fig 24).

In all these artworks there is an underlying need to form a
relationship with my participating audience. This is particular to my status as an artist and my presence as a local of Darwin, Northern Territory. Darwin is a small community compared to my hometown Melbourne. There is less anonymity here than a big city, which in turn allows more opportunities to explore and observe local thoughts within place and time.

Many of my artworks invite a gathering of knowledge over place and time, both for me and for the visiting public. In this way, I encourage an ecological perspective which recognises human interaction with nature. My next chapter *Producer-Product* explores further this ecological thought as an expression of contemporary environmental aesthetics.
we make no distinction between man and nature: the human essence of nature and the natural essence of man become one within nature in the form of production or industry...man and nature are not like two opposite terms confronting each other—not even in the sense of bipolar opposites within a relationship of causation, ideation, or expression (cause and effect, subject and object, etc.); rather they are one and the same essential reality, the producer-product (Anti-Oedipus 4-5).

From Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘essential reality’, the notion of producer-product encourages my integrated thoughts about humankind and Nature. This united reality has the ability to consume or use in an intertwined relationship - we are the product of each other or we are one product of one essential reality or experience. To relate the producer-product reality within a contemporary environmental aesthetic is to associate the human nature nexus as part of a greater ecological thought.

This part of the research shifts from one socially constructed notion to another - Nature to Ecology. In this reading ‘ecology’ refers not to the classification of species but to the “interrelation and interaction between and within species and the diverse biochemical and geophysical properties of their habitat” (Conley 1997 p.42). Thinking ecologically provides an inclusion of humans in the definition of Nature by decentring the human subject as ‘operator’ of the world. The relational aspect of nature and culture is then defined within the confines of producer-product as a mutually dependent sphere. Timothy Morton take this one step further to insist on an object oriented ontology where ecological thinking has no place for Nature (Morton 2010). Nature is too enmeshed in our desire for it to be operational²⁵.

In this chapter I examine the ecological phenomenon of waste and the relational activity of recycling. I tell how these activities impact on the corporeality of ecology and result in certain method of production within my artistic
practice. This is labour intensive and timescale related, to include the notion of hyperobjects as an aesthetic element - particularly in relation to waste.

Waste not, want not

Waste is a flexible category grounded in social relations (Hawkins 2006 p.ix Preface)

Objects are owned and have purpose for a time. The ones we eventually call waste have seemingly outlived their function and purpose and are continually discarded in a quest for order. My artistic exploration of the found object has a deep seated belief that the point of discard reveals our knowledge of the object. We are unconsciously aware of the object’s materiality and its changing status as it moves from one purpose to another, one environment to another, one meaning to another. Waste is “both a provocation to action and itself a result of that action” (Hawkins 2006 p.4-5).

Rosalind Krauss when writing about Georges Bataille’s belief in a repleted aesthetic ecosystem stated, “If nothing can be added, then something must be destroyed” (Krauss 2008 p.130). This suggests that a limit can be reached when considering production and consumption so that something is inevitably squandered.

Following this trajectory, waste is part of a bigger system including the problematisation of waste within an environmental agenda. Why we own, use and reuse within our lives is intricately linked with how we interact as a society and culture26. Ecologically we relate equally to our environment through the absence and presence of waste. This “active experimentation”27 (Hawkins 2006 p.7) interconnects waste and alerts us to the importance of the “everyday actions of cultivating a self”28 (Hawkins 2006 p.7). Active experimentation implies a constantly changing state which requires our interaction and consideration. It reflects a natural living reality, an act of ‘continuous becoming’.

26 Hawkins relates William Connolly’s writings in ‘Why I am Not a Secularist’. Here Connolly states, “Micropolitics and relational self-artistry shuffle back and forth among intensities, feelings, images, smells, and concepts, modifying some of them and the relays connecting them, opening up, thereby, the possibility of new thinking and alternations of sensibility.” (Hawkins 2006 p.7)

27 ‘Active experimentation’ is a term used by Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet in discussion of “Many Politics” in Dialogues II (Hawkins 2006 p.18).

28 Hawkins identifies “styles of waste disposal” as being analogous to styles of self; “in managing waste we constitute an ethos and a sensibility.” (Hawkins 2006 p.15)
Ian Buchanan’s interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari critiques their philosophical premise of ‘becoming’ as another way of understanding ‘desire’ (Buchanan 2000 p.15). Without desire there would be no becoming. As consumers we identify with an object of desire and what we do with this, once it is spent, is as much the object’s origin as it is its destination. It is my desire to consider and enact an ‘active experimentation’ of waste. I desire to make new artworks from old material, reinvest old work with new material (such as Rare Earth Magnets) and participate (like the rest of Darwin’s community) in thoughts around the presence and absence of waste. I am a producer of waste but also a product of waste.

The art of waste

Artist Joseph Kosuth’s theoretical alternative to modernism’s “art-in-general” expanded the physical object into the conceptual condition of language (Krauss 1999 p.10). This conceptual art negated artistic autonomy and provided the option for art objects to take any form necessary. Artworks now use any material, including the site or place itself, in order to shift the general to the specific, the universal to the local or national. For Krauss this artform “implode[s] the idea of an aesthetic medium and turns everything equally into a readymade that collapses the difference between the aesthetic and the commodified” (Krauss 1999 p.20).

This places the trajectory of waste not only within its familial commodified relations but more importantly within the ‘collapse of difference’ for an aesthetised Nature. The aesthetics of beauty and the pristine are fleeting within this thought and are equal to notions of waste. It is perhaps within this thought, that waste as a hyperobject, can be addressed as art.

My artistic production includes the found, the made and the recycled so that both producer and product are collapsed into a continual cycle of waste and renewal.
Embracing both the beautiful and unsightly as one and the same ecological thought, allows a process which is inherently connective in character. This recalls the origins of the found object while emphasising the condition of becoming - the found object becomes the made object through the process of recycle; the made object becomes the found object through reuse. ‘Becoming waste’ is not only an ecological process but a description of my material practice both as a consumer and maker. Becoming waste suggests that no matter how precious an ecological thought may be, at any one time it is depleted and renewed with another image of self.

**The use and reuse of Rare Earth Magnets**

Rare Earth Magnets allow me to recycle artworks for the process of attachment and removal. They provide an access point to my own ecological process as it meets and engages with other ecologies. Nothing is permanent where magnets are involved, as even the magnets require a protective coating to prevent shattering and oxidation (Magnets 2011). This is consciously reinforced by my covering of the magnets with paper.

The ongoing use of magnets has directly connected my artwork with a consumer demand and a material associated with future green production. The rare earth elements are,

used extensively across ‘green’ products, from the rechargeable batteries used in electronic vehicles, to the magnets used in the electric motors for wind turbines, tidal power platforms and hydro power generators. Demand for these products has been increasing steadily for years, as an environmentally conscious consumer base demand more and more green solutions. As demand for the products themselves increased, so too did the demand for the raw materials used in their production, and thus broadly speaking, REE’s are being increasingly supported by growth in this sector. (Investors 2010)

When I use Rare Earth Magnets a kind of ‘production of territory’ or ‘justification of use’ is continued through
considering how these materials were found and resourced and their interconnection with future notions of sustainability. In many ways the magnets provide a virtual reality, a positive future for a new ‘green’ world. Making the magnets my own language, involves generating a new ‘image of thought’. Stories of how they were obtained, their material production and the ongoing use as a ‘substructural form of wonder’, (magnets present a magical invisible force) provides me with a culture building activity through ritual and use.

This ecological analysis of Rare Earth Magnets is indicative of all the materials I use in my art practice. Every resource, from the found as an observation or object/site of intervention (names on trees, abandoned cars in the mangroves, plastic bottle), to the readymade (temporary fences) and the recycled (wreaths), tells of my localised experiments. These experiments are part of a greater ecology, related within the contemporary environmental aesthetic of ‘collapsed difference’ and played out as ritual.

**The corporeality of ecology**

My materiality and my artworks are tangible entities perceived through touch as substantially real. Their corporeality reflects an ecology which interrelates and interacts with each element through a relational process of making, thinking and becoming. I develop a new ‘image of thought’ which allows the artwork to become more than representation of environmental sustainability. Here a virtual reality of actualised, rather than realised, processes needs to occur. This reality, as for many environmental artworks, is about an “ontology of process” (O’Sullivan 2007 p.103) a possible eventuality or actualisation which resides in the virtual. To quote Deleuze from ‘Difference and Repetition’ via O’ Sullivan,

...the virtual possesses the reality of a task to be performed or a problem to be solved. It is the problem which orientates, conditions and engenders solutions, but these do not resemble the conditions of the problem (O'Sullivan 2007 p.103).
My 2010 installation, *be careful how you develop*, at the Wesleyan Church, George Brown Botanic Garden (See Appendices for images and essay related to this installation), was made while thinking about the environmental problems of water and the ocean underworld. A collection of sculptural attachments were made to cling to the interior of the church using magnets or other hanging devices suggestive of fishing trawlers or meat hooks. The problematic environmental concerns considered an unseen marine ecology, a benthic community that no one is aware of. Made from paper, *be careful how you develop* (Fig 25-27) experienced changing climatic conditions while exhibited within the Church. Unstable humidity and extreme heat had a palpable impact on the structural makeup of the individual forms. Wind from the overhead fans moved the artworks which created new associations and sculptural entanglements. The artworks underwent a transformation while at the Church and returned to my studio affected by the experience.

I responded to the changes unfolding within the installation. I assessed the atmosphere and its impact on events. I gauged why and at what point elements needed saving from the extreme conditions. When I thought intervention was necessary I deliberated over its impact and necessity. I constantly struggled with my part in what had become a ‘real and experienced corporeal ecology’. In the virtual realm of the installation I became an ‘environmental decision maker’.

I will exhibit *be careful how you develop* again. Changed by previous experience the installation will include a ‘new’ body of artworks whose corporeality has been affected by previous eventualities or “creative acts” (O'Sullivan 2007 p.103).

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30 Sylvia Earle in 2009 told us that, “Still less than 5% of the ocean has been seen, less than 5% of the ocean has been mapped with the same detail we have mapped Mars or Jupiter or the land part of our planet” (Institute 2009).
Abandoned cars, discarded bottles and labour

The annual ‘Clean-up Australia Day’ invites Darwin communities into unfamiliar zones within their local environment. Debris often accumulates where Nature puts it. Apart from dumping sites, tactically or strategically assigned\(^{31}\), the locations for ‘Clean-ups’ are ‘organised’ by wind, rain, tidal flows and other environmental conditions. From the point of discard, objects evolve into new ecological system: into hyperobjects massively distributed in space and time\(^{32}\).

To ‘clean-up’ our environment is not simply an act of beautification, but a bid to do something about saving our environment. To muck into the mangroves to pick up plastic bottles, fishing nets and plastic bags, is to halt the movement of waste once it has left our hands becoming part of another ecological process.

The labour involved in clean-ups is time consuming and constant. Rarely do we practice cleaning up ‘other peoples’ waste outside of community organised activities. There is a strong negative association with completing someone else’s task and as such denying the ‘owner’ of the rubbish a learning experience.

*Touch Projects* provide me with an opportunity to clean up within a creative process of making, rather than completing. For me, thinking ecologically provides an opportunity to embrace rubbish as my own. This is not because it is manufactured and distributed by humans but because it belongs to my artwork. My artwork is embraced by an evolving ecology which is part of a local experience and part of nature as producer-product.

Along the University path which skirts the mangroves there is a place that I have dubbed the ‘bottle graveyard’ - a place bottles come to die. Here hundreds of plastic bottles sit on the mangrove floor. Only once, in the aftermath of 2011 Cyclone Carlos’ flooding, did I see the bottles change place. Their slow decay is marked by their being dyed orange from the mangrove mud. Introducing these bottles into my *Touch Projects* allow my artwork to participate in a clean-up cycle. I collect

\(^{31}\) The dumping sites of most interest to me during this Master’s candidature have been the Mangrove Abandoned Cars site – an engaging place hidden from public view and therefore operating in an unofficial tactical way- and the Nightcliff beach which has a historical dumping site of World War II refuse. Only recently after many years absent have interpretive signs about this history, been replaced.

\(^{32}\) In this context ‘waste’ is identified as a hyperobject associated with global consequences and timescales beyond our lifetimes. (Morton 2010)
the bottles, use them and envision disposing them thoughtfully. There are always more to collect from the mangroves and the labour involved in the process of assemblage makes Touch Projects an ecological method.

**Labour as an ecological method for an artist with an axe**

As Falguières identifies, quoting from William James’, “A Pluralistic Universe”

What really exists is not things made, but things in the making (Falguières 2007 p.34-35)

‘Things in the making’ rather than ‘things made’ is an emphasis in a contemporary environmental aesthetic and a definition of practice for my “artists with axes”. Process, the importance of time related activities and labour, invite experimentation and opportunities for local accents to occur. Labour within my artistic practice is an expansive process. Included within this methodology are actions of collection, repeating visits to local sites, and time related activities of making and remaking paper artforms. To create and destroy is to recover.

Labour is most significantly felt when affiliated with recovery. The shifting and contingent meaning of ‘recovery’ and/or ‘restoration’ when contextualised within sustainable ecologies relate to economies of labour. The time taken to collect all the bottles from the mangrove floor reflects a desire to ‘improve’ this ecology regardless of whether the reality is achievable. Drawing from this obvious environmental problem means embedding the ‘act of recovery’ within my practice. This is done not just through onsite labour but also within my studio and gallery practice as I make and remake paper forms.

Intensive labour, like waste itself, reflects the intertwined relationship of ecological thinking and producer-product. This is a labour of real time and requires my bodily participation. The duration of making
can also be contrasted with the fragility of my paper artwork. Although it may take a long time to make, it does not become eternal and durable. Labour creates and destroys as one essential reality, one producer-product.
CONCLUSION
CONCLUSION

Throughout this exegesis I have examined the relationship of ‘resource’ to notions of a contemporary environmental aesthetics. Over the last two years I have researched many envisioned Natures. This in turn has directed my making process to develop creative problems which have been realised through exhibition or intervention.

Thinking my art into contemporary environmental problems has required me to dismantle certainties about how the environment works and collapse differences in terms of the traditional social and cultural hierarchies placed on Nature. In doing this I have been able to diversely explore through my art practice many different Natures, identifying the contradictions and ambiguities which make up an artistic practice which is conditional on the constructed world in which we live.

Through the practice of new thoughts, questioning assumed knowledge and engaging with new visions, I have engendered my art practice within a local environmental discourse. Discovering (n)onsites or sites that are ‘unseen’ in terms of traditional environmental values, I have made artworks which address the changing states of our local environment. In addition to this I have developed a studio practice which includes corporeality of nature and its ephemeral condition through acknowledging the material qualities of my resource, seeking acts of recovery or restoration for artwork or simply identifying a ritual of reuse and its connection to waste.

Artworks included in my final exhibition for this Master’s candidature are Touch Projects|Thales’ Touch and be careful how you develop. In addition to these exhibited works I will invite people to walk within the mangroves to visit one of the many sites I have used and to witness an act of sculptural graffiti as I place my paper cells onto an
abandoned car. Quoting the final paragraph of Simon O’Sullivan’s book “Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari”

Our practice is always one of ritual. We intend a performance that will allow those who dare participate to move from work time (utility) into sacred time (play). Our practice affirms transformation... (O’Sullivan 2007 p.175).
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## APPENDICES

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**Adaptation 2010**

(Exhibition with Talitha Kennedy, Wood St Gallery, Darwin Visual Arts Association DVAA, Darwin, Northern Territory, March 2010)

Exhibition Essay for installation

**Temporary Fence Hire (TFH)**

All around us are Temporary Fences. They are time capsules within neighbourhoods staging moments of recovery, change and sometimes tragedy. If we look for these markers on our landscape we can see *becoming* places in a state of flux. Once the fence is removed the identity of the site is static and unassuming, revealing little of the drama it once held.

Temporary fences are often decorated. Obvious imperatives to protect and warn us from danger inside the fence, they are often seen with aging fluorescent ribbons, signalling what lies beyond and reinforcing the instruction the fence has already implied. On other occasions the fence might act as a site of memorial. Temporary Fences assembled after a fatality, may have flowers, messages and cards attached to the outer surface of the fence to remember loved ones lost at the accident site.

When things are attached to a temporary fence they also become temporary. Their existence is captured on the surface of this *temporal time capsule* and becomes one with the fence itself. Their former identity is also dissolved within the tension of the wire, its properties as a grid and its relationship with notions of inside and outside. These temporary public marks or graffiti provide statements about function that others may read and instantly understand.

In Temporary Fence Hire (TFH) the temporary fence is adapted into the Gallery. This is Gallery as time capsule;
site of becoming. Attention is given to the outside of TFH as small paper cells are attached with magnetic force. This is sculpture graffiti where element by element, bit by bit the work grows in space and time; my time as maker and artist from the assemblage of the paper cells to the labour of attachment.

Rare Earth magnetism is strong; it attracts and repels with great force - this is the material embedded within my paper cells. These cell-like elements express the organic as an assemblage of small pieces stacked, layered and placed growing gradually piece by piece.

Mimicking a natural process they grow along the fence, reaching between the gaps; opportunistic, constrained by their physiology and limited by their substructure. These paper monads are colonisers seeding out and expanding from the edges. Their singularities work as one to complete an image or make a new bigger sense of self. Not unlike the butterflies’ camouflage instinct, these paper pieces link together to form a new image of self, one which is part of a greater whole.

The process of making the singular paper piece includes an unorthodox printing philosophy. The image should always be expansive; the notion of Editioning dissolves into the multiplicity of fragmentation. This is not about one final image been reproduced but about how that image can expand and grow after the die has been cast (the lino-cut or wood stamp has been made).

Amassing a different identity to its origins, threatens the existence of the print’s source material. In this temporal sculpture three images are used, each drawn from moments and events in my time; an image of an overused pathway at Phillip Island, Victoria; Henna wood-stamps collected from Southern India; and a diagrammatical representation of Darwin’s local sea sponge.

This loss of original reference is for me an important act of reclaiming the essence of the thoughts and attractions to the reference. Formal considerations of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ images are dismissed, replaced by an importance of

**Henna wood-stamps** are an ancient cultural tradition for India. In purchasing the stamps on my visit to Southern India, I joined the many thousands of tourists enjoying keepsakes of their time overseas. Using red Chinese calligraphic ink (also purchased on another tourist adventure) I have added to the fence, paper cells printed with images intended for use on skin. Now, in the context of TFN, the images form the skin of the fence and my ‘tourist appropriation’ is temporarily surfaced.

**Darwin’s Sea sponge** is only seen washed up on the shores after a big storm. Like all the ecologies of the ocean its habitat is hidden from our view and as such is often forgotten and more often disregarded by Developers. The sponge as an organic structure is beautiful and mysterious. Its interweaving parts and open grid structure provides a parallel with the temporary fence in TFH.
memory of thought. It is this ‘memory of thought’ which clings to the temporary fence.

In this way the fence becomes the synapses of the memory; a fleeting, personalised tribute to memory in time.

On the inside of TFH all possible subjects become unified. The paper cells undergoes another transformation; barnacles exposed, we see everything. A commonality has been reached. From the inside we look out. A new vision of the world is obtained, one which is outward looking; framed by new shapes and spaces.
**Names on Trees (NOT Project)**

(Ongoing intervention at the Jingili Watergardens, Darwin, Northern Territory)

2009-2011

NOT Project or Names on Trees Project has become an encounter with unknown taggers and the natural process of growth & re-generation of a pathway of Eucalyptus trees. What began in 2009 continues as an ongoing study and night-time intervention. In August 2011 NOT Project will be part of Darwin Festival events. As a result Names on Trees as a project will be accessed through social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook.

Using portable lights which are strapped onto the trees, recent tags are revealed to a general public, who might otherwise walk by.

**NOT Project** is an intervention upon a pathway of trees in order to acknowledge the regenerative powers of nature and the history of the park’s use. **Names on Trees Project** is a participatory act that identifies a tactical relationship between humans and Nature.

As an environmental piece it focuses on tagging as a minority practice, the regenerative gum tree and my actions as the intervener/observer. This focus makes problematic the normative associations of what is considered an offence against society and Nature. It tells of the small and possibly noticed phenomena of tagging and bark regeneration or the act of erasure by the tree’s natural regenerative process. As an artwork it repositions tagging as a domestic norm rather than a criminal act. The designed lighting suggests a picture gallery or the intimacy of a book light. As an observed act of graffiti it explores notions of harm against a nature which is in a state of eternal flow.
All the trees sighted within this project occur near the public pathway which runs through the park. When walking a public path it is the verge that provides the interface for viewing our environment intimately. The act of constructing a contemporary path often strives to allow maximum access with minimal disruption to the environment. It is this site, this interface with the made and the natural which engenders the local to provide both collective and individual experiment - “it is both a risk and a resource- a milieu.” (Falguières, 2007 p.33)

For these reason it is not surprising to find the act of cutting, gouging, chiselling and scratching into trees situated alongside paths. The need to individualise a journey; create a different view, one which is filled with a personalised coda and one which provides a learning trajectory leads to taggers placing their names on trees.

In this project I raise the awareness of the tree cutters/taggers. Assuming the taggers are teenagers their culture and their marking of this familiar space makes for a dynamic place. Their ephemeral marks emphasise the refrain of “territorialisation, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation” of both taggers and trees. The taggers cannot see their names on trees for eternity. The perpetual shedding of bark represents a time span as distinct as European seasons and becomes a defined timeline for the individual. I was here in 2010. The bark peels back to reveal an unblemished surface. The graffiti which signalled past relationships and activities has been removed but the trees and its surface awaits a future of interaction and use.

NOT Project alerted me to the cluelike and contingent status of the art object/event. These encounters with ‘trace’ elements acknowledge a history of actions by and to Nature. Tagging here is a tactic more real that any twitter or facebook message. The tactic facilitates a method of negotiation with our environment enabling the impersonal to become personal, or habitable. NOT Project, in many ways, is a study of tactics within our local
environment. For me a name on trees is a beautiful convergence of human tactics and Natural actions.

Today, within the sphere of consumer economics, strategies and tactics are an interactive relationship (S.F.M.o.M.Art 2008 p.72). Lev Manovich in his essay Art after Web 2.0 reminds us that since the 1980s consumer culture and cultural industries have systematically turned every subculture (particularly youth subcultures) into product (S.F.M.o.M.Art 2008 p.73).

In 2000s the transformation of peoples’ tactics into corporate strategies is further realised within the world of the internet. Web 2.0 companies provide non-professional-content-producers with social media sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Blogger and Youtube. As Manovich states,

What was once ephemeral, transient, untraceable, and invisible has thus become permanent, mappable and viewable. Social media platforms give users unlimited storage and plenty of tools to organise, promote, and broadcast their thoughts, opinions, behaviour, and media to others (S.F.M.o.M.Art 2008 p.74).

The difference for an environmental aesthetic is that people are there locally, actively participating in the real not the virtual. To be present to walk the path require a different relationship to the environment than signing a mass partition for Get Up or Youtube[ing] your mountain walk to a global internet world. The discoveries made in this world can be shared through the web but the engagement with the environment will always need to be real, tactical and thoughtful.


Be careful how you develop 2010

(Installation held at the Wesleyan Church, George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens)

Text written after installation 9-18 October 2010

(The title and part of this text were also used for a singular work that appeared in the 2010 Togart Award.)

Not man as the king of creation, but rather as the being who is in intimate contact with the profound life of all forms or all types of beings, who is responsible for even the stars and animal life, who ceaselessly plugs an organ-machine into an energy-machine, a tree into his body, a breast into his mouth, the sun into his asshole: the eternal custodian of the machines of the universe.

Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, 1994, p. 4

This work is clearly not a political placard. And yet the signifying chain it belongs to encompasses protest, memory and anxiety about our oceans. It also encompasses action, appreciation and pleasure. The theme could be about the breakage and destruction of a world, an underworld and ocean world full of leafy and weedy strata; an ocean world in a church that is no longer a church, an ocean world contained within an architectural structure made completely of metal. Something like the place Peter Carey saw for Oscar and Lucinda;

There were bush-flies inside the church. They did not understand what glass was. There were also three blue-bellied dragon-flies. For one hundred thousand years their progenitors had inhabited that valley without once encountering glass. Suddenly the air was hard where it should be soft. Likewise the tawny hard-shelled water beetle and the hand legged wasp. They
flew against the glass in panic. They had the wrong intelligence to grasp the nature of glass (418)

What is made by us and what exists in Nature are difficult to know and relate. The artworks in this installation of *be careful how you develop* were hung within the metal church to express a becoming nature, always changing, never fully grasped; understood through sensation rather like the hard-shelled beetle understood the glass church.

While the artworks are made elsewhere they are also born of the church into new ecologies.

Inside the Wesleyan Church temperatures reach over 40 degrees despite the fans, eight doorways, 4 windows and giant Rain Trees shading the building outside. Build up weather in Darwin is wet with humidity—something inescapable in a metal church in the botanic gardens.

*Just think what it would have been like for the congregation?*

Inside the church the paper forms are suspended from the metal frames or attached to the metal walls. These artworks are fragile and constantly at the mercy of the elements; if it is too humid the works will become limp and heavy, fall and flatten; if it is too exposed to light they will fade. This artwork’s condition is one of flux. Like Nature it cannot be fixed, explicable and controlled.

For me *be careful how you develop* is a concerned wish for all to consider and reconsider our engagement with marine life. To be mindful of how we progress/develop is to be conscious of the contradiction of such a notion.

During the installation visitors spontaneously told stories

*One visitor told of an experience while snorkelling. When he lifted his head out of the water he took the snorkel out of his mouth. Upon plunging in again without an extended method for breathing there was a disconcerting anxiety; a momentary shock. This story was related during his second visit to the Church. On this day the sun was shining and the Church had an immense temperature*
inside. The temperature combined with the high humidity of the day, to add an impressive weight inside in contrast to the breezy outside.

Another visitor told a story about collecting

During the exhibition time Darwin experience an extreme low tide. This visitor did not reside in Darwin and had a keen interest in visiting the beaches during low tide. The relationship of taking and fossicking was discussed. I suggested that when visiting a beach our instinct is to collect; either randomly or with a specific eye. If we hold off from picking up and endure the ‘loss’ of ownership then a dissolve occurs between the other and self. In a sense we are giving back before we take. He suggested alternatively, that when you go to the beach with the intention of specifically collecting, it is difficult to challenge your motivation. There is no desire to be inclusive; it is a resource - just like a mine.

One of the last visitors to come to the church was a local jewellery maker and her friend. Arriving in car she told me of a small paper cell which she keeps attached to the front window frame. This was a piece collected from 

Temporary Fence Hire installation in early 2010. It was on this occasion that I took the photo of the paper cell and its new owners and place of residence.
**Touch Projects**/Thales’ Touch

(Installation held at the Nan Giese Gallery, Charles Darwin University is part of the ongoing Touch Projects)

Text written to accompany installation 10-27 June 2011

(Touch Project is a developing project expanding both in scale and content. Initial materials used were taken from an abandoned car within the mangrove. This installation uses found discarded bottles also collected from Casuarina Reserve mangroves)

Thales’ Touch

To conceive water, rather than man or god, to be the ‘reality of all things’ (Nietzsche, 1962, p.42) This is the ancient Greek philosopher, Thales of Miletus’ legacy - a philosophy of flows and becomings; never written down but posited to be understood in several ways.

Thales’ touch is a watery one. Everything begins with moisture. It is a necessity for the survival of every organism from bacteria to humpback whale. Every animal’s life begins in a watery seminal fluid (Halsey 2006 p.64).

Today no one is without a water bottle in hand- they are our tool for adaptability. We can survive and go anywhere as long as we carry our water with us. Carrying water negates our becoming-still, from becoming predictable and habitual. We know water to be active and transformative in direct contrast with our human nature that is reactive and imitative. For Thales water is composed of infinitely varied speeds whereas humans are constant (Halsey 2006 p.64).

The mangrove intertidal zone experiences the constant coming and going of water. Over time this has created a wonderland of life and community that accepts the continuous and irregular patterns of change (Groenewald
2010 p.1). Water bottles washed into the mangrove intertidal zone are part of the hyperobjects of waste; objects hugely distributed in time and space (Morton 2010). Discarded by us with intention or by mistake, they are our vessels of life returned to stillness remaining idle; gravestones to our inability to change.

And yet even these vessels of neglect have life. Through decomposition events, water assists in the decay of the bottles making a mockery of our reactive desires to contain, trap, fix and dominate life.

These bottles continue to exist for over 400 years, more at one with their ecology than the original users who hold firm in a belief that they only visit the intertidal zone rather than co-create it.

“We shall be playing the game of coexistence for a very long time” (Morton 2010)


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Temporary Fence Hire, CDU Corner of Lakeside Drive, Charles Darwin University. Detail view
Temporary Fence Hire, CDU Corner of Lakeside Drive, Charles Darwin University. Detail view
be careful how you develop, Wesleyan Church, George Brown Botanic Gardens, October 2010, installation view. Image Fiona Morrison
be careful how you develop, Wesleyan Church, George Brown Botanic Gardens, October 2010, installation view. Image Fiona Morrison
be careful how you develop, Wesleyan Church, George Brown Botanic Gardens, October 2010, detail view. Image Fiona Morrison
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Touch Projects, Studio installation
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Touch Projects, May 2010, Nan Giese Gallery. Image Fiona Morrison
Touch Project, November 2010, Uphere CDU Student exhibition, installation view. Image Fiona Morrison
Touch Project, November 2010, installation including discarded bottles, detail
Touch Project, *Thales Touch* June 2011. Installation including discarded bottles, and dumped shopping trolley
Touch Project, *Thales Touch* June 2011. Installation including discarded bottles, and dumped shopping trolley
Touch Project, *Thales Touch* June 2011. Installation including discarded bottles and paper flow
Touch Project, *Thales Touch* June 2011. Installation including discarded bottles and paper flow
Sculptural graffiti, onsite of the Abandon cars in the Casuarina Reserve mangroves

Sculptural graffiti, onsite of the Abandon cars in the Casuarina Reserve mangroves
Sculptural graffiti, onsite of the Abandon cars in the Casuarina Reserve mangroves
Detail view
Sculptural graffiti, onsite of the Abandon cars in the Casuarina Reserve mangroves
Detail view

Sculptural graffiti, onsite of the Abandon cars in the Casuarina Reserve mangroves
Detail view
Sculptural Graffiti, Nightcliff Beach - Metal Detection Coastal Walking Trail. Following reinforce concrete and WWII discards, 2009
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