

Oceanic Literacy in Contemporary Art:
Communal Effort, Scientific Knowledge and Poetic Intervention

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A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Art History)
Concordia University

April 2018

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

Oceanic Literacy in Contemporary Art: Communal Effort, Scientific Knowledge and Poetic Intervention

As the global population faces unprecedented accelerated environmental devastation, the future becomes increasingly unpredictable, and consequently difficult to visualize. This thesis thus considers how visual artists working in the twenty-first century are producing works that address the environment-in-crisis by proposing alternative paths, and potentially offering clearer and more hopeful visions of the future. While it alludes to several relevant artworks, it focuses on two creative responses to threatened bodies of water: Basia Irland's *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding* (2007-) and Pam Longobardi's *Drifters Project* (2006-). Through an examination of the conditions of visibility and the inter- or transdisciplinary nature of contemporary ecological art practices, this thesis first contextualizes Irland and Longobardi's practices. It also provides new interpretations of their work by theoretically engaging with posthumanism. Interweaving William Cronon and Elizabeth Grosz's accounts of posthumanism, and the writings of Indigenous scholars, namely Daniel Wildcat, Kim Tallbear, Vanessa Watts and Zoe Todd, this thesis considers visual art's capacity to literally and conceptually intercept environmental destruction and climate change. In their attempts to recognize nonhuman agency, both Irland and Longobardi employ anthropomorphic aesthetics that are highlighted in this thesis. Finally, I contend that their most effective and innovative aesthetic strategies for dealing with environmental destruction are found in their roles as listeners.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the ongoing support of my supervisor, Dr. Cynthia Hammond. Her intellectual rigour, coupled with her infinite warmth and kindness, has made my graduate experience all the more positive. I am forever grateful to Cynthia, who continues to be someone I look up to as a scholar, an artist and a person. I would also like to thank Dr. Carmela Cucuzzella, whose feedback on my thesis has been extremely constructive.

Instrumental to the development of my thesis were scholars from Concordia's Art History Department, namely Dr. Johanne Sloan, Dr. Elaine Paterson and Dr. Heather Igloliorte, whose courses all shaped my thesis topic and methodology. I am immensely grateful to Dr. Kristina Huneault and Dr. Igloliorte, whose comments on my thesis proposal provided me with new and important insights. To our Graduate Program Director, Dr. Huneault, thank you for preparing our cohort for the thesis-writing process, providing both motivation and comfort. Thank you to Dina Vescio, Candice Tarnowski and Anna Waclawek for your assistance and resourcefulness.

Writing my thesis also would not have been possible without the support of my family, friends, and colleagues. Thank you to my mother, Nicole, for her endless attentiveness and nurturing encouragement. To my father, Robert, thank you for your constant love and motivation. Your support of my creative curiosities as a child has been integral to my lasting dedication to pursue an artistic profession. Thank you to my sister, Émilie, for your optimism and reassurance. Thank you to my brother, Marc, for the countless laughs. Thank you to my partner, Wesley, for your ceaseless emotional support and for providing endless cups of coffee.

To my dear friend Chloé, thank you for all the uplifting conversations we have had both in person and over the phone. My gratitude also extends to Sherena, who has been generous with her intelligence, advice, and humour. Thank you to the wonderful individuals from my cohort for providing me with endless inspiration, companionship, and for teaching me the importance of being kind to oneself during the thesis research and writing process.

Finally, I would like to thank Basia Irland and Pam Longobardi for having created beautiful and challenging projects. It has been a privilege to write about their artworks, which have been beacons of hope and inspiration in my often overwhelming and unnerving reflections on environmental degradation and climate change.

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INTRODUCTION

Yet how can I be in dialog
 with that with which with whom
 I have no points of similarity
Develop empathy
*and construct patterns of similarity*¹

As the global population faces unprecedented accelerated environmental degradation and climate change, the future becomes increasingly unpredictable, and consequently difficult to visualize. This thesis considers how visual artists are producing work in the twenty-first century that addresses the environment-in-crisis by not only experiencing and reporting it, but also by proposing alternative paths, and perhaps offering clearer and more promising visions of the future. I seek to understand how and why these contemporary ecological artists are, progressively since the turn of the millennium, focused on exploring perspectives that, despite having always existed², remain largely unacknowledged or misunderstood in many Western societies. In the course of my research, as I examined the work of two American artists specifically concerned with water issues, the importance of further engaging with said perspectives, namely those rooted in Indigenous knowledges, became rapidly clear. Though this thesis occasionally alludes to other pertinent artworks, it hones in on two creative responses to threatened bodies of water: Basia Irland's *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding* (2007-) and Pam Longobardi's *Drifters Project* (2006-).

While Irland is devoted to the care of rivers and their ecosystems, and Longobardi to the cleaning of oceans, it is valuable, as my thesis will show, to put these artists in conversation with each other. Born in 1946 in Forth Smith, Arkansas, Irland is currently working as an artist and professor of art and art history at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her recent and ongoing project *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding* is one of many that have stemmed from her lifelong interest in water and ecological issues. It consists of a series of interventions performed globally in which the artist releases book-shaped ice sculptures embedded with native

¹ Helen Harrison and Newton Harrison, "The Seventh Lagoon: The Ring of Fire, The Ring of Water," in *The Book of the Lagoons* (Self-published, 1984), http://174.132.159.222/~hstudio/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/botl_part7.pdf.

² Dr. Kim Tallbear, among other Indigenous scholars, notes that despite the recent upsurge of scholarship concerned with human and nonhuman relationships, a lot of these ideas are long-standing for Indigenous peoples who never forgot the interconnectedness of things. I further address this in Chapter Two.

riparian seeds (fig. 1) into rivers that contribute to the restoration of their watersheds. Longobardi, born in 1958 in Montclair, New Jersey, is currently working as an artist and professor of art at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia. *Drifters Project* is a global artistic initiative led by the artist that involves the removal, accumulation and documentation of oceanic plastic. The found objects are then displayed in photographic and sculptural installations like the one seen in figure 2, which I discuss in Chapter Three. The material outcomes of this project differ from Irland's *Ice Receding/Books* because, while Irland's ice and seed sculptures are ephemeral, Longobardi's installations are characterized by the hyper-permanence and prevalence of plastic. I selected these projects for their overt dedication to improving water quality and care. I chose to examine them, as opposed to works by other artists actively involved in discourses of environmental crises³, for their community-based and interdisciplinary methodologies. Irland and Longobardi both physically intervene in the "natural" environment, attempting to incrementally preserve or remediate aquatic ecosystems. Perhaps more importantly, especially in the context of this thesis, is the transformative power of their projects, which I argue calls for paradigm changes in Western societies, namely for the recognition of nonhuman agency. Irland and Longobardi's overlapping approaches and philosophies provide rich points of departure for fruitful discussions concerning the urgent necessity for ecological art.

This brings me to define "ecological art", or "eco-art". Irland's definition of "eco-art", published in *Keywords for Environmental Studies* (2016), states that ecological artists often consider it their role to:

[...] help raise awareness and create actions about important issues and natural processes; invite participation and devise innovative strategies to engage diverse communities; work directly with others to augment the knowledge associated with particular fields; and produce works which inspire people to reassess the notion of commons.⁴

In the early days of research on this topic, I encountered varying definitions of the term, some more prescriptive than others. Irland's definition, however, largely informed my most recent understanding of it. I have found ecological art to be theoretically, philosophically, methodologically, and geographically far reaching, and in intention, abundant. It is not restricted

³ Examples of other artists engaging with environmental degradation include Edward Burtynsky (b. 1955), Mark Dion (b. 1961), Andy Hughes (b. 1966), Courtney Mattisson (b. 1985), and Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967).

⁴ Basia Irland, "Eco-Art," in *Keywords for Environmental Studies*, ed. Joni Adamson, William A. Gleason, and David N. Pellow (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 61.

to a medium, and usually involves an activist-oriented process that addresses environmental and sustainable issues, from oil spills to cyclical processes, pollution, waterborne diseases, extreme weather, etc. In his introduction to *Art and Ecology Now* (2014), Andrew Brown writes that ecological artists “[...] can engage local communities and garner broad support in ways that science alone can rarely do. They can offer tools for reflection, discussion, awareness an action that lead to new ways of thinking about and of being in the world”.⁵ The impacts some humans have on the earth’s ecosystems, the places in which they live and the other species with whom they share these places with are often attended to in ecological art projects. The process of creation is then naturally as, if not more, important than the end “product”, which may or may not exist only through documentation. These artists are devoted to positive change, and their processes of creation are often embedded with possible solutions to ecological problems of varying scales.⁶ It is then not surprising that ethical considerations are also at the core of this practice. Artists question the traces their materials and processes will leave, or the way in which traveling to create works or attend exhibitions and conferences will increase their carbon footprint. It is along these lines that ecological art is considered in the context of this thesis, essentially as an “art in service to communities and ecosystems”.⁷

“Ecological art” and “environmental art” are sometimes used interchangeably, but it is important to differentiate the two. Environmental art is often used as an umbrella term that encompasses ecological art, but also land art. While land art is often thought of as a precursor to contemporary ecological art, I consciously decided to sidestep this usual genealogy in my examination of recent ecological art practices. “Land art” or “earth art” can be defined as “art that is made directly in the landscape, sculpting the land itself into earthworks or making structures in the landscape using natural materials such as rocks or twigs”.⁸ The genre emerged in the 1960s and 1970s with artists like Robert Smithson (1938-1973) and Richard Long (b.1945). While the connection between land art and contemporary ecological art has been considered by many scholars,⁹ and has even been a prominent focus in Tate Britain’s 2010 *Art*

⁵ Andrew Brown, *Art and Ecology Now* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014), 8.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Land Art,” Tate, accessed February 4, 2018, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/l/land-art>.

⁹ The following publications are among those that examine the relationship between land art and contemporary ecological art: *Landscape into Eco Art: Articulations of Nature Since the '60s* (2018) by Mark Cheetham, *Land and*

and *Environment* Conference,¹⁰ I have chosen to focus on the work of women artists rather concerned with the entwining of environmental and social ecologies. I owe a particular debt to the contributors of *Mapping the Terrain – New Genre Public Art* (1995), namely Lucy Lippard, Mary Jane Jacob, and Suzi Gablik, who provided me with the original impetus for framing the work of Irland and Longobardi in the way that I have in this thesis.

In *The Ethics of Earth Art* (2010), art historian Amanda Boetzkes groups ecological artists and land artists for their shared habit of working outside of the museum, in public, in “nature”. Contending that their work’s relationship to the “natural” world is based on receptivity and thus on ethical concerns, she puts contemporary artists like Irland in conversation with artists like Robert Smithson and Ana Mendieta. However, though they share a habit of intervening directly in the landscape,¹¹ their motives appear to be worlds apart. Intuitively, I initially chose to bypass ecological art’s historical association to land art because while some land artists’ interventions in the landscape were minimal or temporary, others used mechanical earth-moving equipment to create their artworks, which was the case in the construction of Robert Smithson’s quintessential *Spiral Jetty* (1970) shown in figures 3 and 4. Usually achieved without ecological or ethical consideration,¹² land art projects differ from ecological art works in which, as mentioned above, ethics and positive outcomes are vital. I also could not help but liken the land artist’s desire to modify and imprint the land to Western conceptions of human dominion over nature. Considering that environmental destruction is intimately tied to capitalist patriarchal and colonial moments that have and continue to justify the imperative to own, control and destroy “nature”, it is not surprising that contemporary ecological artists would produce work informed by the approaches of feminist and activist artistic practices as opposed to those of land art. In 1995, writer and activist Lucy Lippard contended that since the early seventies, socially experimental art had developed in parallel and thanks to the women’s art movement which emphasized social structures as formal innovation. The women’s art movement had consequently

Environmental Art (2010) by Jeffrey Kastner, and *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (2003) by Suzaan Boettger.

¹⁰ For some of the conference’s contents, see: Nicholas Alfrey, Stephen Daniels, and Joy Sleeman, “To the Ends of the Earth: Art and Environment,” *Tate Papers*, no. 17 (2012).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² While some land artists did cause permanent damage to the landscape, others had a much gentler approach. Ana Mendieta, for instance, has been intimately tied to the land art movement for her “earth body” works, which did not cause environmental damage, even though ecological consideration was not central in her work.

broadened the notion of public art into a nurturing and critical enterprise.¹³

In *Mapping the Terrain – New Genre Public Art*, curator Mary Jane Jacob suggested that art “in public” does not necessarily constitute “public art” based on the book’s new overarching understanding of the genre, which included socially engaged practices. It is not because an artist chooses to step out of the museum or gallery that they are engaging with audiences or public issues. In this regard, commissioned public art, and perhaps earth works too, would essentially consist of “museum exhibitions outside museums”.¹⁴ One of land art’s founders, Robert Smithson, insisted that he perceived the earth as mere “stuff”, and the landscape as coextensive with the gallery.¹⁵ On the other hand, artists like Helen and Newton Harrison, known for having popularized ecological art around the same time, had a different perspective. They claimed that in contrast to land art, their artworks dealt with ecology, ultimately addressing public issues.¹⁶ Let’s consider, for instance, *The Lagoon Cycle* (1974-84), one of their earliest works that was built around seven cycles, and was comprised of maps, handwritten text, a 360-foot-long mural, among other elements like a tank for growing crabs, which is pictured in figure 5. Each cycle is structured around a conversation between two characters, the Lagoon-Maker (Newton Harrison) and the Witness (Helen Harrison).¹⁷ When the two artists visited Sri Lanka, and learned of its threatened lagoon ecology and food crises, the Lagoon-Maker became intrigued by the idea of artificially raising lagoon crabs in a tank to generate greater food source, simultaneously easing civil conflict and related ecological damage. While this began as a written conversation between the Harrisons (fig. 6), experiments in crab aquaculture were in fact carried out.¹⁸

This thesis associates the work of Irland and Longobardi to artists such as the Harrisons and Mierle Laderman Ukeles¹⁹, as opposed to land artists like Robert Smithson, for their similar intentions and approaches to public issues in relation to ecological crises. These are only some of

¹³ Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain - New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, Washington: Bay Press, 1995), 124.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁵ David Raskin, “Jetties and Lagoons,” in *Tracing Cultures : Art History, Criticism, Critical Fiction*, ed. Miwon Kwon (Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994), 145.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁷ Mrill Ingram, “ECOPOLITICS AND AESTHETICS: THE ART OF HELEN MAYER HARRISON AND NEWTON HARRISON,” *The Geographical Review* 103, no. 2 (2013): 262.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Mierle Laderman Ukeles is further discussed in relation to Pam Longobardi’s work in the first chapter.

the examples that make apparent the notion that ecological art often possesses a degree of relationality – with communities and ecosystems – that land art lacks. Additionally, ecological art aligns more fruitfully with socially engaged practices that unfolded in the latter half of the twentieth-century as its methodologies and intents seamlessly allude to what scholars like Suzi Gablik²⁰ called “connective aesthetics”, or what Nicholas Bourriaud theorized as “relational aesthetics”²¹, which will be further discussed in the body of the thesis.

In Chapter One, “Hope and Desire for Change”, I immediately hone in on the contemporary context in which Irland and Longobardi are working, and consider the conditions of visuality that today’s ecological artists must navigate. This section also elaborates on the inter- or transdisciplinary nature of ecological art practices, which is then followed by a detailed outline of the thesis’ two main case studies: Irland’s *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding* and Longobardi’s *Drifters Project*. Here, and throughout the thesis, I engage with these case studies by consulting photographic and video documentation of the works, project descriptions, interviews with the artists, reviews, and texts written by the artists that offer first-hand accounts of their motives and processes. While both projects are discussed individually in the first chapter, I then put them in conversation with each other in order to thematically address some of the thesis’ main concerns, and to highlight the patterns of similarity that point to perhaps larger societal issues, namely humanity’s relationships with nonhuman worlds.

Indeed, I distinguish contemporary ecological art from previous generations of socially-engaged practices by providing new interpretations of Irland and Longobardi’s work by theoretically engaging with posthumanism. My choice to engage with this framework is based on the observation that in many of the case studies I have encountered in my research, ecological artists are decentering the human being by thinking of ways to allow non-human agency to be acknowledged and considered. Whether they are successful in doing so or not, this approach signals the necessity for new paradigms on the local and global scale in an increasingly threatened world. My thesis focuses on visual art’s capacity to literally and conceptually

²⁰ Suzi Gablik, “Connective Aesthetics: Art after Individualism,” in *Mapping the Terrain - New Genre Public Art*, ed. Suzanne Lacy (Seattle, Washington: Bay Press, 1995), 74–87.

²¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique Relationnelle* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 1998).

Also see : Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relation Aesthetics,” *October* 110, no. Fall (2004): 51–79. Claire Bishop more recently challenged Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics and theorized a “relational antagonism”, which is predicated not on social harmony, but on revealing what is repressed in the semblance of this harmony.

intercept environmental destruction, interweaving William Cronon and Elizabeth Grosz's posthumanist accounts, and the writings of Indigenous scholars, namely Daniel Wildcat, Kim Tallbear, Vanessa Watts and Zoe Todd. Chapter Two, "Recognizing Oceanic Agency", critically outlines posthumanist theories, and highlights the importance of noting that such ideas are long-standing in Indigenous epistemologies.²²

As métis scholar Zoe Todd warns, the irony of the framework is that while it brings to light non-human agency, it tends to overlook the voices of marginalized humans. She warns against the current framing of environmental discourses as they often blunt the distinction between those who drive the fossil-fuel economy and those who do not.²³ This is problematic because it does not acknowledge the complex and varied experiences of people in the world, nor environmental degradation as a form of colonial violence. The insight that Indigenous scholars like Todd have given me inevitably informed my methodology, encouraging me to approach theories of posthumanism with caution, and to put work by Indigenous artists in conversation with Irland and Longobardi to further emphasize that many of the ideas present in contemporary ecological art are borrowed from non-Western traditions.²⁴

Finally, Chapter Three, "Ecological Art and the Politics of Listening", examines how it is in their roles as communicators that Irland and Longobardi develop one of their most effective and innovative aesthetic strategies for dealing with environmental degradation. Through the writings of communications theorists Leah Bassel and Andrew Dobson, this thesis considers how artists are strategically facilitating discussions between human and nonhuman worlds.

Bodies of water are complex, and often overlooked sites of cultural and ecological exchange. While this thesis focuses on the work of Irland and Longobardi in relation to current understandings of humanity's relationship with water, it is important to acknowledge that the ancient symbolic rapport between humans and the ocean has changed in the past century. Art historian Abigail Susik notes that the formerly awe-inspiring sublimity of the ocean has now

²² Dr. Heather Igloliorte's postcolonial theory seminar (ARTH 615), and comments on my thesis proposal have been extremely productive and insightful in this regard.

²³ Zoe Todd, "Indigenizing the Anthropocene," in *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, ed. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 244.

²⁴ Inuit Art Quarterly's "Climate" issue offers a rich repertoire of Inuit artists actively engaging with these ideas. It also makes apparent that the urgency of climate change and environmental degradation is long-standing in Inuit communities.

been infiltrated by a new kind of disturbing awareness, one that recognizes that humanity cannot fully escape itself by exploring “alien marine reaches”.²⁵ Though a lot has changed, Susik also contends that some metaphorical associations of the ocean that have prevailed in the past centuries remain firmly in place. For instance, she claims that “[t]he ocean’s tidal force still threatens human life on a terrifying scale, just as its depths continue to harbor myriad scientific mysteries”.²⁶ However, it is also evident that the ocean has begun to submit to the persistent shaping force of the human hand, and this has ultimately shifted common understandings of its semantic identity. The aim of my thesis is not to comprehensively survey how artists have historically explored and engaged with bodies of water,²⁷ but to contribute to such art historical narratives by reflecting on contemporary engagements with water.

²⁵ Abigail Susik, “Convergence Zone: The Aesthetics and Politics of the Ocean in Contemporary Art,” *Drain Magazine* 7, no. 2 (2012), <http://drainmag.com/convergence-zone-the-aesthetics-and-politics-of-the-ocean-in-contemporary-art-and-photography/>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ For an excellent study of evolving oceanic representations in art history, see: Tricia Cusack, *Art and Identity at the Water’s Edge* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012).

CHAPTER ONE

Hope and Desire for Change

Ecological art involves transdisciplinarity, collaboration, and activist-oriented processes. It promotes a shift away from art as commodity in service of communities and ecosystems. Ecological artists are devoted to bringing positive change by inviting participation and developing innovative strategies to engage various communities. Works can be, but are not always, site-specific, and the creative process is often more significant than the end product. My aim in this chapter is to reveal some of the visual conditions with and against which contemporary ecological artists choose to work, and to explore how these choices actively encourage a change in course for many societies today. Further, I discuss how artists are working collaboratively and across disciplines to create “spaces of possibility” in which paths towards transformative change²⁸ can be imagined and forged. My two main case studies, Basia Irland’s *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding* (2007-), and Pamela Longobardi’s *Drifters Project* (2006-), are outlined in the latter part of the chapter.

Conditions of Visuality: Visibility/Invisibility/Hypervisibility

To properly contextualize the works of Irland and Longobardi, it is important to consider the visual culture from which they emerge – from collective imaginaries to the creative practices that shape common perceptions. As the global population faces unprecedented accelerated environmental degradation and climate change, the future becomes increasingly uncertain, and consequently difficult to visualize. Creative practices have long been a vehicle to reflect on present and future states of existence, yet this has come to be a struggle in what has been called the anthropocene. The term refers to the geological era in which human activity²⁹ has been the dominant influence on the climate and the environment.³⁰ With change in climate, shifting seas,

²⁸ While this thesis recognizes the widespread transformative potential of such practices – though the transformative power of an artwork is not something that can be empirically measured – it is important to note that, for now, such practices are often more transformative for specific groups of people. For instance, community members directly engaging with the work of Irland and Longobardi are more likely to be impacted as they become familiar with the processes and intents of the artworks.

²⁹ Many Indigenous scholars (Todd, Tallbear, Wildcat) specify that the activity of *some* humans is having an impact on the planet. Chapter Two addresses the problematic universalization discourses of the Anthropocene perpetuate.

³⁰ “Anthropocene,” Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, accessed April 2, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Anthropocene>.

and the disappearance of innumerable species, art writer and researcher Irmgard Emmelhainz claims these rapid transformations also inevitably “place humanity itself at the brink of extinction”.³¹ This has in turn generated a climate of uncertainty, anxiety and fear that has infiltrated visual culture. Various narratives have emerged from this climate, some cynical, and others attempting to mask the severity of ecological crisis. In some instances, these narratives announce “perpetual crisis and planetary ecological collapse”,³² and instead of exploring potential political, social and paradigmatic changes, they reduce the anthropocene to apocalyptic imagery. Films produced in the past couple of decades – namely Roland Emmerich’s *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and *2012* (2009), as well as Lars von Trier’s *Melancholia* (2011) – have made this especially explicit. For communications scholar Heather Davis, these scenarios are problematic for they promote the logic of finitude, which suggests that there will be a clear and definite end as opposed to a more probable situation of “ongoing devastation” and “mutation”.³³ She argues that it is not by announcing the end of days that we can change the path we are on, and that we ultimately have a responsibility to “account for the slow violence enacted on the poorest in the world as well as other creatures”.³⁴

In the media, environmental degradation and climate change are addressed as very manageable and fixable problems by reporters and politicians who discuss these issues with casualty, or worst, with denial. With the radical change in conditions of visibility of the 20th and 21st century, the severity of environmental degradation has been concealed. Emmelhainz explains that “[h]umanity’s alteration of the biophysical systems of earth has occurred in parallel with the rapid modifications of the receptive fields of the human visual cortex announced by cubism and experimental film”, and importantly, has arisen with an “unprecedented explosion of circulating visibilities, which are actually rendering the outcome of these alterations opaque”.³⁵

³¹ Irmgard Emmelhainz, “Images Do Not Show: The Desire to See in the Anthropocene,” in *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 131.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Heather Davis, “Life & Death in the Anthropocene: A Short History of Plastic,” in *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 353.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 356.

³⁵ Emmelhainz, “Images Do Not Show: The Desire to See in the Anthropocene,” in *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, 134.

The oversaturation of images today renders aspects of the environment-in-crisis invisible. For instance, Emmelhainz explains that the abundant documentation and dissemination of wildlife disconcertingly conceals ongoing patterns of extinction, which in turn lessens the severity of anthropocentric behavior to the general public.³⁶ Denial and ambiguity thus emanate from these images, and invisibility, provoked by hypervisibility, presents ecological artists with a challenge. Irland and Longobardi's projects, discussed in the latter part of this chapter, signal a shift away from the way images are often consumed, by rendering visible repressed and urgent matters. In *Chaos, Territory, Art*, Elizabeth Grosz contends that art does two things: art can make visible and art can make intense. Art extracts from chaos to slow down and create a territory that is "capable of undergoing a reshaping".³⁷ To apply this idea to the specific case of ecological art, art can make visible concealed environmental realities. If images are understood as a form of knowledge, they can help understand planetary crises, facilitating the envisioning of possible solutions and outcomes.

Artistic Research and Transdisciplinarity

To visualize, materialize and engage with climate change and environmental degradation, artists have historically worked collaboratively, often crossing disciplinary boundaries. For example, Helen and Newton Harrison, heralded as pioneers of the eco-art movement,³⁸ worked with scientists at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography for *The Lagoon Cycle*. The artists immersed themselves in experiments on how artificially raise lagoon crabs to increase food production and ultimately ease the political conflicts that they understood as being intimately tied to ecological deterioration.³⁹ This kind of collaboration has become a crucial component for many ecological artists;⁴⁰ both Irland and Longobardi's projects are the result of inter- and transdisciplinary collaborations. Sasha Kagan suggests that in many cases, climate change and

³⁶ Ibid., 135.

³⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 19.

³⁸ Ingram, "ECOPOLITICS AND AESTHETICS: THE ART OF HELEN MAYER HARRISON AND NEWTON HARRISON," 261.

³⁹ Ibid., 269.

⁴⁰ In *Artistic Research and Climate Science: Transdisciplinary Learning and Spaces of Possibilities* (2015), Sacha Kagan contends that over recent decades, a growing number of artists are starting to work in interdisciplinary teams that are not confined to arts and creative industries-related disciplines.

environmental degradation – what he refers to as “wicked problems” – even require more than interdisciplinary research. He implies that such practices rather call for transdisciplinary practice, coupled with “ethical and aesthetic reflexivity”, as it permits further epistemological openness.⁴¹ While interdisciplinary work suggests that researchers from one discipline borrow and adapt methods from other disciplines, transdisciplinarity “offers a wider integrative framework”.⁴² Interdisciplinary research integrates different knowledge systems, whereas transdisciplinary research integrates different ways of knowing, without reducing these differences to one general discipline.⁴³ For instance, Kagan explains that disciplinary scientific theories and discourses usually cannot contain “ambivalences, self-contradictions and ambiguities” as they are typically embedded in a “logic of non-contradiction”.⁴⁴ However, how can one face a problem such as climate change, which presents threatening uncertainties, without acknowledging and embracing ambiguity? This is where ecological artists engaging with environmental crisis through different knowledge systems and disciplines promise to make their contributions.

Kagan notes that there is often a waste of potential when artists are invited to “art meets science” exchanges to simply illustrate and communicate what is considered to be an already fixed and certain body of knowledge.⁴⁵ Here, I am not suggesting that scientific knowledge is not valuable in itself, but that other disciplines could expand their reach by welcoming artistic knowledge to engage with the qualitative complexities of climate change and environmental degradation.⁴⁶ He rather suggests that ecological artists are increasingly contributing to these discourses by bringing together some or all of the following:

[...] a critical analysis; a questioning perspective that does not rush for direct straightforward solutions to problems; an exploration of potentially unconventional perspectives; an appeal to imaginative possibilities and especially subversive imagination; a hands-on approach to experimentation which is not limited to linear logico-deductive processes and instead explores the potentials of metaphorical,

⁴¹ Sacha Kagan, “Artistic Research and Climate Science: Transdisciplinary Learning and Spaces of Possibilities,” *Journal of Science Communication* 14, no. 1 (2015): 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁶ This is starting to happen in a limited way with projects like *CoLLaboratoire*, led by Dr. Carmela Cucuzzella at Concordia University. *CoLLaboratoire* undertakes the selection and realization of installations on Sherbrooke Street in Montreal, Canada. These installations aim to reconsider the role of public art in relation to disciplines of design and architecture in increasing awareness of local issues pertaining to climate change.

associative and abductive patterns of thought; a heightened and dedicated attention to sensory, aesthetic and phenomenological dimensions of learning; and a capacity to overcome the misleading separation of subject and object as well as the myth of value-free discourse.⁴⁷

Considering that transdisciplinarity has the potential to be an exchange, artists in this scenario would not merely contribute, but also naturally gain from it. These forms of collaboration allow artists to work with natural and social scientists among others, and consequently acquire fundamental levels of literacy to work with ecological issues. Particularly as they work with social scientists, they begin to further understand the dynamics of participatory projects, and the best methods for approaching communities.⁴⁸ By transcending disciplinary boundaries, artists are able to escape the “white cube”, without necessarily resorting to remote locations as have “earth art” artists. Those attempting to break with large artistic institutions where the art can at times appear to be removed from the audience can do so in more productive ways. A recent example that emphasizes the value of such collaborations is the ArtCop21 initiative that took place during the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP21) in Paris in 2015. ArtCop21 hosted over 550 major events across the globe, including installations, plays, exhibition, concerts, performances, talks, conference, workshops, and screenings.⁴⁹ The goal was to make climate “everyone’s business” by generating related discussions outside of academic settings, political offices, boardrooms and negotiating halls. ArtCop21 supported cross-disciplinary endeavors to further expand the conversation.⁵⁰

While climate scientists and artists differ in many ways, a shared concern is how to communicate urgency and care with the rest of society. It is important to note, however, that the challenge is not always a matter of communicating definite solutions by offering new technologies. Surely, new technologies or products can help people lead more sustainable lifestyles, or at the very least make them feel as though they are, but ultimately, these “solutions” consist of mere incremental changes. Some scholars suggest that eco-efficiency and incremental

⁴⁷ Kagan, “Artistic Research and Climate Science: Transdisciplinary Learning and Spaces of Possibilities,” 2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁹ “About – An Exceptional Global Climate Festival,” ArtCop21, accessed May 30, 2017, <http://www.artcop21.com/about/>.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

changes⁵¹ may in fact continue to lead towards unsustainable paths.⁵² “Solutions” must be addressed with caution as they risk sustaining the very systems that allow unsustainable societies to prevail. Will commodifying marine debris maintain the same infrastructures of contemporary consumerism that has led to the very problem of oceanic pollution? Will purchasing “green” products simply act as a means for redemption, justifying our existing patterns of consumption?⁵³ While such initiatives and technologies give the impression that the global population is becoming more sustainable, what is urgently required is a fundamental shift in perspectives, a transformative change.⁵⁴ Though policy-makers are increasingly engaging with climate change action plans, and researchers are constantly coming up with innovative technologies, implementing incremental changes, it remains unclear whether “communities have the capacity, tools and targets in place to trigger the transformative levels of change required to build fundamentally low-carbon, resilient, healthy communities”.⁵⁵ Transformative change would entail a shift away from a focus on technologies, and towards a reconsideration of the structures, cultures and societal system that uphold anthropocentric behavior.⁵⁶ But the question remains: how can a change towards sustainability be normalized and eventually embedded into practices?

As I ultimately argue in this thesis, ecological artists can provide productive models for envisioning a sustainable future. Kagan argues that the convergence of art and other disciplines should lead to “spaces of possibility”, places where imagination and experimentation is encouraged, and non-academics and people who are not part of the cultural elites of art

⁵¹ An example of an incremental “solution” is a recent product launch by Adidas. The company announced that they would be selling shoes and sportswear made from recycled plastic pollution. In their promotional material, the products were advertised as a solution to oceanic plastic pollution, with slogans such as “We are working with Parley to transform marine plastic pollution into high performance sportswear. Spinning the problem into a solution, the threat into a thread”. See: “Parley,” *Adidas*, accessed May 29, 2017, <http://www.adidas.com/us/parley>.

⁵² Sarah Burch et al., *Climate Policy (2014) - Triggering Transformative Change: A Development Path Approach to Climate Change Response in Communities* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2014), 6.

⁵³ Environmental gains from the technical improvement of products have been historically outweighed by increased consumption. Dr. Carmela Cucuzzella, a professor in Design and Computation Arts, calls for a sustainable future based on efficiency and sufficiency. Here, sufficiency (based on a precautionary approach) would rely on individual behavior changes, social innovation and the necessity for fewer goods, as opposed to mere product innovation. See: Carmela Cucuzzella, “The Limits of Current Evaluation Methods in a Context of Sustainable Design: Prudence as a New Framework,” *International Journal of Design Engineering* 2, no. 3 (2009): 243–61.

⁵⁴ Burch et al., *Climate Policy (2014) - Triggering Transformative Change: A Development Path Approach to Climate Change Response in Communities* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2014), 6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

institutions are engaged.⁵⁷ The goal of “spaces of possibility” is to develop the creative potential of communities for resilience, and to foster openness regarding a paradigmatic shift that will be explored in upcoming chapters. Irland and Longobardi’s projects, which both foster “spaces of possibility”, have the potential to incite positive transformative change.

Case Study: Basia Irland, *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding* (2007-)

Basia Irland has been exhibiting since the 1970s, addressing major water issues from scarcity to waterborne diseases, non-potable water, and climate change. She has been especially prolific in the past decade, in which she further established her practice as a community-based artist through her latest and ongoing project, *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding*. It was initially conceived in 2007 for *Weather Report*, a trailblazing exhibition dealing with climate change curated by Lucy Lippard for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Boulder, Colorado.⁵⁸ The first iteration of the project commented on the rapidly receding Arapaho Glacier, which provides a large percentage of Boulder’s drinking water.⁵⁹ Irland carved a 250-pound tome of ice into a book, and embedded it with a composition of seeds, specifically mountain maples (*Acer spicatum*), columbine flowers (*Aquilegia coerulea*), and Colorado blue spruce (*Picea pungens*) (fig. 7).⁶⁰ Six people were required to carry the seed-laden ephemeral sculpture to Boulder Creek (fig. 8), where it rested between two rocks until it melted and its seeds were released into the current. Similar interventions based on this model have since occurred in rivers in Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, England, Iran, Canada, the Netherlands, and in several locations across the United-States.

The project addresses a problem (receding glaciers), and proposes a solution (reseeded riparian zones to offset and reduce some of the effects of climate change),⁶¹ while emphasizing the necessity of communal effort, scientific knowledge, and poetic intervention to deal with

⁵⁷ Kagan, “Artistic Research and Climate Science: Transdisciplinary Learning and Spaces of Possibilities,” *Journal of Science Communication* 14, no. 1 (2015): 7.

⁵⁸ Basia Irland, “ICE BOOKS: Ice Receding/Books Reseeding,” Artist Website, Basia Irland, 2017, <http://www.basiairland.com/projects/ice%20books/description.html>.

⁵⁹ Basia Irland, *Reading the River: The Ecological Activist Art of Basia Irland*, 1st ed. (Sittard-Geleen, The Netherlands: Museum de Domijnen, 2017), 147.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

complex issues of watershed restoration. Methodologically, Irland's process is simple and low-tech. In *Reading the River: The Ecological Activist Art of Basia Irland*, a book produced in conjunction with the artist's retrospective exhibition at the Museum De Domijnen in Sittard-Geleen, the Netherlands, Irland explains that cardboard boxes of various sizes are found and lined with used plastic to then be filled with river water and placed in a freezer.⁶² For some of her larger sculptures, Irland has worked with chefs to access walk-in freezers, or has gained access to biology labs. The overall book shape is typically carved with a Japanese saw, while the thinner incised lines for the "script" are done with a Dremel tool.⁶³ These lines are cut deep and wide enough for the seeds to be inserted on the surface of the book, and covered with a thin layer of water that holds them in place.⁶⁴ Irland selects the seeds with the help of stream ecologists, river restoration biologists, and botanists to ensure that they will benefit each of the riparian zones in which the artist intervenes. Once released into a river, the seeds are said to have the capacity to sequester carbon, mitigate floods and drought, pollinate other plants, create soil regeneration and preservation, act as filters for pollutants, slow the erosion process, provide shelter and shade to riverside organisms and of course, foster aesthetic pleasure.⁶⁵

Both the form of the ephemeral sculptures and their materials are significant to Irland. For the reasons listed above, the artist believes in the power of the seed. She also claims that "[a]n individual seed is a spectacular sculptural display, with each one being elegantly and distinctively formed", capable of transforming "into some enormous cottonwood tree or tiny fragrant Lily-of-the-Valley".⁶⁶ Embedded into the book-shaped ice sculpture, and typically placed in an abstract manner, Irland refers to the seeds as "ecological text" or "ecological

⁶² This aspect of the process signals an unresolved ethical dilemma for Irland. The artist acknowledges that her use of electricity to freeze the sculptures add to her carbon footprint. As this project also requires her to travel a lot, flying also adds to this footprint. Other contemporary ecological artists also face this dilemma. For instance, Courtney Mattison, an American ceramic artist whose work deals with fragile oceanic ecosystems (primarily coral reefs), recognizes that her sculptural work requires a significant amount of energy to fire kilns, and ventilate the studio. She consequently makes every effort to recycle, reduce waste, purchase in bulk, and only fire full kilns, in addition to making annual donations to *Mission Blue*, and global organization that raises awareness and supports ocean conservation groups. Courtney Mattison, "About," 2017, <http://courtneymattison.com/about/>.

⁶³ The process varies on the location where the artist is working; for instance, the carving must be done quicker in warmer locations so ensure that the sculpture does not melt right away.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

language”.⁶⁷ The book, a symbolic form that has consistently been central in her art practice over the last couple of decades, performs an act of gathering and instructing, as does the artist. Many readings of the book form have been expressed in accounts of Irland’s work, and even the artist’s writing reveals various interpretations of it. Most recently, Irland poetically depicted the book, alluding to its earthy and sculptural qualities, as offering a set of tools:

When open, volumes appear as if they could lift off the surface, join a flock of migrating birds, flap their winged pages, and rain down letters on those of us below. When closed, a book is a sarcophagus – a toolbox waiting to be pried open, with descriptive words on three sides deciphering some of the contents.⁶⁸

I also later examine the book’s prominence within Irland’s project not as a tribute to the book as an epitome of knowledge, but rather as a critique of how Western society has and continues to communicate with the nonhuman world.

Perhaps the most important part of her process is what Irland calls the “book launch”.⁶⁹ When the seeds have been selected, collected, and embedded, the ice sculpture is ready and members of a river’s local community are invited to witness or take part in its release into the stream. While participants do not assist with the physical carving of the books, they assist largely in gathering the seeds, scouting launch locations, and placing the sculptures into the stream.⁷⁰ In an interview with Susan Loubet, Irland explains that her interventions are not entirely planned before arriving on site, that her interventions are based on exploratory research. She meets with local Indigenous groups and other community members to discuss the specific needs of their river.⁷¹ In the past, Irland managed to gather hundreds of people for a single launch.⁷² In one iteration of the project along the Nisqually River in Washington State, local Indigenous leaders, salmon restoration specialists, musicians, students, professors from a neighboring school (Evergreen State College), and forest rangers all took part in the launching of several ice books. While some were released from the shore, many were attached to the front of kayaks and

⁶⁷ Irland, “ICE BOOKS: Ice Receding/Books Reseeding,” <http://www.basiairland.com/projects/ice%20books/description.html>. This aspect of her work is further discussed in Chapter Three.

⁶⁸ Irland, *Reading the River: The Ecological Activist Art of Basia Irland*, 148.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 154.

⁷¹ Basia Irland and Susan Loubet, Women’s Focus, podcast audio, April 22, 2017, <https://soundcloud.com/user-168057798/kunm-womens-focus-interview-with-basia-irland>.

⁷² Ibid., 152.

paddled further into the stream (fig. 9). At the end, participants lifted a glass of drinking water along the shore, proposing a toast to the Nisqually River: “May you always flow and may you always flow clean” (fig. 10).⁷³

Coordinating social gatherings to foreground the centrality of rivers is a large part of *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding*, thus emphasising Irland’s role as a gatherer of individuals and communities. This is important, and perhaps what has the potential to truly foster transformative change⁷⁴ because when a river-based network of people is formed, individuals become sensitized to the fact that their water source is conditioned by the people upstream, and that their care for the river affects those downstream.⁷⁵ Lisa Gerber writes that a river is often seen as a resource, and people consequently come into conflict over it. However, through the building of communities, she claims Irland allows people to see themselves differently.⁷⁶ Besides hoping that participants come to this realization, Irland aims to promote actions that can pragmatically have constructive results in helping restore streams anywhere in the world, while also providing a model that can be easily replicated. To facilitate this, the artist gives a gift to each person involved in the process of preparing and performing her interventions. This is not surprising as Gerber, whose essay provides an ethical analysis of the artist’s creative process, particularly emphasizes the fostering of reciprocal relationships. Usually consisting of biodegradable envelopes or small glass vials filled with specific regional seeds, the gifts encourages participants to continue the planting process and become involved with the river through caregiving. They are also typically accompanied by small scrolled watershed maps, and lists of local and international water preservation websites.⁷⁷ Ultimately, the process of gifting is an act of reciprocity not only with the people involved, but with the rivers themselves.

Though the several aspects of *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding* allude to it, the final act of gifting is particularly comparable to American artist Kathryn Miller’s *Seed Bombs* (1992-2002) (fig. 11 and 12). Over the course of a decade, Miller assembled seed bombs made from compressed soil and seeds native to South California, where she primarily exhibited. In museums

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ As opposed to the incremental changes made through the releasing of seeds into bodies of water.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 189.

⁷⁶ Lisa Gerber, “The Nature of Water: Basia Irland Reveals the ‘Is’ and the ‘Ought,’” *Ethics & Environment* 8, no. 1 (2003): 47.

⁷⁷ Irland, *Reading the River: The Ecological Activist Art of Basia Irland*, 154.

and galleries, the artist left seed bombs that were made available to visitors interested in helping her with the project. They were encouraged to throw the seed bombs in the region, especially in areas that were degraded or in need of vegetation.⁷⁸ Miller writes that “[...] for some people (like it was for me) it [the act of throwing seed bombs] may be the first step in coming to terms with a new way of seeing and understanding our native landscapes and knowing that we can take things into our own hands”.⁷⁹ For Miller, as it is for Irland, the small-scale non-sanctioned act of contributing to the restoration of an ecosystem or watershed helps connect people to their landscape, thus cultivating healthier relationships between the human and nonhuman world.

While *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding* is primarily a site-specific intervention, extensive photo and video documentation allows Irland to extend the reach of the project by exhibiting its records in museums and galleries. Installations include photographs – typically 30 by 24 inches in size – of the sculptures printed on canvas, along with smaller photographs of the ice books being launched. Though videos are also played on monitors, visitors get to also viscerally experience the work as an ice book is placed on a metal grate above a trough, where it is left to melt during exhibition openings. A week after the opening, the seeds released begin to sprout in the melting water, creating a micro-ecosystem in the gallery. The sprouts are later taken to their assigned river where they ultimately are freed into the stream.⁸⁰

Case Study: Pamela Longobardi, *Drifters Project* (2006-)

While Irland is interested in rivers as entities that connect source to sea, bridging communities upstream and downstream, Longobardi is concerned with their ultimate destination (oceans), where residues of human behaviors converge to manifest a now global and alarming phenomenon. More specifically, her ongoing *Drifters Project* is dedicated to mitigating and ending oceanic plastic pollution. The project began in 2006 after the artist visited the “remote” beaches of South Point (Kae Lae), Hawaii, which is the most southernmost tip of both the Big Island of Hawaii and of the United-States. While the location’s sparse population and geographic isolation suggest an idyllic paradise of thriving tropical beauty, Longobardi instead encountered

⁷⁸ Kathryn Miller, “Seed Bombs,” Artist Website, accessed April 1, 2017, <http://www.kathrynamiller.com/seedbombs.html>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Irland, “ICE BOOKS: Ice Receding/Books Reseeding,” <http://www.basiairland.com/projects/ice%20books/description.html>.

mountainous piles of plastic debris.⁸¹ In *Pam Longobardi: Drifters: Plastics, Pollution, and Personhood*, a book published in 2010 contextualizing and promoting the project, Longobardi describes this initial encounter as having occurred in two stages. At first, there was “a spark of pure retinal pleasure”⁸² as she witnessed the bright colors, bold shapes and textures of tangled driftnets (fig. 13). Her awe, she describes, was also attributed to the mind-boggling scales varying from “golf cart- to whale-size”⁸³ compositions of debris. Though seemingly attractive and innocuous at first, not long after she processed what her eyes were seeing, and with a “sickening thud”,⁸⁴ she recognized that it indeed consisted of garbage and quotidian castoffs. At this moment, Longobardi started to collect and use plastic as her primary material.

Plastic objects find themselves in “remote” locations, like South Point, due to the efficiency of the five major gyres. The North Pacific Subtropical Gyre, for instance, “sweeps, in clockwise motion, south down the coast of the Americas, east across the upper Arctic frontier, north along the coast of the Asian continent, and back westward towards the Hawai’ian Islands”,⁸⁵ collecting large amounts of floating debris flushed from city streets, landfills, and thoughtless dumping. The gyres circle areas of calm water commonly referred to as “garbage patches”,⁸⁶ where debris accumulates. This accumulation, mostly saturated with garbage originating from the land,⁸⁷ only becomes visible once the waste is regurgitated onto the coast. The gyres are difficult to see and to get to, hidden below the perpetual horizontality of the ocean, also making them difficult to imagine. Longobardi’s practice makes visible the too often concealed environmental reality of oceanic plastic pollution in hopes of fostering a wider understanding and awareness of the consequences of late global capitalism, which is marked by the materiality and impermanence of convenience.

⁸¹ Pamela Longobardi et al., *Pam Longobardi: Drifters: Plastics, Pollution, and Personhood* (Milan: Edizione Charta, 2009), 16.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Longobardi et al., *Pam Longobardi: Drifters: Plastics, Pollution, and Personhood*, 16.

⁸⁶ “Ocean Gyre,” National Geographic, accessed December 2, 2016, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/ocean-gyre/>.

⁸⁷ Longobardi et al., *Pam Longobardi: Drifters: Plastics, Pollution, and Personhood*, 16.

In 2014, the artist was named official Artist-In-Residence of the Oceanic Society, the oldest ocean conservation non-profit in America.⁸⁸ Both this title and Longobardi's labor-intensive process are reminiscent of feminist eco artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles who has been Artist-In-Residence of the New York City Sanitation Department since 1977.⁸⁹ In one of Ukeles' seminal works, *Touch Sanitation* (1978-80), she shook hands with over 8,500 sanitation workers across five boroughs, and thanked them individually for maintaining the city (fig. 14 and 15).⁹⁰ Ron Broglio writes: "Ukeles is intimately engaged in the cradle to grave history of production of material objects and their forgotten afterlife".⁹¹ The relationship between their practices intimately ties Longobardi's contemporary work to histories of feminism and ecology in art, as she also works towards making individuals accountable for the waste they generate, recovering the repressed remains Ukeles powerfully began to address. Artists like Ukeles were once concerned with the detritus of capitalist circulation that flooded their city neighborhoods, but today, as waste is so diligently removed from city streets, rendering it invisible, artists reflect on the omnipresence of the excess that is found even on the most "remote" beaches. The following addresses Longobardi's labor-intensive process, further likening her to artists like Ukeles.

While South Point remains the primary site of the *Drifters Project*, Longobardi has since performed interventions on beaches all over the world, removing thousands of pounds of plastic from the "natural" environment.⁹² Having worked directly through local sponsorship, small grant support and personal expenditure, the artist has worked with communities in Atlanta, Georgia; Nicoya, Costa Rica; Beijing, China; Samothraki and Kefalonia, Greece; Seward, Alaska; and Armila, Panama among many other locations.⁹³ Longobardi's interventions are two-tiered: the plastic detritus is first removed from the beaches, caves and oceans, and later resituated within the "cultural" realm, which is also their point of departure. The re-presentation of the plastic in

⁸⁸ Pamela Longobardi, "Bringing Awareness to Plastic Pollution In Indonesia," Oceanic Society, 2014, <https://www.oceanicsociety.org/blog/384/bringing-awareness-to-plastic-pollution-in-indonesia>.

⁸⁹ Tom Finkelparl, "Interview: Mierle Laderman Ukeles on Maintenance and Sanitation Art," in *Dialogues in Public Art* (The MIT Press, 2001), 295.

⁹⁰ Andrea K. Scott, "Mierle Laderman Ukeles and the Art of Work," *The New Yorker*, November 7, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/07/mierle-laderman-ukeles-and-the-art-of-work>.

⁹¹ Longobardi et al., *Pam Longobardi: Drifters: Plastics, Pollution, and Personhood*, 25.

⁹² Pamela Longobardi, "Project Statement," Drifters Project, accessed October 23, 2016, <http://driftersproject.net/about/>.

⁹³ Pamela Longobardi, "About," Drifters Project, accessed October 23, 2016, <http://driftersproject.net/about/>.

galleries, museums and public spaces is a crucial aspect of her work as this problem, though it is slowly receiving some attention, remains largely invisible. When intervening, usually with the help of members of local communities such as sea turtle rescue volunteers and student recycling groups,⁹⁴ Longobardi approaches a site as a forensic scientist, photographing and documenting before collecting. While she sometimes makes constructions and installations on site, she typically brings the debris back to her studio. The process of removing the plastic from a beach typically consists of collecting plastic until her hands and pockets are full, at which point she inevitably finds a discarded plastic bag or container nearby to carry on with the removal.⁹⁵ Occasionally, she dives down into the ocean to remove sunken plastic as not all plastic floats, or to cut driftnets and fishing lines that have latched onto corals.⁹⁶ In July 2012, Longobardi travelled to Kefalonia, Greece, to clean an entire coastal cave with a team of swimmers who helped her remove thousands of pieces of plastic. The powerful video shows the artist and her team swim around the Cape of Liakas to get to the cave where they amassed what seemed to be an infinite number of plastic objects wedged between and under rocks (fig.16). The debris was put into several large plastic bags that were tied together, creating a giant raft of plastic, a “floating island” (fig. 17).⁹⁷ It was transported back around the Cape of Liakas by the swimmers. The physically demanding task was documented by Athens-based Nickos Myrtou and Sergio Ko. The videographers filmed the artist and her team with both underwater and above water cameras, producing a beautifully powerful and tragic video. The materials that were floated out of the cave were later sorted and presented at the Oceanographic Museum of Monaco alongside the projected video.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Pamela Longobardi, “Plastic as Shadow: The Toxicity of Objects in the Anthropocene,” in *Framing the Ocean, 1700 to the Present: Envisioning the Sea as Social Space* (UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2014), 182.

⁹⁵ Longobardi, “Plastic as Shadow: The Toxicity of Objects in the Anthropocene,” 187.

⁹⁶ Longobardi, “Bringing Awareness to Plastic Pollution In Indonesia”.

⁹⁷ Nickos Myrtou and Sergio Ko, *Giant Sea Cave Excavation ~ Drifters Project Kefalonia Greece, July 2012* (Kefalonia, Greece: Drifters Project, 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFqpaWzvktw>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

Recognizing Oceanic Agency

Outlined in Chapter One, Irland and Longobardi's projects are among the contemporary creative practices that signal a methodological shift in ecological art. Based on the observation that in many of the artworks and case studies I have encountered in the research conducted for this thesis, artists seem to be decentering the human being in contemporary art practices by attempting to allow nonhuman agency to be acknowledged and considered. They are accompanied by an increasing number of scholars across disciplines challenging the human/nonhuman binary, such as new materialists actively engaging with "thing theory".⁹⁹ Despite the diverse, and sometimes even irreconcilable, definitions and ideas generated by posthumanism and new materialism, scholars generally share the conviction that matter has agency, and even possesses degrees of intelligence among other qualities often uniquely attributed to humans. To differentiate the work of previous generations of socially engaged and ecological artists from Irland and Longobardi's practices, this chapter considers theories of posthumanism that provide a productive framework from which to examine their current and ongoing projects. Though I do not attempt to provide a comprehensive survey of scholars engaging with posthumanist thought, this chapter first outlines some key ideas by William Cronon, Elizabeth Grosz, Daniel Wildcat, Kim Tallbear, Vanessa Watts and Zoe Todd. The latter part of the chapter analyses instances in which Irland and Longobardi's work demonstrate attempts at depicting bodies of water as agential entities. Lastly, it considers anthropomorphism as a strategy to recognize oceanic agency.

From "Ego" to "Eco"

Over two decades ago, Suzi Gablik noted that creativity in the modern world had gone hand in hand with individualism, and art had thus been viewed as an individual phenomenon. Rejecting the egoism and claimed neutrality of modernism, she claimed that "the romantic myth of the autonomous individualism has crippled art's effectiveness and influence in the social world".¹⁰⁰ Grounding her argument in the work of artists, philosophers, and writers – for instance, Gustave Flaubert who expressed that one could only bear this "horrible world" by

⁹⁹ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

¹⁰⁰ Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain - New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, Washington: Bay Press, 1995), 76.

avoiding it¹⁰¹ – she also insisted that the prevailing artistic isolation and remove could not accommodate feminist values of care and compassion which are undoubtedly rooted in Irland and Longobardi’s methodology.¹⁰² However, Gablik maintained that modernist conceptions of art had been changing, and called for “connective aesthetics”, which make art into a model for connectedness and healing.¹⁰³ Since the nineties, socially-engaged practices have continued to emerge, and contemporary ecological artists are among those who work within this realm. However, I argue that the collaborative and community-based nature of Irland and Longobardi’s work has further expanded in recent years. Their notion of community can be understood within a larger, more diverse frame. It brings together very different communities, sometimes even some that are in conflict, that enclose beings of both human and non-human worlds; for instance, in Irland’s practice, the community includes not only people, but plants, animals, birds, and of course, bodies of water.¹⁰⁴ This thesis, and more explicitly this chapter, thus contends that they are expanding the field of community-based art by enlarging and pluralizing the very notion of “community”.

To understand the ecological promise of more pluralistic communities, it is important to consider Irland and Longobardi’s point of departure and context: a society subjugated by a Eurocentric paradigm in which humans are defined in opposition to and superior to nonhumans. While there has been an upsurge of scholarship in which attempts at lessening the hierarchies between Westerners and their nonhuman others have been made,¹⁰⁵ some of which I attend to in this chapter, this paradigm still prevails. By examining some of Elizabeth Grosz and Karen Houle’s ideas, I begin to briefly consider some of the ways in which some humans have perceived themselves as distinct from other animals, and thus from other nonhuman/animal beings. By positioning themselves in opposition to other animals, humans imply their superiority

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 77.

¹⁰² See: Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor, “Regarding Intimacy, Regard, and Transformative Feminist Practice in the Art of Pamela Longobardi,” *Feminist Studies* 42, no. 3 (2017): 649–88; and Lucy Lippard, “Basia Irland Knows What the River Knows,” in *Reading the River: The Ecological Activist Art of Basia Irland*, ed. Basia Irland (Museum de Domijnen, 2017), 117–20.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰⁴ Lisa Gerber, “The Nature of Water: Basia Irland Reveals the ‘Is’ and the ‘Ought,’” 47.

¹⁰⁵ Kim Tallbear, “Beyond the Life/Not Life Binary: A Feminist-Indigenous Reading of Cryopreservation, Interspecies Thinking and the New Materialisms,” in *Cryopolitics: Frozen Life in a Melting World*, ed. Joanna Radin and Emma Kowal (MIT Press, 2017), 187.

over not only animals, but over all nonhuman beings and entities; this has become a basis for thinking of nonhuman animals, plants, soil, rocks, water, and so on as resources, as opposed to agential beings worthy of respect. Through William Cronon's writing, I later also consider how these oppositional structures inevitably engender divisions between nature and culture, ultimately positioning the human outside of "nature". Since Irland and Longobardi's projects seek to foster better relationships between humans, bodies of water and their countless ecosystems, reflecting on the origins, and more importantly, the dangers of perspectives that exclude humans from their environment is imperative.

For Elizabeth Grosz, there is an elusive and intangible line that has divided humans and other animals since ancient Greece, if not before, that is maintained by an oppositional structure that denies to the animal what it grants to the human, namely language, reason, consciousness, etc.¹⁰⁶ Alluding to this structure's Greek and Cartesian roots, Grosz contends that humans have long understood themselves as fundamentally different and superior to the animal. Though still categorized as animal, they have defined themselves as animals with at least one added category – "a rational animal, an upright animal, an embarrassed animal".¹⁰⁷ Karen Houle similarly reflects on Westerners' impulse to conceptualize "fundamental truths" about beings; for instance, only humans are referred to as "person", "citizen", "friend", "artist", or "poet".¹⁰⁸ She argues that because humans are pleased with the features they possess, they have defined themselves as different from and above all that lacks one or more of these features. Essentially, I see Grosz and Houle's accounts of human self-definitions to be suggesting that humans have destructively used their distinctively human qualities to define personhood, which ultimately qualifies them to occupy the highest position of the hierarchy they have constructed to indicate which beings are worth protecting at the expense of others. However, what if an albatross were to be thought of as a person, a friend, a citizen? Would humans then make the required efforts to stop infusing plastic debris into their food chain? What if a river were thought of as a person? Would humans then be more inclined to stop poisoning it with its pesticides and debris?

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (Duke University Press, 2011), 12.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Karen Houle, "Infinite, Indifferent Kinship," *C Magazine*, no. 107 (2010): 13.

Along with defining themselves in opposition to animals, and consequently all nonhumans, some humans continue to position themselves outside of “nature”. In *The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature*, William Cronon critiques the human/nonhuman divide, which he claims is linked to the way “wilderness” is perceived and celebrated in Western society. As he surveys different movements in European and North American history, namely the sublime and the frontier, he argues that wilderness is a profoundly human construct that originates from particular human cultures at very particular moments in time that ultimately do more harm than good. To further emphasize the falsity of the idea of pure and untouched “nature”, Cronon recalls the creation of national parks and protected areas in North America that forced prior human inhabitants to move onto designated reservations.¹⁰⁹ The myth of wilderness proves to be especially cruel as it displaced groups of Indigenous peoples for tourists and wealthy Americans to “safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing their nation in its pristine, original state, in the new morning of God’s own creation”.¹¹⁰ Wilderness tends to be seen in opposition to humans and modernity; it is rather idealized as something distant and distinct from human civilization. Cronon writes that the most troubling and harmful outcome of this division, is that those who live in urban societies often assume that wilderness (or “nature”) is their real “home”.¹¹¹ People consequently seek to occasionally escape “humanity” in search of “nature”, often resorting to national parks and evading responsibility for the lives they lead; “[i]dealizing a distant wilderness too often means not idealizing the environment in which we actually live, the landscape that for better or for worse we call home”.¹¹² As Irland and Longobardi make evident in their work, this is highly problematic as most serious environmental problems start at home, mainly through production and consumption habits that characterize modern capitalist society. It is the oppositional structures – human/nonhuman, nature/culture – that many posthumanist and Indigenous scholars work against, and that these artists hope to change through their artworks.

¹⁰⁹ William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 77.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 84.

¹¹² Ibid.

Beyond the Human/Nonhuman

As previously mentioned, there has been an upsurge of scholarship working against these oppositional structures in the last couple of decades. However, as Kim Tallbear reminds me, while these theories' fundamental insights have recently infiltrated Western scholarship, they are certainly not new for everyone.¹¹³ The seemingly revolutionary character of this framework lies in its challenge to Western anthropocentric intellectual traditions in which philosophical and scientific divisions between nature and culture, human and nonhuman, have justified the capitalist imperative to own, control and destroy "nature". For many Indigenous peoples, the ideas that shape these "new" theories are longstanding. More often than not, this knowledge is appropriated and obscured by non-Indigenous practitioners, but for the sake of the rich diversity of life that we share this planet with, and for the sake of our human selves, Daniel Wildcat hopes that Indigenous ideas will not be ignored.¹¹⁴ As a whole, the ecological promise of these ideas, both established and emerging, is to foster a dialogue among a wider group of agents, where a profoundly relational world in which humans interact with, rather than act upon, others can be imagined.¹¹⁵

In *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (2011), Grosz brings together the writings of Deleuze, Bergson, and Irigaray in a reading of Charles Darwin's account of the evolution of species that considers both humans and nonhumans as forms of competing and coordinating modes of openness. She contemplates what kind of intellectual revolution would be required to make humans "one among many living things, and one force among many".¹¹⁶ Grosz understands Darwin to have provocatively suggested that if they were in fact placed in their rightful place, as one of many, the distinctively "human" qualities through which they have defined themselves would have to be reconsidered. To imagine a world in which humans are not the sole producers and evaluators of, for instance, morality, art and

¹¹³ Kim Tallbear, "Beyond the Life/Not Life Binary: A Feminist-Indigenous Reading of Cryopreservation, Interspecies Thinking and the New Materialisms," in *Cryopolitics: Frozen Life in a Melting World*, ed. Joanna Radin and Emma Kowal (MIT Press, 2017), 198.

¹¹⁴ Daniel R. Wildcat, *Red Alert!: Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge* (Fulcrum Publishing, 2009), 12.

¹¹⁵ Jessica L. Horton and Janet Catherine Berlo, "Beyond the Mirror Indigenous Ecologies and 'New Materialisms' in Contemporary Art" 28, no. 1 (2013): 18.

¹¹⁶ Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*, 13.

religion, is to acknowledge the relativity of knowledges.¹¹⁷ Darwin speculates that we cannot assume that the kinds of morality that humans frame as “normal” or conducive to their well-being – though this standard can hardly be defined as even different groups of humans are already often in conflict – are the same that would and should regulate other species. Ultimately, there could be infinite numbers of modes of knowing, ethics, political and social organizations, etc. The human, situated as one among many, should no longer order and control, and is at the very least encouraged to listen and respond, to a “nature it was always part of but had only aimed to master and control”.¹¹⁸

Though his approach differs considerably from Darwin’s, Wildcat addresses similar concepts, suggesting that if taken seriously, the “web of life” would imply that human intelligence must be framed in the context of learning to live sustainably as one small but powerful part of nature.¹¹⁹ For him, this is more important than learning to strategize and manage nature as “[h]umankind does not stand above or outside of Earth’s life systems”.¹²⁰ He suggests that the most difficult required change is not a merely physical, material, or technological one, but a change in worldviews embedded in modern Western-influenced societies; he calls for what he refers to as a “cultural climate change”.¹²¹ While Irland and Longobardi’s interventions initially appear to be calling for incremental change, especially with Longobardi who advocates the end of plastic production and consumption, something else is at stake as they both engage with ideas like those of Wildcat’s, whether they explicitly acknowledge this or not. Wildcat explains that Indigenous traditions in North America tell us that reality is more than just fact and figures collected for humankind to wisely (though not usually) use resources. For him, to know “reality” is to recognize and respect the relationships that constitute the complex “web of life”; he calls this “indigenous realism”.¹²² In this sense, the “real” often remains invisible in Western paradigms, but artists have the capacity to make it visible. Grosz writes that “[a]rt induces the real to reveal itself, to make it more than itself, to discover economies of action, forces, effects

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 24.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Wildcat, *Red Alert!: Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge* (Fulcrum Publishing, 2009), 5.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 21.

¹²¹ Ibid., 5.

¹²² Ibid., 9.

that make as they change or unmake”.¹²³ If art can enact the real, it also promises to productively bring attention to what Wildcat theorizes as the “Red Alert”.

The “Red Alert” is positioned in continuation with longstanding North American Indigenous traditions issuing calls for action.¹²⁴ It is a wake-up call to those always forward-looking societies that have failed to ethically and genuinely inquire the modes of living of Indigenous peoples whose histories and ways of living have been interrupted and threatened by ongoing processes of colonization.¹²⁵ Now, as there is a growing recognition that Indigenous knowledges provide integrative thinking capable of problem solving outside the dualisms and dichotomies that characterize the Western worldview, Wildcat urges people to listen to Indigenous voices, and to Mother Earth.¹²⁶ The “Red Alert” comes from the Earth: “What she has been telling tribal people around the world, especially those paying attention, is that she is undergoing a dramatic change, one that threatens their lifeways and those of most of humankind on the planet”.¹²⁷ The question now is who is listening and paying attention. Ultimately, Wildcat warns that it would be arrogant and unproductive to continue to change everything but the way we live, that it is time to start paying attention to other-than-human entities.

Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe scholar Vanessa Watts conceptualizes a principle of “Indigenous Place-Thought”, which is based upon the premise that “land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts”.¹²⁸ Habitats and ecosystems are understood as societies, which suggests that they maintain ethical structures, interspecies treaties and agreements, and abilities to interpret, understand, and implement. Non-human beings are active members of society, and importantly, have direct influence on how humans organize themselves.¹²⁹ Watts rejects the hierarchies of agency often

¹²³ Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*, 190.

¹²⁴ Wildcat, *Red Alert!: Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge* (Fulcrum Publishing, 2009), 26. See: Britt Gallpen, ed., “Climate,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2016). As stressed by most of this issue’s contributors, there is certainly no shortage of Inuit artists responding to the lived experience of the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation, yet their voices and warnings are not sufficiently heard.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹²⁸ Vanessa Watts, “Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!),” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no. 1 (2013): 21.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

imposed in Western scholarship.¹³⁰ Tallbear similarly contends that Indigenous standpoints, which never forgot the interrelatedness of all things, accord greater animacy to nonhumans, including nonorganisms like stones and places.¹³¹ She suggests that “to really grasp the nature of and the potential solutions for the world’s most critical problems, including environmental degradation, climate change, poverty, systematic violence, and warfare, nonhumans in all their myriad forms must be given their due”.¹³²

In *Fish Pluralities: Human-Animal Relations and Sites of Engagement in Paulatuqq, Arctic Canada*, Métis scholar Zoe Todd explores human/nonhuman relations, more specifically human/fish relationships, as an “active site of engagement” based on case studies and fieldwork conducted in the hamlet of Paulatuqq in 2012; she thus provides concrete examples of how nonhumans can in fact be given their due. She first explains that fish are understood in a plurality of ways for Paulatuuqmiut; they have been described both as individual and plural entities, specimens, food, trophies, non-human persons with agency, a metaphor for Paulatuuqmiut’s relationships to the land, and nodes of engagement.¹³³ Human/fish relations are thus reciprocal and respectful. Todd examines the commercialization of the Hornaday River char fishery in the seventies and eighties, which occurred due to governmental actors who sought to generate local economic development in the area. This inevitably led to overfishing, and locals were required to negotiate and define their relationships to fish beyond common scientific and bureaucratic understandings. The process mobilized a new approach to human/fish engagements in the area; the fishery is now restricted to scientific studies, sport fishing, and recreational trips with community members that allow Paulatuuqmiut to assert their local views of “fish-as-persons’ to non-locals.¹³⁴ Todd ultimately suggests that if relationships to nonhumans were considered as literal, rather than symbolic, they could be understood as concrete sites of political and legal exchange that have the potential to “de-anthropocentrize” current Indigenous-State discourses.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ For example, hierarchies of agency are present in Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory.

¹³¹ Tallbear, “Beyond the Life/Not Life Binary: A Feminist-Indigenous Reading of Cryopreservation, Interspecies Thinking and the New Materialisms,” 180.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 190.

¹³³ Zoe Todd, “Fish Pluralities: Human-Animal Relations and Sites of Engagement in Paulatuqq, Arctic Canada,” *Etudes/Inuit/Studies* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 223.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 222.

Given the importance of place that figures in the relations between Indigenous peoples and nonhumans, which was namely highlighted in Watts' "Place-Thought", Tallbear explains that considerable damage done to these relations as they have been displaced from traditional lands, been subjected to assimilationist policies, including the forced conversions to Christianity and the imposition of state/religion and spirit/material divides that fundamentally misunderstand Indigenous ontologies. She adds that ongoing environmental degradation is equally a contributing factor. Despite the recent increased interest in nonhuman agency among non-Indigenous scholars, she notes that Indigenous ontologies often remain invisible, and the little references to them and Indigenous thought denies the ongoing intimate relations between Indigenous peoples, and between them and the nonhumans in their land.¹³⁶ Todd also considers the way Indigenous thought is often brought into discourses of the anthropocene, which ultimately blunt the distinction between those who drive the fossil fuel economy and those who do not.¹³⁷ To universalize the "human" – a trap both Irland and Longobardi tend to fall into as they write about their artistic interventions – is problematic as it does not acknowledge the complex and varied experiences of people in the world, nor the ongoing damages of colonial and imperialist agendas.¹³⁸ She claims that not all humans are equally responsible for environmental degradation and climate change, yet not all humans are equally invited into the spaces where disasters are addressed and conceptualized. In fact, scholars working within this realm often reiterate and obscure what Indigenous peoples have been saying for decades.¹³⁹ If a theoretical turn were to seriously attend to addressing some of the world's most pressing problems, it needs to learn to acknowledge Indigenous peoples in full vitality, which in turn could lessen global devastation.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Ibid., 198.

¹³⁷ Zoe Todd, "Indigenizing the Anthropocene," in *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, ed. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 244.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Tallbear, "Beyond the Life/Not Life Binary: A Feminist-Indigenous Reading of Cryopreservation, Interspecies Thinking and the New Materialisms,"

Basia Irland: National Geographic Blog Posts (*What the River Knows*)

Since 2013, alongside her interventions performed in the context of *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding*, the artist has been regularly writing for *National Geographic's* blog, *Water Currents*, in a series titled *What the River Knows*. The platform is an ironic vehicle for the artist's activism for National Geographic is a fundamentally conservative magazine, often criticized by progressive scholars like herself, that has "provided couch tourists with glimpses of the exotic, the distant, the dangerous"¹⁴¹ – terms reminiscent of Cronon's account of "wilderness", a harmful Western conception. However, in contrast to her site-specific interventions, the blog's global reach intrigued her. In 2013, Irland seized this opportunity when she was asked to be the first non-scientist contributor by Sandra Postel, director and founder of the Global Water Policy Project which promotes the preservation and sustainable use of Earth's freshwater through research, writing, outreach and public speaking.¹⁴² Each post brings together histories, current events, and documents both the scenic and the tragic to inform readers about the state of various rivers across the globe. Perhaps more importantly, each blog post is written in the first person, creating an intimate dialogue; this perspective removes the objectivity expected of journalist criticism, and delivers a direct experience of "being" a river, rather than an experience of someone simply traveling, rafting or researching a river. Each river has a distinct voice as it recalls its interactions with others, and describes both its beauty and its pain.

Given the blog's global reach, Irland's approach is meant to inform and provide a "new" perspective, one in which bodies of water possess agency, to her Western readers. It also does not entirely escape human-centrism, though as will later be discussed, it strategically attempts to challenge dangerous dichotomies through storytelling and a shifting of outlooks. The saddest story told by Irland (or seemingly by the river), is that of the Rio Yaqui/Jiak Batwe in Sonora, Mexico, home of the Yaqui people. A post from June 2015, *Yaqui River, Sonora, Mexico, as it flows (or not) through the Yaqui Nation*, addresses the terrible history of colonial devastation the Yaqui share with the river, which is often drained of life, choked with trash and pesticides, and illegally exploited by more powerful interests. The Yaqui have protested and been arrested, yet

¹⁴¹ Basia Irland, *Reading the River: The Ecological Activist Art of Basia Irland*, 1st ed. (Sittard-Geleen, The Netherlands: Museum de Domijnen, 2017), 120.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 81.

the river barely survives. This history is briefly referenced in the following excerpt, which demonstrates Irland's use of the first person perspective:

My struggle as a river is interconnected with the struggle of my people, the Yaqui Indigenous Community of Mexico in the Sonoran desert, as I try to provide the ancestral source of water for drinking, everyday use, irrigation, and ceremonial purposes. Together we have had a long and complex history. Manuel Esquer Nieblas, a member of the Yaqui Defense Brigade, grew up playing in my waters during a time when there was still some flow. His relatives live in several of the eight remaining Yaqui villages along my northern banks as I move south and empty into the Gulf of California 28 miles (45 km) southeast of Guaymas.¹⁴³

The publications are also often accompanied by photographs of the river, or of the ones it interacts with (fig.18); for instance, a photograph of Manuel (fig.19) was included in the Yaqui's River's post. Though Irland acknowledges the impossibility of knowing exactly what the river knows and thinks, she describes this process as poetic, and imaginative, one that seeks to better connect people to their local rivers and watershed in ways that will "motivate concern, caring, appreciation, and positive actions".¹⁴⁴ During an interview, Irland referred to rivers as "friends" and "living beings", condemning the use of the term "resource" when talking about them as it denotes that a river is there simply to be used, and too often abused. She shared her enthusiasm for the Whanganui River in New Zealand,¹⁴⁵ which was granted legal personhood in the past year.¹⁴⁶ Irland expresses that this change in status has provided an excellent model for how humans should approach their rivers and their environment, an opinion she reflects in her writings for *What the River Knows*.

¹⁴³ Basia Irland, "Yaqui River, Sonora, Mexico, as It Flows (or Not) through the Yaqui Nation," *Water Currents* (blog), 2015, <http://voices.nationalgeographic.org/2015/06/01/what-the-river-knows-yaqui-river-sonora-mexico/>.

¹⁴⁴ Basia Irland, "Posts for National Geographic's Water Currents," Artist Website, 2017, <http://www.basiairland.com/projects/blog/index.html>.

¹⁴⁵ Basia Irland and Susan Loubet, Women's Focus, podcast audio, April 22, 2017, <https://soundcloud.com/user-168057798/kunm-womens-focus-interview-with-basia-irland>.

¹⁴⁶ The river is now represented by two nominees, one appointed by the Maori community and the other by the government. While the Whanganui is the first river to be granted personhood, Te Urewera national park (also in New Zealand) was also granted the same status. This does not signal new worldviews, but rather it shows that people are catching up to existing and productive ones.

Daniel Melfi, "New Zealand Grants Whanganui River Legal Personhood, Settles Case Dating Back to 1870s," National Post, March 15, 2017, <http://nationalpost.com/news/world/new-zealand-grants-whanganui-river-legal-personhood-settles-case-dating-back-to-1870s>.

Pam Longobardi: Forensic Aesthetic for “Crimes Against Nature”

While Irland disregards the expected “objectivity” of journalism and science, Longobardi strategically embraces an “objective” aesthetic. In fact, she approaches sites as though they had already been granted legal personhood. With every intervention, the artist confronts a breaching of both humans and nonhuman rights as she steps onto a coastal site invaded by discarded and lost plastic objects. To simulate the criminality of a scene, she employs a forensic aesthetic as a mode of inquiry,¹⁴⁷ examining and documenting as she identifies and collects the “evidence of a crime”.¹⁴⁸ In a recent 2017 *Drifters Project* intervention in Llansteffan, Wales, the artist photographed plastic objects in situ, where they were abandoned by their human users (fig. 20) or where they eventually ended up, washed up or wedged between rocks (fig. 21). For Longobardi, the expansion of creativity into the scientific is necessary as artists give more credence to all forms of knowledge; however, she accomplishes more than merely making visible the sometimes already-known horror of oceanic pollution. With a scientific approach and creative allowance, Longobardi aims not to simply depict what is, but what ought to be. She understands much of human activity as a crime against “nature”.¹⁴⁹ Abigail Susik considers her forensic approach as one aligning with an emerging aesthetic in contemporary oceanic art: the “documentary aesthetic”.¹⁵⁰ She contends that scenes recorded with objectivity¹⁵¹ and little manipulation express a desire for the professed “factuality” of reportage. I see Longobardi’s strategy as a move to convince a concerning number of people in denial of humanity’s impact on the planet, and to further validate, in a language deemed more “credible” by many, oceanic agency.

While this aesthetic is consistent throughout all the interventions performed for *Drifters Project*, it is especially effective in the display strategies used in her solo exhibition, *What Was*

¹⁴⁷ Pamela Longobardi, “Plastic as Shadow: The Toxicity of Objects in the Anthropocene,” in *Framing the Ocean, 1700 to the Present: Envisioning the Sea as Social Space* (UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2014), 182.

¹⁴⁸ Pamela Longobardi, *Pam Longobardi: The Ocean Gleaner*, interview by Celina Jeffrey, 2016, <http://drainmag.com/pam-longobardi-the-ocean-gleaner/>.

¹⁴⁹ Problematic language given that she is trying to challenge the perceived divisions between human and nonhuman, nature and culture.

¹⁵⁰ Abigail Susik, “Convergence Zone: The Aesthetics and Politics of the Ocean in Contemporary Art,” *Drain Magazine* 7, no. 2 (2012), <http://drainmag.com/convergence-zone-the-aesthetics-and-politics-of-the-ocean-in-contemporary-art-and-photography/>.

¹⁵¹ Susik uses this term more as a “style” than a “de facto category”.

Once Lost Must Now Be Found: Chronicling Crimes Against Nature. The “lost” in the title of the exhibition refers to the lost objects themselves, and perhaps more importantly, to the loss of “sense of connection and embeddedness in nature”.¹⁵² The exhibition, which took place at the Hudgens Centre for the Arts in Duluth, Georgia in 2014, was divided in two main rooms, one of which Longobardi called the Forensic Study Lab (fig. 22). The long and narrow room’s white walls, beige floor tiles and fluorescent lighting further fostered a lab-like space. As visitors navigated the space, they encountered unframed photographs hung on the wall, glass display cases, and black tables covered in neatly exhibited plastic objects. Items such as lighters, toothbrushes, combs, and toys were categorized by type and by size. *Evidence of Crime IV (cross coffin bundle)* (2014) (fig.23) was one of several poster-sized prints that combined photos of plastic objects taken where they were found, and some of the artist’s notes. These notes provided additional information about the conditions in which the debris was found, divided into the following categories: “Date Found”, “Location”, “Collection”, “Notes”, and finally, “Crime”.

Longobardi’s forensic aesthetic in all phases of her interventions (documenting, collecting, exhibiting) reveal her insistence on nonhuman beings and entities, like oceans, as persons worth legally defending. She deems appropriate the use of the term “oceanocide”, reminiscent of “ecocide” which defines “the destruction of large areas of the natural environment as a consequence of human activity”.¹⁵³ While “oceanocide” is still an unpopular term in scientific publications, the term has been used by artists like Mark Dion in the catalogue for *Oceanomania* (2011), and by journalist Claire Nouvian.¹⁵⁴ For Longobardi, the suffix “-cide” is suitable here because “[oceanic pollution] is truly a murder scenario and nothing short of it”.¹⁵⁵ In an interview, she explained that the intent to kill on such a large scale can only be likened to human extermination campaigns because of its “wanton disregard for life that, by extension, includes *all* life on the planet”.¹⁵⁶ Though Longobardi’s *Drifters Project* is intent on decentering humanity, she contends that the neglect of nonhuman life inevitably impacts and endangers human lives.

¹⁵² Pamela Longobardi, *Terrible Beauty*, interview by Sally Hansell, 2015.

¹⁵³ “Definition of Ecocide,” Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, n.d., accessed November 4, 2017.

¹⁵⁴ Longobardi, *Pam Longobardi: The Ocean Gleaner*, interview by Celina Jeffrey, 2016, <http://drainmag.com/pam-longobardi-the-ocean-gleaner/>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Insisting that recent refugee crisis is first and foremost a climate crisis,¹⁵⁷ she traveled to Lesbos, Greece, a small Aegean island that greeted nearly 600,000 refugees on its shores.¹⁵⁸ Longobardi and her team encountered mountainous piles of materiality composed of life vests worn and discarded by the refugees who floated across the Aegean Sea (fig. 24). The site was documented, the material collected, and reassembled to form a flag symbolizing the new nation of refugees without borders (fig. 25). Safe Passage bags (fig. 26) were also sewn and sold by the Hathaway Contemporary Gallery with all proceeds going to the Lesbos Solidarity social enterprise.¹⁵⁹

Anthropocentrism and Anthropomorphism

Recognizing other-than-human agency can be beneficial for both humans and nonhumans as the past has proven that a failure to do so perpetuates environmental degradation that has devastating effects for all. However, in their attempts to do just that, is it possible for Irland and Longobardi to decenter the human being in a way that does not further enforce anthropocentrism? By imagining that the river expresses itself in a distinctively human manner, and by likening the murder of a human to that of the ocean, are the artists simply anthropomorphizing, and thus humanizing nonhumans? Can anthropomorphism combat anthropocentrism? In written reflections of their work, both Irland and Longobardi further display anthropomorphic understandings of bodies of water. For instance, Irland relates rivers to human bodies: “Rivers are alive. They have a body called a watershed with a mouth at the delta; organs of wetlands and riparian zones; cells, molecules of water; and like us, a circulatory system. We are not separate from the waters of the world”.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, Longobardi’s discussion of the ocean as the “chemical twin to our own body”¹⁶¹ offers a salient analogy and a base for understanding the alarming physical effects of plastic. Blood testing, she explains, reveals the bad habits or illnesses of the host body, while the ocean’s “blood test” would reveal its bad

¹⁵⁷ See: Timothy Snyder, “The Next Genocide,” *The New York Times*, September 12, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/13/opinion/sunday/the-next-genocide.html?mwrsm=Facebook&_r=0.

Snyder argues that climate change threatens to provoke a new ecological panic that could lead to the next genocide.

¹⁵⁸ Pamela Longobardi, “Reworlding,” *Drifters Project*, August 24, 2017, <http://driftersproject.net/blog/2017/08/24/reworlding/>.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Irland, *Reading the River: The Ecological Activist Art of Basia Irland*, 146.

¹⁶¹ Longobardi, “Plastic as Shadow: The Toxicity of Objects in the Anthropocene,” 184.

health caused by someone else. As in her interventions, her writings include parallels between the ocean and the human body, but these are, however, not isolated instances of anthropomorphism in contemporary ecological art concerned with water issues.

Tanya Harnett, artist and member of Carry-The-Kettle First Nation in Saskatchewan, attributes human bodily qualities to Canadian bodies of water. In 2011, she produced a photographic series titled *Scarred/Sacred Water* (fig. 27) that provides insight into the perspectives of First Nations rural communities. In the summer of the same year, Harnett visited five First Nations communities in northern Alberta – specifically Paul First Nation, Alexis First Nation, Driftpile First Nation, Cold Lake First Nation and Lubicon Lake First Nation – all of which are especially concerned with the state of their water.¹⁶² In each of these communities, she asked local political leaders and environmentalists to direct her to key locations where water concerns were most identifiable. In these areas, she poured red food coloring and proceeded to document it.¹⁶³ The resulting photographs depicted landscapes that appear to be wounded and bleeding. The land is depicted as a body, one that suffers the same physical symptoms a human might. The photographs viscerally and conceptually humanize the land, and thus destabilize human/non-human binaries with anthropomorphic strategies. Harnett does not suggest that the land is indeed human, but creates a “space of possibility”¹⁶⁴ in which viewers are invited to empathize with the land, and where they can contemplate a reshaping of existing paradigms.

Historically, the process of anthropomorphizing was one of the means by which people understood their worlds. English scholar Bryan L. Moore explains that in ancient Greece, people gave virtually all “natural” phenomena human qualities.¹⁶⁵ While he contends that such a practice could foster greater empathy between humans and nonhumans, Houle warns against some of the ways it could continue to perpetuate anthropocentric perspectives. For one, in *Infinite, Indifferent Kinship* (2010), she suggests that the process of anthropomorphizing is deeply present in contemporary animality art. In this essay, Houle identifies Western ideas of animality in relation to a series of pertinent artworks, one of them being Francis Alÿs’ *The*

¹⁶² Tanya Harnett, “Scarred/Sacred Water,” Pitt Rivers Museum, accessed June 6, 2017, <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/harnett>.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Kagan, “Artistic Research and Climate Science: Transdisciplinary Learning and Spaces of Possibilities,” 7.

¹⁶⁵ Bryan L. Moore, *Ecology and Literature: Ecocentric Personification from Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 30.

Nightwatch (2004) (fig. 28).¹⁶⁶ The work consists of a video documenting an urban fox that was let loose inside the National Portrait Gallery in London. The fox wanders through the collection, sniffing, scamping, pausing, and at times, backtracking.¹⁶⁷ The video, which essentially features a fox “looking at paintings”, appears to be an attempt to make the fox look less nonhuman if “gallery-goer” or “art lover” are understood solely as human roles.

However, by identifying a quality of our choice – by using anthropomorphism in relation to solely intelligent or prosocial animals – the risk is that most species will not be perceived as animals in the “right” ways.¹⁶⁸ Referring to Alÿs’ work among several others, Houle defines an “extensionist impulse”, which is the impulse to make a different “we”.¹⁶⁹ Essentially, this impulse, common among contemporary artists, tries to find or expose a key feature that is usually and mistakenly considered absent in nonhumans. The problem with this, she claims, is that while it professes to equalize and include, it also underscores the differences between us.¹⁷⁰ The act of making one appear less nonhuman confirms the human as the sole “rational animal, upright animal, embarrassed animal”, as the sole “art lover”.¹⁷¹ The “extensionist impulse” leaves intact demarcation, which simply alters the hierarchy of species in a minimal way. It makes a different “we”, reinforcing a new and inferior “them”. This favors a very small percentage of nonhumans, excluding, for example, molluscs, plants, soil, water, etc. As the authors of *Anthropomorphized Species as Tools for Conservation: Utility beyond Prosocial, Intelligent and Suffering Species* (2013) suggest, the development of an empathetic, and thus productive, anthropomorphism would need to engage with a much broader set of features.¹⁷² Yet, artists like Harnett, Irland and Longobardi continue to – perhaps inevitably, as the next paragraph explores – liken bodies of water to human bodies with human desires and impulses.

¹⁶⁶ Houle, “Infinite, Indifferent Kinship,” 15.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ M. Root-Bernstein et al., “Anthropomorphized Species as Tools for Conservation: Utility beyond Prosocial, Intelligent and Suffering Species,” *Biodiversity and Conservation* 22, no. 8 (2013): 1578.

¹⁶⁹ Houle, “Infinite, Indifferent Kinship,” 15.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*, 12.

¹⁷² Root-Bernstein et al., “Anthropomorphized Species as Tools for Conservation: Utility beyond Prosocial, Intelligent and Suffering Species,” 1578.

Grosz explains that Darwin understood the extent to which “man” had ordered the world according to his own various interests.¹⁷³ She understands that Darwin’s legacy makes explicit that this is inevitable as humans cannot produce accounts of the world that are not embedded in, or associated to other “humanist” knowledges. However, they can reconsider their position in relation to others. Grosz proposes:

We need a humanities in which the human is no longer the norm, the rule, or object, but instead life itself, in its open multiplicity, comes to provide the object of analysis and poses its questions about man’s – and woman’s – specificity as a species, as a social collective, as a political order or economic structure.¹⁷⁴

This passage suggests that it is not wrong, or even avoidable, to be primarily concerned with humanity if its position within a complex set of relations is understood. Irland and Longobardi’s projects imaginatively work towards understanding and making visible these relations. It is a process of acknowledging one’s embeddedness, and of respecting the bodies of water that sustain us. In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), Jane Bennett, explains that is it wrong to deny vitality to nonhuman bodies, forces and forms, and states:

[...] a careful course of anthropomorphization can help reveal that vitality, even though it resists full translation and exceeds my comprehensive grasp. I believe that encounters with lively matter can chasten my fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is, expose a wider distribution of agency, and reshape the self and its interests.¹⁷⁵

While politics oriented towards humans – what has come to be called anthropocentrism – can be destructive, scholars like Cronon argue that it is not only impossible, but unproductive to eliminate humans from the equation. The idea that “nature” is separate, and must be saved from humans¹⁷⁶ leaves little hope of establishing what an ethical and sustainable human place in “nature” might look like.¹⁷⁷ To maintain politics oriented towards humans, but that also seriously

¹⁷³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁷⁴ Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*, 16.

¹⁷⁵ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 197.

¹⁷⁶ This idea is one that surfaces in some of the darkest forms of “deep ecology”, which Timothy Morton challenges. See: Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge: MAL Havard University Press, 2007).

¹⁷⁷ William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 17.

takes into account nonhumans could lead to what Andrew Dobson calls a form of enlightened anthropocentrism.¹⁷⁸

While it does not claim that a perfect model has yet been established, this thesis recognizes the potential of anthropomorphism in ecological art attempting to reduce anthropocentrism in Western societies. Attributing human qualities with caution can help artists like Irland and Longobardi convey the idea that rivers and oceans are worthy of personhood, thus challenging the dualisms of Western thought. Anthropomorphism, cannot, however, be a substitute for the completely elaborate worldview these artists call for, and must be coupled with other aesthetic strategies, some of which the following chapter identifies.

¹⁷⁸ Andrew Dobson, "Democracy and Nature: Speaking and Listening," *Political Studies* 58, no. 4 (October 2010): 758.

CHAPTER THREE

Artists as Communicators

As this thesis has demonstrated, contemporary ecological artists inevitably take on multiple roles. In *Art and Ecology Now* (2014), Andrew Brown notes that they adopt a wide range of approaches, from passive commentator or enquiring researcher to visionary innovator or active interventionist seeking transformative social, political and ecological case.¹⁷⁹ Though focused on separate water issues, and employing different aesthetic strategies, it is clear that Irland and Longobardi take on the role of active interventionists, which in turn entails a cultivation of skills as activists, collectors, gatherers, laborers, etc. This chapter, however, will focus on their shared role as communicators, which is perhaps their most innovative approach in dealing with environmental degradation. It could be argued that most artists necessarily communicate in one way or another, but what is specifically at play in Irland and Longobardi's practices is a desire to facilitate dialogue between the human and nonhuman worlds. To sensibly consider their role as communicators, I first attend to the differences between speaking and listening, and questions of who addresses and who is being addressed. Further, I examine how the proposition to increased communication with the nonhuman world is manifested in the work of Irland and Longobardi.

The Politics of Speaking and Listening

In *The Politics of Listening: Possibilities and Challenges for Democratic Life* (2017), Leah Bassel explains that scholars across disciplines have repeatedly noted that listening has been significantly understudied as opposed to the focus often given to voice and speaking.¹⁸⁰ Andrew Dobson suggests that "speech" has been one of the key characteristics with which humans have distinguished themselves, and this has in turn resulted in a general lack of political consideration of nonhumans and even future generations of humans.¹⁸¹ Both Bassel and Dobson highlight the importance of listening, as opposed to speaking, to effective democracy. If the agency of nonhumans is to be recognized, signals stemming from the nonhuman world should be

¹⁷⁹ Brown, *Art and Ecology Now*, 7.

¹⁸⁰ Artist-researcher Dr. Luis Sotelo Castro is among those who explore the transformative power of listening in the context of social change.

¹⁸¹ Andrew Dobson, "Democracy and Nature: Speaking and Listening," *Political Studies* 58, no. 4 (October 2010): 753. It is important to note that this statement emerges from a discussion on Western politics, specifically.

listened to and interpreted with the same amount of respect attributed to communication emanating from human subjects. Dobson claims that “[i]f we had been better listeners, we might have heard the drip-drip of the melting glaciers as a ‘proposition’ to be considered”.¹⁸² Bruno Latour insists that it is wrong to think that “[h]umans and humans alone are the ones who speak, discuss, and argue”.¹⁸³ As mentioned briefly above, theorists have largely thought about how the capacity to speak can be improved, but this has not been the case for listening. However, listening as a capacity equally requires cultivation. Dobson is particularly interested in the term “receptivity” rather than listening as it evokes a broader notion of responsiveness that is perhaps more attuned to nonhuman “voices”.¹⁸⁴ While both Irland’s *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding* and Longobardi’s *Drifter Project* work towards mitigating existing water issues, the truly transformative aspect of their work lies in the way they provide a model of listening (or receptivity) to the nonhuman world as a hopeful and precautionary method¹⁸⁵ for future scenarios.

Bassel pushes her reflection on the politics of listening a bit further, contending that it can challenge norms of intelligibility. By shifting the roles of the speakers and the listeners, attributions of power and privilege are disrupted, and the binary of “Us” (the audible) versus “Them” (the silent or stigmatized other) is challenged.¹⁸⁶ Artists who listen with ethical care can provide a resource to understand the contemporary world, bringing to light the possibility of a different kind of future, as listening “[...] can function as ‘an act of attention that registers uniqueness of the other’s narrative’, and telling a story can be a form of recognition through which we recognize our stories as entangled with the stories of others”.¹⁸⁷ In ecological discourses, the act of listening can bring people to reconsider their perhaps distant relationship with their environment, fostering responsiveness to difference and reinforcing the

¹⁸² Ibid., 765.

¹⁸³ Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Harvard University Press, 2004), 66.

¹⁸⁴ Andrew Dobson, “Democracy and Nature: Speaking and Listening,” 761.

¹⁸⁵ See: Carmela Cucuzzella, “From Eco-Design to Sustainable Design: A Contribution of the Precautionary Principle” (Université de Montréal, 2007).

¹⁸⁶ Leah Bassel, *The Politics Of Listening: Possibilities And Challenges For Democratic Life* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), 4.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 9.

interrelatedness of all things.¹⁸⁸ Bassel acknowledges that new perspectives do not always seamlessly merge with existing ones, but remains hopeful that the nature of conflict, power relations and what is at stake can at least be clarified through the act of listening; “[c]riticism can be combined with knowledge and awareness” and “a positive alternative might be articulated that can begin to pluralise public space”.¹⁸⁹ In her concluding remarks, she asks who can and will advocate political listening and demand processes that are less binary and exclusive. Who will defend the nonhuman right to be understood, and consequently to communicate? While I am convinced this is a task that can be undertaken across disciplines, visual artists have previously and continue to advocate for just that.

Of course, the act of listening as an approach and aesthetic strategy is not without precedent, especially when considering art practices that emerge outside of Western society. In 1991, for instance, Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore introduced her participatory sculpture, *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* (fig. 29). The six-foot wide and seven-foot long wooden megaphone provided a mobile technology for Indigenous speech-making and storytelling in response to what is now referred to in Canadian history as the Oka Crisis.¹⁹⁰ Belmore’s piece was done in support of their struggle to maintain their territory; the Mohawk community of Kanesatake protested the development of a golf course and luxury condominium on Indigenous burial grounds, which prompted violent intervention from the provincial police. The object traveled to various First Nations communities – both rural and urban – across Canada, where Belmore asked people to address the land directly through the megaphone as “an attempt to hear political protest as a poetic action”.¹⁹¹ It connected participants to “their Mother”, and became a conduit for uniting a variety of human and other-than-human speakers and addressees. Instead of depicting the earth merely as a “timeless feminine essence inviting passive worship (or worse, colonial penetration)”, Belmore’s megaphone ensured that it was “grasped as a dynamic set of relations shaped by participants

¹⁸⁸ Scholars such as William Cronon have previously worked towards dismantling the nature/culture binaries that continue to inform relationships between humans and nonhumans, namely in Western society. More importantly, Indigenous standpoints have always confounded the Western animacy hierarchy and never forgot the interrelatedness of all things. See scholars Kim Tallbear and Zoe Todd.

¹⁸⁹ Leah Bassel, *The Politics Of Listening: Possibilities And Challenges For Democratic Life*, 60.

¹⁹⁰ Rebecca Belmore, “Ayum-Ee-Aawach Oomama-Mowan: Speaking to Their Mother,” accessed October 3, 2017, <http://www.rebeccabelmore.com/exhibit/Speaking-to-Their-Mother.html>.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

willing to both talk and listen”.¹⁹² The artist specified in a recent interview that while people spoke directly to the land, the work was meant to also echo back their voices.¹⁹³ In a way they were confronting their own selves in relation to the land, engaging in an act of both speaking and listening.

In a more recent body of work, titled *Wave Sound* (2017), the artist took a slightly different approach: rather than asking people to speak to the land, she invites the public to simply *listen* to it. *Wave Sound* was created in the context of *Landmarks 2017/Repères 2017*, a project that sought to creatively explore connections to the land through projects in and around national parks and historic sites. The series of sculptures created by Belmore for *Wave Sound*, consisting of four cone-shaped objects (fig. 30), were installed in four locations across Canada: Banff National Park, Pukaskwa National Park and Gros Morne National Park (fig. 31). Though each varies in shape, they all have a similar function: “to amplif[y] the living sounds that are particular to the location”.¹⁹⁴ Belmore now asks that the voice of the land be heard, a nonhuman voice that has been there all along, but that is disconcertingly often unheard.

Artists as Readers

In Irland and Longobardi’s projects, the act of “reading” – referring to processes of observing, interpreting and listening – exemplifies their receptiveness to bodies of water, and is a gesture in which they allow themselves to be addressed *by* the nonhuman world. While Longobardi takes on the role of reader in a more literal way, instinctively extracting meaning from the oceanic plastic debris she encounters, Irland’s approach to “reading” a river is less defined, and is usually done as preliminary research. She is also not the sole contributing “reader”. In *Reading the River: The Ecological Activist Art of Basia Irland*, the artist writes that “[t]he role of research about each particular site is paramount and consists of the usual web searches and head-in-book investigations, but more informative are discussions with elders, scientists, and river citizens who have spent time hanging out with their river, intently paying

¹⁹² Jessica Horton, “Indigenous Artists against the Anthropocene,” *Taylor & Francis* 76, no. 2 (October 12, 2017): 58.

¹⁹³ Rebecca Belmore, Rebecca Belmore Wants Us to Listen to the Land, interview by Lindsay Nixon, June 7, 2017, <https://canadianart.ca/features/rebecca-belmore-landmarks-2017/>.

¹⁹⁴ “Wave Sound,” *Landmarks/Repères2017*, 2017, <https://landmarks2017.ca/info/rebecca-belmore/wave-sound/>.

attention”.¹⁹⁵ Her willingness to be in dialogue not only with the river, but with others who know it best, reinforces the fact that she tirelessly works towards being responsive to not only what she sees, but what she believes a specific body of water needs. Considering her readings are based on close observation, it is evident that Irland’s “ice books” are not about theorizing in an armchair or classroom, but rather about connecting directly and physically with the river, that the act of reading can be an act of reconnecting with place.¹⁹⁶ The following is a poetry excerpt from *Water Library* (2007), which gathers reflections regarding her art practice:

When rain returns, and
snow replenishes the source,
the river will flow again, its
cycle connecting us all.

But will we have listened to this living body of water?
Will we have heard the raspy voice of
the river asking for reciprocity?¹⁹⁷

Irland is interested in asking what can be done for a river as it is usually asked to offer more than it can give. She usually accomplishes this in a variety of ways, namely by selecting restorative native riparian seeds to embed in her ice sculptures.

The artist’s ability to read, listen and respond was concretely shown through one of her *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding* interventions in Vancouver, Canada, in 2012. After having already selected a composition of seeds to use for her “book launch” at Senakw Staulk (False Creek), Irland attended *downstream*, a water symposium organized by Rita Wong and Dorothy Christian in Vancouver.¹⁹⁸ There, she heard scientists discuss the local challenge of trying to lure salmon back to the area. The traditional food chain had been disrupted due to a lack of krill for the herring to feed upon, which in turn fed the salmon. Irland then decided to forgo the exclusive use of seeds for this iteration of the project, and inserted bright pink krill in her ice books (fig. 32 and 33).¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Irland, *Reading the River: The Ecological Activist Art of Basia Irland*, 151.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. Physically engaging with rivers is something Irland realized was not common practice when she taught classes of 150 students in the Hydrology Department at the University of New Mexico, in which only a small percentage of students had been to the nearby Rio Grande River.

¹⁹⁷ Basia Irland, *Water Library* (University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 56.

¹⁹⁸ Irland, *Reading the River: The Ecological Activist Art of Basia Irland*, 150.

¹⁹⁹ Basia Irland, “SENAKW STAULK (FALSE CREEK), Vancouver, Canada,” 2012, <http://www.basiaairland.com/projects/ice%20books/vancouver.html>.

In contrast, Longobardi's processes of "reading" are not necessarily focused on the specificities of a certain body of water. Irland recognizes the interconnectedness the planet's rivers, lakes and oceans, but given the nature of her work, she is mainly concerned with the individual needs of distinct rivers. On the other hand, Longobardi's *Drifters Project* focuses on oceanic pollution, and thus hardly sits well with the notion of site-specificity. The artist, who has previously referred to her role as "Plastic Interpreter",²⁰⁰ engages with lost and discarded objects that Dores Sacquengna characterizes as "Bodies Glocal".²⁰¹ The term "glocalization", typically used in the context of marketed products) emerged in the eighties to signify the relationships that exist between the global environment and the local context. It seems highly appropriate given that oceans, more so than rivers, gather castoffs that transcend both geographical boundaries and historic time. In the sea, everything moves and converges, from past (sculptures, pottery fragments, wreckage, etc.) to the present (toys, dishwashers, washing machines, televisions, mobile phones, etc.), housing massive conglomeration of garbage from east and west coasts.²⁰² Oceanic plastic pollution cannot be traced back to one particular location; Abigail Susik has noted that the trash photographed and incorporated into Longobardi's work demonstrates the presence of "Japanese fishing nets knotted into Afroamerican sailing ropes, which have entangled Russian water bottles, South American toothbrushes, and Canadian toilet seats, and so on".²⁰³ Perhaps the infiltration of global capitalist culture into the local is precisely what makes plastic pollution so distant, yet unsettling and guilt inducing.

Longobardi then considers the plastics of her collection as a "magic encyclopedia that may tell us our fate", and that of the global population.²⁰⁴ She is interested in plastic, as opposed to garbage in general, because of "what it reveals about us as a global economy and what it reveals about the ocean as a type of cultural space".²⁰⁵ For the artist, the ocean is regurgitating human-made garbage as a clear attempt to communicate specifically with its human producers

²⁰⁰ Longobardi, "Bringing Awareness To Plastic Pollution In Indonesia,".

²⁰¹ Longobardi et al., *Pam Longobardi: Drifters: Plastics, Pollution, and Personhood*, 12.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Abigail Susik, "Convergence Zone: The Aesthetics and Politics of the Ocean in Contemporary Art," *Drain Magazine* 7, no. 2 (2012), <http://drainmag.com/convergence-zone- the-aesthetics-and-politics-of-the-ocean-in-contemporary-art-and-photography/>.

²⁰⁴ Pamela Longobardi, "Wilderness and Invasion: Plastic Place-Makers of the Anthropocene," in *Gyre: The Plastic Ocean*, ed. Julie Decker (Booth-Clibborn Editions, 2014), 179.

²⁰⁵ Longobardi, "Plastic as Shadow: The Toxicity of Objects in the Anthropocene," 182.

and discarders, and she is readily prepared to listen. In this sense, her artistic process is receptive to this call for action. She writes:

[Plastic] is a new supreme commodity because it expresses the ‘amount of labor’ that nature bestows, wrought by ocean forces, and it carries readable knowledge of nature’s powers of material production, transport and transformation. It also carries with it messages of fragility and limitations.²⁰⁶

Through *Drifters Project*, Longobardi takes on the task of uncovering these messages and stories, which she reads as “siren[s] of grave consequences”, before exhibiting in the later stages of her interventions. Recent examples of these readings are found in her collection of forensic site photos taken at Llansteffan Beach in Wales, where she performed an intervention in 2017. In one photograph, titled *Shared Plastic* (fig. 34), beach sand, rocks and small shells occupy the frame; the focus, however, is a mesh netting and a discarded plastic candy wrapper inscribed with the words “More to share!”, which the artist playfully and somberly interprets as the ocean stating that there is a lot more where this came from. Another photograph, *White Plastic Non Non* (fig. 35), also demonstrates an engagement with the textual elements found on the plastic debris. Faded black letters make up the word “non”, which is printed a couple of time on an unidentifiable object covered in dirt and shells, and based on the image’s title, Longobardi picked up on this negative assertion. In other instances, the title is the only indicator of her reading. *Plastic Dig* (fig. 36) pictures a bright yellow sand toy – perhaps a small rake or digging tool – in the same setting. Despite the lack of textual elements, the artist interprets this scene as one alluding to the deep dark corners of the planet that are now inhabited by plastic. The artist thinks of the ocean as having a collective intelligence, which she claims is proven by the infinitely creative act of evolving life. Messages from the ocean are spelt out in plastic, and Longobardi supposes that this is because it is a language, a material we understand. In an interview, she further elaborates on this form of oceanic agency by implying that “if you were an alien species attempting to communicate something of grave importance to another who did not understand your language, you would use the most expedient means to do so”.²⁰⁷ Of course, she

²⁰⁶ Longobardi, “Wilderness and Invasion: Plastic Place-Makers of the Anthropocene,” 179.

²⁰⁷ Pamela Longobardi, Messages from the Ocean: An Interview with Pam Longobardi, interview by Karen Tauches, January 11, 2017, <http://pelicanbomb.com/art-review/2017/messages-from-the-ocean-an-interview-with-pam-longobardi>.

acknowledges that the process of “reading” the ocean is a largely interpretative one, but that it fosters a frame of mind capable of productive openness and receptiveness.²⁰⁸

Artists as Translators:

This initial focus on Irland and Longobardi’s listening and reading methods is followed by an examination of their responses. This component of their work is equally strategic, and used to foster stronger relationships between human and nonhuman worlds. After being addressed by the nonhuman world, instead of speaking back, Irland and Longobardi turn their attention to their human participants and viewers, establishing their role as translator. The dilemma they face in such inclusive dialogues is how to translate the communications of nonhumans into commonly understood articulations. As previously discussed, this requires significant interpretation, and effective aesthetic strategies. As Longobardi described her artistic process during a recent interview, she claimed that “if you were an alien species attempting to communicate something of grave importance to another who did not understand your language, you would use the more expedient means to do so”.²⁰⁹ This section then considers Irland’s use of the book form and “text” as a familiar learning and readable device, and Longobardi’s use of a material of our own making to articulate messages communicated by rivers and oceans, and their nonhuman inhabitants; to not speak *to* water, but *for* water.

As previously discussed, *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding* consists of a series of site-specific interventions in which the artist releases an ice book embedded with restorative seeds into a given river. The book as a communicative device, representative of knowledge and education, is a reoccurring symbol in the artist’s practice. The act of releasing an ice book into a river can be understood in different ways if we position Irland as the author of its seed-based text. A first reading could imply that the artist is attempting to speak to the river in a language that it understands. A second could, while recognizing it as an act of gifting to the river, suggest that the sculpted books are rather intended to be read by human viewers and participants (fig. 38 and 39). I argue that the latter offers a more productive understanding of Irland’s work. After all,

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Pamela Longobardi, *Messages from the Ocean: An Interview with Pam Longobardi*, interview by Karen Tauches, January 11, 2017, <http://pelicanbomb.com/art-review/2017/messages-from-the-ocean-an-interview-with-pam-longobardi>.

the “messages” carried by the books are dissolved and become “illegible” in their encounter with a river.

A carved book – an aesthetically pleasing recognizable, and thus enticing, form – invites people to approach it and “read” it.²¹⁰ Despite its accessible and conventional form, the contents of the books (the “text”) is rather experimental and requires a certain degree of openness from the person that encounters it. While she has previously expressed her love for academia and books, she also contends that “book knowledge and what one can learn from libraries, manuscripts, and archives is only ever partial. It can be a complement to, but can never replace, direct experience that to me is almost always more meaningful”.²¹¹ Consequently, the text, typically made out of seeds, makes up what Irland calls a “universal ecological language”²¹² and “since it is not a specific language – neither Japanese nor Thai, Italian nor Yaqui – the seed script embedded within each ice sculpture can be read as a language of the earth”.²¹³ Perhaps this creatively mediated translation critiques and challenges humans’, and more specifically Western society’s, past and ongoing communication (or lack thereof) with nonhuman others. As she reads landscapes and waterscapes, tests water quality and works with scientists and conservationists to better understand the restoration process, Irland puts herself in a position where she speaks for water, and proposes a strategy that translates the “voices” of ecosystems, facilitating dialogue between humans and nonhumans.

After a careful process of reading, Longobardi too addresses human viewers in the final stages of her interventions for *Drifters Project*. This last part of the chapter discusses her translation strategy in a consideration of one of the projects outcomes: an installation titled *Economies of Scale* (2013) (fig. 40). The wall installation piece was first exhibited in Longobardi’s solo show at the Sandler Hudson Gallery in Atlanta, Georgia. The artist selected 72 plastic objects removed from beaches and caves in Alaska, Greece, Hawaii, Costa Rica, Italy and

²¹⁰ Photographs from the launches at the Rio Grande River, Boulder Creek and Deckers Creek document these interactions. See figure 37.

²¹¹ Irland, *Water Library*, 29.

²¹² Irland, *Reading the River: The Ecological Activist Art of Basia Irland*, 115.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 150.

the Gulf of Mexico among other places, and placed them in a horizontal line.²¹⁴ Placed in ascending order of size, the piece gathers objects varying from a single Styrofoam ball to a hard plastic net float. Many meanings emerge from this work; for instance, its title references a term in microeconomics that speaks to the cost advantage that arises with increased output of product. It also visually alludes to a timeline, perhaps pointing to the urgent need to transform conceptions about the ocean as “endless”.²¹⁵ For the purposes of this discussion, however, I am particularly interested in the artist’s selection of objects as she has made conscious decisions to present selective “stories” communicated by the ocean. Describing her work as an act of discovery and then translation, she seeks to communicate information shared by the ocean and nonhuman portion of the planet, which she considers to be highly “sentient entities”, to challenge the status quo.²¹⁶ Longobardi does employ a conversion strategy when plastic enters the gallery, as it typically comes free of associative background like location and conditions of discovery. Having often been cleaned and scrubbed by the cleansing processes of the ocean, these objects tend to appear distant and alien-like.²¹⁷

Among the various objects displayed in *Economies of Scale*, a minuscule white flower shaped item (fig. 41), a faded brown bottle cap of some sort with the word “endless” inscribed onto it (fig. 42), and a weathered toothbrush were displayed (fig. 43). Despite their varying levels of familiarity and appearance of functionality, all are not particularly threatening. However, carefully selected, they “engage extended looking which allows the horror of this material, and one’s personal associations to it, to seep in slowly”.²¹⁸ If this was not enough, Longobardi ensures that the threat they impose is communicated with people by making a QR code available in the gallery. When scanned, the code provided detailed information about each object. It is at this point that viewers realize, if they had not before, that the small flower shaped item is in fact a manicure decal found along the Spree River bank in Berlin. One also finds out that plastic nail

²¹⁴ Pamela Longobardi, “Economies of Scale I, 2013,” Drifters Project, November 21, 2013, http://driftersproject.net/blog/2013/10/24/endless-new-exhibition-opening-at-sandler-hudson-in-atlanta-nov-1st/economiesofscale_lg/.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Pamela Longobardi, Pam Longobardi: The Ocean Gleaner, interview by Celina Jeffrey, 2016, <http://drainmag.com/pam-longobardi-the-ocean-gleaner/>.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

decorations absorb many hazardous chemicals in nail salons, causing harm to both humans who wear them and the animals who ingest them.²¹⁹ In the same way, the artist highlights the irony of the toothbrush found on the coast of Midway Atoll in the United-States by identifying it as a Reach brand toothbrush; it was introduced in 1972 to help kids brush hard-to-reach places, and now finds itself in hard-to-reach underwater areas.²²⁰ By confronting humans with objects of their own making and using, Pam Longobardi hopes to convey the ocean's stories and cries for help.

²¹⁹ Pamela Longobardi, "Economies of Scale," 2014, <http://www.driftersprojectart.net/>.

²²⁰ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Basia Irland and Pam Longobardi have been consistently active in discourses of environmental crises in the twenty first century, making contributions that paradigmatically move away from illusion of control that often prevails in scientific and political discourses. Instead, they embrace the chaos and complexity of our²²¹ changing times to ensure creative resilience within communities. Such ecological art practices are helpful for visualizing an often ambiguous and uncertain future. Irland's *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding* and Longobardi's *Drifters Project* propose models for imagining and achieving a more sustainable future in upcoming years.

These projects undeniably benefit, even if only in a very small way, the ecosystems in which the artists intervene. Irland hopes to be contributing to the restoration of watershed ecosystems by releasing seeds, specifically chosen with the help of stream ecologists, river restoration biologists, and botanists,²²² into rivers. Longobardi, who has removed thousands of pounds of oceanic plastic since she initiated *Drifters Project*²²³, urges communities to keep their beaches clean. On the surface, these actions appear to be reactionary, attempts to mitigate existing damages. However, in this thesis, I examined overarching themes that surfaced in each project, which was especially generative for it allowed me to see their true transformative potential. Though guided by acts of remediation, the aesthetic strategies employed by Irland and Longobardi – namely the anthropomorphization of nonhumans and the overt receptivity to nonhuman “voices” – are rather precautionary. I see them as propositions to reconsider and alter anthropocentric perspectives and actions that continue to perpetuate environmental destruction.

As both Irland and Longobardi are established practitioners and thus addressed in many art reviews, interviews and journal articles, a challenge in writing this thesis was to approach their work in new and productive ways. I consequently undertook to frame the artists' work through Western accounts of posthumanism, while allowing this perspective to be complicated by Indigenous perspectives. Together, these frameworks were a dynamic and complex lens through which to interpret Irland and Longobardi's projects, which confirmed that, whether the

²²¹ By “our,” I mean the global population that collectively faces, though at varying levels, the consequences of environmental degradation and climate change.

²²² Irland, *Reading the River: The Ecological Activist Art of Basia Irland*, 147.

²²³ Longobardi, “Project Statement,” *Drifters Project*, accessed October 23, 2016, <http://driftersproject.net/about/>.

artists acknowledge this or not, their methodologies and philosophies are deeply informed by long-standing Indigenous knowledge. The debt that Irland and Longobardi owe to previous and present generations of Indigenous artists and scholars manifests itself in the artists' desire to expand the notion of "community" for it to equally include humans and nonhumans. The ecological promise of posthumanist ideas is to foster dialogue among a greater group of agents.²²⁴ This would ideally generate a profoundly relational world in which humans interact with, instead of act upon, nonhumans. Recognizing nonhuman agency can benefit both humans and nonhumans as the past has proven that a failure to do so perpetuates environmental degradation and neglect. However, as Kim Tallbear makes apparent, if a theoretical turn were to seriously attend to some of the world's most pressing problems, it needs to learn to acknowledge Indigenous people in their full vitality.²²⁵ After all, the silencing of Indigenous voices has gone hand in hand with the suppressing of nonhuman agency.

Exploring Irland and Longobardi's projects through the lenses of posthumanism led me to identify a methodological pattern in both artworks. In their attempts to recognize agency and respond to the "voices" of nonhumans throughout their process, both artists resort to anthropomorphic aesthetics highlighted in Chapter Two, such as likening the ocean's reaction to plastic pollution to the physical suffering of a human body. I wondered: Can anthropomorphism combat anthropocentrism? While humanizing nonhumans did raise some ethical questions, for now, anthropomorphism may be an inevitable strategy, at least for artists trying to put forth notions of nonhuman agency to a public operating within Western paradigms and dichotomies.

By putting Irland and Longobardi's projects in conversation with one another, the act of listening also appeared to be an imperative approach in their relational ecological art practices. If the agency of nonhumans is to be considered, signals or "voices" stemming from nonhuman world should be listened to and interpreted with the same level of respect attributed to communicating human beings. The transformative power of these artistic initiatives lies in the model they provide for listening to the nonhuman world, which is a precautionary method as developing such receptivity could prevent future damages. This thesis does not claim that Irland and Longobardi's aesthetic strategies are perfect or that they have reached their utmost potential,

²²⁴ Horton, "Indigenous Artists against the Anthropocene," 18.

²²⁵ Tallbear, "Beyond the Life/Not Life Binary: A Feminist-Indigenous Reading of Cryopreservation, Interspecies Thinking and the New Materialisms".

but it does underline some of the efforts ecological artists are making with the aim of improving models of sustainability.

The corpus of artworks that I discuss in this thesis represents only a small part of ecological art approaches, and additional work is to be done to further understand the relationship between contemporary art and the environment-in-crisis. Though the scope of this thesis included examples of North American art, its two main case studies focused on the work of American artists. While conducting research for this thesis, it became evident that eco-critical writing in art history, meaning the examination of how imagery has constructed and sustained the complex relations between humans and their environments throughout various periods, thins out as I honed in on ecological art practices in Canada, though there is certainly no shortage of artists working within this realm. Further research in this stream of Canadian art history could reveal consistent patterns of common aesthetic strategies, or could provide a productive base for comparison. Artists and art historians must continue to critically engage with the growing phenomenon of artistic story-telling in the name of nonhuman “voices”, and simultaneously fight for more pluralistic and ethical visions of the future.

FIGURES



Figure 1 – Irland, Basia. *BOOK XVII: Spanish Broom (Genista hispanica)* and *BOOK XVIII: Wild Fennel (Foeniculum vulgare)*, 2008. Digital Image. <http://www.basiairland.com/projects/ice%20books/spain1.html>



Figure 2 - Longobardi, Pam, *Economies of Scale*, 2013, microplastic, plastic, hydrocarbons, and steel, 24" x 30" x 208". Atlanta, Hathaway Contemporary Gallery. Photograph by Mike Jensen.
<http://news.psu.edu/photo/510880/2018/03/18/pam-longobardi-economies-scale-2013>



Figure 3 - Gorgoni, Gianfranco, *Building Spiral Jetty with truck and bulldozer, Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1970*, gelatin silver print, 9 15/16 x 14 9/16 in. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute.



Figure 4 - Gianfranco Gorgoni, *Spiral Jetty*, aerial (helicopter) view, *Great Salt Lake, Utah*, 1970, gelatin silver print, 9 1/16 x 13 9/16 in. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute.



Figure 5 - Harrison, Helen and Newton Harrison. Image from *The Third Lagoon: The House of Crabs*, 1984.
http://theharrisonstudio.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/botl_part3.pdf

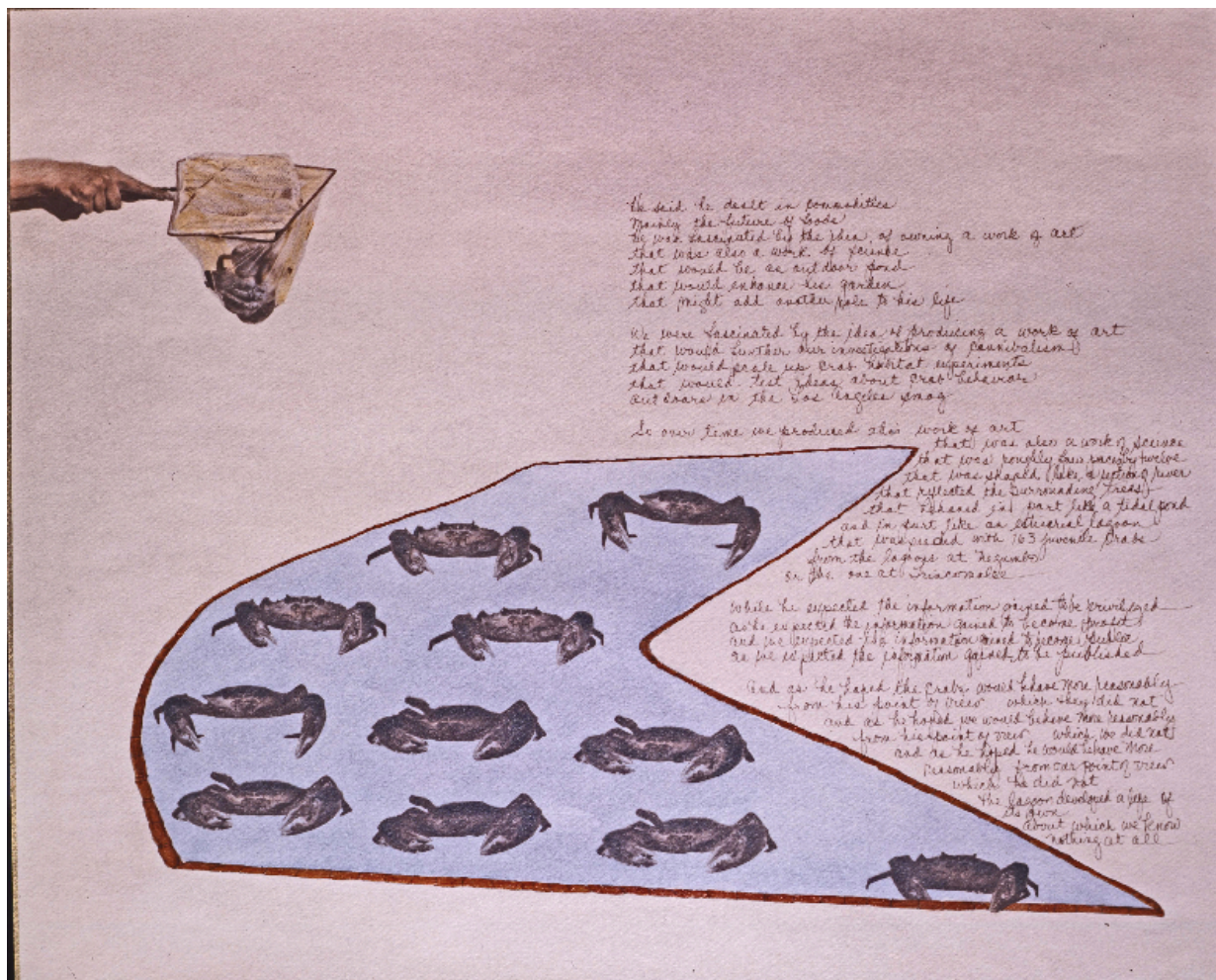


Figure 6 - Helen and Newton Harrison. Sketch from *The Third Lagoon: The House of Crabs*, 1984.
http://theharrisonstudio.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/botl_part3.pdf



Figure 7 – Irland, Basia, *Tome I: Mountain Maple, Columbine Flower, Blue Spruce*, 2007, ice and seeds. Digital Photograph. <http://www.basiairland.com/projects/ice%20books/boulder.html>



Figure 8 – Irland, Basia, Participants carrying Ice Book into Boulder Creek (*Tome I: Mountain Maple, Columbine Flower, Blue Spruce*), 2007. Digital Photograph. <http://www.basiairland.com/projects/ice%20books/boulder.html>



Figure 9 – Basia Irland and River Stewards releasing ice books into the Great Miami River, 2012. Digital Photograph. <http://udquickly.udayton.edu/2012/10/using-art-to-sustain-nature/>



Figure 10 – Basia Irland and River Stewards toasting after the release of ice books into the Great Miami River, 2012. Digital Photograph. <http://udquickly.udayton.edu/2012/10/using-art-to-sustain-nature/>



Figure 11 – Kathryn Miller throwing seed bombs in Southern California in 1992. Digital Photograph by Michael Honer. <http://www.kathrynamiller.com/>



Figure 12 – Miller, Kathryn, Seed bombs given away at unspecified exhibition. Digital Photograph. <http://www.kathrynamiller.com/>



Figure 13 – Longobardi, Pam, *Sleeping Giant*, from *Drifters*, 2008-2009. Digital print on plexi, 36 x 50 in. In *Convergence Zone: The Aesthetics and Politics of the Ocean in Contemporary Art* by Abigail Susik. Drain Magazine 7, no. 2, 2012.



Figure 14 – Laderman Ukeles, Mierle, *Touch Sanitation Performance*, 1979-80. New York, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts. Photograph by Marcia Bricker. <https://www.theartblog.org/2016/10/a-womans-work-is-never-done-mierle-laderman-ukeles-maintenance-art-at-the-queens-museum/>



Figure 15 - Laderman Ukeles, Mierle, The artist with two unidentified workers in *Touch Sanitation Performance*, 1979. New York, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/07/mierle-laderman-ukeles-and-the-art-of-work>



Figure 16 - Myrtou, Nickos, and Sergio Ko. *Giant Sea Cave Excavation ~ Drifters Project Kefalonia Greece, July 2012, 2012*. Screenshot still of film.



Figure 17 - Myrtou, Nickos, and Sergio Ko. *Giant Sea Cave Excavation ~ Drifters Project Kefalonia Greece, July 2012, 2012*. Screenshot still of film.



Figure 18 – Irland, Basia, Image of a Yaqui family washing clothes in the pesticide-clogged Río, 2015. Digital Photograph. <https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2015/06/01/what-the-river-knows-yaqui-river-sonora-mexico/>



Figure 19 - Irland, Basia, Image of Manuel Esquer Nieblas standing next to the Río where he used to play as a child, but now is stagnant and polluted, 2015. Digital Photograph.

<https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2015/06/01/what-the-river-knows-yaqui-river-sonora-mexico/>



Figure 20 - Longobardi, Pam, *Sloppy Campers*, 2017. Digital Photograph.
<http://www.ephemeralcoast.com/pam-longobardi-forensicsitephotos-llansteffan-2017/>



Figure 21 - Longobardi, Pam, *Car Battery Wedge*, 2017. Digital Photograph.
<http://www.ephemeralcoast.com/pam-longobardi-forensicsitephotos-llansteffan-2017/>



Figure 22 – Longobardi, Pam, *Forensic Study Lab for Plastic Crimes Against Nature*, installation view of Room 2 of *What Once Was Lost Must Now Be Found: Chronicling Crimes Against Nature*, 2014. Duluth, Hudgens Center for the Arts. Digital Photograph.
<http://drainmag.com/pam-longobardi-the-ocean-gleaner/>



Date Found:	<i>7/23/2011</i>	Location:	<i>Sea cave at Liabos, Kefalonia, Greece</i>
Collector:	<i>P.L. + Maria Rigatou</i>	Notes:	<i>Collected from giant sea cave named The Mermaid Cave. Remnant of a Styrofoam float handmade by Greek fisherman as a boat fender or buoy. Breaks into millions of tiny balls</i>
Crime:	<i>Food Imposter; poses as fish eggs and is ingested by birds, turtles and fish</i>		

Figure 23 - Longobardi, Pam, *Plastic Crime Cross Coffin Bundle*. Digital Image.
<http://www.ephemeralcoast.com/drain/>



Figure 24 - Longobardi, Pam, *Division Line* (site photograph, Cemetery of Life Vests : Lesvos, Greece), 2017. Digital Image. <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/pam-longobardi-division-line>



Figure 25 – Longobardi, Pam, *Recovered life vests from Lesbos, Greece*, 2017, thread and life vests, 110 x 175 in. Digital Image. http://driftersproject.net/blog/2017/08/24/reworlding/flagoflesvos_xsm/



Figure 26 – Longobardi, Pam. *SAFE PASSAGE Messenger Bag*, 2017. Digital Image. <https://hathaway-contemporary-gallery.myshopify.com/products/large-safe-passage-messenger-bag>





Figure 27 - Harnett, Tanya, *Scarred/Sacred Water* (series), 2011, photographs on paper, 33 5/64 x 24 1/64 in each. Collection of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.



Figure 28 - Alÿs, Francis. *The Nightwatch*, 2004. Digital Photograph.
<https://imageobjecttext.com/2014/07/14/after-dark-the-night-watch/>



Figure 29 - Belmore, Rebecca, *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother*, 1991, performance with sculpture. Banff, Walter Phillips Gallery. Digital Photograph by Michael Beynon. <http://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13529/rebecca-belmore>



Figure 30 – Belmore, Rebecca, *Wave Sound*, 2017. Digital Photograph. <http://oldcrowmagazine.com/rebecca-belmores-wave-sound-art-piece-opens-at-green-point/>



Figure 31 – Belmore, Rebecca, *Wave Sound*, 2017, Green Point. Digital Photograph.
<http://oldcrowmagazine.com/rebecca-belmores-wave-sound-art-piece-opens-at-green-point/>

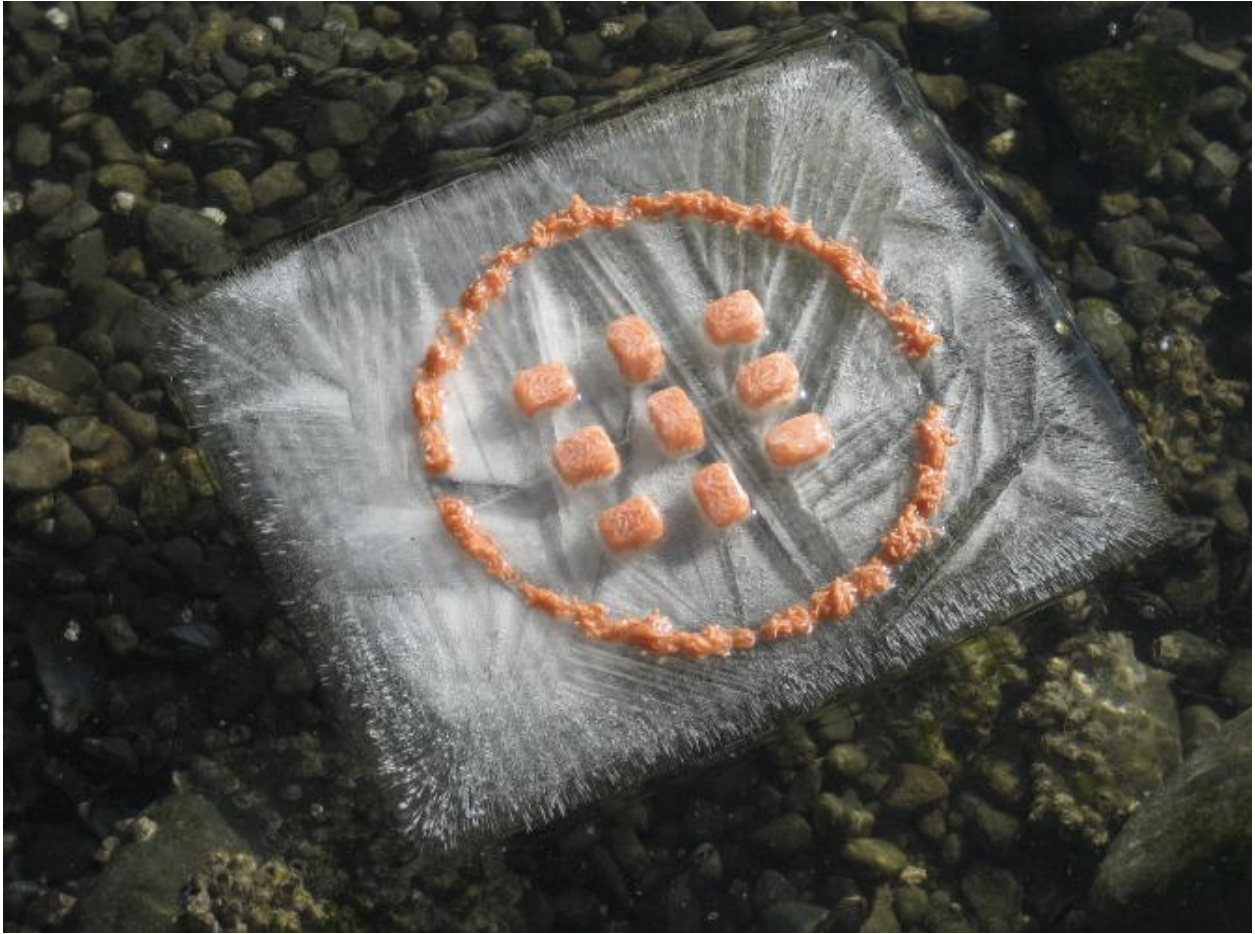


Figure 32 - Irland, Basia, *Krill Ice Book*, 2012, ice and krill. Digital Photograph by Derek Irland.
<http://www.basiairland.com/projects/ice%20books/vancouver.html>



Figure 33 - Irland, Basia, Krill Ice Book with diver, 2012, ice and krill. Digital Photograph by Karolle Wall.
<http://www.basairland.com/projects/ice%20books/vancouver.html>



Figure 34 - Longobardi, Pam, *Shared Plastic*, 2017. Digital Photograph.
<http://www.ephemeralcoast.com/pam-longobardi-forensicsitephotos-llansteffan-2017/>



Figure 35 - Longobardi, Pam, *White Plastic Non Non*, 2017. Digital Photograph.
<http://www.ephemeralcoast.com/pam-longobardi-forensicsitephotos-llansteffan-2017/>



Figure 36 - Longobardi, Pam, *Plastic Dig*, 2017. Digital Photograph.
<http://www.ephemeralcoast.com/pam-longobardi-forensicsitephotos-llansteffan-2017/>



Figure 37 - Irland, Basia, Image of Limestone Book being released into Deckers Creek at site of acidic mine drainage, 2010. Digital Photograph. <http://www.basiairland.com/projects/ice%20books/west-virginia.html>



Figure 38 - Irland, Basia, Image of Cleo reading *Tome II: Fremont Cottonwood (Populus fremontii)*, 2009. Digital Photograph by Claire Cote. <http://www.basiairland.com/projects/ice%20books/albuquerque.html>



Figure 39 - Irland, Basia, Students reading *Tome I: Mountain Maple, Columbine Flower, Blue Spruce*, 2007. Digital Photograph. <http://www.basiairland.com/projects/ice%20books/boulder.html>

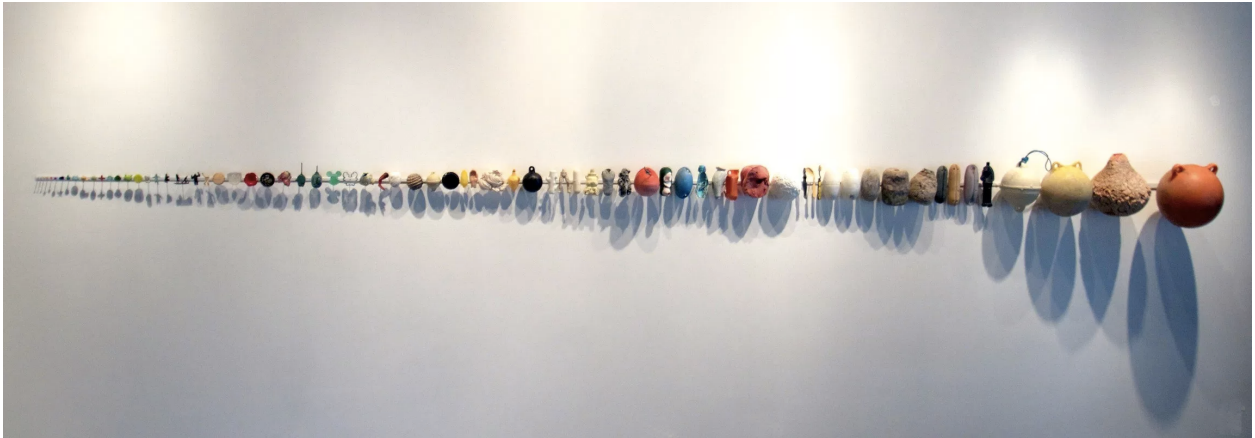


Figure 40 – Longobardi, Pam, *Economies of Scale*, 2013, microplastic, plastic, hydrocarbons, and steel, 24 x 30 x 208 in. Atlanta, Hathaway Contemporary Gallery. Digital Photograph. http://driftersproject.net/blog/2013/10/24/endless-new-exhibition-opening-at-sandler-hudson-in-atlanta-nov-1st/economiesofscale_lg/



Figure 41 – Longobardi, Pam, Detail of *Economies of Scale* (manicure decal from Spree River Bank, Berlin found in 2012). Digital Photograph. <http://www.driftersprojectart.net/index.html>



Figure 42 - Longobardi, Pam, Detail of *Economies of Scale* (Endless cap, Vouti Beach, Kefalonia, found in 2012). Digital Photograph. <http://www.driftersprojectart.net/index.html>



Figure 43 - Longobardi, Pam, Detail of *Economies of Scale* (Reach toothbrush, Midway Atoll, found in 2010). Digital Photograph. <http://www.driftersprojectart.net/index.html>

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