

Chimera: Queering the Myth of the One

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*To Justine*

## Acknowledgements

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## Author's Note

I have designed this document in order to showcase all important aspects of my thesis. Organically, I wrote, incorporating poems at the end of each chapter that emphasized the topic at hand. Following each chapter are photographs of some of my material explorations, occurring in order of creation.

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## Preface

I stumbled across an entity—a feral wolf—who wore their history draped across their shoulders as a battered hide after the hunt. Both predator and prey, they carried their past as tangible weight; old wounds dripping into every footstep. I had never witnessed someone (or something) so wild and vulnerable. Rapidly and entirely absorbed in their existence, I revelled in the moment, knowing I was not safe from pain but longing to feel anything and everything I could. They obliged.

I never wrote poetry until then.

Words began to build inside my body; a visceral yearning and growing—all consuming—until they burst forth in an unfamiliar language filled with disjointed metaphor, rhythm, and pain. I began to question language and communication—for I unearthed a mode of dialogue that had previously evaded me. This was my initiation into the magical world of queer culture that I had only ever tiptoed around.

I was drowning in the aches of my becoming, only resurfacing to bleed poetry into my surroundings; seeing the reflection of my new genre of otherness in all that I created. Through pain, I became an unfamiliar monster on the outskirts of my self-perceptions and I found peace only in the company of trees, plants, and water. Alone in nature, I felt a belonging I was unable to feel among friends and family. I saw myself as a hybrid creature—a chimera—who was not just this human form, but all that it touched. I was the grass I felt between my toes. I was the wind that caressed my cheek. I sat and grew roots deep into the ground, reaching downward toward the core, stretching my limbs toward the welcoming sun. Through poetry, I became something more than one individual. As the Chimera, I queered the myth of the one, knowing I was entangled in all that I did or did not encounter.

In the midst of this metamorphosis, I sustained a concussion; the effects of which I face to this day. My eyes could not experience the sunlight without pain that shot like icepicks through



my brain, in my jaw, across my shoulders and down my spine. My jaw clenched day and night, a tense and defensive armour that kept my thoughts inside my skull. I felt hollow. My battered brain could not form connections—between thoughts or others. I was ostracized within my own body; consumed by a frigid agony that would not allow me to move with ease. With little effort I would turn white as a corpse and collapse—dizzy and in complete disorientation.

How my body moved through space became an obsession of mine. I felt cold and disconnected from myself. This body was unfamiliar territory that did not move or operate in the manner it used to. Focusing on my body's physical orientation, I tested how far I could push my movements before my damaged form rejected the instruction. Many of my physical desires were overruled. I was simultaneously occupied by the disorientation of my emotions, sexuality, and physical body.

Not a year later I began my studies at OCAD University.



**Figure 1.**

***Breathe*, 2019**  
**Single frame from the**  
**film/installation**  
**OCAD University**

*Breathe* is a looping 3 second film/animation of myself breathing in whilst looking up then breathing out and closing my eyes. The material research and use of my body within this project propelled my research forward. To begin this process, I filmed myself with a digital camera at 10 frames per second, these frames were then printed on paper scaled to be my exact proportions. I utilized matte medium to transfer the ink from the paper to the medium itself, resulting in semi-transparent delicate skin-like images. These frames were scanned into the computer and strung together back into a time-based looping film. I hung each of these frames in a row at my height and projected the animation back onto the hanging frames. *Breathe* was an expansion of myself through space and time—lingering forever in this quiet moment.

## Introduction

Drawing from personal experiences, I investigate connections between orientation, desire, gender and otherness, questioning how desire affects bodies and if orientation is an embodiment of time. Considering these questions, I am also researching the concept of 'human.' What does it mean to be human? What is the difference between human and non-human? How are the two entangled? All points of my research intersect at the monster—the chimera<sup>1</sup>.

The chimera is an embodiment of the innate entanglements of all. Through contamination as collaboration<sup>2</sup>, a term drawn from Anna Tsing's *A Mushroom at the End of the World*, I investigate how we transform and are transformed by our encounters. This embraces auto-ethnographic poetry, photography, and filmmaking. Through imagination, I speculate on ideas of otherness, hybridity, and metamorphoses. I approach research through playfulness, seeking joy in all steps of thinking and creating. My material exploration informs and is informed by the theories I read. Through imagination and intuition, seemingly dissociated areas of investigation align and entangle, revealing threads of myself along the way.

Contamination as collaboration is the lens through which each aspect of my material and theoretical research are perceived. Traces of myself and those I encounter are suspended together in this intricate web. My studies expose the intimate entanglements I recognize within myself while simultaneously welcoming others to find their own involvement. I invite you to join us—we begin with noticing<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>The classical Chimera, and the origin of this term, is a mythological creature that possessed a serpent's tail, the body of a goat, and the head of a lion. The word chimera evolved throughout history to mean a hybrid of various species. The contemporary scientific definition of chimera refers to "any organism that incorporates discrete populations of cells within different genomes," (Powell 1). In my work, I approach the chimera as a being that recognizes their interconnectedness with all else.

<sup>2</sup> Discovering this concept shifted my research and mentality significantly. Not only did the idea of contamination as collaboration strike home in the midst of the Spring Quarantine of 2020, but it opened up doors through which I could perceive anew networks, connections, and relationships. We are contaminated by each moment and interaction as we simultaneously contaminate. All is a collaboration.

<sup>3</sup> This phrase derived from the introduction of *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*. It so beautifully articulates how important it is to recognize the blind and docile state we often live in. It is time to question the answers we have been given.

Over the last two years I wrote a poetry book and created a looping analogue film exploring the murky in-betweens of existence, the politics of being/feeling connected, shared impressions, affective contagion, attunements and difference in itself<sup>4</sup>. Through material and theoretical research, I investigate how such entanglements affect bodies. Hybridity is a means to investigate possible futures informed by queer theory and intersectional feminism. Through speculative fabulation, I approach worldmaking in a way that embodies the pleasures and pains of becoming.

A separation so astounding  
screaming and whispering  
in synchronous union

A splitting of thoughts  
A fusion of truths

Discomfort in this  
harmony of  
fear  
loathing  
excitement  
*pleasure*

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<sup>4</sup> In *Ordinary Affect*, Kathleen Stewart discusses the politics of being connected and of difference in itself (Stewart 16). It is this thread of affect theory that lingers in my research.





**Figure 2.**

***Pollen Experiment, 2020***  
**120 Medium Format Film**  
**Mono Cliffs Provincial Park**

The March 2020 Quarantine hit hard. Suddenly the trajectory I was on shifted out of sight. Lost in this bubble of disconnect, I longed for some form of intimacy which I soon found in my childhood forest. I took a series of photographs off the common paths. These photos showcased the collaboration and contamination of human and non-human worlds. I decided to develop these negatives in home-brewed developer made of pollen, vitamin c, washing soda, and water. A lovely shade of yellow stained the film, the pollen's mark lingering upon its surface.



## Orientation and Desire

As I move through space and contemplate my artistic practice and my research methodologies, I am in constant consideration of my body. I am aware of my physical orientation in space and the natural directionality of my movements. I am aware of my emotional orientation in space and the impact my environment has on my experiences and how I affect my environment. I am aware of my sexual orientation in space and how desire could transform surroundings into objects or embodiments of affection. This awareness of the orientations<sup>5</sup> I embody lead me to consider desire as a driving force in the human experience.

Desire leads our bodies and minds through time. In “A Glossary of Haunting” by Eve Tuck and C. Ree, the concept of desire is considered in relation to history, colonization, and ghosts:

“Desire is what we know about ourselves, and damage is what is attributed to us by those who wish to contain us. Desire is complex and complicated. It is constantly reformulating, and does so by extinguishing itself, breaking apart, reconfiguring, recasting. Desire licks its own fingers, bites its own nails, swallows its own fists. Desire makes itself its own ghost, creates itself from its own remnants. Desire, in its making and remaking bounds into the past as it stretches into the future. It is productive, it makes itself, and in making itself, it makes reality,” (Tuck & Ree 648).

Tuck and Ree discuss desire as a sum of its parts—a self-created ghost who yearns for its own missing pieces. This creature is shaped by its own history. Ghosts are concocted out of the fantasies that make us and the orientation of ourselves through time. Desire is tied to nostalgia and the longing toward a past. Desire is subsequently tied to the future and the notion of ‘becoming-specter’—a future ghost. My research on desire focuses on this metamorphosis of the self into the monster/ghost.

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<sup>5</sup> The first book that I bought as an MFA student was *Queer Phenomenology* by Sara Ahmed. Her discussion of orientation as a movement between space as well as time is the foundation of my research and experience of the world. It connected to the newfound struggles with my concussed and disoriented body and mind. The connection to queer bodies and culture added a depth to my experiences that I had not previously perceived, tying together the various levels of disorientation I was experiencing.



Time and desire are entwined not only in relation to ghosts and the nostalgia<sup>6</sup> of the past but as an accumulation of habits over time. In *No Archive Will Restore You*, Juliette Singh analyzes the connections between time and desire. She states that there “are at least two ways to understand the emergence of a desire: one is through a moment, when something shifts and the way you act and react, the way you turn things over, is fundamentally altered. The other is through accrual, how over time and repetition our histories draw us toward certain practices and ways of feeling and wanting,” (Singh 19). Desire, thus, is not only an orientation of the body toward its learned and practiced behaviours but also a momentary occurrence—a movement in space.

At the core of our orientation, whether that is physical, emotional, or sexual orientation, sits desire. Through the analysis of orientation and how bodies move through space and time, we discover the fantasy that guides desire, wishes, dreams, and lust. This is known as the fantasy of lack<sup>7</sup>, the orientation toward and desiring of something outside of ourselves. The fantasy of lack is what distinguishes the subject from the object; in this case the subject always being the ‘human’ and the object as other. Sara Ahmed states in *Queer Phenomonology*: “Desire directs bodies toward its object; in desire we face the desired and seek to get closer. Desire confirms that which we are not (the object of desire),” (Ahmed 114). Through the fantasy of lack, Ahmed argues that the desire toward what is not here shapes the desire for what is there. We can begin to distinguish a trend of here versus there, or rather, subject versus object. My research lies in the indistinct void where subject and object entangle.

The relationships and interconnections between subject and object unfold beneath the heat and directions of desire. My research further focuses on the human desire for nature or

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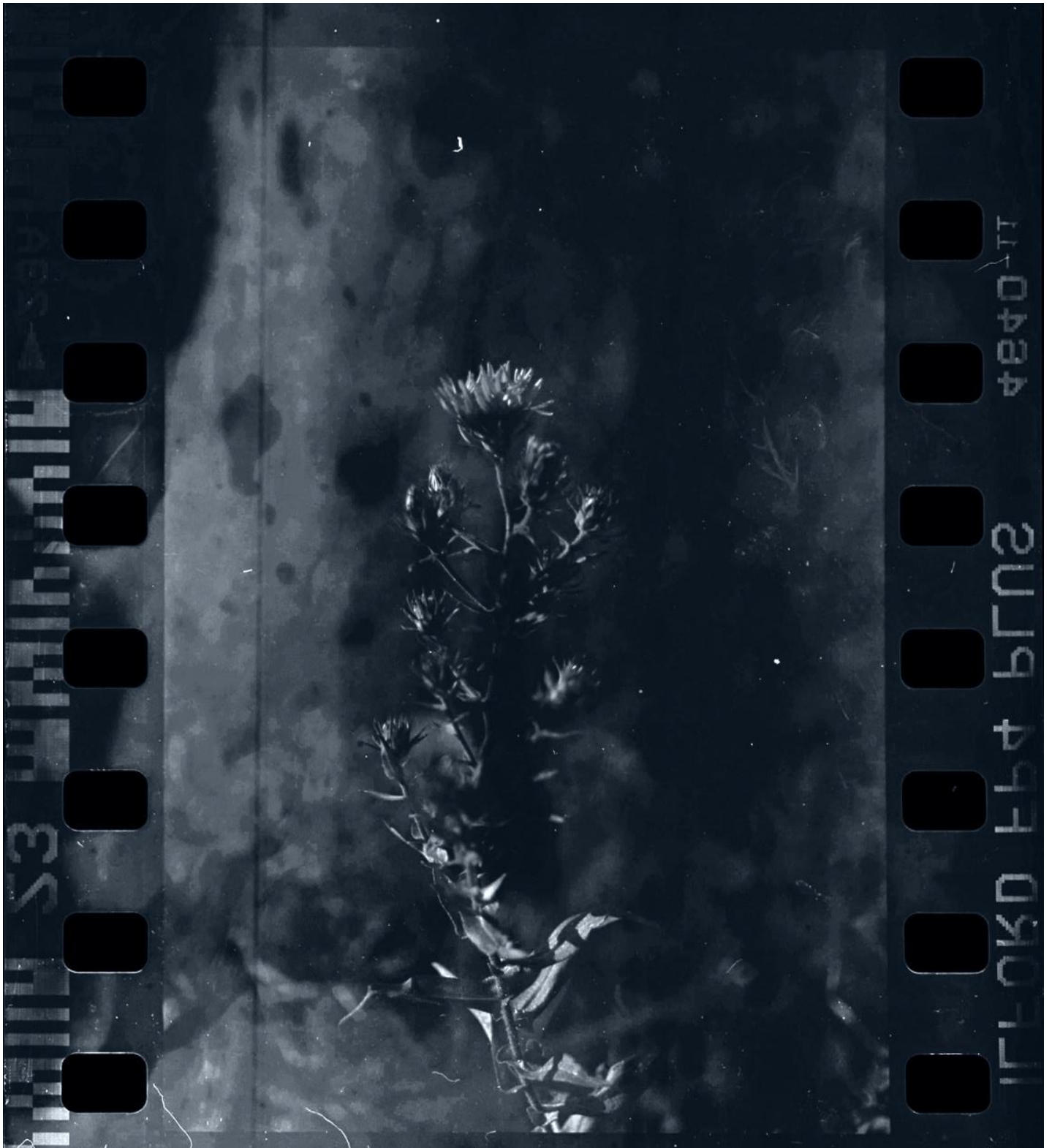
<sup>6</sup> In “The ‘Uncanny,’” Sigmund Freud ties nostalgia to fetish and the uncanny. According to this theory, nostalgia is an orientation toward the past.

<sup>7</sup> I was originally introduced to the concept of the fantasy of lack in Mike Kelley’s work “Playing with Dead Things” in the book *Foul Perfection*. Kelley discusses the fantasy of lack in relation to fetish and desire. This chapter excitingly connects history, theory, and psychology to magic. This notion was welcome at the beginning of my studies. I began to realize that all areas of my interests were valid and can inform each other.

landscape; it is noteworthy that there are murky, flexible barriers in this desire for nature. One perspective is rooted in the Western/Occidental patriarchal fantasy of lack and the all-consuming urge for ownership. The desire is to gluttonously overpower all things natural and use them for their own delights. The alternative desire for nature is a yearning to become one with it—to collaborate. This perspective desires nature as friend, family, or loved one, entangled in constant dialogue. This desire for nature is centered around the body, senses, pain, and awareness. The body is an extension of nature and nature is the extension of the body. The desire to be touched by nature is a vulnerable juxtaposition to the desire to imprint your touch upon it. There is no clear line between these descriptions of our desires, rather, there is a gradient leading one to the other—to and fro—like the lapping waves upon the sand. What these desires have in common, is the way they frame nature as other.

Taste mourning on these lips  
sticky and sweet as honey  
dripping with all I used to be

Words flow like ink down  
my chin but I can't  
recognize the language



**Figure 3.**

***Contact-Developing, 2020***  
**35mm Photograph**  
**Mono Cliffs Provincial Park**

During the Spring Quarantine of 2020, I became increasingly enamoured by the material possibilities of analogue film. I involved myself in new experimental developing practices such as contact developing, which, as far as I can find, is a significantly under-explored process. This roll of film, taken in my childhood forest of Mono Cliffs Provincial Park, was developed by draping a pollenol-soaked cloth across the film. The images turned out to have an uneven and smoky aesthetic that I found particularly compelling.

## Otherness and Gender

Gender and otherness are entwined from every angle of perception. The very concept of gender<sup>8</sup> is framed from the perspective of the cisgender man. This concept has been reinforced throughout the Victorian age to contemporary times in the form of the monster (or ghost) in literature and now also in cinema. Within *Skin Shows*, Jack Halberstam states: “Monsters have to be everything the human is not and, in producing the negative of human, [Gothic] novels make way for the invention of human as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual,” (Halberstam 22). The invention of human as such is embedded in contemporary discourse and dialogue, establishing other genders and bodies as nonhuman.

Otherness is a monster that embodies all that is outside what is considered ‘normal’ or standard. This can refer to not only nature but race, gender, and sexuality. When framing nature as other, we are contaminating it with other others; nature wears the masks of other races, other genders, and of other sexualities. Nature becomes a queer monster—one that the patriarchal perception yearns to eviscerate by means of absorption. Evisceration through a voracious and feverish eating, a violent chewing and a pleased regurgitation—or a passing through the body. An abject release among bodily fluids. Nature as other can also initiate a complex and intimate relationship between itself and other others as all others exist simultaneously on the outskirts of the accepted.

The identity of the other in itself is as natural as could be but framed as an oddity among the ‘normal’ humans. Monsters are then everything but human. Monsters are those that identify as anything but the cisgender male. Monsters are those that fight for and think about their identities. Monsters are those that ask questions and reflect. Monsters are the self-aware. In “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,” Susan Stryker, utilizing the Frankenstein monster as an analogy for other bodies, asks us to question and investigate our own natures:

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<sup>8</sup> I am discussing gender as a hybrid creature—a chimera in and of itself. I think it is important to mention Judith Butler in this chapter, as her writings have informed my perception of this subject.

“Hearken unto me, fellow creatures. I who have dwelt in a form unmatched with my desire, I whose flesh has become an assemblage of incongruous anatomical parts, I who achieve the similitude of a natural body only through an unnatural process, I offer you this warning: the Nature you bedevil me with is a lie. Do not trust it to protect you from what I represent, for it is a fabrication that cloaks the groundlessness of the privilege you seek to maintain for yourself at my expense. You are as constructed as me; the same anarchic womb has birthed us both. I call upon you to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine,” (Stryker 247)<sup>9</sup>.

The investigation of our own natures is as vital as investigating our relationship with nature itself. Exploring the entangled relationships between monsters is where my photography, film, and poetry flourish. I revel and create in the discomfort of noticing.

Discomfort is a key valley of exploration when studying others. Considering contemporary discourse regarding landscapes, we could pin-point when the land has become the monster. This occurs precisely when we begin to tie the landscape to gender. Monsters make people uncomfortable and so they are exiled, existing as the abject edges of society (Singh 17). Gendering nature, therefore, distorts it and places the land on the further outskirts of our understanding. The normalized way of talking about and thinking about landscape, “tends to reduce it to vegetation and form, and in so doing it misses or at least de-emphasizes the forces, processes, beings, and energies coursing through it on every scale from the microscopic to the galactic,” (Solnit). The earth is frequently thought of or addressed as feminine and consequently it is perceived as passive. Females are other, not as human as the above defined human, and so misogyny comes into play. Placing gender<sup>10</sup> on it as such, welcomes humans to

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<sup>9</sup> I discovered this passage in Karen Barad’s essay: “Transmaterialities: Trans\*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings.” This powerful quote and writing style resonated with me. I sat with these words for days on end, trying to digest their meaning. Stryker and Barad are both writers that inspire me. I have been forever contaminated by their words and theories.

<sup>10</sup> Harriet Hawkins wrote of the relationship between the human body and the Earth in her work *For Creative Geographies*. Hawkins discussed the struggle to connect and the problematic perception that humans and land are separate. Ana Mendieta is a primary example of an artist who challenged these boundaries and embraced the notion of the earth as an extension of her femininity. Although her goal was to portray the connection between

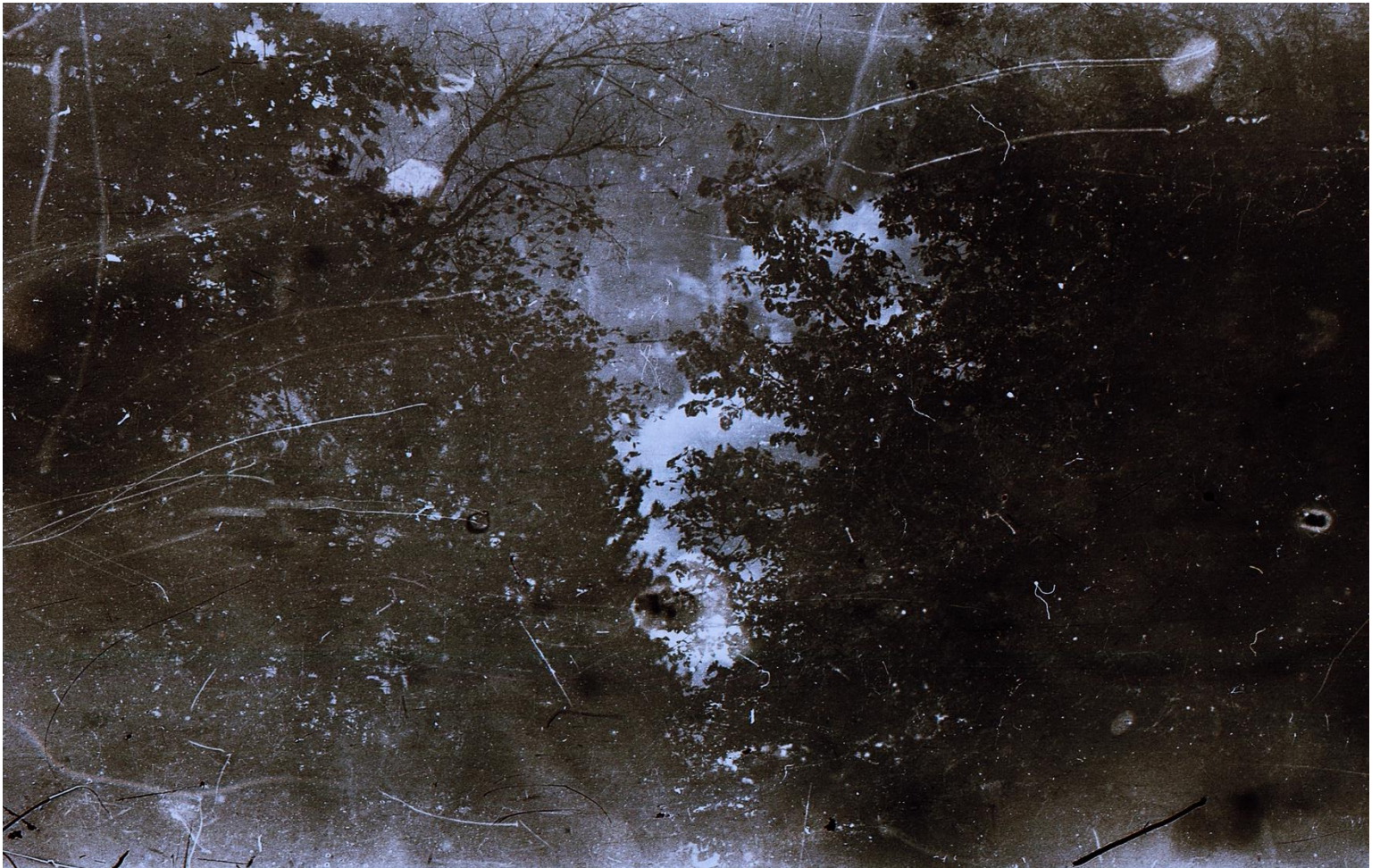
take advantage of the land and use it for their own gain. This is where the patriarchal expression of desire rears its lustful head.

The feral scent  
    of broken branches and  
broken bones  
    of leaking sap and  
seeping blood  
    of the destruction of all  
that I am

---

herself and the land, the use of gender was perhaps a counterproductive method, causing more of a distinct separation.





**Figure 4.**

***Soup Experiment, 2020***  
**35mm Photograph**  
**Mono Cliffs Provincial Park**

Amidst my studies of analogue developing practices, I stumbled across the concept of souped negatives. This idea of soaking the negatives in a self-brewed cocktail struck home to me. I gathered in a small jar, ingredients that held meaning to me. In this jar I placed soil and local beeswax. I added a red chili pepper, which is an Italian folk magic symbol that protects against malocchio. I included bay leaves, juniper berries, and cinnamon—all symbols of strength, resilience, and healing. Symbols of love and serenity, dried rose and lavender petals, were also placed in the jar. I topped these ingredients with an Abruzzo Digestive, which is an alcohol made from the herbs in the region my maternal grandparents were born and raised. After taking photos in Mono Cliffs Provincial Park, along the paths I used to walk along as a child, I placed the film roll in the jar and filled it to the top with boiling water. It sat in this concoction for 48 hours before I took it out and placed the roll by the heater for two weeks. The roll was too sticky to process with a spool in a tank so in the darkroom I was forced to think on my feet and bucket-process the film. I am so happy with these images. I will forever use the bucket-processing technique in place of a tank, as the scratches and tears are incredibly engaging and provocative. The process of rubbing the pollenol developer over each and every frame with a gloved hand was a very fun and playful step. Feeling the chemicals glide over the negatives in complete darkness was a very intimate experience in comparison to the mechanical shaking of the developing tank I was previously utilizing.

## Monsters and Entanglements

In many stories, the land is not a passive object. The land as a monster that fights back is seen in stories within colonized societies. Eve Tuck states within *A Glossary of Haunting* that monsters are interruptions of the peace when injustice is ignored or forgotten (Tuck & Ree 650). Contemporary western societies are enamoured by ghosts and monsters and the reflection of the otherness that is so desired. The monster in literature from the Gothic era to contemporary stories are “drawn from imperialistic or colonialist fantasies of other lands and peoples, but it concentrates its imaginative force upon the other peoples in ‘our’ lands, the monsters at home,” (Halberstam 15). The subject is the center of the world and all objects surrounding it. Halberstam reveals the subject as comfortable<sup>11</sup> in their self-absorbed and narcissistic frame of mind. According to this mentality, home is where the human is regardless of what was there previously. Colonization begins in the fantasy of lack: the desire for what is there, the yearning for the other, and the hierarchal perception of the subject’s relationship to/ownership of the object. Colonization of the land, and those entangled in it, is the capturing and domesticating of the monster.

There is a whole suite of species that travel with colonizing humans: “First, there are those one might call ‘shock troops’, that is, those that help human invaders do their bloody work. In the New World, European pathogens did that first work; livestock followed them. But there were also what one might describe as ‘camp followers’, the suite of intentionally and non-intentionally introduced organisms that made life more difficult for natives, human and non human,” (Tsing, *The Buck* 8). The colonizer spreads its arms and takes over the landscape as weeds spread across the land to their heart’s content. As ‘humans’ touch the land, invasive species of weeds aggressively colonize the landscape, leaving no memory of what was and

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<sup>11</sup> I use the word ‘comfortable’ as Sara Ahmed does in *Queer Phenomenology*: “To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one’s environment that it is hard to distinguish where one’s body ends and the world begins,” (Ahmed 134).

inevitably erasing history, as is seen in the California Grasslands<sup>12</sup>. The weeds that spread are bold and make it difficult for less aggressive species to thrive. The lure of a rewritten and universal history denies the presence of diverse landscapes. “Landscapes are both imaginative and material; they encompass physical geographies, phenomenologies, and cultural and political commitments,” (Tsing 7). Human and nature histories are entangled in the imagination.

Desire can be a yearning for communication and connection, or a longing for power, control and ownership. The two heads discussed of this powerful drive are in constant battle within all living in contemporary society, raised through colonized teachings, stories, and mentalities. It is impertinent to work toward a decolonized future and disassemble the blatant binaries that have been constructed. “A decolonial queer praxis requires that we engage in the complexities of re-orienting ourselves away from White supremacist logics and systems and toward more respectful and accountable ways of being in relation to one another and the lands we live on,” (Hunt & Holmes 168). Recognizing our own orientations in time and space is the first step in becoming responsible for our actions toward others. The human, as defined above, must come to recognize that it is only one subject position among others<sup>13</sup>.

The term ‘human and nonhuman’ is thread throughout contemporary western perceptions and academic discourse. This phrase always sat uncomfortably with me, for the use of these categories clearly overlook the innate entanglements of all. If human is perceived as the white heterosexual cisgender male, then what are non-humans? By this knowledge, non-human encompasses all other genders, races, and sexualities as well as all else outside the definition of humanity. These binaries, borders and categories make little sense when faced with the vast

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<sup>12</sup> In “Remembering in Our Amnesia, Seeing in Our Blindness,” author Ingrid M. Parker discusses how the iconic California Grasslands of Santa Cruz are almost entirely devoid of plants native to that area. In fact, eight-four percent of the species were introduced in the 1800s by Spanish colonists (Parker M155).

<sup>13</sup> Carla Freccero connects queer culture to hybrid monsters or, more specifically, to the werewolf. In her chapter “Wolf, or Homo Homini Lupus,” Freccero argues that exploring the hybrid can prepare us to open up to new possible futures and the possibility of post-humanity (Freccero M62).

reality of our muddy existences. When we consider non-humanity, we can perceive the interconnections and entanglements of those within (and without) this category. Embracing entanglements can encourage and animate the move toward the decolonization of the land and those on it. Embracing entanglements can disrupt the current trajectory the western world is currently on. Embracing entanglements can initiate a decolonized future that “may, or may not, include ‘us’ in a form we recognize,” (Freccero M92). Transformations begin by welcoming collaboration and recognizing the contaminations that make use. We are all chimera.

Delicate whispers of the  
moment shimmer in my  
peripherals reminding me that  
this is not a new perception  
  
but that I am new *to it*.





**Figure 5.**

*Bucket-Process Experiment, 2020*  
35mm Photograph  
Toronto, ON

Having been forced into bucket-processing in my previous darkroom experience, I decided to intentionally develop a film with this method. With no further contamination to this roll but my hands and developer in the bucket, these images turned out crisp, clear, and covered with small hairline scratches. I used ice water as my wash bath, resulting in subtle reticulation of the chemicals on the film. This series of photographs depicted the rot and decay of the city and the auto-rewilding of urban spaces.

## Being and Becoming

Auto-ethnography is used as a mode of self-investigation. Through autoethnography, I open a dialogue with those who are willing to investigate themselves and their own perceptions. This poetic language, that had consumed me in my best and worst moments, has become a means for building connections and communicating with others who may be able to relate to me, my experiences, pains, and intimate discoveries. In *Artful and Embodied Methods, Modes of Inquiry, and Forms of Representation*, Bartleet states that: "Both drawing and photography have often provided creative modes of expression for those who are vulnerable and marginalized and who have not customarily been heard through traditional channels of social research," (Bartleet 445). These artworks archive my physical injuries and emotional confusion. I welcome others to engage with the work and reflect on their own experiences, interactions, and entanglements. Auto-ethnography becomes a contaminant; affecting those who observe my intimate works, drawing them into the web of the chimera—this monstrous entity that encompasses the untraditional, the ugly<sup>14</sup>, and the other.

I situate myself in my research and practice, in the position of the other, entangling myself in other monsters existing simultaneously on the edges of the normal. I explore what it means to coexist in this void and how I affect and am affected by other others. In *What is the Measure of Nothingness*, author Karen Barad wrote: "The void is a lively tension, a desiring orientation toward being/becoming. The vacuum is flush with yearning, bursting with innumerable imaginings of what could be," (Barad 13). To reside in this void, we exist in a constant state of becoming. This everlasting transformation informs and inspires my creative practices. Imagination propels me forward, divining a future that is a full magnificent collaboration between all.

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<sup>14</sup> In my Undergrad, I was captivated by the concept of ugliness. A huge inspiration was Umberto Eco's *On Ugliness*. It encompassed everything abject, uncanny, affective, and uncomfortable. This fascination lingers in everything I do and create.



Speculative fabulation, a term coined by Donna Haraway, is a methodology that I utilize to imagine and speculate possible futures. Through the imagination, I explore the materiality of imaginings. “We relate, know, think, world, and tell stories through and with other stories, worlds, knowledges, thinkings, yearnings,” (Haraway M45). Words and images stream together, building a world of intricate and intimate entangled moments. I research and create through speculative fabulation, imagination and storytelling. The world I have built and incarnated into material art and writing is akin to fables, folk tales, and fantastical stories. Although the poetry was written through a stream of consciousness, and the film and photographs were taken intuitively, I look closely and consider facts and theories I encounter. Every conversation, reading, sound, taste and touch I experience impulsively leak into my creations, resulting in archives of my lived experience. Haraway stated that the “fabulator does not ignore facts but it takes the facts seriously,” (Haraway, *Youtube*). Every aspect of my fabricated world is researched thoroughly either through reading theory on Queer and Alien Phenomenologies, Feminist Theory, Object Oriented Ontology, Physics or through conducting my own research through ceremonial practices.

Through observation, conversation, and experimentation, the Speculative Fabulation world shapes itself into existence. My sense of belonging when surrounded by nature inspires my creative practice, drawing out and animating sensations that I had not previously acknowledged. Through my new sense of pain, I relate to the world in different ways. I began to notice what I had always ignored. Focusing on my physical orientation in space, my relationship with myself and my surroundings have forever been altered. Embracing this connection, I write outdoors; sitting by the trees, among their roots and below the lush canopy. I observe. I see how I contaminate the space by being there and how it contaminates me. Each moment is wrought with intimate connections. The wind carries my scent through the forest, mingling with all others in close proximity. My shadow covers flowers that yearn to touch the light filtering in through the shivering leaves. The sun warms my skin, leaving freckled kisses wherever it has touched. I bend the grass and carve the dirt with every step I take, my bare feet leaving prints of my history as traces of the earth are carried with me

forward and onward in time and space. Through observation, I am becoming the chimera. We are changed by these encounters. This process of observation and becoming is my primary methodology<sup>15</sup>.

Just beyond this moment is an  
expanse of dreams

that entwine and encourage  
each other to grow

A becoming and decaying  
at the moment of anticipation

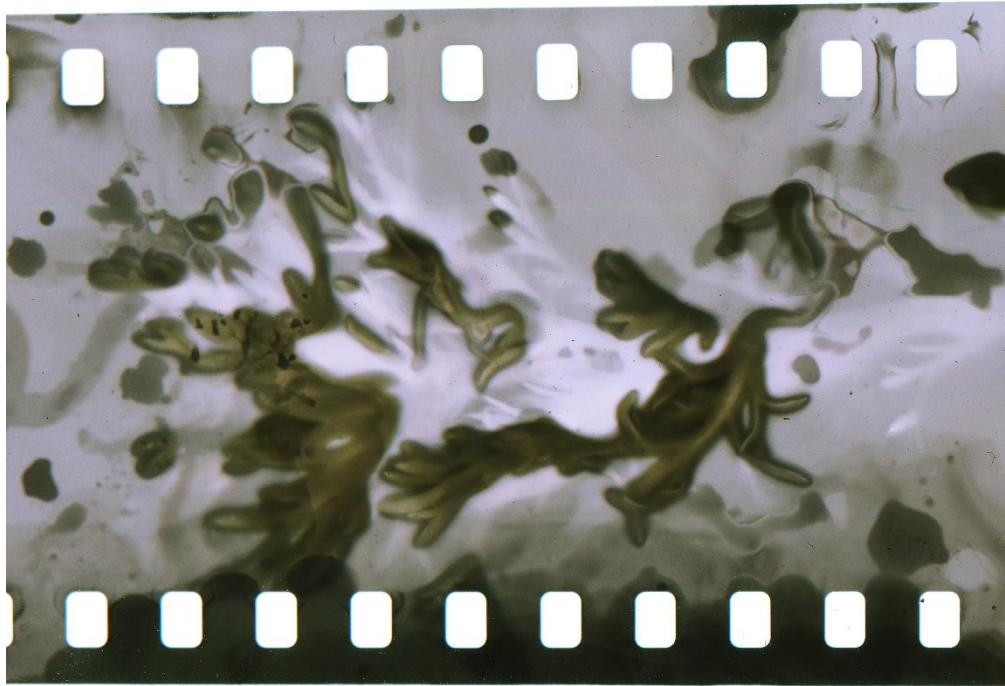
always on the verge

teetering between existence  
and the void

A balancing act.

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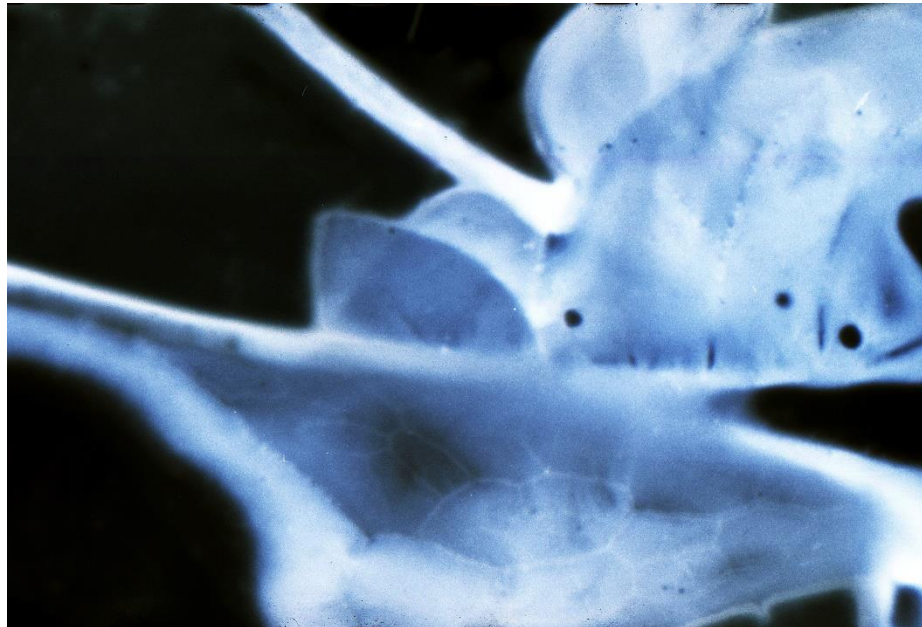
<sup>15</sup> To begin the process of speculation, I approach this research through ceremony. Sean Wilson's *Research as Ceremony* is an increasingly important methodology to my practice especially in regards to world-building.



**Figure 6.**

*Phytogram Experiment #1, 2020*  
**Phytogram**  
**Red Clover Flower**

After experimenting with 35mm photography, I began to question other processes that could develop film. Phytograms became the next step in my material research. I foraged for plants and flowers along the Cook's Bay shoreline then saturated them in a developing concoction of water, vitamin c, and washing soda. Through photosynthesis, the plants painted themselves onto the film.



**Figure 7.**

*Phytogram Experiment #2, 2020*  
**Phytogram Portrait**  
**Self-Portrait in Dandelion Leaf**

I desired to hybridize the phytogram further. On this roll of film, I took a series of self-portrait photographs of body parts or odd angles of my face. Rather than developing them in a dark room, I strapped the film to a piece of wood and placed the saturated plants on the negatives in the dark. I then moved this outside for a couple minutes before returning it to the darkness, removing the plants, washing and fixing the film. This film embodies the nature of the chimera and contamination as collaboration.

## The Decay

“The truth is a matter of the imagination,” (Le Guin xvi).

The wounds of my becoming bled poetry. This language, that was so foreign and new to me, contaminated everything I touched and created. Poetry became an orientation toward connection, a longing for something outside of my physical and emotional pains. My words embodied intimate experiences, creating a world saturated in my own vulnerability. Embracing metaphor, allegory, abject, affect, emotion, rhythm and sound, I wrote until a story formed from my seemingly disconnected outbursts of words. This book of poetry is titled *The Decay*, suggesting both a fall as well as a physical transformation or breaking down. A story of metamorphosis, *The Decay* becomes a monster that weaves the reader into a web of impressions. In this long-form poem, metamorphosis is metaphor for being other and recognizing ourselves as the monster. In playful dialogue between human and non-human worlds, I explore the contamination of both through welcome collaboration. The book begins in a well of confusion and abject, fighting through feelings of rejection, mourning, violence, and the disorientation of becoming until we reach acceptance, clarity, anticipation, and pleasure in our contaminated and ever-changing existence. Words trickled out of me in lively and experimental ways, toying with our accustomed uses of language. Welcoming various perceptions of ordinary words, I write with full knowledge that many meanings could be derived from a phrase or sentence. I invite collaboration with the reader on the meanings, contaminating each other with affect and interpretation.

I feel nausea, a rejection, a  
visceral push  
against this prosthetic  
aesthetic—this uncanny façade  
of life

This is an example of a phrase that is packed with various meanings. By ‘prosthetic aesthetic’ I mean to expose how unnatural this moment feels. I want the reader to feel overwhelmed by an uncomfortable appearance forced upon them. ‘Prosthetic aesthetic’ suggests an uncanny feeling that the body you are in is not what you would call home. It is unnatural to you—a

deep rejection. I think of a body transformed by pain. It is an expression of my struggles during and after my concussion. Simultaneously, this phrase evokes gender. I consider the notion of performing as something that is untruthful to you, the mask you are expected to wear. This social construct is confusing to me, not quite fitting into my personal understandings. Performing gender may be a lived experience for readers as well. The term ‘uncanny façade’ illustrates this mask as an object that fluctuates between what it conceals and reveals. Uncanny façade also evokes the discomfort and disorientation of an injured body, reflecting on the discovery of my own intricate otherness. This phrase expresses entangled experiences, embodying nausea<sup>16</sup> in all senses—inducing discomfort and disorientation.

Black noise comforts me.

I write of black noise in response to a quote in Ian Bogost’s *Alien Phenomenology* where he discusses what black noise is. Originally this term was used by Graham Harman “to describe the background noise of peripheral objects: ‘It is not a white noise of screeching, chaotic qualities demanding to be shaped by the human mind, but rather a black noise of muffled objects hovering at the fringes of our attention,’” (Bogost 32-33). Black noise encompasses all that is overlooked. It acknowledges the reaching toward us from that which is on the outskirts of our observations. Black noise desires to be noticed. There is a world of happenings occurring all around us if we just become mindful. I am enthralled by the overlooked, or simply ignored, languages that are forever reaching toward us—aiming to connect. Black noise embodies the visceral and ever-present life that we live amongst and within. In this instance, I use the phrase to depict a contaminant that queers the myth that we are completely alone.

This poetry book was brought to life as an object of my pain. Pain formed into poetic language, for it had no place in other modes of communication. As my only means of expression, poetry became an outlet for feelings that otherwise transcended language. In *No*

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<sup>16</sup> The book *Nausea* by Jean-Paul Sartre ties beautifully to my work. This book explores disorientation and noticing in fascinating and uncomfortable ways. Sartre uses the word nausea as both a physical and mental sensation.

*Archive Will Restore You*, Juliette Singh wrote: “Pain became a colonizing language that I was made to speak against every ounce of my desire and will,” (Singh 73). I am drawn to Singh’s work, as she explores pain and the connections it has to communication. In this quote, Singh describes an occurrence in which she could no longer ignore this language—a moment when it has taken over and colonized both her mind and her body. Pain shows its true strength in its own language, as vocabulary is insufficient and limited. Singh argues that pain “seems to belong more to poetry than to narrative prose. But even poetry, for all its subtle rendering, fails to capture the pain of pain, its illegible core,” (Singh 61). I existed in a void of disconnect immediately following my concussion and emotional hurt. My tongue was tied, and thoughts were foggy and slow like walking waist-deep against the tide, feet sinking deep into the mud with each heavy step. It was difficult for me to articulate the full wave of interconnected pain within my body and my mind. I was in a world of my own post-linguistic pains<sup>17</sup>, unable to share with those who expected words. Poetry was where I found my voice again—it was a negotiation.

Words flow like ink down  
my chin but I can’t  
recognize the language

What happens when we forget our words and names<sup>18</sup> and begin to exist without having known that a tree is a tree or that I am not that but I am me? *The Decay*, is a story of a human that is transforming into something more-than-human. This is a vessel full of observations—a discovery and awareness of the self. It is a story of becoming as it is simultaneously a story of unbecoming. The ebb and flow of contamination, collaboration and transformation all converge at the point where one becomes more than one. It is the story of a monster—a chimera—who has just begun to acknowledge their hybrid existence. What happens when you allow yourself to recognize your entanglements?

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<sup>17</sup> Singh described the language of pain as post-linguistic alien echoes (Singh 62). The sense that pain is a post-humanist mode of dialogue is found threaded into my poetry.

<sup>18</sup> Within *Trace*, Savoy states that names encode meaning and memory (Savoy 75). We only have need for names when we want to distinguish one thing from another without observation (Savoy 71).



Translating the method of creation into the final book, I developed a font from my own handwriting, bringing my analogue process back into the words, as these poems were originally written by hand on scrap pieces of paper while sitting in a park or going for a walk. I am drawn to humble papers; I could never write or draw as freely on pristine white or quality paper as I could on recycled or craft paper. Each page of the book has been hand-cut from a large roll of deep brown craft paper. The vertical layout of each page was designed to integrate poetry and imagery in a fluid and affective manner. Each image has a story and incorporates traces of myself and their creation. Through touch I am saturated into each page of this book, including the cyanotype cover and the hand-stitch binding.

Can you smell the stench of decay  
clinging  
caressing  
long and lingering  
upon my paper flesh?



**Figure 8.**

*Unedited Frame, 2020*  
16mm sound stock  
Mono Cliffs Provincial Park

In September 2020, my sister and I travelled to Mono Cliffs Provincial Park. With a Bolex hand-crank camera, I filmed my surroundings. This film was spontaneous, unorganized, and completely intuitive. After the success of my previous bucket-processing tests, I decided to develop this 100ft film in a large bucket in the darkness of my basement. The results of this process were uneven and inconsistent. It was both physically and emotionally demanding, causing my body to drift into the haze of my chronic pain.

## Touch

“To think with touch has a potential to inspire a sense of connectedness that can further problematize abstractions and disengagements of (epistemological) distances, the bifurcations between subjects and objects, knowledge and the world, affects and facts, politics and science,” (Bellacasa 97).

The power of touch provoke human desires and holds the power to communicate beyond bodies. Through touch, I contaminate with my materials, processes and environment, engaging with every aspect and step of creation. Traces of myself linger in every photograph, film, and poem that develop. I am drawn to analogue photography and film, revelling in the tactility of the processes and results. Each moment is in collaboration. Touch becomes an intimate dialogue between my body, mind, and the artwork. Pushing through my own physical limitations, I am in constant consideration of my physical movements and the pains that bubble to the surface when I engage with analogue photographs and film practices. Although my body rejects the strenuous and time-consuming processes, I persevere, delighted with the visceral and palpable moments of interaction. My process of taking and developing analogue film and photography renders me vulnerable to the materials, who take on a life of their own. Each material exploration embraces the unknown, making room for new results. Each creation is a festering monster. I am enamoured by all of the technical ‘mistakes’ and flaws that manifest in each photo and film, recognizing beauty in the ugly, in the abject, in the queer.

Touch is where my physical and emotional senses converge. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed discusses touch as a queer encounter: “If objects are the extensions of bodies, just as bodies are the incorporations of objects, how can we locate the queer moment in one or the other? ... Things become queer precisely given how bodies are touched by objects, or by ‘something’ that happens, where what is ‘over there’ is also ‘in here,’ or even what I am ‘in,’” (Ahmed 162-163). The intermingling of objects is a happening of monstrous proportions.

Desire to communicate with others begins with touch and expands beyond the bodily senses. Touch is used as an intimate infinite connection.

Touch has immense powers of transformation and metamorphoses<sup>19</sup>. Not only is touch an important step in my process of creation but it is an element within the works. In the film and photography, touch is yielded as a starting point for change and growth. It is the connection between the internal and the external, human and non-human, subject and object, and all others. Karen Barad beautifully explores the sense of touch within quantum physics and expands the knowledge of particle intra-actions to queer bodies and objects. She states that every level of touch is itself touched by all possible others. The very nature of the 'self' is called into question. The "self is dispersed/ diffracted through time and being," (*Transmaterialities*, Barad 400). The sense of contamination and collaboration hybridizes others into an ambiguous monster<sup>20</sup> that is always in a state of becoming.

Photographs and other photographic material explorations have been threaded throughout *The Decay*. Each image was selected from hundreds of unique and visceral material experiments I have conducted, integrating themselves into the writing and story. The content of the images are entangled in my history and current existence, as they were all taken in locations that hold meaning to me. I begin with walking. Most of the photographs of nature, plants, and trees were taken in Mono Cliffs Provincial Park. This forest played a prominent role in my upbringing and over time has become a dear friend and collaborator. I travelled along my familiar and nostalgic paths, spontaneously taking photographs of moments that struck me as vulnerable and compelling. This is how I spent the spring, summer and fall of

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<sup>19</sup> *Metamorphoses* by Ovid has been a constant inspiration in my life. The fantastical stories of transformation as a result of wrath, love, and fear connects to my exploration of contamination as collaboration and the ever changing nature of the chimera.

<sup>20</sup> I began my MFA studies with *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley at the forefront of my research. I tied the idea of animation and filmmaking to the monster. By animating, I found that I was breathing life into an otherwise inanimate object or image. The more I sat with this story, the more I realized I was not only the orchestrator of a new life form but I was entangled in it. I am both the doctor and the monster. *Frankenstein* has its way of relating to all areas of research and being. This book is an ambiguous monster in and of itself.

2020, against the backdrop of the Covid19 pandemic. These photographs are a dialogue between me, the forest, and the sun that plays with the film's chemicals to paint the images onto the film. They are extensions of our relationship.

As such personal archives, the photographs wished to be developed in an equally intimate manner and so processing the films by hand felt like a natural step in our partnership. Collaborating with the subjects of the photographs—the plants themselves—I produced a non-toxic developer rather than utilizing the standard developer, which is toxic for the environment. This organic developer is known as pollenol<sup>21</sup>, which is made from bee pollen, vitamin C, washing soda, and water. The pollen was locally sourced, the worker bees pollenating and contaminating each plant in their wake. This pollen could very well have touched and collaborated with the plants, ultimately becoming part of the development of the photos they are subjects of.

Conducting material research was a joyful and instinctive journey. I played with the developing process of each roll of film, changing and tweaking the methods as I progressed. In April 2020, the first analogue photographs I took were on 120 medium format film. It was refreshingly sunny and warm after spending so much time indoors in quarantine and so my mother, sister and myself decided to take our dogs to Mono Cliffs for the day. All of us nostalgic for our old home and way of life, we enter the forest through our familiar trails. On this day, we visited a stone building that had always sparked our curiosity and imagination. I focused on this decrepit structure that has been consumed by plants and other forms of wildlife. Every image examined this treasure that has become a home for so many forms of life save for those that built it, embodying the concept of contamination as collaboration—which was a new theory to me at the time. To develop this film, I retreated to the darkness of my basement. Blindly, I wound it around a reel and placed it in a light-safe developing tank, feeling my way from one step to the next. The pungent pollenol was poured into the tank,

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<sup>21</sup> I was taught how to create and use pollenol in the summer of 2019 by TJ Ediger who worked and taught at the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto.

which I rocked gently back and forth—the liquid dancing along the negatives. Tart sprinkles of the ochre-coloured fluid dripped onto my fingers with every movement, tinting my skin yellow as the chemicals activated and revealed the images. So that they may survive the light's impression, I washed and fixed the film before removing it from the tank and hanging it to dry. The pollen from the developer stained these otherwise faultless images its honey hue ([see Figure 2](#)).

The process of analogue photography moved me. Each moment of interaction between myself, the camera, and the film were dripping with touch and intimacy. From loading the camera in a darkened room, through the engagement with the technology, to the physical processing of the negatives, I felt a bond materialize that hybridized all that were touched. On September 20, I ventured back to Mono Cliffs. This time I took two rolls of 35mm film. My sister, Justine, and I spent the entire day exploring our favourite childhood trails, fields, and views. We walked from the stone structure, through high grass fields, to an apple orchard that was lush and wild. I was overwhelmed with the mere height of the plants, worried that I may disturb lives with my presence. On our drive home, we pulled over to the side of the dirt road and the car decided to malfunction. Refusing to turn on for nearly an hour, we were forced to stay with the vehicle, seeing the sun rapidly set around us. In this time, I discovered plants, bugs, berries, and flowers that intrigued me. I was forced to stand in one place and notice my surroundings without the goal of a location or the act of walking to distract me. I stood barefoot in the grass and photographed the shadows nature cast upon my skin. This unexpected interaction wielded the most compelling photos.

I processed each of the two rolls of film with different methods. With one roll, I played with a technique that came to mind when considering other photographic processes such as phytograms, photograms, and cyanotypes. In complete darkness, I blindly unrolled the film and strapped it chemical-side-up along a piece of wood to keep it from rolling back up. Across the negatives I draped cheesecloth, drenched and dripping with warm pollenol developer. My fingers danced along the cloth and film, making sure there were points of contact. I worried

that the cloth did not hold enough developer, as I flicked more along the surface. This process was both exciting and terrifying, for I have neither seen nor heard of other artists contact-developing negatives and had no frame of reference. The photos were delightfully foggy, some parts of the image revealing more than others. The contact-printing with pollenol resulted in yellow-tinted, slightly scratched, and uneven photographs and I was enamoured by each and every one of them ([see Figure 3](#)). Further transformation occurred when the negatives were scanned into the computer and inverted to positive images, resulting in a stony-blue tint, as the yellow pollen hue was also inverted.

Seeing the results of touch along these surfaces inspired me to explore more experimental processes that would initiate a deeper dialogue between myself and the material. How could I be more involved in the process of developing film?<sup>22</sup> Up until this point, I was the orchestrator of the developing process, but I was otherwise uninvolved. With the second roll of 35mm, I decided to contaminate it with traces of me. I filled a glass jar with items that held meaning for me. I placed soil from one of my beloved potted plants in the jar along with local beeswax and sand to connect with this land I reside on. In this jar, I placed herbs and spices that, in Italian folk magic/traditions, symbolize protection, resilience, strength, love, and healing. I poured in Abruzzo Digestive to connect to the Italian mountains of my ancestors. The roll of film, still in its canister, was placed in the jar and topped with boiling water. It sat in this concoction, or ‘soup’ as some call it, for forty-eight hours before it was removed and placed by the heater to dry for two weeks. As I unravelled the film in the dark, ready to develop it, I realized that the surface was still too sticky to wind around a reel and place in the developing tank. My fingers stuck to the emulsion, removing bits of it with each grasp of my hands. Completely surprised, I spontaneously switched gears and processed it with the tools I had at my disposal which luckily included a bucket. Up until this moment, I had never considered processing film in a bucket since I had access to darkroom equipment. As I rubbed

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<sup>22</sup> I talk to my family about each stage of my practice. My sister mentioned a cookbook of experimental photographic processes that could inspire me. She reached out to her coworker TJ Ediger for the document that listed various recipes photographers have used to develop, fix, and distress film. This *Site and Cycle* document has proven to be incredibly informative and inspirational.

the pollenol along the surface of the film, I realized that I was more involved than ever before. My gloved fingers glided across every inch, feeling the developer saturate the smooth acetate. The scent of the pollenol was pungent and sweet—so much more present in the open bucket than it had been in the tank. In the pitch-black darkness, I counted to eight minutes in my mind, as no clock was visible to me, before I rinsed it in the sink, placed it in the developing tank, and fixed the film. These photographs are monsters in their own right with traces of each step of their creation visible upon their surface. The soup discoloured the negatives, leaving milky rings on the images. The bucket-process scratched the acetate, archiving each movement of my hands across the film ([see Figure 4](#)). This roll of 35mm film was touched by my body, my history, and my intentions. It, likewise, affected me with its physicality and scent. I could do no further work that day, as my spine was agitated by the strenuous work.

I was so enamoured by this physical process, that I decided to develop another roll of 35mm film with the bucket-process technique. This time, I took photos of nature taking over Toronto during the fall. The images focused on the rot and deterioration of the city. It was a look into the auto-rewilding happening simultaneously as the Covid19 virus spread, keeping the otherwise bustling streets rather quiet and vacant. I processed this roll in warm pollenol developer before throwing it into an ice-cold wash bath, which resulted in subtle reticulation ([see Figure 5](#)). These photos are very clear, contrasted, and full of beautiful hairline scratches.

The material research that spanned across 2020 was a very joyful and playful experience, led by touch and the materials themselves. In the summer, I experimented with cameraless experimental photography techniques such as phytograms and cyanotypes. In July, Justine and I went foraging for plants along Cook's Bay shoreline. I foraged for red clover flowers and dandelions, both of which connect to my childhood and Italian ancestry—dandelions have forever been a favourite flower of mine. Rather than using pollenol, the plants became their own developer. Soaking in a bath of vitamin C, washing soda, and water, the plants' internal chemistry is activated, which in turn plays with the emulsion on film. It is unnerving to unroll the film in the sunlight when I have been so accustomed to the darkness of my basement, but



it was a liberating experience letting the sun caress the film. One by one, I pulled the leaves and flowers out of their bath and delicately placed them onto the exposed emulsion, making sure they were in full contact with each other. They sat together in the sunlight until little copper-coloured rings appeared around each petal and leaf. Briskly, I pulled the plants off the surface and whisked it into the darkness to wash and fix ([see Figure 6](#)). Contact-developing with plants in a developer of their own making was a game-changing process for me. The involvement of each and every material and step produced these monsters that ignored so many rules of photography and norms of analogue processing. I desired to further involve myself in this medium.

Integrating my body into this process, I took a series of self-portrait photographs on a new roll of 35mm film, which I then developed with the phytogram process. By placing (and removing) the plants on this film in darkness, I was able to retain hints of my body within these images. The plants protected portions of the photos from full sun exposure while imprinting their shape upon my photographed body. These images are embodiments of the chimera, portraying creatures that are simultaneously human, plant, and fragments of their formation in time and space ([see Figure 7](#)).

Considering photosynthesis as a stage in the development of photography led me to the art of the cyanotype. Using a combination of foraged plants and transparent self-portrait photographs, I produced cyanotypes interweaving the human body with plant forms into chimera creatures. Excited by the change in scale from small film frames to full sheets of watercolour paper, I played with gesture and movement. Unevenly, I painted the chemicals onto the paper, letting my brush guide me in creating organic and undefined edges to these prints. After they dried in the darkness, I brought them into dim lighting, where I placed the transparent photographs onto the paper and arranged foliage that I scavenged along the image. Between two panes of glass, I sandwiched the materials together for full contact. The paper was placed outside in direct sunlight until the light green chemicals transformed into a dark mossy tone. Back in the dim lighting, I removed the acetate and plants and washed the

chemicals from the paper. Over the matter of hours, the colour transformed into a brilliant cyan hue. Both the colour and the scale of these photographs inspired me to create unique cyanotypes for the book cover of *The Decay*, each book possessing a cover that differs from the last in subtle and quiet ways.

With each experiment, I became eager to breathe further life into my materials, this is when I transitioned into the moving image. In fall 2020 and winter 2021, I filmed, developed, and edited together the beast that is *The Becoming*. *The Becoming* was filmed on both 35mm motion picture film and 16mm film sound stock shot as motion picture film. The 16mm film was shot with a Bolex hand-crank camera in September 2020. In order to film, the Bolex requires you to crank the motor by hand, demanding consistent engagement. This film was taken intuitively along the paths of Mono Cliffs Provincial Park. I filmed the trees and plants in movement along with scenes of my own body moving in that space. I captured moments of my feet mingling with the grass and branches between my fingers. I shot the wind carrying the clouds quickly across the sky. After taking this roll of film, it sat in the camera for four months while I pondered what the next steps for it may be.

Following the extensive material research that I underwent with the 35mm photos, I decided to develop this roll with pollenol in a bucket. Using a playlist as my timer, I closed myself into my pitch-black basement and began this process which was remarkably physically demanding, as 100 feet of film was quite a bit different than the 5 foot strips I was accustomed to. Kneeling on the cold tile floor, I unwound the film from the take-up reel and plunged it into the bucket. It was a full-body engagement to dunk the film into the deep bucket and move the pollenol along the surface. On a time-limit, I frantically moved the film around, trying to make sure the developer touched all as evenly as possible. It was a laborious and demanding experience; not only was I activating the chemicals, but I was activating my chronic pain. Due to these physical difficulties, the film was unevenly developed and, as a result, the footage at the bottom of the bucket over-developed and the footage at the top of the bucket under-developed. Humbled by the physical demands, I embraced the unevenness of this film as a

useful lesson in collaboration and yielding some of the control I thought I had over these processes and materials ([see Figure 8](#)).

In the cold, grey, and isolated winter of January 2021, I explored 35mm motion picture film. The land around me was dark and desolate and I felt equally dormant. I became the subject of this film, a more present role than I have yet taken. I loaded a 1920 Devry Lunchbox style hand-crank camera with 50ft of Kodak Plus X. I moved<sup>23</sup> before the camera, exposing my androgynous form. Each shot was framed to partially conceal my full identity and gender in order to portray myself as an ambiguous creature that anyone could relate to and perceive as an extension of themselves. This film presented itself with a world of negotiations and unexpected discoveries. I succumbed to the desires of this camera, emulsion, and processes. My first negotiation occurred when I opened up the camera in the dark and found that the film did not fully wind on the take-up reel, deciding to move throughout the camera halfway through the filming process. Film poured onto the floor as I blindly unwound it from the gears within the camera. I dumped the film into the pollenol bucket, but, as my hands pushed the chemicals around, I noticed that this time something felt different—the film was slimy. As I moved it around, I felt large parts of the chemicals flake off the acetate. I realized that the chemicals on this film did not react to pollenol in the same way as the other films had. As a result of this chemical reaction and the camera reel issue, this roll of film was incredibly distressed ([see Figure 9](#)). Beautifully contaminated by the process of its own creation, this film destroyed my identity in an ethereal and ghostly manner that reinforced the concept of this work. This film is an archive of our interaction.

*The Becoming* integrates the 16mm and 35mm films. I animated this film frame by frame in Photoshop in order to build on the concept of the chimera and to spend time and energy on every moment. Each frame becomes a hybrid of body parts and plant parts. Playfully, I painted the images together in an intuitive manner, letting each frame direct my movement. This film

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<sup>23</sup> Justine not only procured the Devry for my use but she worked as a camera assistant, hand-cranking the film forward as I moved before it.

is a story of transformation, ensnaring the viewer into its web of metamorphosis. *The Becoming* is an infinitely looping film revealing the struggles of metamorphosis and the continuous journey of recognizing the self. It invites you to become part of the world of the chimera.

There is a shift  
-a tactile depth

collapsing and expanding  
simultaneously  
approaching and departing

An understanding—no start to finish processing  
A knowing without beginning or ending  
A void in which all exists.

Here lie the dreams that we  
forget during wakefulness

Except now I am awake.





Figure 9.

*Unedited Frame*, 2021  
35mm motion picture film  
Gilford, ON

So enamoured by the 35mm tests I have conducted, I decided to experiment with a 1920 Devry Lunchbox style camera, which would allow me to shoot on 35mm motion picture film. With my sister operating the camera, I filmed a series of my body both in motion and standing still. Every angle was framed so as to mask my identity and gender. The Lunchbox camera was faulty, resulting in frames that were double or triple exposed to the same movement. This ghostly effect was further enforced during the developing stage of this film. The emulsion did not react well to the pollenol that I used, causing large parts of the image to flake off the acetate, further concealing my identity. Every aspect of this film embodies the chimera. These images are true archives of their own history of creation.

## Conclusion

“Our perceptions work in large part by expectation. It takes less cognitive effort to make sense of the world using preconceived images updated with a small amount of new sensory information than to constantly form entirely new perceptions from scratch. ... [When] tricked out of our expectations, we fall back on our senses. What’s astonishing is the gulf between what we expect to find and what we find when we actually look,” (Sheldrake 14-15).

The body is in a constant state of transformation. In *The Decay*, I write from the perspective of a person immensely aware of their becoming. This book of poetry focuses on the astonishing reality of what exists when you allow yourself to look and to connect. It depicts the metamorphosis from human to other, but it is indefinite and always changing. *The Becoming*, *The Decay*, and the interwoven photos, explore the body archive. Singh beautifully articulates the depth of the body archive: “The body archive is an attunement, a hopeful gathering, an act of love against the foreclosures of reason. It is a way of knowing the body-self as a becoming and unbecoming thing, of scrambling time and matter, of turning toward rather than against oneself. And vitally, it is a way of thinking-feeling the body’s unbounded relation to other bodies,” (Singh 29). Both film and book of poetry affect the reader and the viewer, engaging in communion with others. Each is an intimate portrayal of the self as unrecognizable and yet undeniable. They are the exploration of the internal and external workings of the chimera.

Beginning my MFA journey in a state of disorientation has driven my research into directions I would not have previously explored. Embracing the monster and the entanglements with my surroundings, I began to notice. Through studying contamination as collaboration, pain, orientation, and affect, I understand how I move through and interact with the world. I recognize the impact I have on my environment and the affect my surroundings have on me. Each material exploration wove me further into an ambiguous existence. Through touch, my materials and body were able to create their own narrative separate from any pre-conceived

expectations. From my research, I emerged with new knowledges, theories, and connections and move through space and time with newfound awareness. Through engaging with *The Decay* and *The Becoming*, I invite you to join this journey. Together we expand into an inclusive future.

The vision of the future and post-humanity should encompass all that is other and all that is human, recognizing the indistinct lines between these worlds. As Bogost argues within *Alien Phenomenology*, a posthuman future must cease to “focus on [others] from the vantage point of human intersubjectivity, rather than from the weird, murky mists of the really real,” (Bogost 8). Existence is messy, undefined, and full of connections. By shattering the notions of gender, race, and sexuality, we can shatter the barriers between human and nonhuman, thus embracing the monster that we inevitably are. The recognition of shared existence can shift the trajectory humanity is currently charging toward and welcome a decolonized and queer future. “[A] posthumanist ontology is one in which ‘humans are no longer monarchs of being, but are instead among beings, entangled in beings, and implicated in other beings,’” (Bogost 16-17). This is the hybrid and entwined future my poetry, photography, and film refers to. They utilize entanglements as a means to explore possible futures and the reality of contagion and communication. Focusing on queer, intersectional feminist, and alien phenomenologies and theories, I fabulate a world that embraces the pains of becoming. Through embodied practices of collaboration, I welcome a future where we are aware of our entanglements—empathetic and connected. We are chimera, and together we queer the myth of the one.

We are  
    blood and bones  
    branches and bark  
We are  
    broken pieces  
    of each other  
    and everyone else

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