Inbetweening Beings

An Ecology of Relational Animation

by Isaac King

Isaac King, OCAD University
Inbetweening Beings: An Ecology of Relational Animation
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Abstract

My research uses animation to examine ecology in the Anthropocene, through an immersive installation. Experimenting with the formal process of frame-by-frame filmmaking, installation, and the materiality of landscape, I observe, reflect, and project an array of related living systems, asking where and how humans fit in. Referencing specific ecologies and locations, the assemblage relates human and more-than-human life through moving increments. Using illusion and analogy, I invite reflection, complication, and implication. My installation of relational animation focuses on urban and human-disturbed landscapes, suggesting a distinctly anthropogenic "nature" – jumbled, entangled, polluted, and resilient.

Keywords: Animation, Installation, Anthropocene, Ecology, Relations, Nature, Inbetweening

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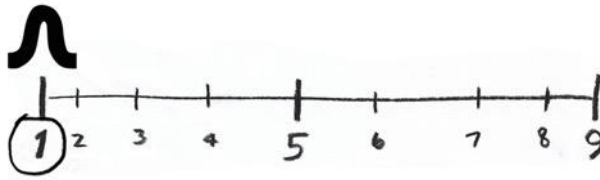
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Keyframe (1): Introduction

This thesis paper accompanies my animated installation *Inbetweening Beings*, exhibited in OCAD U's Great Hall, 100 McCaul St, April 10-16, 2022. This essay has 9 short chapters, interpreted as stills, or frames, of an animated inchworm's loop. At each chapter heading, there is an image of the worm's position and a corresponding number, representing an animation timing chart. This introduction is a keyframe (1) – a distinctive, establishing upright position, followed by 3 inbetween increments before the next keyframe (5), a flat, middle position describing my methodology. After that, there are 3 more inbetweens leading to the last keyframe (9), the essay's conclusion. While an animated cycle's last position matches the first, my final arched keyframe projects my research forward, not back to the beginning. The first 8 chapters describe the 8 related stories of *Inbetweening Beings*: *WARNING SIGN, FOOTSTEPS, BIRDWATCHING, BURDOCK GOLFER, INCHWORM, DETERIORATE = REDO, ITERATE, BEAVER BLOCKADE*, and *RETURNING.*

Inbetweening is an animation term describing the intermediate images between keyframes. These increments create smooth transitions from two extreme positions when the frames are played in sequence. The liminal, transitional space between two points has led me to explore other inbetweens. Climate change and extreme weather define the instability of the Anthropocene. We're inbetween the political stasis of maintaining fossil-fuel extraction and the urgent action required to decarbonize the planet. Complex, biodiverse ecosystems are made of overlapping, interacting, inbetween life. The connected organisms of food and energy webs are inbetween living and dying. Inbetween landscapes are made up of artificial and natural materials, are between demolition and construction, in unceded and colonized territories. In every instance, an inbetween reflects a relationship: between images, organisms, and environments.

How did I get here? In 1997, I chose an animation major at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Its interdisciplinarity appealed to me – drawing, sculpting, photography and computers could be used to produce the illusion of movement. Animation requires thousands of frames for seconds of media, each one flickering briefly before it's gone, contributing to the overall moving story. These temporary images are free of the sustained scrutiny of still objects like paintings or sculpture. As Norman McLaren famously observed, animation exists not with each frame, but at the "invisible interstices that lie between the frames" (qtd. in Furniss 5). Animation also appealed to me for its practical application – I hoped to work in the animation industry after graduation. For the next 20 years I made animated commercials, PSAs and

broadcast design at Toronto's Head Gear Animation, while creating my own short films independently, funded by arts council grants. In 2017 a serious concussion forced me away from computer screens, the animation industry, and into quiet outdoor contemplation. My priorities shifted to recovery, family time, and a renewed focus on nature in my art practice. I began experimenting with drawings and stop-motion photography outside. In the pandemic's isolation, my children and I explored local greenspaces regularly, appreciating the connected life of plants, insects, and birds. This MFA program has furthered my ecological animation research, integrating projection and installation, and incorporating theory into practice as I challenge established modes of production and presentation. I've returned to art school choosing animation again, for its interdisciplinarity and lively joy which has continuously sustained my interest. Like the inchworm that inspired this thesis, my path has been both linear and cyclic, incrementally moving along.
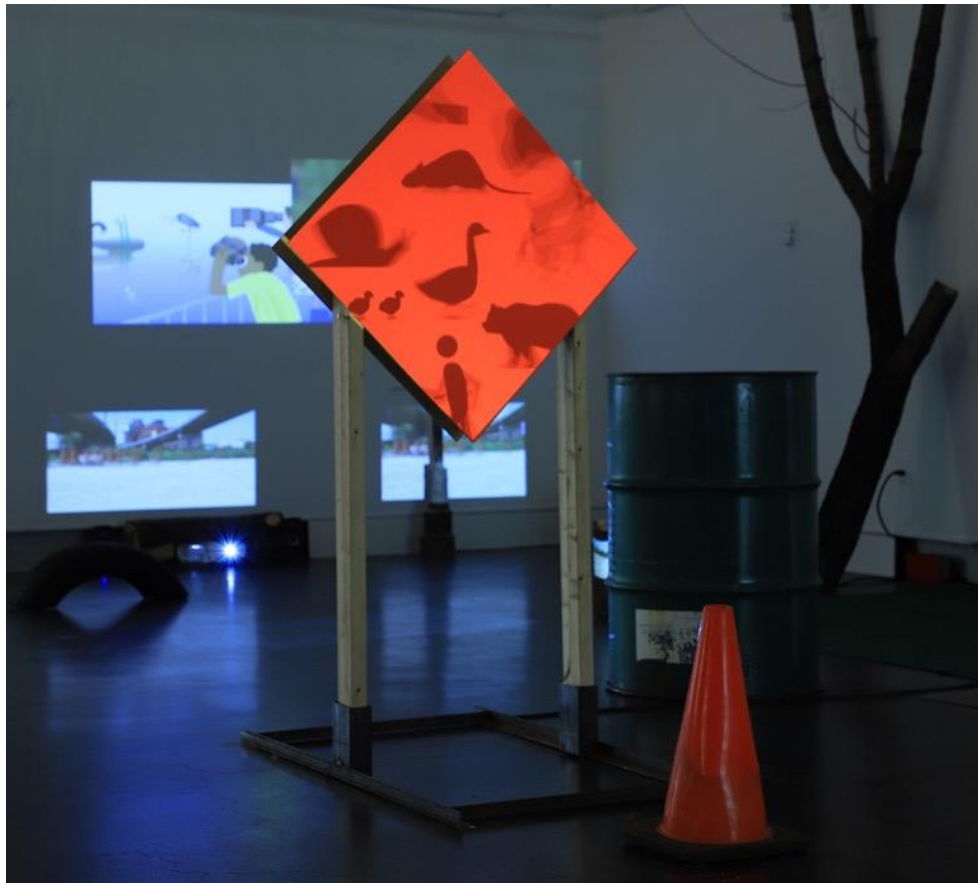
WARNING SIGN is a bright orange traffic sign at the front of the installation. It's both a cautionary marker and an invitation into the space. In a loop, it presents the thesis title *Inbetweening Beings* and introduces the tension between still and moving images – constantly switching from singular, static iconography to a mass of overlapping, writhing, entangled life. A traffic cone stands before the sign, hiding a short-throw video projector. Together, the sign and cone warn visitors of potential danger, suggest a shifting work-in-progress, and encourage careful footsteps moving ahead.
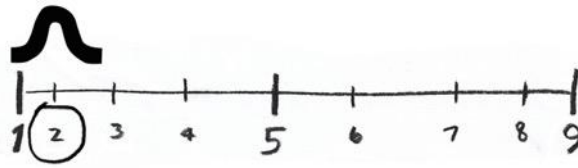
Inbetween (2): Acknowledging Footsteps on the Land

Land-based ecological animation begins by looking down and thinking about where I stand. While the places I have lived inform my identity, the current sites of my animation research are significant to the meaning of *Inbetweening Beings*. Working on and with the land, my relationship to it matters.

I was born in Crescent Beach, BC, on the traditional territory of many nations including the Semiahmoo, Coast Salish, Katzie, Tsawwassen, Stó:lō, W̱SÁNEĆ, and Kwantlen peoples (Native-Land.ca). In 2000 I moved to Toronto, located on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabeg, the Huron-Wendat, and the Chippewa peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Like so many Canadians, my ancestors came here seeking a better life. My father's Jewish grandparents fled persecution in Poland, Russia, and Belarus and my maternal relatives arrived from Denmark and the British Isles a generation earlier. Their opportunity came at the expense of Indigenous people. The confederation project was built on stolen land and the cultural genocide of the First Nations of North America, brutal truths that have only recently entered mainstream conversation. Although my Jewish grandparents endured anti-Semitic attacks and the institutional restrictions of Toronto in the 1930s, I have lived in safe, supportive communities – first in a suburban setting and currently in a diverse, middle-class downtown neighborhood. As a white settler with an assimilated family name (Koenigsburg to Kingsberg to King), I have and continue to benefit from white supremacy in Canada.

European colonialism has violently defined land use and ownership in North America. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission asserts that "the negotiation of Treaties, while seemingly honourable and legal, was often marked by fraud and coercion, and Canada was, and remains, slow to implement their provisions and intent" (TRC 1). 1787 marks the initial Toronto purchase (Treaty 13) between the British Crown and the Mississaugas of the Credit. However, it was disputed for over 200 years due to missing documents, descriptions, and vague land surveys (Duric). The Crown's original purchase description of "ten miles square at Toronto" cut the territory along straight lines, establishing the future city grid. As the land was parcelled off, colonial law established individual ownership rights along fences. Beverly Jacobs notes how this contrasts Indigenous understandings of shared land responsibility ("Land Governance" 00:11:03-00:11:23).

In the Anthropocene, land relations are broken. The Land Back movement calls for Indigenous control over traditional and ancestral territories. According to LandBack.org, "It is the reclamation of everything stolen from the original peoples: land, language, ceremony, food, education, housing, healthcare, governance, medicines, and kinship." Anishinaabe storyteller and artist Bomgiizhik relates how the Indian Act forced Indigenous people onto reservations, out of the way of resource extraction. "It was very pivotal for the Canadian Government to remove us from the ecology because we're the natural land protectors" ("Land Governance" 00:07:45 - 0:07:55). Through control and assimilation, the act allowed colonial domination and exploitation that has led to our environmental crisis. *Land Back: A Yellowhead Institute Red Paper* connects self-governance and the benefits of traditional ecological knowledge: "the matter of land back is not merely a matter of justice, rights or 'reconciliation'; like the United Nations, we believe that Indigenous jurisdiction can indeed help mitigate the loss of biodiversity and climate crisis" (12).

At the centre of my installation, *FOOTSTEPS* is an animation loop projected prominently on the ground. It invites viewers to look down and walk with a series of travelling footprints – shorebird, snake, snowshoe hare, coyote, human, horse, railroad, and construction boots. These marks share pathways, suggesting living relationships and revealing histories of displacement by settler colonialism. *FOOTSTEPS* offers more-than-human perspectives, drawing on ecophenomenology, biophilia, and kinship. Viewers inhabit shifting bodies and overlapping locomotion – walking, running, chasing, hunting – always moving on land in relation to each other. Leanne Simpson writes that "all living things are in relation, from food webs to treaties" (Blockade 31), and the roving camera of *Footsteps* references both life cycles and intersections of contested territory. It literally asks where you stand, and how you are connected to this land.
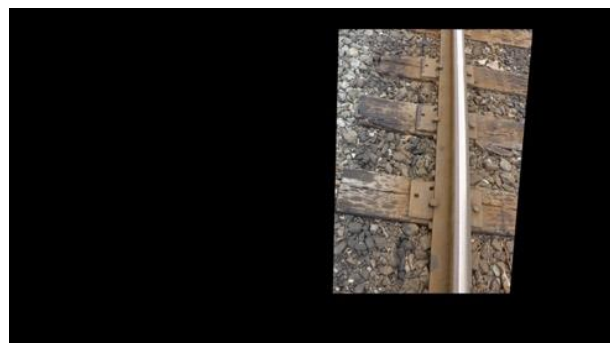
The animation shooting locations are meaningful: bird feet on the banks of the Humber River follow the Toronto Carrying Place Trail, an important Indigenous travel and trade route connecting Georgian Bay, Lake Simcoe and Lake Ontario. The dozens of villages and campsites along the Humber River Valley represent several thousand years of Indigenous occupation before European settlers arrived (J. Johnson 61). When the Europeans arrived in 1615, the trail's importance continued as the fur trade made it sought-after land, and was controlled by the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississauga and their European allies at different times (62), until British colonial settlers forced the Mississaugas further west by the end of the 18th century (63).

In Crescent Beach, I animated my own bare feet walking through the mud flats at low tide. I grew up here, where layers of shell middens and ash in the soil reveal centuries of seafood harvesting and fires before the Spanish arrived around 1791. By 1850, white settlement had begun, bringing conflict and smallpox that decimated the Snokomish population. European trade at Fort Langley, the BC gold rush, the Catholic church, and the early mining and logging industries were all a part of settler domination and land control (Brown). By 1911, a railroad and hotel were built, transitioning the beach into a holiday destination for Vancouverites, who eventually bought property and built homes. Many Indigenous tools and belongings are still unearthed in Crescent Beach and returned to the local Semiahmoo Band; these buried items are symbolic of the hidden history and systematic erasure of the area's first residents. Today, the trains carry more freight than people, mainly transporting extracted US coal on its way overseas. Ironically, the Burlington Northern right-of-way, an overgrown corridor on either side of the tracks, is one of the only undeveloped areas around, and where I spent my youth climbing trees and collecting blackberries. My ancestors did not live off this land and my connection to it may be superficial, but it's here that my passion for outdoor nature began.

I continue to learn from land, and from Indigenous epistemologies and land-based knowledge that have transformed my sense of place. Leanne Simpson uses Nishnaabeg stories to advocate for a reclamation of land as pedagogy, describing how "the land, aki, is both context and process" ("Land" 7). Rooted in Nishnaabeg intelligence, a girl discovers maple syrup by watching a red squirrel nibble on a branch. The education happens with curiosity and a desire to learn, supported by family, community, and love (7). Western mainstream pedagogy does not promote these outdoor discoveries. The scientific method

isolates phenomena and attempts objectivity, leaving out the observer in relations. Robin Wall Kimmerer has bridged this divide, combining Indigenous wisdom and scientific knowledge in *Braiding Sweetgrass.* A botanist and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, she implores us to overlap taxonomy with care, learning and relating with land – "for what good is knowing, unless it is coupled with caring" (345)?

At the end of *FOOTSTEPS*, the boot imprint animates into leaves of the broadleaf plantain, which integrate into the surrounding terrain. The common weed is known as "White Man's Footsteps" in some Indigenous communities for its habit of growing along colonial roads and railways (Kimmerer 213). However, unlike many aggressive introduced species, common plantain does not have "the colonizing habit of taking over others' homes and growing without regard to limits… Its strategy was to be useful, to fit into small places, to coexist with others … to heal wounds" (214). While not native to North America, this edible, medicinal, well-behaved plant has become "naturalized" to place – an admirable goal for all immigrants and settlers. Colonial settler-land relations were based on domination, ownership, and extraction. Canada's financial wealth has come from the earth, at great cost to Indigenous communities and planetary ecosystems. As the climate crisis worsens, this footprint needs to shrink, integrate, make

space, and heal. "To become naturalized is to live as if your children's future matters, to take care of the land as if our lives and the lives of our relatives depend on it. Because they do" (215). Animating *FOOTSTEPS*, my camera tripod makes its own marks on the land. For me, naturalizing to place means identifying and resisting established colonial land relations, listening to the land and water protectors, and educating myself and my children to live in conscious relationship with this land and its people.


© Moccasin Identifier Project

In Trillium Park on the edge of Lake Ontario, two large Anishinaabe/Woodland moccasins are engraved into the stone walls. These, along with other painted stencils in public spaces, are part of Carolyn King's *The Moccasin Identifier Project*, which has inspired my thinking about *FOOTSTEPS*. In partnership with the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation and the Ontario Green Belt, the project's vision statement is "to advance treaty and Indigenous awareness by covering Canada in moccasins", which have been researched and designed by Philip Cote. Through education kits, school visits, and public stencilling, the project engages children and passersby with public art, raising awareness about where they stand. Instead of my fleeting *FOOTSTEPS*, these moccasins are indelibly marked on ancestral territory in Canada, affirming continuing Indigenous presence.

Footsteps within the installation.
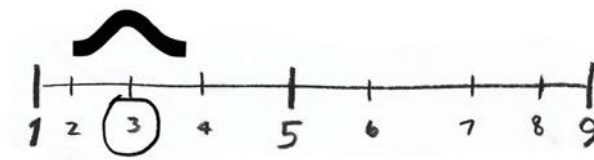
Inbetween (3): Research Questions and Project Overview

What is the Anthropocene?

The Anthropocene describes the current epoch of human-impacted planetary ecosystemic change, coined in 2000 by atmospheric scientist Paul Crutzen (Scientific American). Critics of the name cite hubris and the problem of equal responsibility, but I find alternatives like Capitalocene or Donna Haraway's Cthulucene too obscure. Seeking a common understanding, I prefer Anna Tsing's term "patchy Anthropocene" suggesting the precarity and inequality of the climate crisis. Instead of a solvable problem, Julia Thomas calls the Anthropocene a "multidimensional predicament" to navigate (par. 8). This muddling along feels right to me, with curiosity and fragments of hope guiding my work.

How do humans and "nature" overlap?

My goal at the outset of my MFA was to imagine how animation could connect humans to nature. It's a simple idea in a world where globalized capitalism and aggressive social media have addicted us to smartphones and isolated us through polarizing politics. Living alongside plants and animals – and not just potted cacti and poodles – but whatever dirt, weeds, trees, insects, birds, and mammals live nearby felt so important to me personally and to an urban society shut indoors by the COVID pandemic. I wanted to share my lifelong curiosity about how more-than-human life exists around us, with us, in us, in human-dominated environments. In the course of my research, I have reconsidered the human relationship to nature: not outside, but within it. In popular media, humans are positioned as either destroyers or saviours of wildlife, but often we're both (Wilson 129). The Cartesian duality that has defined so much of modern thought, mastery, and human exceptionalism positions culture versus nature, whereas the jumbled Anthropocene links the life of our species to all others on the planet. We are nature, it is us, we must live among (and learn from) all other life.

How can animation relate ecology? Why animation in the Anthropocene?

Animation and ecology may seem like an odd pair. On the surface, a technology-based optical illusion and the energy exchange of earthly organisms have little in common. However, looking at the pre-cinema optical toys and devices of the 1820s, we see fundamental connections. The thaumatrope, or "wonder turner", is a simple paper disc on a string. When flipped over quickly, a different image on the reverse blends with the first, creating an afterimage (Crary 104). The Zoetrope (meaning "wheel of life") followed,

which plays short animated loops in a spinning slotted drum. These precursors to animation and film technology link curiosity and the wonder of life to the vitality of moving images. In the 1870s, Edweard Muybridge's rapid photography of a galloping horse proved all 4 hooves left the ground, while Etienne-Jules Marey, a zoologist studying animal behaviour, photographed flocks of birds and how a falling cat always lands on its feet. These frame-by-frame image sequences projected at high speed became the earliest cinema experiments, using cameras to reveal imperceptible details of animal locomotion. Fuelled by a curiosity about how life moved, animation and motion picture technology "made motion tangible and decipherable to an extent that had not been previously possible" (Ivakiv 200). Moving images and moving life have been linked since the dawn of cinema.

Muybridge's chronophotography analyzed human and animal movement individually, against plain backgrounds and grids. Ecology, on the other hand, studies organisms and environments in relation to each other. The biophilia hypothesis, First coined by E.O. Wilson in 1984, suggests humans' innate connection with other life, linking an environmental ethic to sociobiology (Kellert and Wilson 76). Beyond relying on other species for our own survival, biophilia proposes that "the diversity of life has immense aesthetic and spiritual value" (73); that supporting and identifying with other lifeforms helps ourselves as well as ecosystems. From a scientific perspective, this kinship resembles some Indigenous understandings of interdependency. In *Native Science,* Gregory Cajete's describes "seeking life... the most basic of human motivations" (15). Deborah Bird Rose learned about "the shimmer of life" from Aboriginal people in Northern Australia's Victoria River region (G51). Building on Howard Morphy's study of *bir'yun,* the Yolngu term meaning "brilliant" or "shimmering", she describes this powerful aesthetic in both art and nature that "actually grabs you... brings you, into the experience of being part of a vibrant and vibrating world" (G53). In its rapid succession of aligned images, animation's jittery, strobing energy can relate this vibrancy. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett describes a "vital materiality" running through bodies, referencing the earlier vitalists Henri Bergson and Hans Driesch (63). The "boiling holds" of animation – jiggling pauses that are still yet quivering – make visible this sensation. Biophilia, "seeking life", shimmer, and vibrancy are impulses that draw me to animate life, attracting viewers with movement, colour, narrative, humour, characters, and sensory appeal.

In their 12 Basic Principles of Animation, legendary Disney animators Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston define *appeal* as the eye-catching "quality of charm, pleasing design, simplicity, communication, and magnetism" (69). However, unlike mainstream cartoon characters, ecology is difficult to visualize. Organisms' relationships to their environment are ubiquitous, imperceptible, and crucial - demanding close attention as we grapple with the climate crisis. With vibrant moving graphics, animation has unique abilities to inform, entertain, educate, and expand reality – all attractive qualities that invite viewers of all ages into ecological dialogue. In "Designing for Homo Ludens, Still", Bill Gaver considers humans playful creatures, observing that "pleasure comes before understanding, and engagement before clarity" (15). My aim is to use animation's appeal as a familiar, lively medium to highlight relations in the Anthropocene.

Project Overview

While many of my previous films have dealt with environmental themes, it was only my recent outdoor stop-motion filmmaking experiments that directly connected ecological theory to animation practice. The increments and inbetweens of animation – those frames that make up movement – are conceptually linked to aspects of ecology: the measurements of species' interconnectivity, the degrees of devastating temperature rise, and the gradual, scalable, multi-faceted efforts required for global survival. Beyond animation production en-plein-air, *Inbetweening Beings* exists among an assemblage of natural and artificial objects. I propose an ecology of *relational animation*: inviting and implicating viewers into the space of the immersive installation. In the dim gallery, glowing animated loops are projected on material

surfaces with sound. Among reeds, stumps, and tires, the images become entangled with the visitors' own shadows. In this, the assemblage both projects and reflects a fractured, interrelated Anthropocene, where human activity has forever altered life on the planet, and nature is not separate from culture.

BIRDWATCHING is digitally drawn with shimmering, smooth gradients. The story depicts two enthusiastic young birdwatchers observing a great blue heron in a polluted pond. From their position behind a fence, their tunneled gaze through binoculars and camera are focused on the bird's graceful form and colourful plumage. All around them, garbage and anthropogenic waste pollute the scene. The heron ignores them and spears a minnow. As our perspective shifts to that of the heron, we watch the birdwatchers watching us. As a heron, we see humans disconnected from their habitat – are they oblivious to pollution, ignoring it, or inured to damaged landscapes?
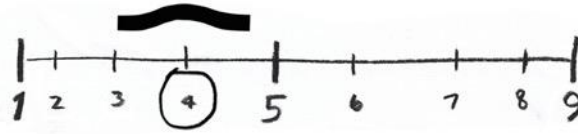
**Inbetween (4): Jumbled Anthropocene: Theoretical Framework**

Where are humans in nature? Within this question are two problems: the impossible universality assumed in the human "we," made up of diverse cultures and knowledge, and an othered "nature," existing outside the human realm. It presupposes an essential difference and ontological divide, while centering humans and our anthropomorphic perspective. While I am a human, making art for other humans, trying not to disrupt other species in the process, the destructive influence of human activity has created the Anthropocene. Capitalism's tendency toward domination, development, and exploitation of the planet has led to the current climate crisis, threatening all life on earth. As global warming continues, every extreme weather event, extinction, and evolutionary adaptation highlight our interconnections. Earth's fragile, resilient ecosystems are jumbled and troubled. Donna Haraway suggests we stay with the trouble, describing earth's inhabitants "entangled in symbiotic, dangerous, and intimate relations (10)". Lingering with our shared challenges, we may find solutions.

Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* has helped me articulate an ecology of relational animation. Far from carefree symbiosis, life in her *Cthulucene* is about living and dying in complex multispecies knottings, committed to the possibilities of recuperation and "getting on together" (10). She argues that "multispecies flourishing" is possible with "intense commitment and collaborative work and play with other terrans" (101). This *sympoeisis*, or "making-with", involves blurring species borders and getting up close to other life. My work is a form of this collaborative play, both through time-lapse outdoor animation and in my installation, which connects humans to other organisms. "Making-with" questions human mastery and the individualism of the artist. *Inbetweening Beings* assembles, juxtaposes, and reuses existing materials: reeds, bricks, icons, and ideas. In the troubled Anthropocene, we're not creating – we're already here, muddling along, in our complicated relationships.

Haraway's work is associated with New Materialism, a theoretical perspective that focuses on the primacy of matter and decentering human mastery and the domination of nature (Coole and Frost 8). It presents matter as indeterminate, forming and reforming in unexpected ways, becoming rather than being. Coole and Frost suggest "the difference between humans and animals, or even between sentient and nonsentient matter, is a question of degree more than of kind" (21). I interpret these degrees as animated increments, transforming stills into movement and inviting the more-than-human world into discursive relations as forms, species, or ecosystems. While new materialist ontology is open, contingent, uneven and complex (28), Kyla Tompkins notes this flat ontology can be problematic as it may assume a

universal human subject, omitting considerations of gender, race, and power (1). I believe the differences between humans and other organisms are equally important as the similarities as we discover the nature of our entanglements. There is no planet B, and we really are all in this together. However, Haraway's argument to "become-with each other" in "hot compost piles" (4) may suggest a level playing field. Human inequality has been on display in the COVID pandemic: precarious and essential workers are exposed to health risks with low pay, while middle-class incomes remain stable in safe home offices. Meanwhile, the ultra-wealthy avoid the worst consequences of global warming while over-contributing to its cause, walling fortresses and launching vanity space missions. The Anthropocene's Greek roots describe "a new age of Man", which both centres and blames humans for the state of the world. Clearly we're not equally responsible, but our survival depends on all kinds of collaborative *sympoeisis*.

Along with Haraway, Anna Tsing's notion of the "patchy Anthropocene" has informed my understanding of compromised, entangled, multispecies life. Far from the famous "Blue Marble" image of earth in NASA's 1972 photo, *Feral Atlas* is a sprawling digital map of more-than-human relations, describing new "feral ecologies" emerging from out-of-control human-built infrastructure. Its digital format encourages relationships of scale – from specific species in particular locations to global mashups of trade, colonialism and resource extraction. Co-editor Jennifer Deger suggests visualizing the Anthropocene means "attending closely to the intimate conjunctions of ecologies and social forces in specific places and processes… (requiring) many different maps and multiple scales" (par. 27). Little stories can add up to larger meanings, and *Inbetweening Beings* follows this path. Projected over the installation surfaces, specific loops connect with others, their details assembling an overall experience of fractured living systems.
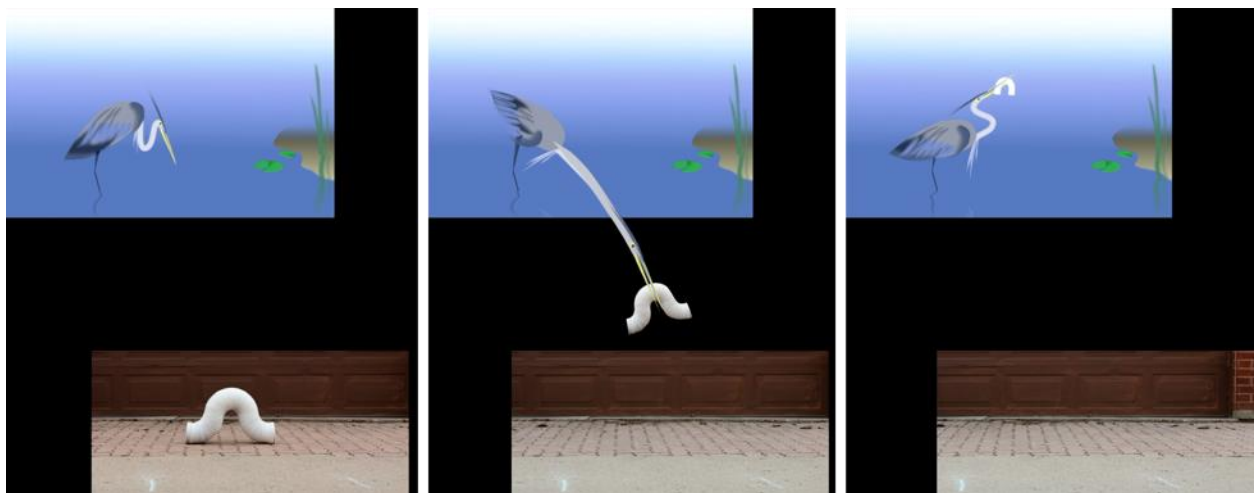
An interaction between *Birdwatching* and *Inchworm*.

The bigger picture, an aggregate collection of everything and everyone, is unknowable and unrepresentable. Timothy Morton calls these "hyperobects" – massive, impossible to comprehend and

visualize yet equally impossible to ignore or stop thinking about. Global warming is a hyperobject (3). His claim that "the aesthetics of nature truly impedes ecology" (105) has helped me see nature everywhere. Beyond an idealized wilderness with its pristine ecosystems, I see nature in the irrepressible life of disturbed landscapes, and in human ingenuity facing climate chaos. "Nature's beauty", long held up to bolster the environmental movement, can include human activity. Could an ordered field of solar panels be as beautiful as a tree's spreading leaves, or the geometry of a bee's honeycomb? By not putting nature over there and humans over here, ecology benefits. *Inbetweening Beings* intermingles weeds, worms, beaver dams, rubble, traffic and golf courses in a looping "meshwork". Tim Ingold, thinking deeply about lines, argues a *meshwork* is about knotted entanglements, whereas a *network* is a connection of points (186). Networks are formed by straight, colonial routes, or "lines of occupation" – highways, railroads, pipelines – connecting and dividing the land (190). Rivers, pathways, stories and ecologies don't follow those lines. They twist, loop and meander along. Robert Smithson observed that "nature does not proceed in a straight line, it is rather a sprawling development. Nature is never finished" (132). This rambling, never-ending nature of life in the Anthropocene inspires my assemblage, following waterways, rhizomatic roots, spreading seeds, and cycles of growth and decay.

Kimmerer, Tsing, and Ecologist Peter Del Tredici have helped me think carefully about weeds. Plantain, milkweed, phragmites and burdock feature prominently in my animations as symbols, food sources, nuisances, and teachers. Before plucking a dandelion from my yard, I consider its potential benefit as biodiverse habitat and carbon storage. Weed-killing sprays contain glyphosate and neonics that poison pollinating insects, toxifying the entire food chain. These chemicals are deployed to maintain the uniformity of turfgrass, a monoculture which provides no ecological benefit. This lawn order reflects the aesthetics of human dominance and requires a thorough rewilding. Instead of exterminating weeds, what can we learn from them, in our yards and industrial wastelands? Kimmerer reminds us we have much to learn from our older plant relatives, who "have been on the earth far longer than we have" (9). Tsing states the Anthropocene "is an invitation to pay attention to the weeds" ("Buck" 17), as they thrive in the disturbed landscapes of human activity. In *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Tsing uses the Matsutake mushroom trade to connect economy and ecology in the Anthropocene, marked by modern capitalism's "long distance destruction" (19). She follows the unpredictable growth of the prized wild fungi and the foragers themselves – linking precarious livelihoods and environments (4). The Anthropocene's precarity and flux have upended both a predictable climate and job stability. Matsutake appear in patchy, disturbed woodland, nurturing trees through mycorrhizal networks. Tsing highlights that disturbances like deforestation, fire, and floods can damage or create ecologies depending on their scale and duration, opening "terrain for transformative encounters, making new landscape assemblages possible" (160). *Inbetweening Beings* is inspired by this understanding of disturbance, adaptability, and resilience, assembling open-ended stories across disparate surfaces, repopulating empty space with relational animation.

After WWII, bombing had reduced Berlin to rubble. The weeds that grew over the broken concrete created a novel "ruderal" landscape as introduced plants thrived in dry, gravelly conditions. Many of the seeds had travelled from the Mediterranean and the Americas through war traffic and supply shipments (Stoetzer 303). The global movement of plants, like humans and other animals, has consistently challenged and shifted their destination ecologies. Language colours these movements. An "invasive" or "alien" species denotes a dominant, colonizing force, while a "native" species belongs, fitting into the local ecosystem. Biologically, these distinctions matter in terms of ecosystem function: native plants feed native bugs which feed native birds. An aggressively spreading introduced species can take over an ecosystem, greatly reducing biodiversity. In *Nature's Best Hope*, entomologist Doug Tallamy calls on private landowners to practice responsible land stewardship, planting beneficial trees and shrubs to encourage pollinators, rodents, and mammals to share space (95). Tallamy's vision of a "Homegrown National Park" requires converting vast expanses of ecologically sterile lawnscape to biodiverse habitat and ecological corridors for collective survival (124).

While this native plant habitat is required for the specialized interactions of bioregional food webs, in urban, industrialized landscapes, any plants can help. According to Del Tredici, "spontaneous vegetation", or weeds, reclaiming space in paved urban settings is beneficial – be they native, introduced, or naturalized. This free, "cosmopolitan" growth should be celebrated for its ability to absorb carbon dioxide, mitigate pollution, reduce heat, prevent erosion, and provide some food and habitat for wildlife ("Urban Nature" 59). In the Anthropocene, cities without remnant native soils can be sites of novel ecologies, where non-native plants are jumbled with human life. This requires an aesthetic and cultural paradigm shift. Del Tredici notes that the context of plants reflects how they are viewed: in a meadow, goldenrod is a beautiful wildflower; in a city, it's a messy weed (*Wild Plants* 21). He believes by identifying these volunteer plants we can elevate their perceived status, so he wrote an authoritative field guide. Similarly, Kimmerer notes that naming species connect us all: "names are the way we humans build relationship, not only with each other but with the living world" (208). By learning about our neighbors and kin in fragmented, ruderal ecologies, the hierarchies of native and invasive labels dissolve.

Weeds: burdock, invasive Phragmites australis *australis*, and my stand of phragmites reeds.

When describing non-native species, the terms "alien", "exotic", and "invasive" can be problematic. Linking countries to beetles or weeds can contribute to xenophobic associations in their introduced areas. While mainstream conservation ecology actively resists these wildly successful introduced species, an Anishnaabe perspective may offer an alternative, longer term view. In "Anishnaabe Aki: an indigenous perspective on the global threat of invasive species", Nicholas J. Reo and Laura A. Ogden conducted ethnographic research with Anishnaabe tradition bearers in Michigan. Firstly, Anishinaabe teachings see plants and animals as migrating kin, having purposes that humans need to uncover (1443). This suggests opportunities for collaborative problem-solving rather than outright extermination. Instead of placing blame on species, the larger problem is settler colonialism itself: "we found that Anishnaabe tradition bearers are more concerned about an "invasive land ethic" than the threats of invasive species. Elements of this invasive land ethic include the imposition of Euro-American property ownership regimes, 'command and control' forms of environmental management, and a worldview predicated on the separation of people from nature" (1449). Traditional Ecological Knowledge, practiced by those who have lived here longest, must inform all land use policy in the Anthropocene. The Indigenous Land Stewardship Circle is a group of Indigenous Elders, leaders, and knowledge-keepers in Toronto. They are working with city staff to end the exclusion of Indigenous decision-making on ancestral lands. In their view, non-native species are not the enemy to be eradicated with pesticides, which only toxify ecosystems, compounding ongoing processes of colonization ("Ban" par. 10). Calling for a complete pesticide ban in High Park, they define Indigenous stewardship as harm reduction and climate action, encouraging more people to work on the land to "come into Right Relation" ("Stewardship" par. 5).

BURDOCK GOLFER relates humans and weeds on a golf course. On the meticulously controlled fairway, an unauthorized burdock plant has sprouted. Burdock is prized as food and medicine by some, yet considered a messy weed by most. On the USGA website, George Waters notes weeds on a golf course are "often unsightly, sometimes unplayable, and almost always unwelcome" (par.1). The inspiration for Velcro, the burdock seed head is covered with tiny hooks, adapted to travel with passing animals. When the golfer notices burrs on her elbow she plucks them off, distributing the burdock's seeds. As the plants grow and the human shrinks, the golfscape is enveloped in leaves. *BURDOCK GOLFER* is about the colonial spread of settlers and plants, in an endless loop of resilience and domination.

Like burdock from central Asia, golf was introduced from Scotland. Both have taken root in North America, complicating native ecosystems and land relations. The vast areas golf courses occupy make them contested sites – by disrupting sensitive ecologies or displacing Indigenous communities. In 1990, a golf course expansion onto Kanien'kéhaka (Mohawk) burial grounds led to the violent Oka Crisis, also known as the Kanesatake Resistance. The standoff displayed the government's militarized response to land defenders resisting ongoing colonization on ancestral territory.

Golf clubhouses have been exclusive places for wealthy white males. While golfers are now a diverse bunch, membership fees, equipment costs and unspoken cultural codes still make golfing out of reach for many. The Toronto Environmental Alliance recently proposed changes to Toronto's five city-run golf course parklands to maximize their potential beyond golf. Public consultation provided ideas on how the 150 acres of public land could benefit local communities through equitable greenspace access, Indigenous collaboration, natural area restoration, food growing and more (par. 1). Re-envisioning public golf course parklands with inclusive, ecological functions is one piece in the larger puzzle of the jumbled Anthropocene.
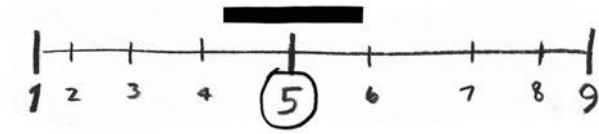
Keyframe (5): Methodology: Animation as Research Creation

This chapter is a keyframe, as my inchworm lays flat on the ground. It stretches out before arching up again, and is a good place to add a hold to an animated loop. This moment of pause is more "staying with the trouble", looking earthward at my methodology of animation as research-creation.

More than a medium or genre, I see animation as interdisciplinary praxis combining theory and method. Animation scholar Paul Wells states that animation "intrinsically interrogates the phenomena it represents and offers new and alternative perspectives and knowledge to its audience" (*Understanding* 11). I believe the detail and attention required for frame-by-frame filmmaking makes animation an ideal medium and methodology of inquiry into the complexities of the Anthropocene and the relationship between real and imagined space.

In live-action filmmaking, life is recorded, whereas animation requires ideas and increments to generate moving images. From nothing, action and story unfold through the animator's hands. In its interdisciplinarity, animation can investigate and represent the more-than-human world at an incremental, material level by zooming in, accelerating, slowing down, and crossing over multispecies boundaries,

offering opportunities to link concept and material. Wells and Moore observe that animation, "by virtue of its technique, in whatever form, necessitates that the animator is self-conscious about the relationship between the 'idea' and the method of its expression" (*Fundamentals* 427). I'm proposing an animated methodology that fully engages, investigates, and represents themes through considered materiality to reveal deep connections between object, subject, and viewer. I am integrating both natural plants and construction debris into my outdoor animation, addressing ecology with found environmental materials. Not only does this minimize waste, this research-creation investigates "an object with the object itself" (Boomgaard 70). Bricks, those inert construction icons, move freely in my animations representing settler colonialism, incremental growth and crumbling decay. Objects like phragmites reeds and old tires appear both animated and in real life in the installation space. Framing and obscuring the projections, their still, tactile forms contrast their flat, moving counterparts.

The intimacy of outdoor animation, involving the precise, repetitive positioning of rough, wet, or dusty objects, informs my methodology. I'm in the weeds, relating more-than-human life through sequences of forms, textures, and time-based photography. Getting muddy, scratched by buckthorn, swatting mosquitoes and fearing ticks, my practice entangles me in the messy Anthropocenic landscape. The materiality of this terrain both inspires and forms the work: discarded plastics, construction debris, and

eroded rubble mark human impacts, while plants, both ancient (horsetails) and new (phragmites) thrive among the jumble. I am measuring sizes, distances, textural and material differences and similarities that, in linear form, constitute replacement animation.

An inchworm is a living measurement, marking units as it walks. Earthworms help to think about togetherness, as their active decomposing leads to endless recomposing. As they break down dead matter and create nutrient-rich soil for new growth, they are at the end and beginning of all other life cycles. Thinking deeply with these invertebrate bioturbators, Filippo Bertoni considers *eating* "not just material, it is also relational. It is constitutive, both of the organisms eating and of the ecosystems of which and in which they eat" (67). In his ecology of togetherness, "we are not so much all kin; rather we are all each other's environment" (14). This blurring of human/nature and figure/ground gets messy in his worm bin experiments, where he suggests humans can learn from compost politics. "Vermicomposting is political, we suggest, in the sense that it involves and brings together multiple different entities and activities" (100). It is a unifying thought that all life, including us, will pass through the bodies of worms (Darwin qtd. in Bertoni 65). Despite our immense anthropogenic impacts, biologist-turned-cartoonist Gary

Larson reminds us of the humble earthworm's last laugh as our expired bodies re-enter the food web in his children's storybook, *There's a hair in my Dirt! A Worm's Story*.

In making *Inbetweening Beings,* I'm uncovering these hidden unmakers. Animation as research-creation begins with observation, experience and analysis. In "The Loupe's Secret", Kerry Ruef suggests giving a child a magnifying glass can improve ecological literacy. Looking at nature up close helps us understand connections, from watching ants herding aphids on a leaf to mycorrhizal root systems linking fungi and trees. Zooming out, ecology's interdependencies become visible at a wider scale, as a disappearing wetland reduces insects, fish, and birds. My installation invites both close inspection and a roving spatial experience, as human bodies and shadows are enmeshed in nature.

Moving inbetween the animated stories and objects, viewers themselves resemble animated increments: some still, others drifting from point to point. In the installation's endlessly looping, scattered arrangement, there is no hierarchy. Historically, inbetweening has been a lowly role in the animation industry, as the frames between key poses pass quickly and are considered less important. In fact, these inbetweens are the movement of animation, and their labour should not go unnoticed. It's here that stretches and smears can happen, where acceleration and deceleration are established. Inbetweens bridge two static keyframes to create moving life. Contrasting digital pose-to-pose animation which can generate inbetweens that are too perfect, mechanical, or lifeless, handmade animation requires that every single increment is drawn, sculpted, or repositioned. George Griffin's concept of *Concrete Animation* focuses on "actual materials, objects not just images, and the processes which cause them to spring to life…. It suggests the tactile, the tangible, the real, the stuff which is often forgotten in the river of illusion" (260). This materiality offers the potential of animation to crossover into sculpture and installation. Nature's dimensional tactility has inspired my projection-installation to be multisensory, combining animation with actual objects that can be examined and touched. The passive act of watching a screen is augmented with materials bridging animator and viewer. Griffin reflects: "After 40 years of controlling the flow of pictures in time and space, I have come to understand that the concrete stuff I use to put on a show, whether it's embedded in the film's architecture, or grasped in greedy, flipping, manipulating fingers – this stuff can also act as an emergency exit to return some measure of freedom and control back to the viewer" (273).

INCHWORM crawls along the bottom of the projection wall, periodically catching up with itself. It's a long, slow, series of loops within loops, switching location and technique every few seconds. The diverse materials - plastic, paper, weeds, bricks, beans, humans, technofossils – are aligned in their simple, repeating movement. Cole Swanson is an artist who integrates phragmites and found plastic from bird's nests into his sculptures and images, linking species through objects. "Materials are a bridge to the non-human world – so many networks and relationships we humans have with the biosystems around us are embedded in materials themselves" (qtd. in Madjus par. 4). While shifting materials and contexts, the inchworm measures past Anthropocenic effects and marches forward along a path of uncertain survival.

Many segments of *INCHWORM* were animated at "Bloordale Beach", an inbetween space in downtown Toronto located between demolition and new construction. From a hole in the fence, the vacant gravel patch became a dynamic community artspace, featuring cheeky beach-themed signs and various art interventions. Like the weeds sprouting in the disturbed soil, a fractured, resilient community-building experiment flourished, thanks to local artist Shari Kasman. For just over a year, the land was enjoyed, passed through, ignored, celebrated, and vandalized by humans, plants, rodents, and at least one sandpiper in some sort of sympoiesis, inching along in complicated relationships.
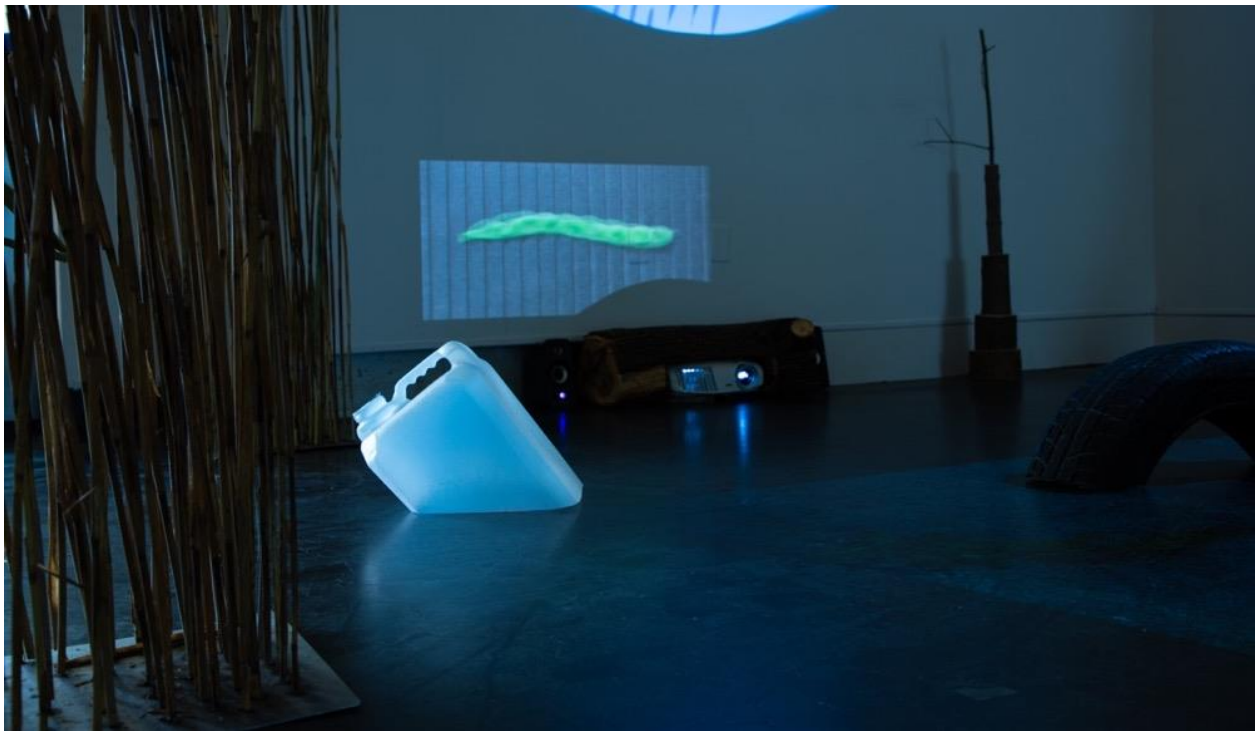

Closeup view of *Inchworm* in the Installation.
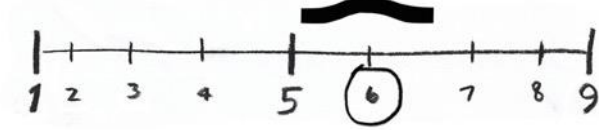
Inbetween (6): Review of Relevant Artwork

Inbetweening Beings is influenced by animators and artists working with ecology. From a foundation of independent animation practice, my research has expanded to include projections and embodied objects in an installation space. Avoiding overtly digital or technology-based practices, I have pursued an interdisciplinary handmade materiality.

Brent Sievers' *The Divide* and Karen Aqua's *Taxonomy* are two contrasting animated films that have helped frame the animation of *Inbetweening Beings*. Sievers offers a satirical romp through human/nature disassociation while Aqua's film meditates on interconnection. Both works appeal to me and have helped me parse the power of communicative humour and the transcendence of animated metamorphosis.
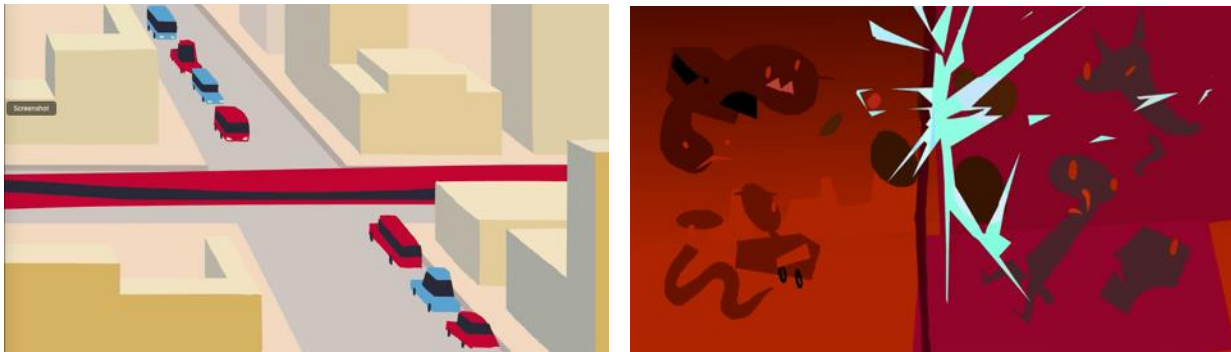
Stills from *The Divide*. © Brent Sievers 2014

The Divide confirms the dominant anthropocentric perspective: humans ignoring, exploiting, or consuming nature. The "divide" is clear: human/nature, nature/culture, subject/object, foreground/background, predator/prey. A scene of snakes slowly swirling through grass is abruptly cut with streets bustling with traffic. Humans in cars rumble along with jagged energy, as the lines of highways and glass panes isolate and disrupt ecology. Exaggerating the difference between static and fluid motion, the stopped cars are jittery, spiky polygons before streaming into elongated smears. *The Divide* vibrates with tension until a spectacular collision between humans and nature shatters relations between worlds.

Stills from *Taxonomy*. © Karen Aqua 2011

Conversely, *Taxonomy* blurs the lines of "the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms… reflecting a world of transience, mutability, and impermanence" (Aqua). Made up of thousands of coloured drawings that morph and shift into each other, the defined categories of material life dissolve. Aqua's technique blends photographs, objects, and hand-renderings within a central frame, creating a meditative stream of related imagery. The steady, constant speed of life continuing among species and objects contrasts the jerky stop-and-go of *The Divide*. Communicating without dialogue, both films' content and rhythm inform my animated assemblage, as variegated textures, styles and narrative structures relate the jumbled Anthropocene.

Replacement-style animation disrupts traditional drawn animation, by aligning similar-shaped objects in sequence that appear to flow and morph into each other. Paul Bush has mastered this technique. *While Darwin Sleeps* documents 3500 individual insect specimens from the Walter Linsenmaier Collection and arranges them into a timeline, creating the illusion of a singular, pulsing creature, shapeshifting between beetle, cicada, and butterfly. In *Orgiastic Hyper-Plastic*, he has sourced, edited, and aligned thousands of pieces of plastic trash, giving single-use plastics a second life onscreen. Using material waste for storytelling is both an ecologically conceptual and practical notion. For *BEAVER BLOCKADE*, I've made water striders out of used plastic forks, microbes from an umbrella, fish from an old red snow carpet, and waterways cut from discarded blue tarps.

Blu's graffiti-based, outdoor-animated street films are unparalleled. His painted characters start on a wall and travel everywhere, leaping across buildings, through tunnels, and across bridges with a loose, jangly energy. His frames are individual overpaintings that multiply, divide, and bubble over whatever structure they inhabit, breaking open real walls or spilling into courtyards. In *Muto*, Brad Yarhouse observes how the industrial surfaces are transformed by the animation, and how "Blu creates a dialogue through the juxtaposition of his imagery" (par. 11). Yarhouse aligns *Muto* with Norman Maclaren's film *Neighbors* and the work of William Kentridge*,* in its "real/unreal moments" and its self-documentation of the animation process itself (par. 18). *Muto*'s large-scale recontextualization challenges traditional studio practice, literally bursting through walls and reaching into real life. But for the viewer, it still appears on a rectangular glowing screen. My interest in outdoor animation expands to immersive presentation and experimenting with screen alternatives.

The mutoscope is an early motion picture device, derived from the latin *muto* meaning change, shift, and movement. Functioning like a circular flipbook, a singular viewer cranks the handle to play a loop. Sixty years after it was patented, experimental animator Robert Breer made his own variations, including a hands-on linear version: a row of wall-mounted vinyl sheets invite a brushing touch from visitors. The spread-out flipbook created a physical movie, activated with visitor participation. Breer's "ideas about continuity and discontinuity" (qtd. in Macdonald 30) triggered my own thinking about material, viewer-controlled screen alternatives for displaying animation. In 1980, Bill Brand created *Masstransiscope,* a 300-ft long linear zoetrope in a New York subway tunnel. It was the first artwork commissioned by the MTA, and according to George Griffin, "one of the most successful works of kinetic public art ever built" ("B Train" 285). Installed on an abandoned platform, it's made up of 228 painted frames behind a slotted wall that animate when viewed from passing trains. Its innovative underground location is also sustainable, as it "reclaims abandoned public space, it reclaims the mobile energy of the passing train to generate the necessary continuous transport and, aside from replacing the light bulbs, it requires no maintenance" (288). For 20 seconds, individual subway riders are invited to share an optical enchantment. Inspired by the possibilities of screenless public animations, I created a simple merry-go-round zoetrope at the Christie Pits playground. Incorporating play and exercise, the 10-frame experiment has limited storytelling ability but has potential as a future art engagement with children who could design their own loops.
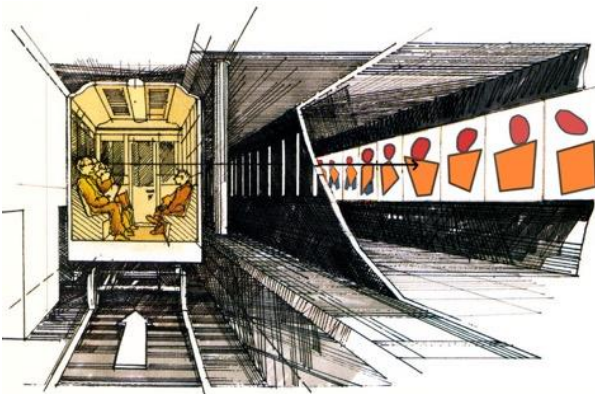
Bill Brand's illustration for *Masstransiscope* and my temporary *Merry-go-roundiscope.*

In my pursuit of screen-defying, kinetic public art, some ecological works are of particular interest to me. In Vancouver, I witnessed *Uninterrupted,* Nettie Wild's film about spawning salmon projected on the underside of the Cambie Street Bridge. As giant salmon swam against the night sky, humans looked up from a river-bottom perspective. The projection experience invited wonder and reflection on liveable waterways. Nearby there is a concrete Douglas fir tree trunk supporting a condominium – Liz Magor's *Ninth Column*, a tactile reminder of nature's rough texture in a smooth, urbanized setting. In Toronto there is *Woodpecker Column,* Fastwurms' 100-ft steel sculpture with two native woodpeckers dwarfed by the CN Tower beside it. This "artificial nature" both recalls a lost wilderness and delights in the surreal

mingling of objects in the Anthropocene. Seeing a gray, limbless tree trunk among ordinary concrete pillars or a steel pipe drilled by giant wildlife, we wonder "what's wrong with this picture"?

Philip Cote of Moose Deer Point First Nation is an artist, activist, historian, and traditional Wisdom Keeper who has painted many murals about site-specific Indigenous life around Toronto. These images connect his research to the broader public, enabling "embedded stereotypes to transform under the gaze of an Indigenous based interpreted presence and intervene in the cross generational colonial bias" (par. 8). A fellow OCAD U IAMD graduate, he spoke with me at a Humber College mural site about how he bridges academic knowledge and community. His moccasin designs for Carole King's Mocassin Identifier Project are reminders of first footsteps, confronting colonial land control. When I see his brightly coloured murals in my children's school, along the Humber River, and on Bloor street near my home, I'm reminded of the connection of life to land from an Indigenous perspective. Cote's work inspires me to seek these connections and pursue public engagement.

While the movement of connected life guides *Inbetweening Beings*, the stillness of land and materials provide a counterpoint. In the 1960s and 70s, American land artists Robert Smithson and Walter de Maria moved masses of rocky earth and stood thousands of steel lightning rods in the ground. Conceptually minimal yet maximal in terms of machinery and labour, these earthworks are statements of anthropogenic control. Emerging from this movement, Patricia Johansen's sculptural land art expanded into functional infrastructure, decentering the human presence. With *Fair Park Lagoon* in Dallas, she converted a polluted urban swamp to a life-sustaining ecological community, interweaving multispecies life with sculptural pathways and strategic landscaping. Collaborating with community groups, city planners, engineers, and scientists, her work dissolves hierarchies, "get(ting) everything on the same level – the art, the people, the soil, the plants, the water" (qtd. in Kelley 40). Like Johansen's work, my installation is a place that invites all life, especially if installed outdoors, where weeds and wildlife mingle with my assemblage. According to Johansen, the most important aspect of her work is in the parts she does not design, centering the living landscape instead (Kelley 19).

In Toronto, another interspecies habitat has been developing since 1970 without an artist's design. The Leslie Street Spit reaches into Lake Ontario, formed entirely from the city's demolished rubble. Now home to Tommy Thompson Park, it's a biodiverse landscape of plants, butterflies, foxes and millions of migrating birds. All this life appeared without human encouragement – it happened by simply not developing it. Walter Kehm, founder of the park, observes that "it's a standard trope in our human-centric world that people despoil nature: Nature creates paradise, and we ruin it. But in this case people had created a wasteland, and nature was rescuing it" (2).

I've spent long days among the eroded bricks and twisted rebar on the beach, selecting increments for animation as I consider how waste material can anchor new life. Every year the spit gets longer, providing new habitat for North America's largest colony of double-crested cormorants. Their presence remains controversial – they eat lots of fish and their acidic droppings kill the cottonwoods, but "any privileging of one species over another based on a human-centric perspective would be a violation of the 'Let It Be' approach that created the park's ecology in the first place" (Del Tredici "Spontaneous" 32). Robert Burley compares the Leslie Street Spit to *Spiral Jetty* in Utah: "perhaps the greatest genius of the Spit is the thing Robert Smithson called 'the dialectical landscape'; it has become a place where the natural and artificial features of the terrain have merged" (159). By using the Anthropocenic materials of landscape to explore ecology, I consider my installation a temporary earthwork, continuing a conversation between culture and nature.


In *DETERIORATE = REDO, ITERATE,* I have broken down the first word to form the next two. The anagram is part of the jumbled Anthropocene, in which materials decompose and reassemble in new

ways. Projected on the smooth planed surface of a vertical log, we see compost decay with the help of microbes. Stumps dissolve to dirt, fungus rots a log. Birch bark unfurls around a tree, mingling with cardboard peeling off a construction pillar. From decomposed organic waste new shoots of the ancient horsetail emerge, each segment repeating, reiterating increments as it reaches skyward.

Closeup view of *Deteriorate = Redo, Iterate* in the Installation.
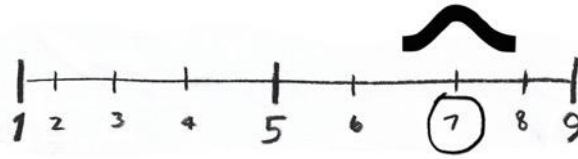
Inbetween (7): Animation Process

I have collected the animation of *Inbetweening Beings* over the two years of my MFA program. With the goal of relating ecological connections through increments, my practice has drawn me outdoors, looking for material and conceptual cues that lead to storytelling loops. Ecological, cultural, and scientific theory has inspired some ideas, but others arrive from watching bugs, considering vantage points, or finding interesting objects. Traditional animation requires intensive planning and labour, and while my work is a time-consuming commitment, I'm not bound by narrative structure or industry standards. Like any practice, my "motion sketches" have succeeded and failed, sometimes growing into fuller stories and often withering to nothing. In every case, laborious thinking, building, rigging, shooting, and moving in repetitive stressful motions result in piles of unused footage, heaps of scraps, and a sore back. Animating outside means pre-planning the action and location, bringing all necessary supplies, and paying close attention to weather and environmental concerns like biting ants or broken glass. Knee pads, sunscreen, snacks, and water sustain me for the hours working in place. Respecting the land and its wildlife, I remove traces of my work and clean up any trash nearby.

Instead of photographic cinema which captures movement, Phillip Thurtle describes animation as creating "stability from change" – that is, every new frame must relate to those before and after it – without that linear stability we would only see a jumble of flickering images (100). Stability, in practical terms, is crucial for stop-motion animation: if the camera wobbles, the screen shakes. If the objects fall, wilt, melt, or break, the continuity of motion is lost. But as clouds move and wind blows, the scene's exposure fluctuates and leaves tremble. An intentional departure from the controlled studio, my outdoor animation incorporates nature's chaotic flux while maintaining the control needed for the registration of animated increments. This balancing act results in smooth motion in a time-lapse framework, highlighting temporality and speeds of life. A few seconds of outdoor stop-motion represent hours of shooting, recording the condensed passage of time in the real world. With flickering light and fluttering foliage, Vicky Smith observes how this storytelling technique of bringing "otherwise invisible phenomena to visibility" is an objective shared by both time-lapse animators and ecologists (98).

Inbetweening Beings measures Anthropocenic relations in physical and temporal increments. Time-based cinema is both a linear and segmented medium, a paradox Simon Payne explores in "Lines and Interruptions in Experimental Film and Video." Through the ideas of Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, Sean Cubitt and Tim Ingold, Payne considers how a work's distracted flickers or flowing vectors may produce

"intervals for reflection" (34). This tension between smooth and choppy motion, slow and fast time, simple and complex design runs through my work's overarching structure: isolated moments combine to flow in a larger linear continuum. The contrast extends to the installation space, as viewers traverse unpredictable routes, staying still or moving as their real-time shadows overlap with pre-recorded animation.

Animating outdoors is full of surprises. Canada geese walk through the scene. Weeds were removed that I planned to shoot. Unexpected conversations delay the intervals of time-lapse recording. A curious dog knocks over my prop. The tide is coming in. It's hailing. Despite rigorous planning, challenges arise that require improvisation and onsite problem solving. Often these makeshift solutions lead to new discoveries. For *FOOTSTEPS*, I found a twig that made a convincing bird imprint when pushed into wet sand. Swiping an old bike tire in gravel made the snake tracks, and when an armatured "technofossil" prop broke halfway through an *INCHWORM* scene, I reanimated it with an adjusted limp. Besides employing found materials with a "for this" practicality, adhocism "makes visible the complex workings of the environment", looking to problems as sources of expression (Jencks and Silver 73). Exploring locations by bike with my mobile animation kit, using free or cheap materials, and my modular, flexible installation structure disrupt both studio-controlled filmmaking and traditional methods of controlled presentation.

Animating *Beaver Blockade*.

A polyethylene tarpaulin is a ubiquitous object of the Anthropocene: made from extracted petroleum and non-biodegradable. In Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies*, the old woman Mindimooyenh praises the virtues of the "Certified Value Tarp 15 x 20 in royal blue" from Canadian Tire: "Tarp as tent. Tarp as sleeping bag. Tarp as blanket" (85). The bright blue fibres of a discarded tarp along Toronto's Black Creek got me thinking about waste material and the shape of urban waterways. Following Hurricane Hazel, flood-vulnerable sections of Black Creek were straightened and encased in concrete to reduce erosion and quickly carry away polluted stormwater. By 1965, almost 5 kilometres of Black Creek had been channelized (Black Creek Project par. 11). The increasing pavement and pollution of urbanization led to this forceful straightening, which resulted in more habitat loss for nonhuman species.

Discarded tarp, Black Creek channel.

In *BEAVER BLOCKADE*, the dominated linear waterway becomes complicated, serpentine, and biodiverse thanks to a beaver dam. Seen by many as nuisance animals, these ecological architects are a keystone species, creating "apparent chaos: jumbles of downed trees, riotous vegetation... but this 'disorder' is complexity, a profusion of life-supporting habitats" (Goldfarb 8). In *A Short History of the Blockade*, Simpson describes the brilliance and wisdom of the beaver: "Amik is a world builder. Amik is the one that works continuously with water and land and animal and plant nations and consent and diplomacy to create worlds, to create *shared* worlds" (15). Her analogy of beaver dams as Indigenous blockades inspired the political aspect of my animated story, in which the dam itself resists colonial pressure from a pipeline and shovel.[1] Simpson notes how blockades are presented by the media as dangerous and disruptive, but in fact they are rich sites of radical resurgence (11). While refusing dominant systems, they create community and change, just as beaver dams restore flourishing multispecies life. While Simpson links political activism with animal behaviour, Naomi Klein describes "Blockadia", a "roving transnational conflict zone" where protestors resist the digging and drilling of global extraction projects (294). These are grassroots activists, Indigenous peoples, and business people forming unlikely alliances all over the world.


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[1] I'm grateful for Leanne Simpson's permission to reference *A Short History of the Blockade* in my work.

Scenes from *Beaver Blockade*.

BEAVER BLOCKADE blends natural and artificial materials freely, drawing from the jumbled assemblage of urban waterways. Tarps, plastic, and a pool noodle embody water, bugs, and a frog. Plant growth was animated in reverse by cutting weeds, and beaver-chewed sticks were both collected and imitated with my carving knife. This interspecies collaboration was influenced by Leah Decter's *Castor Canadensis: Provokas*, a fort-like structure assembled from beaver-chewed stumps, addressing land, labour, and decolonization.

BUSH gallery is an Indigenous land-based collective, unsettling the colonial gallery system. Within their manifesto, they state that "BUSH gallery is sometimes a blockade, sometimes a bridge, always a balancing beam" (7). Tania Willard, Secwepemc Nation, and activator of the BUSH gallery collective, elaborated on this balance: between asserting land rights and educating others; between conflict and exchange. For me, this underscores art's ability to both confront and invite while reflecting social reality. Whether stopping highways or diverting waterways, a blockade interrupts flow, demanding change and altering the status quo. Behind the beaver dam the water swells and slows, curving along sidewalks and gravel, nurturing plants, insects, frogs, and fish. Reflecting the endless water cycle, the pulsing blue tarp loops on itself before returning to its first position.
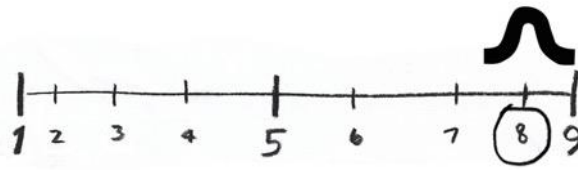
Inbetween (8): Installation/Projection Process

This chapter focuses on the installation of *Inbetweeening Beings*, and how the animation interacts with the space, the materials, and the viewers. Disparate objects are associated by their proximity and connected projection beams. In this expanded animation, there are no traditional screens - bright living frames shape-shift as they travel across textural surfaces, looping independently and periodically interacting with each other in the darkness. A 15-foot tree trunk leans against the wall, a sawn-off tire and a bunch of phragmites stand nearby. In front of that sits an oil drum, scattered logs, a traffic sign, and an orange cone. On every surface, including the ground, animated stories appear from four hidden projectors. Subtle sound effects punctuate the stories, and are heard through hidden, localized speakers. Why hide these devices? Their visible forms distract from the images and props. Wonder and illusion are animation specialties, and I extend this *trickfilm* ethos into the installation.

This is my "ecology of relational animation", a jumbled, sprawling system of fractured yet interdependent relations. Without a focus on one single screen or tangible beginning or end, it exists all at once, challenging traditional cinematic aesthetics, narrative structure, and the passive role of the viewer. *Inbetweening Beings* is relational at three levels. First, each animated loop is made up of collected footage, scenes, cuts, and characters that relate to each other and the loop's internal narrative structure, varying in length from 1 to 3 minutes. Stepping back, the viewer encounters how each loop relates to the others on the wall and floor, how the frames move and interact. In this second relation, there are intersections, overlaps, and scale changes. The third relationship is triangular between the viewer, the animated stories, and the objects in the installation space.
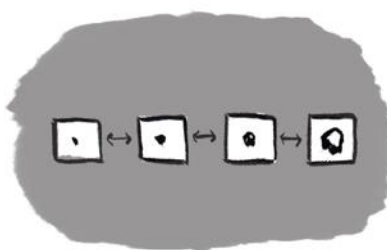
Relations between
still images forming movement (animation)

Relations between
narrative pieces and their surroundings

Relations between
viewers and the projected installation

Two projectors face each other, their cross-projection creating an inbetween discursive zone. To see the images in detail means entering the projector's beam, blocking some images while being projected upon. Ducking or moving out of the way will obscure other loops and affect the viewer's position. The human silhouette is now in play – either dominating in an Anthropocenic sense or decentering to make room for other life. Claire Bishop describes installation art's aim "to thrust into question our sense of stability in and mastery over the world, and to reveal the 'true' nature of our subjectivity as fragmented and decentred" (Installation 133). By confronting our own shadows amongst the meshwork of shifting, living projections, viewers may reflect on their place in nature. In *Relational Aesthetics*, Nicholas Bourriaud describes intersubjective relations resulting from open-ended artworks as "*social interstice* within which … new 'life possibilities' appear to be possible" (20). In her critique, Bishop questions the quality of these harmonic relations, countering that "relational antagonism" provides "a more concrete and polemical grounds for rethinking our relationship to the world and to one other" (Antagonism 79). My work is relational in terms of complex, entangled survival, not in Bourriaud's homogenous sense of social "togetherness". Relational animation invites and implicates human presence that is both disruptive and enmeshed within ecology. Together, apart, and inbetween: organisms, environments, and materials are always in relation.


Viewers interacting with early versions of the installation.

Approaching the work, viewers encounter *WARNING SIGN*, a bright orange marker signalling caution yet drawing attention with moving graphics. Beyond it, the wall is alive with three related stories: *BIRDWATCHING's* switching perspective slides back and forth across the middle, *BEAVER BLOCKADE* circulates in the upper corner, while *INCHWORM* marches along the bottom. On the ground is *FOOTSTEPS*, inviting visitors to walk in different shoes. Its projector is hidden in a birdhouse above,

another invitation to avian life. *BURDOCK GOLFER* loops on the back of the construction sign, while *DETERIORATE = REDO, ITERATE* appears on an upright log and *RETURNING* cycles on an oil drum. The electrical wires and projectors' hum mark technology's presence, disrupting illusionistic space and calling attention to the fabricated installation. These objects and textures ground viewers in reality, rather than transporting them with a wholly imagined narrative. While digital tools are used in the creation and projection of the work; they are also referenced in the animated loops suggesting popup windows and ubiquitous screens of our digital age. An *Inchworm* scene features broken camera parts being dragged along: these are "technofossils" – the non-biodegradable waste of the Anthropocene – reminders of our dependence on the problematic materials of contemporary life.

Investigating Paul Sharits' "locational" film installations of the 1970s, Kate Mondloch notes how objects and surfaces can become screens, creating a connective interface with viewers, a "site of radical inter-implication" (4). My collected objects serve as screens and add textural dimension to the projections with tree bark, a plastic bag, a rubber tire, and leafy stalks of phragmites reeds. As real-life references to the surrounding animated scenes, they ground the "virtual world" and invite human touch. *FOOTSTEPS* projected on visitors' shoes blur the line between human and animal. These relational engagements are aimed to re-enchant viewers with life and movement, while encouraging critical reflections, responsibility, and action. With children in mind, the multi-dimensional videos and objects provide sensory stimuli while raising questions like "why is a bag in a tree?"

According to Duncan White, "Expanded Cinema" involves having meaning produced from the viewer's experience, not just the artists' work onscreen. He references Robert Scholes' differentiation between narrativity and narration, the former relying on viewers' participation (115). *Inbetweening Beings* offers both relational narrativity and narrative stories. Malcolm Le Grice states that for narrative to work, "we must enter into the illusion, suppress our awareness of presence and treat the illusion as a present reality" (161). With varying degrees of representational imagery, my stories don't demand immersive illusion, as viewers are reminded of their own presence every time they navigate the space, move back to absorb the entire assemblage, or shift focus from one screen to the next. A wider view transcends the individual illusions of each story, reminding us of larger connections.
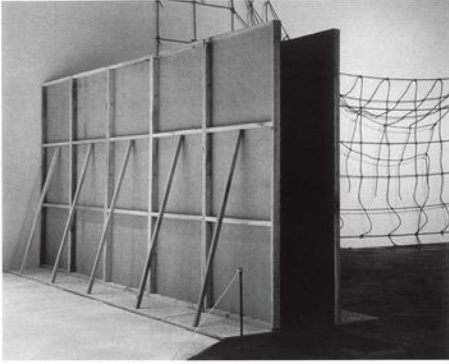
L: Bruce Nauman, *Performance Corridor*, 1969. R: Sarah Sze, *Night Into Day*, 2020.

The installation does not prescribe viewing patterns or timelines. The criss-crossing projections create an inbetween space meant to be explored, while each element forms a part of the non-hierarchical ecology. Bruce Nauman's video installations of the late 1960s involved constricting corridors and surveillance cameras, with viewers' movement "dictated by the artist, in the role of surrogate psychologist; as Paul Schimmel remarks, Nauman's relationship to the viewer is always instructional" (Iles 255). I prefer Sarah Sze's approach, whose monumental yet intimate installations *Images In Debris* and *Night Into Day* offer a fluid viewing experience at micro and macro scales. Suggesting fragile, diverse ecosystems, her bricolage creates lively relational sites. Similarly, Robert Breer's films favour overall active screens – he realized that "if you have one thing moving in an otherwise static field, the static field dies" (qtd. in Macdonald 20). In traditional animation design a figure dominates an empty ground, but Breer wanted everything alive: "I don't want any one thing to take over" (22). Swarming like an anthill alive with energy, loops of unending movement populate *Inbetweening Being*'s diverse spatial surfaces.

Where the work is installed matters. In considering how and where to present it, I have experimented in my living room, my back alley, outside at Toronto's Evergreen Brickworks, and in the basement of the OCAD U grad building. As any surrounding space becomes part of the installation, each context offers a different relationship. Through animation and materials, *Inbetweening Beings* collects, compresses, and transports place from specific locations to a flexible, modular exhibition. According to James Meyer, an artwork's *literal site* is very different from the *functional* site, which is not site-specific. "It is a temporary thing, a movement, a chain of meanings and imbricated histories" (25). My work's *functional* site involves ongoing relationships between images of living systems, actual plants and objects, animals, people (artist, viewer, landlords), and the physical territory on which it's installed, whether inside a gallery or outside in a park. Instead of dominating space with permanent land art, I seek a momentary, living installation. Meyer notes how Robert Smithson's *nonsites* refer to an *elsewhere,* from where art once existed or materials were sourced (30*),* while a mobile site is "an in-between site, a nonplace, a ruin" (31). Whether indoors or outside, my installation encourages a fluid visitor experience, inbetweening images, materials, and viewers.

An inbetween space is located between extremes. Between a forest wilderness and the urban concrete, city parks offer ecological benefits, restful organic forms and pleasing combinations of hard and soft landscaping. For my thesis exhibition, I had hoped to install *Inbetweening Beings* in the McCaul St. parkette, a bland paved square near OCAD U with benches, streetlights, and patches of trimmed perennial shrubs. At night, I envisioned projections on the large brick wall, with my assembly of objects enveloping a bench and tree, inviting foot traffic in. Over many months I pursued this space, with my proposal addressing the various challenges involved, such as electricity access, streetlight covering, maintaining unobstructed pathways, and weather and security concerns. Unfortunately, the condominium that controls the space refused my proposal, making clear how difficult it can be to make public art happen through the city's bureaucratic land relationship.

Inbetweening Beings park proposal and installation test at Evergreen Brickworks.

My experience at the Evergreen Brickworks in the summer of 2021 was very different. With permission, I installed an early version of *Inbetweening Beings* among the weeds and pathways of this former industrial site. On a summer night, cicadas, a burbling creek, and the shadows of trees provided rich context for the work, blending real and illusionistic space. But its remote location did not yield many passing pedestrians, and the surrounding flora which obstructed and complicated the projections was difficult to distinguish from the installation's organic objects. I noticed visitors stood back near the projectors, assuming a traditional cinema-style relationship with the wall, and not casting the shadows I had hoped for. This experience led me to reiterate the arrangement, encouraging more immersive relations. Working at the site, I noticed a huge log cut into sections, decomposing into earth. This is the fading carcass of *The Life of a Dead Tree,* Mark Dion's 2019 artwork at the Museum of Contemporary Art in which the artist collaborated with curators, scientists, and insects. An entire white ash tree filled the third floor of the gallery, offering a closeup view of the emerald ash borer's destruction. When I visited that show I was moved at the sight of the cross-sectioned, limbless tree, lying flat, cadaver-like. Although still, the autopsied tree teemed with life, as beetles tunnelled under its bark. The rough texture and heft of the natural tree trunk within the controlled white space of the art gallery stuck with me.

Installing *Inbetweening Beings* inside OCAD U's Great Hall satisfies the goals of my work in a new way. Seeing the work indoors pushes the natural /cultural conversation - there is a dissonance and tension seeing an upright Manitoba maple tree trunk[2] and phragmites[3] appearing to grow from the polished gallery floor. The tree bark is echoed in other log structures: a horizontal projector housing, a planed upright post, and a "tree cookie" stool. The flickering projections across these textured objects and clean white walls ask where nature belongs. While the indoor exhibition has limited exposure to those passing on the sidewalk, its controlled environment offers some stability, security, and a quiet remove from the outside weather and noise. Large, central, and open, the Great Hall is an ideal indoor venue to present the work. Through my iterative research into spaces and installation, *Inbetweening Beings* became more modular and flexible, requiring fewer locational specifics of walls or trees. Like my animation practice itself, the exhibition is mobile and temporary. I hope to exhibit *Inbetweening Beings* in a variety of other indoor and outdoor locations, offering unique contextual meanings.

In November 2021, I had the opportunity to participate in BigArtTO - a city-wide projection-mapping public art event. I created the short film *RETURNING*, which celebrates the Day of the Dead through nature's endless cycles of growth and decay. It references the annual monarch migration to Mexico, where the butterflies have been interpreted as souls of the departed returning to visit. Projected for 3 nights onto the Princess Park clocktower in North York, giant monarch caterpillars and butterflies dwarfed the assembled people, decentering humans and depicting ecological resiliency at a massive scale. Fir trees shoot skyward, then crumble to dirt. Not outside of nature, a human figure is included – living and dying in a cycle. This experience influenced *Inbetweening Beings* in different ways. The event was a one-way spectacle in which people gathered and watched the wall. While the scale had impact, the animation was not necessarily relational. The 20,000-lumen projector required a generator, tent, and a team of technicians, all which added noise and obstruction to immersive viewing. I knew my installation needed more intimacy and complexity, with smaller projections across diverse surfaces.

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[2] All the tree structures are sourced from local Manitoba maple trees cut by forestry services. *Acer negundo,* also known as boxelder, is a common native tree that tolerates adverse growing conditions but is considered a messy weed tree for its quick growth and potential for limb breakage (Nix par. 6).
[3] Invasive phragmites (Phragmites australis *australis*), also known as common reed, is a tall perennial grass that forms a dense monoculture, outcompeting native species and ecosystems. Since 1990 it has become one of the biggest threats to Great Lakes coastal habitats, where it has drastically reduced plant and wildlife diversity (Nichols 1). It spreads through rhizomatic roots and seeds that are carried by wind, water, and human activity. To prevent possible seed spread, I have removed the distinctive feathery seed heads of the invasive phragmites in my installation.

Returning projected on the Princess Park clocktower and on the oil drum of my installation.

Visually and literally, *RETURNING* is a loop, divided in two halves*. *Within *Inbetweening Beings,* the arc of life and death passes through the glowing beam of a projector, renewing again. Instead of a 5-storey tower, *RETURNING* appears on the side of a steel oil barrel, an object associated with fossil fuel extraction. As the planet reckons with the emissions from two centuries' worth of fossil fuel extraction, this battered drum is now an empty relic, part of the Anthropocenic wasteland.
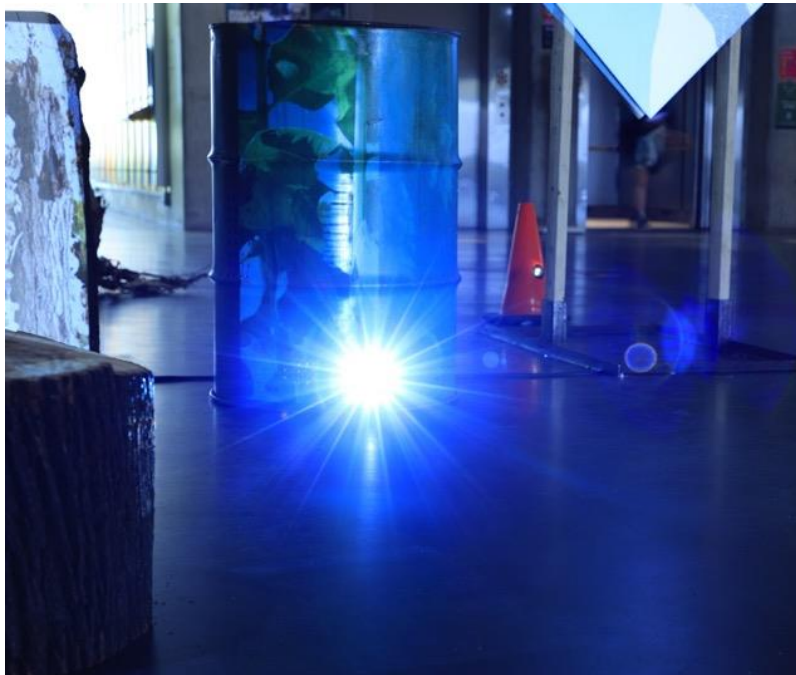
In the installation, the projector's beam becomes a part of *Returning.*
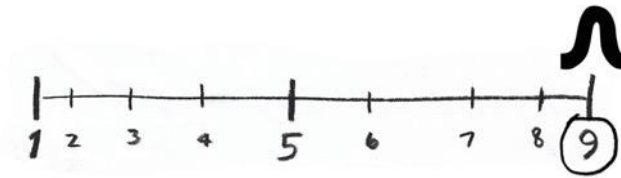
Keyframe (9): Concluding Thoughts

The inchworm's final keyframe loops back to its first. This conclusion revisits the start of my project, wondering what I hoped to do, what was achieved, and what's next. In a perfect repeating cycle, the two keyframes match - but while the plodding, slow work of entangled survival continues, this final keyframe changes slightly, propelling the loop forward in new directions. *Inbetweening Beings* represents almost 2 years of research-creation developing a relational, ecological animation practice, during a global pandemic and intensifying climate crisis.

The challenge of Anthropocenic survival is vast and complex. Life on the human-altered planet is uncertain, precarious, and entangled. The daily stressors of COVID, scorching forest fires, deadly floods, land and housing conflicts, environmental racism, and continuing societal inequities have compounded negative effects on all living systems. These problems of the Anthropocene intersect through settler colonialism, capitalism, and globalization. My project does not tackle these systemic issues, nor directly contribute to the large-scale policy and corporate changes required to limit further ecological turmoil, and these are limitations. Despite the climate disaster shifting from looming concern to present existential threat, the recent COP26 did little to limit the planet's warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. In the face of all this, I wonder, how does *Inbetweening Beings* matter?

Ecology's holistic approach links everything, and as Neil Evernden argues, subverts the subject-object relationship of reductionist science (93). The borders between organisms and environments blur. "There is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place" (103). Like Haraway, he sees arts engaged with ecology as vital to emphasize relatedness. *Inbetweening Beings* attempts to relate and implicate individuals into the immersive context of the installation and the wider ecosystems we inhabit. As a model of the Anthropocene, the installation is intentionally asymmetrical, fragmented, distracting and somewhat messy. Referencing Morton, Tsing, and Haraway in her book *Against Purity*, Alexis Shotwell describes a "toxic connectedness" between all life. For Shotwell, being "against purity is to start from an understanding of our own implication in this compromised world" (204), and to contribute to collaborative change. She's thankful for "people working on moving things, bit by bit, away from devastation and towards unpredictable possibilities for life" (205), and for me these incremental moves are the frames of ecological animation. I have discussed animation's potential as medium and methodology, and incorporating installation further expands its interdisciplinarity. For Erika Suderberg, installation art aspires to the "total work of art", the Bauhaus goal of connecting art

and craft, performer and audience, artist and technology and commerce (6). Combining outdoor animation with indoor/outdoor display and material movement among material objects, new ecological and social connections are possible.

Animation can interpret, approximate, and exaggerate reality. *Inbetweening Beings* does not attempt to replicate nature's movement – live action documentaries already provide high-resolution video reference - but it relates ecology in a novel way. Though limited, an artwork's ability to engage and reflect living relations can lead to societal shifts. Contrasting the predominantly bleak climate news, my installation engages relations in the Anthropocene with curious wonder, providing "re-enchantment" that can activate political action and make us happier (N. Johnson xxi). Just as Biophilia associates humans with other lifeforms, I hope *Inbetweening Beings* connects viewers to ecology through animation's vitality, with a critical lens. In considering the potential for political action, I appreciate Paulo Freire's claim that "action and reflection occur simultaneously…. Critical reflection is also action" (128).

Early film had the power to enthrall, excite, and terrify in a world of still imagery. Today, digital screens, ads and popup messages proliferate our view, cluttering and demanding attention. The living frames of my assemblage offer alternative windows – organisms, ecosystems and varied interconnected life. In the attention economy, they invite contemplation and sell you nothing. The site-specific artworks of the 1960s have been associated with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as installation art requires actually "being there", contrasting the media-saturated society predicted by Marshall Mcluhan (Meyer 26). *Inbetweening Beings* requires this physical presence and offers immediate sensory interface, unmediated by augmented reality (AR) screens or virtual reality headsets. Instead of transporting viewers to an escapist illusion, the installation immerses viewers in the here and now. Entering a discursive space and considering the relations of content and context requires a pause from the smartphone's addictive glow, and brings people together.

Decolonization in Canada is a distant yet crucial goal. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, following the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, must be fulfilled by governments, institutions, and every resident of this country. Only after truth, which is slowly being grasped across Canada, can long-term reconciliation begin requiring apologies, money, land back, and a dismantling of the systemic racism that caused a cultural genocide. As honest conversations about the violence of settler colonialism begin to enter mainstream conversation, I'm attempting to decolonize myself and my art by examining my settler roots, continuing my education, and making space. This does not mean staying silent. Acknowledging white privilege leads to guilt which can paralyze creation, and I hope to shift this tendency through a lens of awareness and responsibility. As a settler artist making animated stories, I seek dialogue with viewers, while understanding the limited perspective and scope of my work. Paulette Regan writes that settler stories can serve as "counter-narratives that create decolonizing space…. They require us to risk revealing ourselves as vulnerable 'not-knowers' who are

willing to examine our dual positions as colonizer-perpetrators and colonizer-allies" (28). As an artist, parent, and citizen, I undertake this challenge with hope and determination, with a spirit of collaboration and curiosity.

Animated inbetweens measure life's movement, evolution, and degrees of difference. As my relational animation engages and implicates human visitors, their own perspectives will guide them to reflection, confrontation, or ambivalence. *Inbetweening Beings* is neither didactic "nature facts" nor a heavy-handed "message" film. As I come to realize my own complicity in the systems of environmental damage and colonialism, I consider my role as an artist. Without dictating ideology or proposing solutions, *Inbetweening Beings* reveals unseen living relations of the Anthropocene, asking where humans are in nature: apart or a part, among, inbetween all other beings.
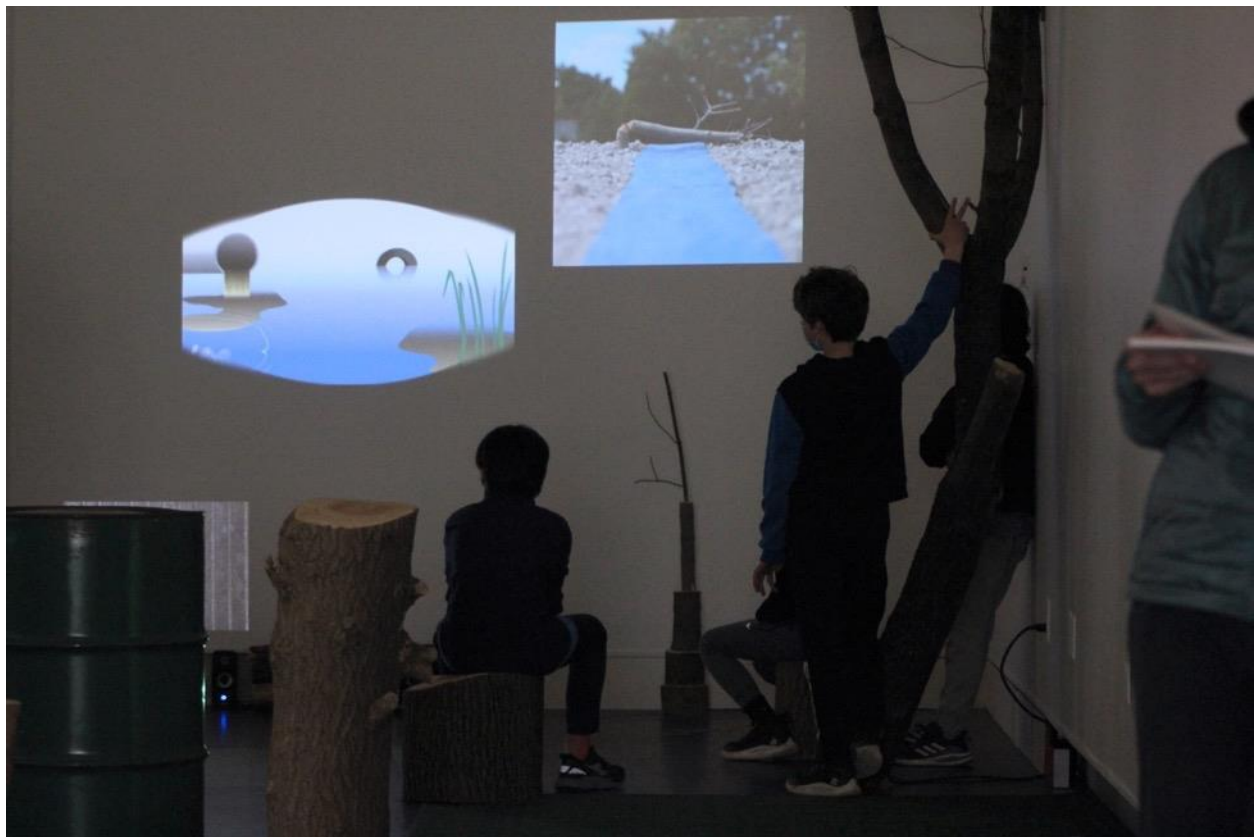
Above and next pages: visiting the *Inbetweening Beings* animated installation.
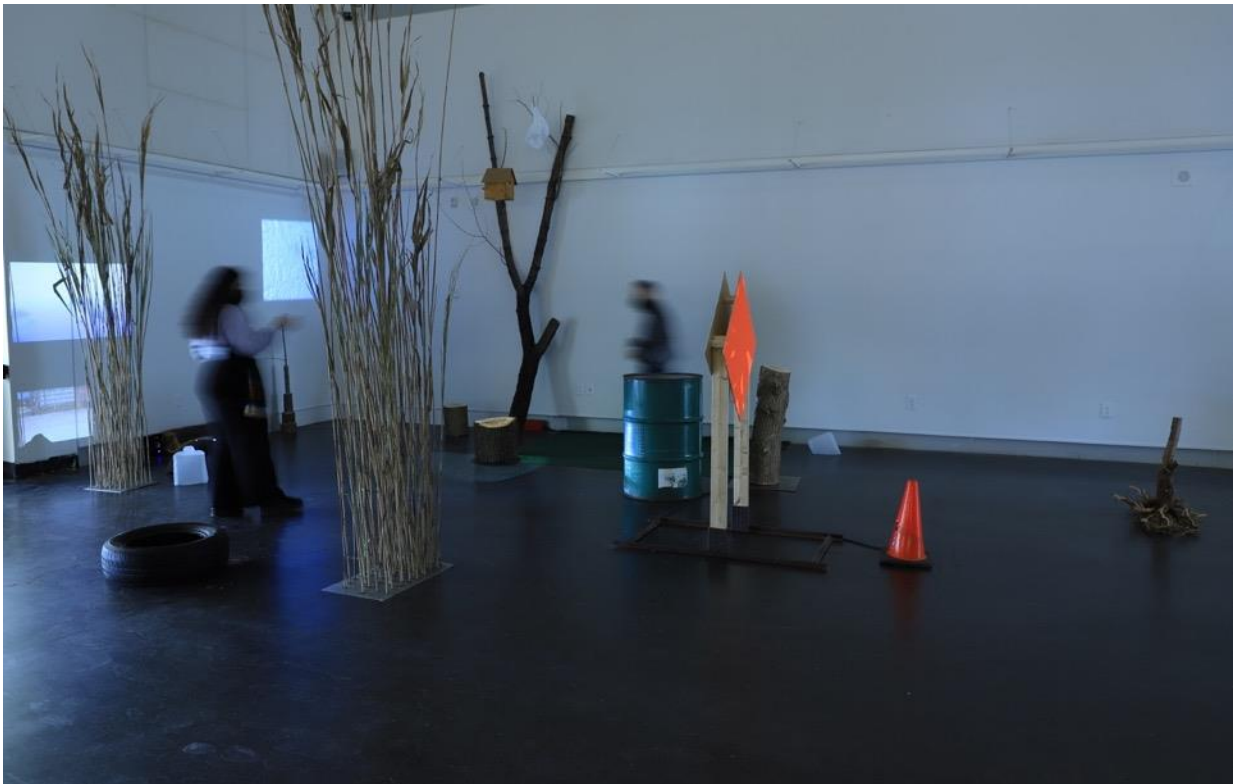
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