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*Conversation With a Strange Stranger*

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## *Abstract*

This research essay explores plant-human relationships within contemporary art practice. Through examining various elements of my creative research and linking them to contemporary philosophies, such as Object-Oriented Ontology, New Materialism and Posthumanism; I explore important issues surrounding the creation of democratic artworks together with non-human living organisms. My artistic practice is based on research of the hidden agenda of a particular plant found in my backyard, and on the dynamic dialogue between all beings in the garden environment. Throughout the research I create an intimate relationship with the plant and explore how other objects and creatures play part in creating a vibrant community. Using the framework provided by philosophies and other contemporary visual artists, this paper outlines necessary steps for constructing an ethical methodology for understanding relationships between humans and non-humans within art practice. The goal of the paper is to understand other species better, relate to them and democratically use that knowledge in art making.

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## ***Introduction***

*The seeds for this book were first planted in my garden... (Pollan 2001, xiii)*

Michael Pollan begins his book, *The Botany of Desire* (2002), by relating ideas to his garden. Like Pollan, this research project came into being through a garden when I moved to a new house and decided to work on the backyard.<sup>1</sup> There was one particular plant; I have never seen it before. Slim and delicate with petite leaves, it was growing everywhere and I assumed that it was a *weed*. As I was about to pull it out, I started wondering about its story, its characteristics and differences with other species. What hidden life does it live? What does it want? Could I investigate its existence in an artwork? This research paper is dedicated to this mysterious plant. The research explores how artists take part in working with plants and how contemporary philosophies describe this modern trend; moving towards destructing the superiority of the human and acknowledging equal participation of beings, regardless of human or non-human. Now, a year later, as I write this paper, I am proud to say that in my garden there are no weeds – all plants, as well as other objects are equal. We are all rightful residents of the same household.<sup>2</sup>

People often disregard weeds, call them invaders and destroy them. However, a big portion of weeds are in fact herbs and edible plants, such as *Wild Fennel*, *Blackberry*, *Wild Olive*, *Dandelion* and many more. Those are completely safe to eat and are a great source of vitamins but, unfortunately, due to their classification as weeds, people often disregard their qualities and think of them as deadly or uncontrolled species. In the book, *Feral Future* (1999), Tim Low in detail explains how weeds came to the country, their historical connection to the colonists and behaviour amongst other native plants.<sup>3</sup> He also discusses the history of plant movements across the globe before human intervention and argues that every plant, regardless of its location or origin, can have aggressive qualities. In this research essay I avoid the stereotype assigned to plants in the invader category and create an intimate and sympathetic relationship with a weed from my garden. For the purpose of this thesis research I have not established the botanical name of the plant variety. It would only provide me with facts created by humans for our own

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002) xiii.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper I will be using the terms 'household', 'backyard' and 'garden'. Although I am not making an anthropomorphic claim that plants have households, I am using this word to establish a domestic space where all occupants are equal.

<sup>3</sup> Tim Low, *Feral Future* (Ringwood, Vic: Viking, 1999)

advantage, while the information that I collected is instead based on empathy and equality. I have called it *the mystery plant* or *the strange stranger*. Strange Strangers, the term used by Tim Morton, is a name for all animate and inanimate beings, as we can never truly understand others due to our differences and unique traits. The more we study something or someone, the more distant they become.<sup>4</sup> The research was conducted in the similar manner as Peter Wohlleben did in his book *The Hidden Life of Trees* (2016).<sup>5</sup> He uses observation as a foundation for a sustainable forestry practice. Though, he is aware of tree's botanical names, throughout the book he does not focus on them but rather on behaviour and physical characteristics. I will explore the mystery plant in the same way - through observing and analysing.

Throughout this paper I unravel the particulars of my Honours creative research, a selection of poems and the major work *Series: Conversation with Strange Stranger, 2017* – a series of performance-installations.<sup>6</sup> I have filmed myself perform alongside various objects from my garden. Through movement and choreography I explore the dynamic relationship between all beings (myself, the plant, chairs, bricks and a tree) and the garden environment. Text pieces describe my role as a human in the environment of non-humans. Throughout the research essay I explore how my art practice achieves the goal of creating equal and non-hierarchical practice that views plants as rightful participants.

How can plant inspired artworks be analysed in terms of contemporary philosophies and theories? How can artists achieve truly ethical practice and is it possible to establish a sustainable platform for working with plants? I will explore these questions through a research into my studio practice and will use various contemporary philosophies as tools in this investigation; in particular Object-Oriented Ontology, New Materialism and Posthumanism. Each chapter looks at a different artwork and links it to a philosophy or examples of artists that work within the same field. Throughout this paper I refer to the concept of *the mesh* – the

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010) 41.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Wohlleben and Tim F. Flannery, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World* (Vancouver, BC: David Suzuki Institute, 2016)

<sup>6</sup> Performance-installation is a term, which I use to describe the hybrid nature of my artworks. Though it is a series of performances using my own body, the equally important element is composition and combined materiality of all objects (including myself). Together we construct a transdisciplinary dialogue between the human and non-human performativities and materialities, thus becoming an installation altogether. The work does not solemnly exhibit the final product (the performance), but also various experiences, energies and processes. Amelia Jones describes common hybrid practice in Amelia Jones, "Material Traces: Performativity, Artistic "Work," and New Concepts of Agency," *TDR: The Drama Review* 59, no. 4 (2015): 18-35. <http://grunt.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Material-Traces-Performativity-Artistic-%E2%80%9CWork%E2%80%9D-and-New-Concepts-of-Agency-by-Amelia-Jones.pdf>

interconnectedness of all life forms.<sup>7</sup> This idea is based on equality, belonging and intrinsic intimacy between all beings. This research assumes that we cannot grant a particular species supremacy or overall leadership over other beings. Moreover, we have to understand each other to make sense of the mesh and to avoid harming the Earth. In the garden, where I conduct my research, I work on the assumption that apart from me studying the plant and other objects, they also study me, and that we co-exist together.

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<sup>7</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 2010, 28.



## *Chapter 1 – Primary Investigations*

This research is attempting to establish an ethical platform for understanding and working with plants. I believe there is an urge for a new way of thinking as we are approaching an ecological crisis associated with Anthropocene – the epoch that identifies humans as a key inhibitor on Earth and marks their presence with a geological footprint.<sup>8</sup> Within this era we need to challenge the concept of human superiority that has developed throughout history and establish mutual recognition between all beings.<sup>9</sup> For artists working with living creatures it entails needs and desires of both parties. Unlike working with animals, plants do not have the same depth of studies within modern literature and philosophy and they are generally not recognised as advanced living beings, although they share common behavioural traits with both humans and animals.<sup>10</sup>

This problem urged me to seek a modern philosophical grounding, with the ability to address a variety of perspectives whilst shifting the viewpoint away from traditional anthropocentric ideals. One of the many contemporary philosophies, Object Oriented Ontology (hereafter OOO), assumes that each object, regardless animate or inanimate, has a point of view and sees the world differently.<sup>11</sup> The two significant elements of the philosophy are the disregard of correlationism and understanding of the actor/alliance system, which urged me to use OOO as a foundation of my research. Through evaluating these features and relating them to my creative research I was able to gain a profound platform for working with the mysterious plant. In the following chapter I will discuss the plant-human communication in relation to my creative investigations through the use of those elements.

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<sup>8</sup> Jedediah Purdy, "Anthropocene Fever," Aeon. Published in Association with Harvard University Press. Reviewed by Ross Andersen. Published March 31, 2015, accessed August 15, 2017. <https://aeon.co/essays/should-we-be-suspicious-of-the-anthropocene-idea>.

<sup>9</sup> In the book *Here on Earth: An Argument for Hope*, Tim Flannery discusses human behaviour throughout history. He shows cases of humans changing multiple ecosystems due to the lack of respect for flora and fauna. Tim F. Flannery, *Here on Earth: An Argument for Hope*. 1st ed. Melbourne: The Text Publishing, 2010. 71-108.

<sup>10</sup> Plants share a number of skills and attributes far more advanced than humans. Lindsey French. "Weak Media, Phytocentrism and Gestures Towards Transgressing the Self," *Antennae*, no. 37 (Autumn 2016): 120.

<sup>11</sup> Dylan Kerr, "What Is Object-Oriented Ontology? A Quick-and-Dirty Guide to the Philosophical Movement Sweeping the Art World," Published 8 April, 2016, accessed 23 May, 2017. [http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews\\_features/the\\_big\\_idea/a-guide-to-object-oriented-ontology-art-53690](http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/the_big_idea/a-guide-to-object-oriented-ontology-art-53690).

## *First Encounter with Life of the Plant*

Upon beginning to research the life of the mysterious plant I had to acknowledge the domain of knowledge outside my personal perspective in order to stretch the boundaries of cognition, learn new concepts and entertain radical ideas. I attempted to imagine the plant's mind and its point of view, as well as consider potential needs and desires. Why does it behave in a certain way? What is it thinking? I had to escape the phenomena of human superiority of a garden owner, and view it from outside the human centric realm. Although there is no way to assess the credibility of the acquired information, I was constantly alert of my human condition and pre-existing knowledge that may have affected the results. I kept making notes of the plant's behaviour and made a number of sketches as a primary investigation (see below some of the excerpts of the study).

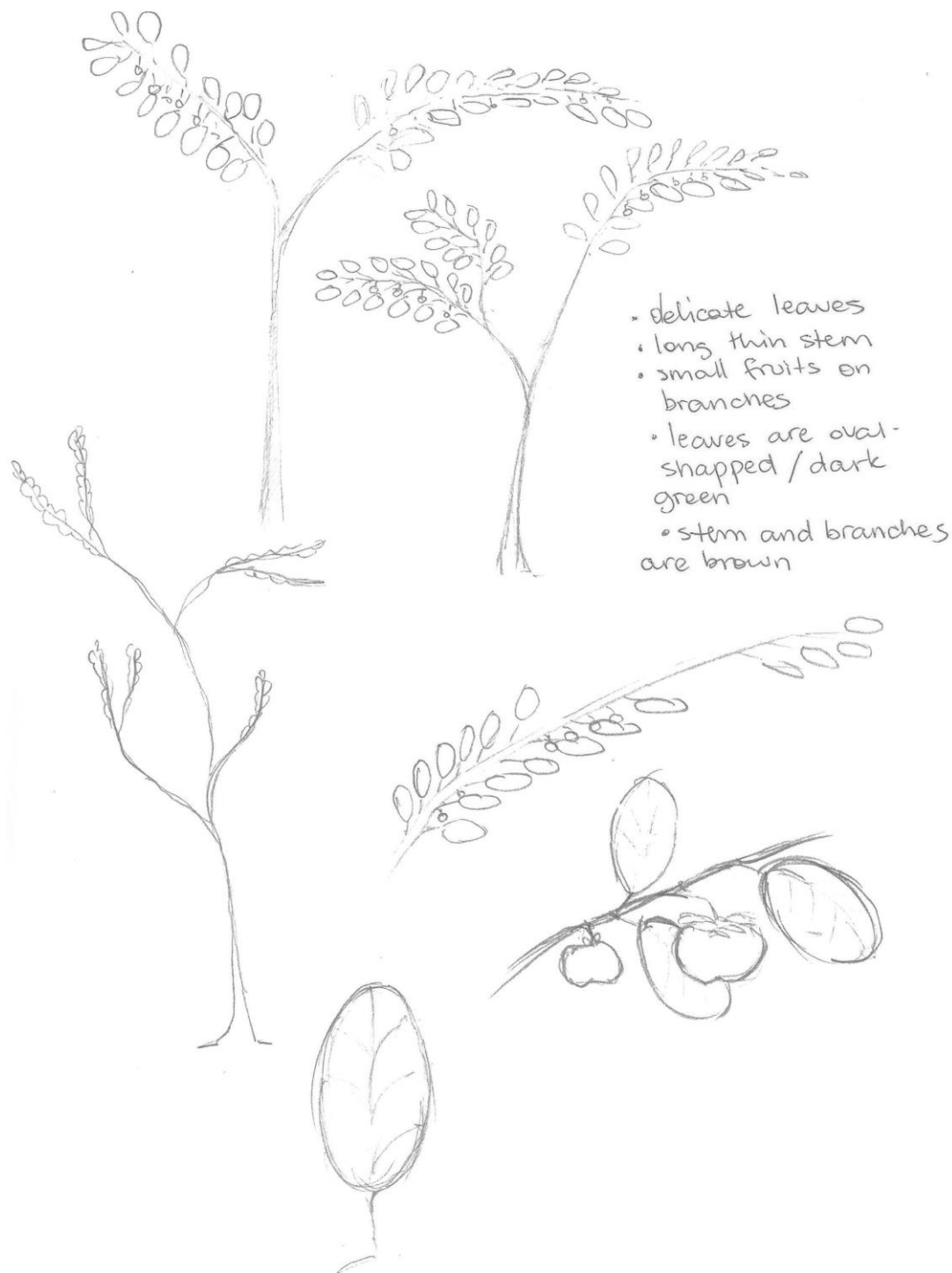
Decentring human perspective and acknowledging the possibility of existing knowledge outside the human realm is a foundation of my research. OOO describes this phenomenon as *correlationism* – all existing information is translated solemnly through human mind and that we cannot think of an object without making it *thought*.<sup>12</sup> OOO, on the contrary, aids humans and other beings with the ability to imagine the world through other perspectives and, in addition, provides with the capacity to view all beings as 'objects', one of which is ourselves.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the philosophy rejects the idea that humanity should reshape the world in its own image and emphasises no distinction between beings. Correlationism, on the other hand, limits our perception, as it prevents from accepting existence of things outside the human realm and therefore, makes the human perception as the central cognition in the universe. I used this element to broaden my research into the hidden plant life and to escape the self-reflecting loop of perceiving the world through human eyes.<sup>14</sup> Imagining the existence of plant's hidden agenda enables our mind to unravel new boundaries of cognition and opens possibility of absolute information beyond the human reach. I imagined and considered desires and visions the plant might have and various pathways for achieving them.

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<sup>12</sup> *Correlationism* is a term introduced by Quentin Meillassoux in his book *After Finitude*, which refers to viewing the world only through the domain of human perception, body or language. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Translated by Ray Brassier. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008)

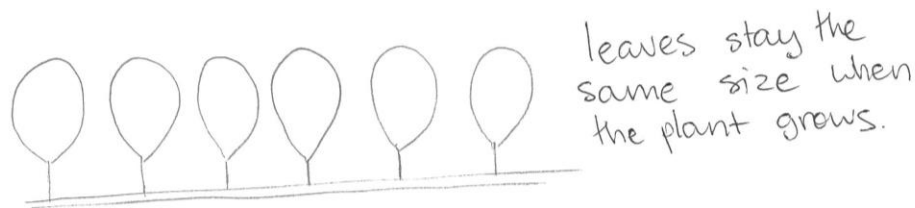
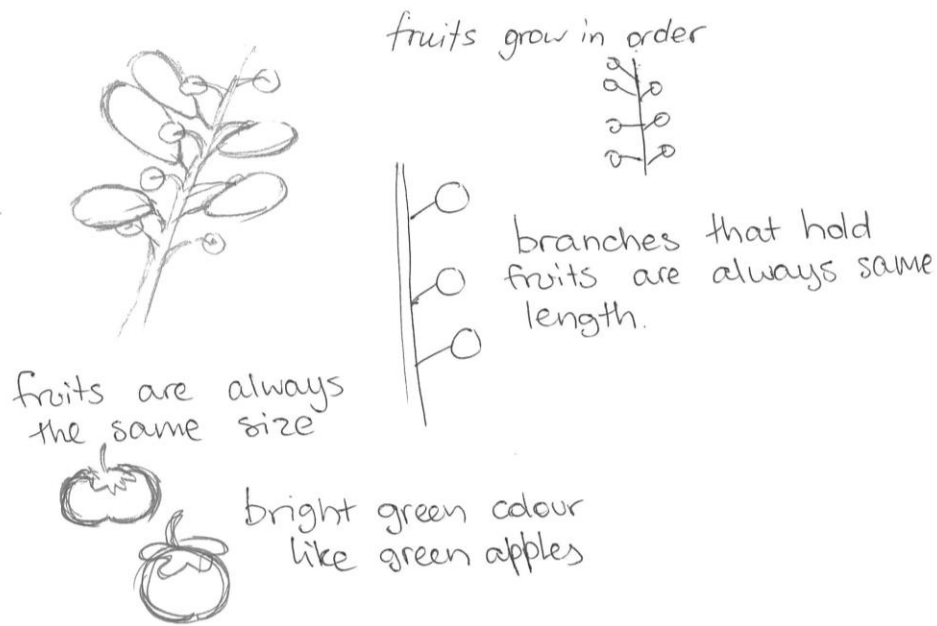
<sup>13</sup> The ontology dismisses cause and effect relation, as well as subject/object relation, and focuses on viewing all on equal terms.

<sup>14</sup> Graham Harman, "A History of Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology," Podcast. *Ecology Without Nature*, 2010. 1h 28min 8s. Accessed July 4, 2017. <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com.au/2010/12/graham-harmans-talk-on-ooo-and-sr-at.html>.

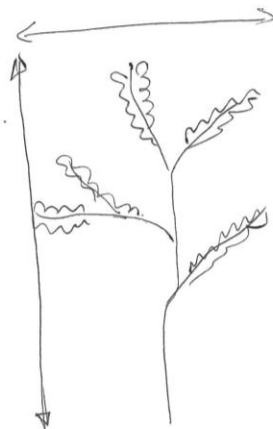


(Image 1 Excerpt from the sketchbook. Pen and pencil on paper. Courtesy of the artist.)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> At first I conducted a visual analysis of the plant. I looked at the leaves, the structure of the branches, the positioning of fruits and the construction of the stem. I visually studied colours of different plant parts and compared plants that grow in the shade to those that are in the full sun locations. I noticed that those in shaded positions had more vibrant and full colours. The leaves were bright green and they had increased number of fruits, whereas those in full sun had yellowing tint on the leaves and thinner branches. I concluded that it might prefer to be growing in shaded areas. Therefore it must have strong sun efficiency or it must be able to share nutrients equally with other plants. In this case it must work well in a team and be able to have a sustainable root system. The plant must grow in shaded areas to prevent its fruits and leaves from burning. The more leaves it has, stronger the photosynthesis is, which in return provides for better plant growth and more fruits.



recorded length/size: 85cm tall  
53cm width.



(Image 2 Excerpt from the sketchbook. Pen on paper. Courtesy of the artist) <sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> I noticed that that the plant does not grow very tall. I believe it prefers to sprout in multiple locations instead of contributing all of the energy towards the growth of one specimen. However, there is a group of older plants behind the house that have reached an abnormal height. I believe they have not had many encounters with other plant species or insects – their location is alienated from the rest of the garden. Perhaps, they share nutrients and water through a tight root system. Since they are separated from the rest of beings, they are forced to communicate with each other to survive.

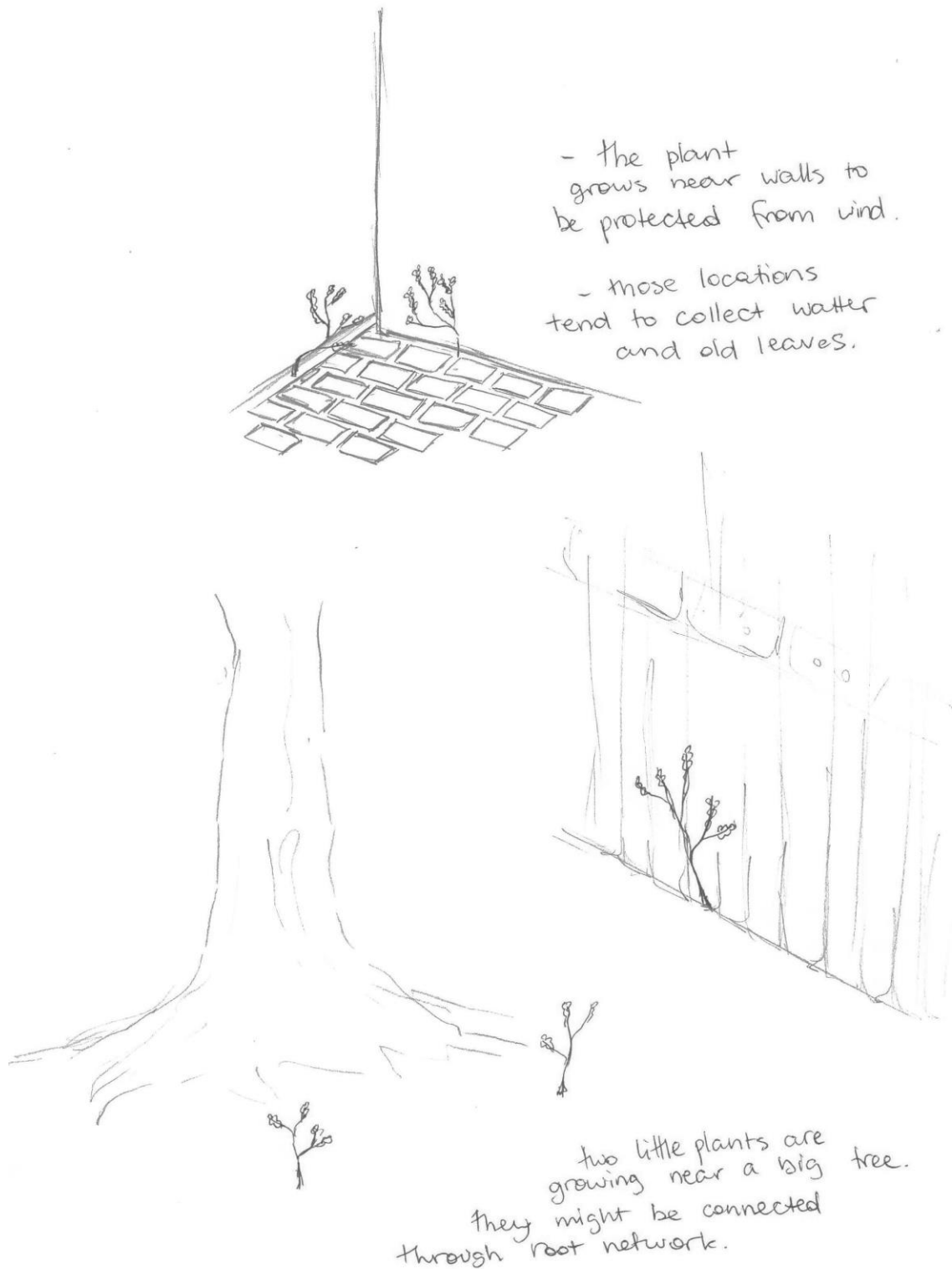
## *Actors and Alliances*

Apart from the hidden agenda of the strange stranger, I also looked at various interactions between all garden beings. I observed how the strange stranger interacted with chairs, bricks, trees and other plants, imagined how various relationships might affect the ecosystem of the environment. I recorded the movements of the plant around other inhibitors, the silent conversation between all beings and the change in behaviour once new objects were introduced. In this step of the research, I looked at each object as an independent being with unique qualities and strengths. What drives each object? What are its strengths and weakness? Once the qualities were identified, I investigated various partnerships in the garden, focusing on how the connections were affected by objects' qualities and performance. It was important for my research to establish these networks early on, as they later became the basis for the following investigations and artworks.

I based this aspect of my investigation on the OOO philosophy by Bruno Latour, the main element of which is viewing all objects as *actors* and understanding relationships between them – *alliances*.<sup>17</sup> He uses concepts of *actors* – a role given to all beings, regardless of their materiality or animate/inanimate nature; and *alliances* – partnerships between actors. Each actor has different strengths and characteristics, which affect the inter-relationships inside alliances. In order to use the framework provided by OOO I viewed each object as an actor and imagined possible partnerships actors could have with each other. Moreover my own role as an actor in the garden environment enabled me to engage with other objects and to enter democratic and rightful alliances. I also had to understand how my own qualities affect the strength of various partnerships and how all alliances affect each other.

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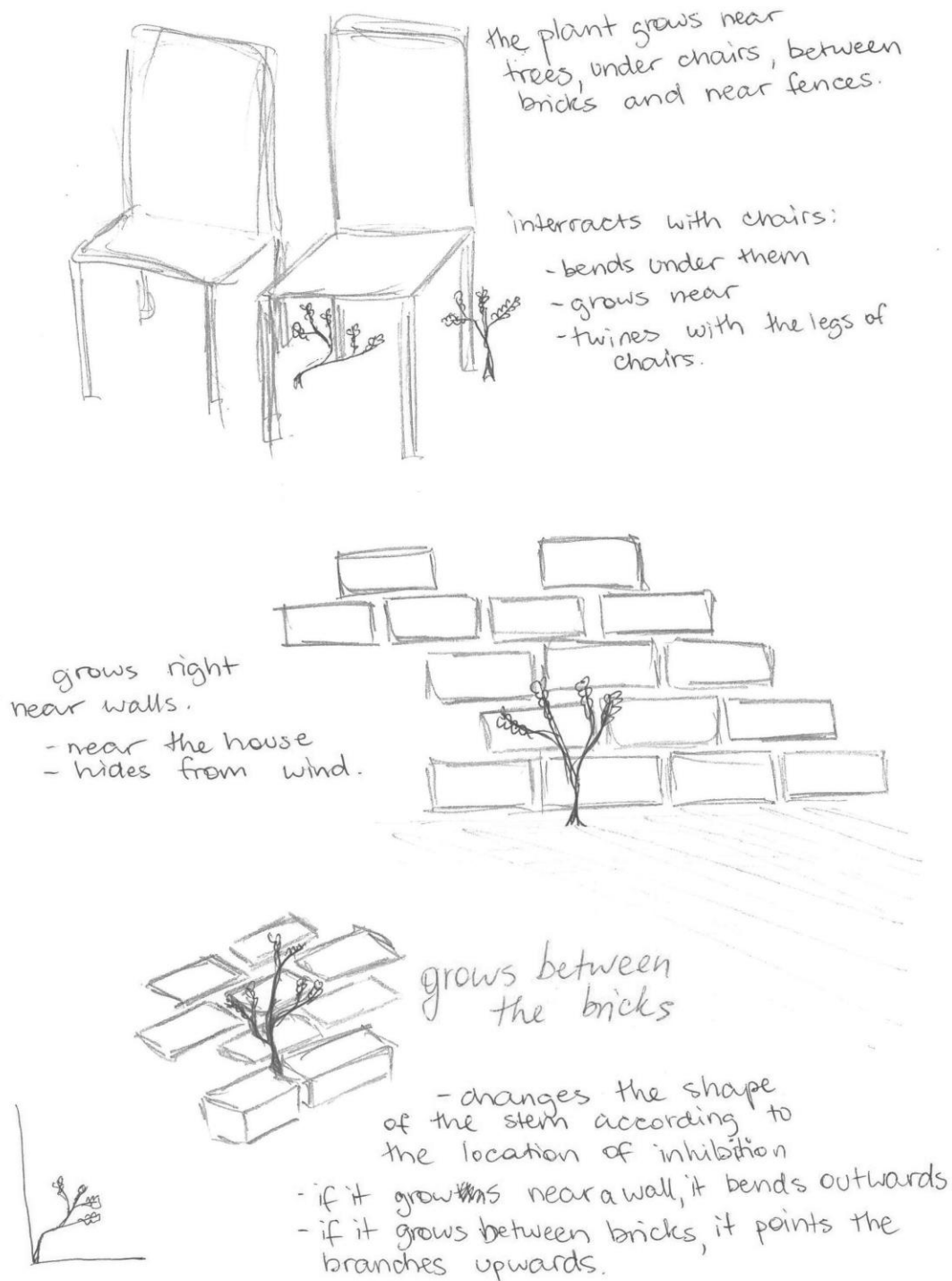
<sup>17</sup> Bruno Latour, Graham Harman, and Peter Erdélyi. *The Prince and the Wolf: Latour and Harman at the LSE*. (Winchester, Washington: ZERO Books, 2011)



(Image 3 Excerpt from the sketchbook. Pen and pencil on paper. Courtesy of the artist) <sup>18</sup>

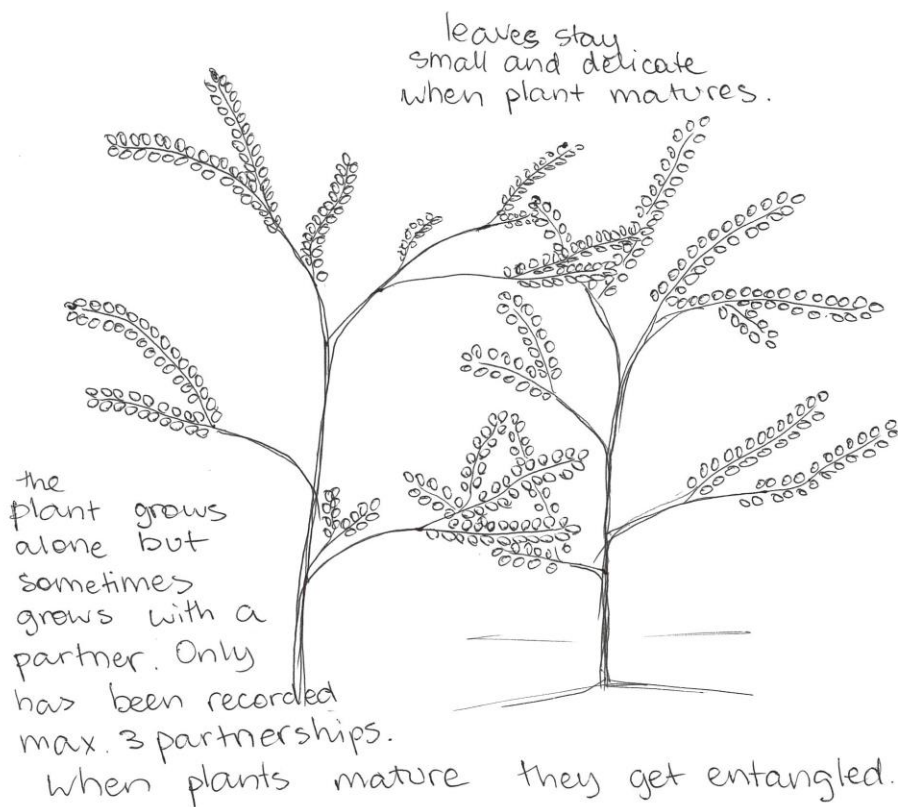
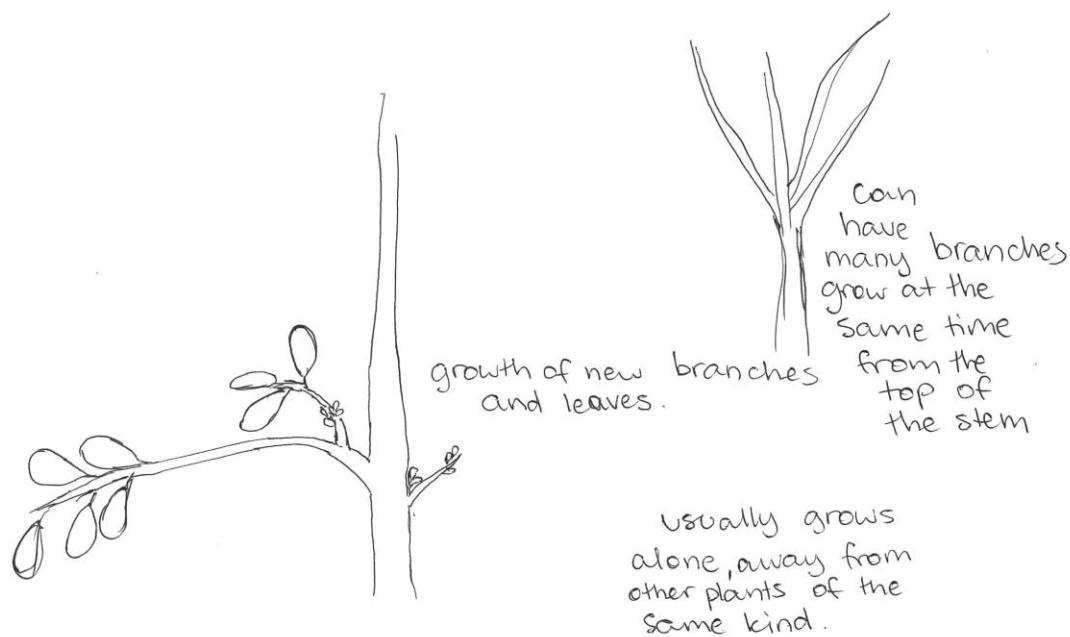
<sup>18</sup> I noticed a strong relationship between the plant and a tree in the backyard. The plant seems to be growing close the trunk and may be connected through the root system. Moreover, the tree can see further and pass on the information to its ally, while the plant sees little details and can liaise with small insects.

The plant also grows in unusual locations: between the bricks, through cement cracks, by the walls of the house and near fences. The mysterious being must feel a strong alliance with cold and brutal materials as oppose to grassy and developed locations.



(Image 4 Excerpt from the sketchbook. Pen and pencil on paper. Courtesy of the artist) <sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The plant tends to change the structure and shape of the stem according to the location of growth and obstacles it has to overgrow. For instance, one grows under a chair and its stem is very angled and it turns its branches around chair legs. In some cases the plant bends the stem more when it has to reach far for light. This interesting growth dynamic results in additional traits to the plant and adds fragility to the body.



(Image 5 Excerpt from the sketchbook. Pen on paper. Courtesy of the artist)<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> I have also observed relationships with other of its kin. The plant doesn't seem to be growing next to its relatives and tends to stay separated. However, the older plants behind the house are situated in a group. I believe that is due to the age of the plants; they had more time to take over the area from other plant species. It seems that it prefers to grow with the plants of the other kin. I believe the plant shares information with other species and create a dynamic conversation to increase the likeliness of healthy growth.



## *Criticism of OOO*

Although OOO provides an important framework for in-depth engagement with the surroundings, the philosophy is not immune to various critics that may affect the credibility of my research. One of the main criticisms of OOO is that by assuming other object's perspective humans automatically anthropomorphise it.<sup>21</sup> Cognition is subject to past experiences, expectations and pre-existing knowledge, which results in re-appropriating new data and subconsciously altering it to fit-in with the rest of existing knowledge. One may argue that we need to process or anthropomorphise information in order to understand or relate to it, as well as to connect closer with strange strangers – beings that will always be alien to us. Monica Gagliano discusses that anthropomorphism is a natural human trait and the brain cannot help but attribute our standards to non-human objects; thus resulting in involuntary conduct of wrong and irrelevant information.<sup>22</sup> This cognitive phenomenon cannot be seen as a flaw, rather as an inevitable information-processing element; new anthropomorphised information could be compared to human knowledge and habits in order to further gather in-depth understanding of non-human and human differences.

I came across this factor throughout the preliminary research. Upon investigating plant's actions and its relationships with other objects I constantly compared it to human traits or to my moral standards of behaviour. Even though I tried to alienate my perspective as much as possible, there is a strong possibility that the majority of the investigation is based on human principles. However, through comparing plant's behaviour to my own I could further examine our cognitive differences. I believe that contrasting information of different types of species could open doors to behaviours of various collectives and could help unravel different learning functions. Gagliano argues for an altered understanding of cognition – “cognition is not a fixed ‘property’ of an organism but rather a dynamic ‘process’ of interactions in the organism– environment system”.<sup>23</sup> I used that position in my research and viewed plant's behavior as a series of active

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<sup>21</sup> Graham Harman, "I Am Also of the Opinion That Materialism Must Be Destroyed," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28, Issue 5 (2010): 772-90.  
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1068/d5210>

<sup>22</sup> Monica Gagliano, "In a Green Frame of Mind: Perspectives on the Behavioral Ecology and Cognitive Nature of Plants," *AoB Plants*, Associate Editor James F. Cahill. (2014).  
<http://aobpla.oxfordjournals.org/content/7/plu075.full.pdf+html>

<sup>23</sup> Gagliano, "In a Green Frame of Mind: Perspectives on the Behavioral Ecology and Cognitive Nature of Plants," (2014). 4. <http://aobpla.oxfordjournals.org/content/7/plu075.full.pdf+html>

interactions with the environment and other species.

Additionally, if we are to follow OOO's objective in saying that all objects have a hidden mind, therefore anthropomorphosis should happen vice versa (though it wouldn't be called the same for other species). Other objects would re-appropriate human worldview when trying to imagine what our desires might be. As much as OOO can be criticised for allowing anthropomorphosis to happen, we cannot possibly know whether it does not occur in the realm of other beings. I'd like to think that the mysterious plant also attempts to re-imagine my behaviour according to the standards of plant life.

Through the use of OOO I attempt to draw desires and needs of the plant and other objects living in the garden. OOO poses an important framework for 'putting oneself in someone else's shoes', which is needed to deduce the line between human needs and their effects on other non-human beings. In the next chapter I will discuss the major work *Series: Conversation with Strange Strangers*, 2017 and look at another platform for engaging with plants - New Materialism.

## *Chapter 2 – Conversation with Strange Strangers*

The main element of my Honours Research is a series of documented performances *Series: Conversation with Strange Strangers*, 2017 (**Image 6**).<sup>24</sup> The work is derived from the study of the mysterious plants and various alliances within the garden (discussed in Chapter 1). A series of performances displays re-appropriated plants movements against the objects that inhibit the household. The movements in performances reflect on various partnerships and their affects on independent agency of beings, whilst considering the overall garden energy and how it is modified with the appearance or disappearance of new objects.



**(Image 6** *Series: Conversation with Strange Strangers* (detail), Mariia Zhuchenko, 2017. Performance, chairs, bricks, tree branches, wood. Courtesy of the artist)<sup>25</sup>

This work explores the dynamic inter-species communication and co-existence in the mesh. As an investigation, I performed myself and later with my peers. I decided against hiring actors and executed the project myself, as I have the first hand experience and intimate relationship with the

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<sup>24</sup> It is a series of 14 short videos 2-5min each. See an excerpt of video performance <https://vimeo.com/238334789>.

*Series: Conversation with Strange Strangers*, Mariia Zhuchenko, 2017. Performance, chairs, bricks, tree branches, wood. Duration 12m13s. Courtesy of the artist. <https://vimeo.com/238334789>

plant.<sup>26</sup> To produce a series of performances, I had to constantly be aware of my body, of the ethical and respectful dialogue within the performance and of the combined materiality of all beings in the set. Through engaging differently with each object, in this artwork I explore the boundaries of my body, search for meaning in combining textures and investigate how the communication between objects can be altered with various actions. I decided to refrain from using verbal expression as a primary source of communication and made contact through other sources; hence in my work I utilise body and movement, as well as vibration, texture and noise. Throughout performing I am given the opportunity to push the limits of human ability; explore new sounds produced by the tension of body and the floor, the vibrations of steps and examine skin, as it stretches in conversation with the body. Although, I am not using sound in the presentation of the final work, I use collected sound data as a dialogue within the performance. I analyse both noise and vibration data to reinforce a more intimate connection with the objects. In the performances I co-exist together with the other beings, the same way we co-exist together in the garden.

### *New Materialism*

Another useful tool in my creative research is New Materialism. It is an emerging movement amongst contemporary philosophers and artists, which calls for a need to build unorthodox understandings of material agency and to review social relationships between humans and nature, while questioning human modes of interactions with material environment.<sup>27</sup> Similarly to OOO, it is targeted to humans; it engages human mind in an alternative conversation about the state of the world and man-made practices. However, while OOO solely encourages humans in the conversation about other beings and their desires, New Materialism poses a larger argument considering global politics, sources of ethics, metaphysics and interacting force fields within the

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<sup>26</sup> Moreover, if I was to re-tell the events that take place within my garden, I would to lose the fragile alliance that I have created with all beings of the household. This research is based on understanding and companionship within the garden. I was conscious of the fact that hired actors would engage their own pre-existing knowledge and experience into the work, thus completely altering my primary research discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>27</sup> It is intertwined with OOO, in a way that it recognises all objects as equals and disregards humans as the sole creators of the world. This trend enables artists and philosophers to attribute agency to objects and offers opportunity to explore its relationship within creative practice.

"New Materialism in Contemporary Art." WordPress, Accessed August 10, 2017.  
<https://newmaterialismincontemporaryart.wordpress.com/about/>.

cosmos.<sup>28</sup> These issues lure contemporary artists as they encourage a wider discourse about the state of being as well as the future of humanity. In my case, New Materialism is a useful tool in the search for a deeper meaning of plant's agency, material existence of other objects and my purpose within the garden, as well as a global political environment of natural beings.

### *Co-existence in the work 'Within and Without' by Kath Fries*

Co-existence is an important element of New Materialism and it involves a balanced relationship of material agencies. One of the artists, who also investigate energy of living creatures and ethical relationship, is Kath Fries, an Australian contemporary artist. She works predominantly with beeswax and fungi in the mediums of bio-art installation and sculpture. *Within and Without*, 2016 (**Image 7**) is an immersive multi-sensual installation made of beeswax, oyster mushrooms and tree trunks.



(**Image 7.** *Within and Without*, Kath Fries, 2016, beeswax, oyster mushrooms and tree trunks, photo courtesy Anne Zahalka)

The work investigates human relationship with forest ecosystems, their importance in the balance of the natural environment, as well as the lack of respect for flora and fauna.<sup>29</sup> Her work relates to both OOO and New Materialism; Fries reflects on the human interaction with the

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<sup>28</sup> Jussi Parikka, "New Materialism as Media Theory: Medianatures and Dirty Matter," *Communications and Critical/Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (2012): 95-100.

<sup>29</sup> Kath Fries, "Within and Without." Kath Fries Artist Portfolio. 2016. Accessed June 10, 2017. <http://www.kathfries.com/>

natural worlds, particularly the flaws of honey and mushroom industries, and considers alternative more sustainable methods. The artwork is both human and non-human made. Although she is the artist who constructed the sculpture, collected beeswax and planted mycelium; the work is mainly generated by the organic materials and by the agencies of used mediums. Through the act of sprouting, mushrooms collaborate with the shape of beeswax and grow in the patterns provided by the artist together with melting beeswax<sup>30</sup>. In the work *Within and Without*, Fries creates a dynamic co-existence of the materials as they grow and evolve together in sustainable structures.

### ***Representationalism***

Kath Fries and I both replicate other objects' movements to question the agency of the materials. She uses bee's movements to create honeycomb-like structures, while I introduce the plant's movement from the garden environment. Duplicating any object or action may be affected by error of representation, or in other words by *representationalism*, which indicates the difference in materiality of objects and how various interactions reinforce qualities and agency.<sup>31</sup> If each object is assumed to exist independently with pre-existing qualities, and if all beings communicate and collaborate together, then these attributes would affect the nature of representation creating two separate entities – original and represented. In this case, would the represented entity have the ability to act as a genuine substance and start communicating with other representations, thus creating a loop of representationalism? Fries uses this dilemma for her own advantage: while trying to picture the look of a honeycomb and using similar techniques as bees, in the work *Within and Without*, the act of representing is lost due to the use of artist's own body heat, different methods of collecting beeswax, and environment of construction. The represented entity is then presented to fungi that use their own attributes to re-establish the

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<sup>30</sup> Kath Fries constructs beeswax tubes by melting the wax with the temperature of her human body and wrapping it around her fingers. Afterwards, she attaches the tubes together and lets them natural glue together with the help of sunlight. Eventually, sculptures end up sinking together and melting due to the weight and heat from the sun.

<sup>31</sup> Karen Barad defined *representationalism* as "the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent; in particular, that which is represented is held to be independent of all practices of representing"

Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 804

environment in their own view. Fries successfully created a multi-dimensional loop of representationalism that only grows with every new location of exhibition.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly to Fries, in my work I create a multi-dimensional loop of representationalism. In *Series: Conversation with Strange Strangers* I use representationalism as a way of knowing, since I am not aided with scientific or technological background for understanding plants. While there are two existing kinds of entities: the plant (the entity to be represented) and my personal vision of the plant (the representation), I am only able to access the second one, since my knowledge will be always affected by various stimuli and experiences. Through representationalism, I move away from the reality of the plant and its true agency. Each time the plant is studied, it gains more layers of materiality with the aid of the subject that does representing. Unfortunately, the research I have created does not respond to the original agency of the plant and cannot refer to the ultimate existence of the being. However, no one is able to see the plant's true self, since each being is affected by own experiences and culture.<sup>33</sup> Artists working with living plants have to consider the possibility that the work may not fully unravel the inside or attitude of a living creature.

My research has evolved through a three-level representationalism. Firstly, the knowledge that I gathered via creating a dialogue with the plant has been altered by my personal experience and the circumstance of the encounter. I have started the research expecting a particular behaviour; however, as I gathered insight into OOO and read plant studies, I widened my perspective of the possibility of plants exhibiting personalities and unique traits. Overall, the circumstances of the encounter affected the experience and the conversation within the garden environment (weather, time of the day, workload outside university). Secondly, the knowledge gathered in the first stage has been altered or modified within the performance. Whilst conducting various rehearsals, collected information kept been affected by the movements of my body and the condition of used materials.<sup>34</sup> The way my body would feel during rehearsals would affect the decisions upon

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<sup>32</sup> Every new exhibition location affects the look and atmosphere of the work. Depending on the space, the smell travels differently and the growth of mushrooms changes. Besides, Fries recycles the materials and uses them again in the next artworks. This affects the materiality of the objects, adds history and alters the appearance.

<sup>33</sup> Plants have memory and feelings, which means that incoming information must also be affected. Anthony Trewavas, "Aspects of Plant Intelligence," *Antennae*, no. 17 (2011): 10-42.

<sup>34</sup> Materials, used in the performance, changed their appearance through the course of the Honours research. It was not because of the inappropriate handling, but rather due to aging. Wood and branches became drier because of tissue death. The chairs on the other hand obtained a brighter color and the indoor moisture protected the wood.

the choreography. Lastly, documentation process has been affected by different entities, such as the mood of performance at the time, camera settings, time of the day and lighting.<sup>35</sup>

This three-level representationalism platform creates a gap between representation and original knowledge, as the information presented becomes more accessible than the real. Similarly as in the work *Within and Without*, both original and represented entities gain a corporeal state of being; both become separate existing agencies *of* the world.<sup>36</sup> Through investigating how materiality can alter representation, the work *Series: Conversation with Strange Stranger* create a dynamic transition between real and represented entities. In the next chapter I will look into how human artist co-create a work with non-human others.

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<sup>35</sup> I investigated various camera settings and how they would affect the relationship within the performance. I have never worked in videography before; therefore, the majority of my decisions were based on improvisation and intuition.

<sup>36</sup> The element Karen Barad uses in her text: "We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because "we" are *of* the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming"

Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," 829



### *Chapter 3 – Communicating with Plants*

Throughout this research I have learned that despite a plethora of critical literature and research, we are still in need for an updated method of communication with the natural world, but hopefully we are moving closer. Artists keep exploring the gap in communication, ethics of working with plants, animals and the role of humans in the environment. With the help of Posthumanism, a contemporary philosophy that explores relationships with nonhuman worlds and sources of ethics, we can explore the future of nature in the context of current human impacts on ecology.<sup>37</sup> Through exploring this philosophy I was able to gain an insight into how the ethics behind working with the mysterious plant and explore what it means to be a human artist in relation to non-human others.<sup>38</sup>

Ultimately (and evolutionarily), being able to communicate with each other, form bonds of various kinds, and engage in teamwork are what makes language so important to us all, human and nonhuman alike.<sup>39</sup>

I am interested in maintaining the relationship with the plant and the rest of the community of beings, while considering the garden environment in an apocalyptic scenario. Through observing the plant and the rest of living forms, I have noticed that my presence has had an impact on the plant and the ecosystem from the first moment of my appearance. There is a difference in behaviours and growing patterns of plants and insects, which occurred ever since I moved into the house. I have noticed the appearances of new plants, different flowering patterns or disappearance of species. I have attempted to analyse the changes in the environment and reflect on whether any of them were caused by my presence but I believe it is natural occurrence in

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<sup>37</sup> Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) xxv.

<sup>38</sup> One of the main elements of the philosophy is looking at the role of humans in the world where all beings have co-evolved together, and calling for a need for updated ways of communication between human and non-human others. It is tightly interconnected with OOO and New Materialism, as they all disregard human superiority over other species and they consider other ways of living in order to achieve a more balanced inter-species community.

Florence Chiew, "Posthuman Ethics with Cary Wolfe and Karen Barad: Animal Compassion as Trans-Species Entanglement," *Theory, Culture & Society* 31, no. 4 (2014): 51-69.

<sup>39</sup> Monica Gagliano and Mavra Grimonprez, "Breaking the Silence - Language and the Making of Meaning in Plants," *EcoPsychology* 7, no. 3 (September 2015): 149.  
<http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1089/eco.2015.0023>

evolution of flora and fauna.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, I considered whether the changes would be different if I had never visited the garden: if any other plants would appear and dominate or if there would be an abundance of the mysterious species. After drawing some of the conclusions of this investigation I have written a selection of short poems that outline the dynamic relationship within the environment and described some of the changes. I also wrote a few poems that are dedicated to the mysterious plant, where I describe its appearance, behaviour and relationship to other beings (See more poems in **Appendix 1**). I will be printing them on handmade sheets of paper from recycled materials.<sup>41</sup>

*Walking on the bricks*

The wind blows harder and people gather with their mindless postures  
Their stares burn the leaves on the branches and poison the stem  
Try to sprawl closer to the fence  
Invisible amongst the leaves with buried treasures

With the force of gravity it becomes hard to inhale  
The air escapes through the limited holes  
The roots get tangled and squished under the weight of the earth

Temperature escalates on the edges of perpendicular assemblages  
They rub on each other and expand with the heat  
Tension is concentrated within the grid of squares

You tend to like your claustrophobic home  
You like the lack of air and movement in your roots  
You like your friends but keep them far  
Wanderers like to pack light and mark their presence  
Even for a night<sup>42</sup>

Though I am not working with the plant directly in my work, I have to be constantly conducting fair dialogue with it throughout my creative research. On the other hand, Jamie North is a great example of artists who work with living plants and foster healthy working ethics.

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<sup>40</sup> Plants and animals have been evolving and adapting around each other before human. Evolution and domestication have been occurring before human development and our impacts on ecology.

Raymond P. Coppinger and Charles Kay Smith, "The Domestication of Evolution." *Environmental Conservation* 10, no. 4 (1983): 283-92.  
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/S0376892900012984>

<sup>41</sup> I have been recycling all wastage throughout the degree and have been saving all sheets of paper used for texts and sketches. In the next Chapter I will be discussing how recycling affects democratic art practice and impacts on ethical work methodology.

<sup>42</sup> Mariia Zhuchenko, *Walking on the Bricks*, 2017. Poem. Courtesy of the artist

### *Jamie North: Using Living Plants in Artworks*

Jamie North is a relevant example of an artist who works with plants and creates a dialogue between human moral code and contemporary art practice. *Remainder No.8* (**Image 9**) is one of the many sustainable sculptures Jamie North has created in the last few years. All of them are made using recycled construction industrial material and living native plants.<sup>43</sup> The sculptures have the ability to support the plants and give them the space to grow. North focuses on using native Australian plants, and by doing so he comments on the diversity of the ecosystems of the land. As the work is sustainable, the artist attempts to isolate himself from the sculptures and lets it exist independently as long as it has all the necessary resources for survival; hence most of them are stored outside for long-term preservation. There is no remainder that the work is spurious and artificially created as the plants grown and change the artwork overtime, placing the artist behind the scenes. The sculpture is intended to evoke ambiance of alien and wild, which occur upon investigating surface of the stone texture; however, the artist is still present without making it obvious to the audience. Since the works are exhibited mostly inside a gallery space, the artist has to contribute to the plants' well being. Regular watering and UV lamps have to be used in order to sustain they comfortable habitat for hosting life forms.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Andrew Frost, "Jamie North: Terraforming the Planet," *Artlink*, Published December 1, 2014, accessed August 13, 2017. <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/4273/jamie-north-terraforming-the-planet/>

<sup>44</sup> I have personally attended to his works during Biennale of Sydney 2016 in Carriageworks, where I work. I hold a Front of House position, which means I have to attend to different exhibitions, liaise with curators and accommodate patrons. During Biennale I had to attend to Jamie North's sculpture and install large UV lights overnight. In the exhibition he didn't show *Remainder No.8*, but instead presented *Succession*, 2016. Both works are made in the same manner except for the structure of the cement sculptures and plant varieties.



(Image 8. *Remainder No.8*, Jamie North, 2016, Cement, blast-furnace slag, coal ash, marble waste, living Australian plants)

As well as in the work by Fries, North creates a harmony between himself, plants, cement and soil, as they all participate in the work equally. Moreover, this alliance is strengthened with force of gravity and solar energy that affect the way leaves grow and fall of the understructure. There are no marks of tools or equipment, even though it is clean and polished, in a way sterile, whilst isolating human presence and evoking apocalyptic imagery. In *Remainder No.8* Jamie north creates a feeling of human alienation, apocalypse and ruin. The work exists without human presence and resembles what the Earth could look like following human extinction, which is one of the focuses of Posthumanism. Overall, Jamie North creates a vital communication platform between himself and materials, thus creating the thriving balance between all parties.

Largely successful element of North's practice is his communication with and understanding of plants. I look up to this methodology in making my own performative research. As I study plants to create movements I examine my presence within the environment and attempt to outline how the dynamic dialogue between objects is affected with my behaviour. Unlike North, who creates apocalyptic structures and distances himself from the artworks, I work directly with the plants

and base my research on co-existence. However, North creates a very intimate platform for communicating with plants in his practice: he only selects Australian native plants and carefully studies their movements and behaviours. Similarly to my research, he looks at how various conditions affect living qualities and plants' health.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, through observing their growth patterns around the cement structures and deducts their needs and studies their growth in a non-human setting (apart from providing with water and sun, North lets the plants grow in their own way). Through considering this apocalyptic point of view, he studies how human intervention affects the plant's behaviour and whether we can live in balance with each other.

In the previous chapters I have described various element of my creative practise and related them to other artists and philosophical grounding. In the last chapter, *Thinking Ecologically*, I will discuss my methodology and ethics in working with plants, in particular weeds.

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<sup>45</sup> During Biennale of Sydney Jamie North often came to check n the plants. Since they were exhibited inside, it was important that the plants had nutritious soil, plenty of water and sun exposure. He added vitamins to the soil a few times during the exhibition to make sure plants' health was not compromised.

## ***Chapter 4 – Thinking Ecologically***

Ecology isn't just about global warming, recycling and solar power...it has to do with society. It has to do with coexistence."<sup>46</sup>

Throughout the Honours research I have constantly considered whether my work was done in an ethical and democratic way; and thought about how my presence has affected the garden and its habitat. Tim Morton in the book *Ecological Thought* (2010) suggests *thinking ecologically* – the practice that encourages humans to live democratically with non-humans and the rest of the environment, as a step towards changing the ecological crisis.<sup>47</sup> Thinking ecologically involves considering coexistence with other beings along with thinking about how our presence affects others and vice versa. Therefore, making ethical artwork is about acknowledging everything and everyone you are working with, as well as being aware of every factor involved in production of an art piece, whether it affects the environment directly or not. It is about the *mesh* – about the collective of all animate and inanimate beings. We all coexist together and our existence is dependent on each other, but unfortunately we tend to forget this on the daily bases. We tend to worry about views and looks of our surroundings, and we completely forget the unseen damage that we are causing. The same reason we pull out the weeds – to make a garden look 'proper', despite the fact that some of the weeds have health and ecological benefits. We consider them as predators and undesirable species, disregarding their crucial role within ecosystems.

### ***Diego Bonetto and weed foraging***

As humanity progresses in causing devastating ecological damage to the planet, many artists attempt to highlight important social issues such as recycling, energy consumption and the use of organic resources. Some artists even undertake participatory or story telling techniques in making their artworks; this way the information becomes more accessible for general public. Diego Bonetto is an environmental activist, cultural worker, artist and forager.<sup>48</sup> Much like Morton, Bonetto encourages his audience to change their attitude towards nature. He hosts workshops,

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<sup>46</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 2010. 2

<sup>47</sup> Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 2010. 98-135

<sup>48</sup> Georgina Reid, "Diego Bonetto: The Weedy One," *The Plant Hunter*. Published February 3, 2014, accessed August 11, 2017. <http://theplanthunter.com.au/people/diego-bonetto/>.

community talks and discussions, as well as runs various foraging tours where he discusses various medicinal, edible or practical usages in order to change our understanding of food consumption, ecology and waste. Similarly to Bruno Latour, Bonetto believes that we (including weeds and other plants) are *actors* and engage in *alliances*; therefore we should work collaboratively in order to establish stronger networking skills with our surroundings. Without creating healthy ties with our immediate environments we would not be able to move forward with improving ethical and democratic understandings of relationships between humans and nonhumans. Like Kath Fries and Jamie North, Bonetto raises important issues, such as ethical and balanced usage of resources, re-imagining the knowledge of environment and its inter-connections, and lack of respect for various life forms. Throughout his practice, Bonetto does not exploit weeds, but takes the minimal amount, which in return allows plants to obtain more space for growth. He fosters healthy communication within a community of beings.

Unlike the work done by Bonetto, *Humus*, 2012 by Guiseppe Licari is an example of the opposite of thinking ecologically (**Image 9**). Even though, the work discusses the relationship between humans and nature, the artist fails to mention the direct effect on ecology that he causes through the creation of his artwork.<sup>49</sup>



(**Image 9.** *Humus*, Guiseppe Licari, 2012, Ceiling construction, trees' roots, halogen lamps. Photo by Job Janssen & Jan Adriaans)

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<sup>49</sup> Guiseppe Licari, *Humus*. 2012 Ceiling construction, trees' roots, halogen lamps. Photo by Job Janssen & Jan Adriaans, 2012. Date Accessed August 13, 2017, <http://www.giuseppelicari.com/humus.html>.

Licari tears trees out of their surroundings, damages roots and deprives from any means for survival causing immediate death to his subjects. Moreover, the artist fails to mention what happens to the trees subsequent to the exhibition. *Humus* is a dramatic example of the work that exploits nature for decorative purposes and outlines the flaws of human-made relationship.

### ***Choosing Appropriate Materials and Methodology***

Through conducting creative research I was posed with the questions: *Should I include living plants and what materials should I use in the artwork?* As I was attempting to gather some information about the mysterious plant, I realised that the more I studied it, the more alien it became.<sup>50</sup> The strange stranger keeps surprising me with new behaviour and unpredictable growth patterns. Unlike Jamie North, I do not pose background in science or botany in order to construct ethical working style, however I can use observational techniques to create a dialogue. If I cannot truly understand the plant I cannot force it to become a part of the installation. Moreover, the intimate relationship with this plant only exists within the borders of the garden and if I was to utilise the plant in the work, the fragile balance of the environment would break.<sup>51</sup>

Another issue that I came across throughout the research is whether I am in the rightful position to use parts of trees in the performances. Due to the nature of this research, I had to avoid exploiting other life forms or utilizing them solemnly for the sake of the project and had to be conscious of their wellbeing and source.<sup>52</sup> After reading *The Hidden life of Trees* by Peter Wohlleben I learned about the root network and partnerships between different plants.<sup>53</sup> As I was

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<sup>50</sup> I attempted to harvest the plant by collecting a few samples from my garden and planting it in a raised bed near my studio. However, the plant seemed to have a hard time adapting to the new environment. I believe weeds are very sensitive to their surroundings and self-sufficient species that refuse to rely on human help to survive or reproduce.

<sup>51</sup> The concept of 'using' a plant is problematic in itself. With this body of work a traditional idea of mastery over a medium is controversial, since the plant is a living creature and is equally an artist of the work. All of the knowledge gathered throughout the year is due to the dynamic alliance between all beings and, while I was conducting the performances and deciding on the words of the poems, the objects and, in particular, the plant play the crucial role in providing me with the vital information.

<sup>52</sup> It was important to include parts of trees in the work because of a vital link between the tree and the rest of the objects in the garden. I believe the tree has very strong actor qualities, which affect the dynamics of the alliances. The tree provides smaller plants with nutrients, shades insects from the wind and covers chairs from the burning sun. It is a crucial actor in the garden environment; hence I wanted to show this link in the work.

<sup>53</sup> Wohlleben and Flannery, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World*, 2016



conducting the research of various alliances within the garden, I noticed a strong connection between trees in the backyard and the plant. The root network is an important element in communication with other living beings; hence I decided that it was important to have tree parts in my work. During my Honours research the University often hired foresters to cut old branches in order to promote healthy tree growth.<sup>54</sup> I collected wasted branches and included them in my work (**Image 10**). I also collected dead branches from the parks or thrown out leaves. I am interested in the history of recycled materials and how their energy could be translated through my creative research. Though tree parts are not sourced directly from my garden, gathered objects create a further dialogue about the recycling and ecological thinking. As I was exploring found objects, captured with them memoirs, such as dust or insects, added an extra layer of materiality and energy to the representationalism within my work.



(**Image 10** *Series: Conversation with Strange Strangers* (detail), Mariia Zhuchenko, 2017. Performance, chairs, bricks, tree branches, wood. Courtesy of the artist)

All used materials were sourced ethically and wastage was re-utilised. Recycling waste is an important step of thinking ecologically, as it encourages us to evaluate our needs and to value limited resources. Upon finishing the project, I plan to reuse the tree branches in other works or recycle for compost. Overall, all materials in my works have unique history and particular materiality that is captured through their past and experiences.

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<sup>54</sup> Trees direct a lot of energy to old or wounded tree branches. Therefore, cutting them down maximizes the energy for growth and promotes growth upwards. This process, although invasive, offers the ability for trees to redirect their energy to the healthiest parts and promotes the growth of leaves, which is the necessity for photosynthesis.

## *Conclusion*

In this research essay I have discussed my intimate relationship with the garden ecology and in particular the strange stranger. With the help of various philosophical groundings and works by different artists I was able to relate my work to ethical and cultural issues and construct a dialogue about conducting a democratic art practice with non-human beings. For the Graduation Exhibition I plan to exhibit the video works and a selection of poems on handmade paper together with various objects that have been explored throughout the research such as chairs, bricks and tree parts. I will present them in a large installation and will attempt to portray my dynamic relationship with the garden environment through the use of lighting effects and shadows.

In the future I will continue exploring human relationships with plants and their role in the ecosystem. I will further research OOO Posthumanism and New Materialism and keep making artworks within these fields. I believe this year has been quiet influential on my artistic practice and expanded my worldview. Moreover, with the help of various readings, such as *The Ecological Thought*, *The Botany of Desire*, *Feral Future*, *The Hidden Life of Trees* and *Here on Earth: An Argument for Hope*, I gained a profound understanding of the issues in regards to ecology, plant preservation, the history of the relationship between man and nature, and furthermore opened my mind to the possibility of hidden agendas and plant's perspectives.

This research helped me understand better the hidden actions and agendas in my backyard and allowed me to unravel the dynamic relationship of all objects in the garden. It assisted in understanding the fragile ecosystem and how it could be changed or damaged through human actions. This research is taking place on small scale in comparison to the rest of the planet, however it could be used to better understand better the world as a whole.

In my garden all beings are equal and we live in a democratic community.

*Appendix 1*

*\\ Sitting on the chairs //*

The chairs keep scratching the bricks  
Tickling the roots  
Wooden surfaces are marked by the crawling ones  
Their signature marks the path for others  
The silver residue is lit in the sunlight

You bend down under  
Welcoming  
You ask for shelter  
You bend under to escape wind

From the burning mist  
Protected  
The sun neglects the surface  
The dirt stays moist  
Water never leaves

My weight is centred downwards  
The gravity pools us to the core  
Together our mass is magnified  
We are united under the force

Don't leave the site  
Don't take away the shade  
Don't disturb the weight

...  
It is quiet now

*// Trees and plants //*

I noticed you've been hiding near the tree  
It is a majestic feature in the desert  
It stands tall  
Patrols the land and sees it all

You like the shelter  
It shares the food  
It lends you essential nourishment  
In return for the service

In return for protection from the worms  
From the crawling predators  
You keep watching the surface  
For approaching danger  
And send the signal through vibrations and movements

You alarm when the danger is near  
You are the eyes and ears from the lower ground

When I came I heard chatter  
A gossip in the air  
You crawled closer to share an insight  
And stayed in the shade

\\      **Camouflaged Affiliation**      //

In a tranquil estate you decided to pause  
your odyssey  
And spread your bloodline before the edges  
The colonisers brought you to this soil  
Or  
Perhaps  
You found our own route and ended up in  
this small field  
And carried the mark of the happenings  
from the other moments in time  
I wish you kept a diary  
Of all you witnessed

As you are reading this  
The iceberg falls  
Momentarily  
Before our eyes... I need glasses  
To see the blue sky

The nature breaks  
But here the time is paralysed  
And we keep wondering what happens  
behind the fence  
Behind the edge  
The other side

But here  
Inside the border, the light is bright  
And here you are,  
Standing in front of the window  
Studying my kitchen, as I observe you

With delicate branches it is easy to bend  
Gravitate towards the ground  
The soil  
The land  
Yet, bricks remain you still and help  
withheld strong currents  
Cold winds  
Leaves fall  
With them the souvenirs  
From when you were green and delicate  
Days made your posture brown and gloomy  
I blame it on the fence

I guess you had to match in colour to  
escape the glances  
Of others, to whom you are alien  
Everyone is staring

Like green apples? You seem to be a fan  
They are very expensive these days  
Maybe it is the abundance of rain and wind  
Roots need arid rocks to cling

It is time to grow between the bricks again  
Under the chairs  
Or even rocks  
They keep your bed warm  
But leave a huge mess!  
We have to clean up!

You are always thirsty  
And when the rain stops the leaves fall  
From your arms  
Repeatedly  
Persistently  
Or are they falling from your legs... or face  
I wouldn't know

If only we spoke the same language  
We could gossip  
About the rocks and trees  
I wonder if you have some stories to tell  
about the other plants  
You are always alone, like a lighthouse on a  
hill

Winds are vigorous lately  
No mercy  
Nor for all of us  
As I am writing, the sun is setting  
We have to shade behind a house and cover  
with a pile of dirt  
Although, I guess we already have excess of  
shade in this estate  
The grass is greener outside the cage  
No man's land out there, lots of stray cats

In here we are safe

We are a team  
An alliance  
A network  
Of old friends

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