

Title

Humans and humus: A creative inquiry into care practices
regarding more-than-human entities

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2025

BH052
Bachelor of Arts (Fine Arts) (Honours)

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Acknowledgement of country

I acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations as the traditional custodians of the land I have come to live and learn on. I also would like to recognise the land I was born and raised on, Tartanya and Yartapuulti, to be the lands of the traditional custodians Kaurna people. I acknowledge that these lands have never been ceded and pay respect to the cultural authorities of the Kaurna and Kulin Nations people, past, present and future.

Declaration of Authorship

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, this research is that of the author alone; the content of this research submission is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Hana Thomson

24/10/2025

Personal Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the honours lectures and supporting staff, Dr. Clare McCracken, Dr. Kelly Hussey-Smith, Dr. Jacina Leong 梁玉明, Dr. Laresa Kosloff and Roberta Joy Rich, the printmaking staff Kyoko Imazu and my supervisor Dr. Clare Humphries for their support, guidance and friendly welcome all the way throughout the year. I would also like to acknowledge the participation and role of Worms in this work, my approximately 500 friends have helped my garden, my work and I grow into amazing new forms.

Notes for Engagement

Inspired by Potawatomi botanist, Robin Wall Kimmer's work in *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013) there will be the capitalisation of the noun Worms, this is done to de-centre an anthropocentric hierarchy, and bias over other elements of nature.

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Abstract

Post-modernist cultures urgently need to deepen their understanding of the interconnectedness between humans and non-human entities by fostering an ethics of care. This research project aims to explore how an interdisciplinary practice—creating with and in response to Earthworms—can contribute to this growing awareness. Donna Haraway’s sympoiesis (creating-with) is central to the research methodology beginning with developing a deeper awareness of the movements, actions, and needs of Earthworms, which I documented and refined through fieldnote reflections and photography. Deeper attentiveness of caring was then expressed in the artworks through repetitive making and printing processes. At the same time, the Worms’ creative agency was considered through the decomposition results of situated fabrics, paper, and organic waste. As the research progressed, the ethical tensions of using Earthworms’ agency for both academic and creative purposes were acknowledged and addressed, shaping the final part of the methodology—mimesis—the mimicry of the Earthworm’s decomposing process, utilising grass-clippings and paper, which are broken down and reassembled into new forms so I could return the Earthworms to their natural habitat. Navigating the ethical imbalance and the desire to create with Earthworms, this research has addressed the limitations of multi-species co-creation, while also recognising how care practices can foster valued and attentive engagement with our multi-species kin.

Introduction



Figure 1, Authors own image, 2025, image of extracted decomposition from Worm farm

'Care is always relational; it unfolds in relations... practicing care requires attentiveness to our own participation in its becoming.' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012:199)

'I compost my soul in this hot pile. The worms are not human; their undulating bodies ingest and reach, and their faeces fertilize worlds.' (Haraway, 2016:35)

How to build better relations with nature has been a central inquiry within my practice. In a world of soil disparity, being friends of the friends of soil is a nutritious prospect to re-grow cultural understandings of the interconnectedness of humans and nature (Krzywoszynska 2020). Within this project I delve into the ways an interdisciplinary practice, in collaboration with Earthworms, can contribute to an awareness of caring for relationships with nature and its multi-species inhabitants. Investigated under the context of the Anthropocene², it is clear that humans cannot survive 'by stomping on all the others...[and] in order to live at all, we need new modes of living together' (Tsing 2015:vii) with kin.³ The compassionate intimacy of creating new possibilities together, facilitates care and cultivates action towards the responsibilities of living and dying well on Earth (Haraway 2016:125).

² The Anthropocene is a term to describe the current geological epoch. It 'designate the period of Earth's history during which humans have a decisive influence on the state, dynamics and future of the Earth System' (International Commission on Stratigraphy 2024).

³ The term 'kin' is used in reference to Donna Haraway's definition of kin, including not only ancestry or genealogy ties but also the multi-species critters of Earth (Haraway 2016).

This project considers in what ways can an interdisciplinary arts practice, exploring an appreciation for multi-species relations, offer an awareness of and contribution to multi-species relations. First, I ask how to hold responsibility and begin to grow stronger bonds. Drawing from post-humanist thought that ‘thinking and knowing are not exclusively the prerogatives of humans, but take place in the world, which is defined by the co-existence of multiple organic species’ (Braidotti, 2019:101), initiating this project thus began with slowing down to listening with attentiveness. Noticing my surroundings, I came to consider my new compost friends, the Earthworm, often unseen, hidden in dark dirt. According to environmental social scientist Anna Krzywoszynska, considering the Earthworms forces one to consider past a human perception, where ‘processes within soils operate not only on scales... but also partly on timescales, which challenge intuitive understandings of environmental processes’ (Krzywoszynska, 2023:403). Considering alternative timescales, I try to cultivate attentiveness to these unseen creatures. Utilising sympoiesis, engaging with deep-time, to create-with Worms.

This creating-with research reveals ethics of care emerging as a key theme. Informing my studio approaches, I shift from creating-with to creating in response to Earthworms. Recognising the limitations of ethical engagement and agency led to my practice creating speculatively. My research question thus reflects the shift in forms of representation—from collaboration to mimicking—and reinforces this shift to uphold changing care practices:

In what ways can an interdisciplinary practice, creating with and in response to Earthworms, contribute to an awareness of care practices regarding more-than-human entities?

This exegesis documents a timeline of inquiries into the research question, beginning with my studio practice, introduced and examined through chapter one. Chapter one introduces applied methodologies: tentāre-rhizome, sympoiesis, phenomenology and mimesis. Tentāre-rhizome dictates the overarching structure of experimentation and collates theories of post-humanist methodology and Donna Haraway’s *tentacular thinking*. Following this, I apply sympoiesis, phenomenology and mimesis to investigate haptic experimentations and reflections conducted over the year. With sympoiesis and phenomenology I detail creating-with, while mimesis details creating in response. Sympoiesis considers researcher and artist Jacina Leong’s generative composting, non-linear degradation and renewal, while investigations into mimesis as an arts practice is introduced and examined alongside Arist Nicholas Mangan’s work *Termite Economies* (2020).

Chapter two, contexts, investigates multi-species connections and care practices. Under multi-species connections I draw on theorist Rosi Braidotti’s mapping of post-humanist thought and divide of humans from nature. Furthered by ideas of Haraway, I investigate perceptions of the broader

environmental climate and how sympoiesis could provide positive change. I also investigate cultivating empathy towards the non-human through artist Patricia Piccinini, while exploring active sympoietic collaborations through Anika Yi's practice. Under care practices, I draw on care ethics from Joan Tronto and Lauren Tynan to outline the complexities of caring. Followed by Maria de la Bellacasa's transformative ethos of care and its haptic labours becoming forms of resistance, investigated through artist Rebecca Mayo's walking and sequential care.

Chapter three, reflections on practice, analyses the turning points and key stages of the work's developments in relation to the ideas and research conducted in the previous chapters. It examines how this developed praxis is effective in responding to the research question and broader area of practice. In this chapter, acknowledging the ethical disparities of intervening, using Worm decompositions and struggling to move forward, I find holding the complex matter of sympoietic engagement reflects a real-world application of care practices: complicated, messy and laborious.

Chapter 1: Methodology: *Tentāre-rhizomes*

In this section I describe an overarching methodology that I call *Tentāre-rhizomes* to articulate my personal creative praxis organically and acknowledge the combination of various established methodologies I take influence from.

Inspired by feminist, multi-species theorist Donna Haraway's *tentacular thinking* and a post-humanist methodology theorised by post-humanist, feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti, *Tentāre-rhizomes* encourages sustainable, non-linear progress and deep-time thinking.⁴ It is to be noted that Haraway (2016:32) does not associate with the theory of posthumanism.⁵ However, her theories and posthumanism have been grouped by the author to clarify the origin of sources.⁶ *Tentacular thinking*, developed by Haraway (2016), is a necessary way of relating in the Cthulucentric⁷ epoch, the broader environmental setting my work is creating within. Drawing from string figures, Haraway likens *tentacular thinking* to a particular thinking 'between.' Here, string figures represent outstretched and entangled tentacles, where a hand can enact trust, care and response-ability.⁸ *Tentāre*, the Latin root word of tentacle, means 'to feel, test, attempt' (Merriam Webster 2025) in this way, I am utilising Haraway's tentacular model and its etymological origin of feeling (or tentacle feelers) to generate a care ethics configuring of haptic makings and experimentations.

Braidotti describes a post-humanist methodology as a 'relational activity that occurs by composing points of contact within a myriad of elements within the complex multiplicity of each subject and across multiple other subjects situated in the world.' (Braidotti 2019:81) This way of thinking and making aligns itself to a heightened receptivity of external information, where collaboration is inherent and distributed amongst the participants. This post-humanist thinking model is reminiscent of

⁴ Deep-time thinking is an engagement with temporalities, 'thinking how to envision the far future of Earth... by [inhabiting] a longer now.' (Ialenti 2020)

⁵ Posthumanism is a 21-st century idea in continental philosophy that encompasses the posthuman condition. 'The posthuman condition introduces a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species...and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet' (Braidotti 2013:17). It is applied to thinking in response to the Anthropocene and is often manifested as a theoretical figuration (Braidotti 2019). In its application it is utilised as a 'navigation tool that enables us to survey the material and the discursive manifestations of the mutations that are engendered by advanced technological developments (am I a robot?), climate change (will I survive?), and capitalism (can I afford this?)' (Braidotti 2019:10)

⁶ Although Haraway takes 'nourishment from [posthumanism's] offerings,' she does not want to be associate with the theory to deny upholding anthropocentric binaries, considering the etymology of [post] disregarding Indigenous knowledges. Alternatively, Haraway uses the terms compost instead of posthumanism and humusities instead of humanities (2016:32).

⁷ In an interview for *Art in the Anthropocene* (2015) Haraway explains how terminology creates lenses, intentionally or unintentionally distorting our perceptions and relations with a word's definition. Haraway advocates that knowledge must be understood as a collective project, composed of connections and therefore advocates for the use of Chthulucene as a generative complex system as opposed to the individualistic Anthropocene. Chthulucene and Anthropocene are further elaborated in chapter two.

⁸ *Response-ability* is defined as the ability to respond to responsibilities (Haraway 2016).

a rhizomatic structure, as a form, thought and process.⁹ Using rhizomes from this posthuman interpretation with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987:21) initial configurations of rhizomes as unpredictable, interwoven networks; I combine these interpretations with *tentāre*'s capacity to feel, forming an empathic and interconnected, experiment approach: *Tentāre-rhizomes*.

Incorporating *tentāre-rhizome* as a methodological lens allows for adaptability, organic development, and the cultivation of creative intuition. This is evident in my process through the documented path of experimentations tracked in my archive (figure 2), showing the many divergent and convergent paths taken, visualising this interconnected rhizome, valuing experiments and tests as integral steps in thinking and development.



Figure 2, Authors own image, 2025, image of archival documentation throughout semester one folded out creates a rhizome structure, dimensions variable

The very fact that this methodology is an accumulation of multiple theoretical and practice-led sources is relevant to its post-humanist characteristics, where multiple voices and perspectives are heard simultaneously. In doing so, my aim is not to dismiss and override these vast knowledges by re-

⁹ Braidotti's description of a post-humanist rhizomatic methodology is echoed by contemporary philosopher Francesca Fernando (2014:11) in her work *Towards A Posthumanist Methodology. A Statement*. 'A post-humanist 'methodology' for lack of a better word, finds its rhizomatic outlines in the post-modern critique of objective knowledge... It is in no way definitive, but dynamic, mutant, shifting.' Fernando resists using 'methodology' as a descriptor, showing the implications this shift of posthuman thinking from an observer/observed relationship towards existing-with, has on research method. I have taken on this approach myself by providing the methodology chapter with an alternative name.

naming their work for my gain; rather, the grouping of theorists and artists is done with respect for intergenerational knowledge and articulates my personal creative praxis. Furthermore, the renaming of methodology to *tentāre-rhizome* is done for thematic engagement with Worms through this text. Continuing in the following sections, where conducted experiments and experiences analysed throughout this year are re-named Wormholes.¹⁰

¹⁰ Wormhole as defined by Merriam-Webster.com (2025):

1. *A hole or passage burrowed by a Worm.*
2. *A hypothetical structure of time-space envisioned as a tunnel connecting points that are separated in space and time.*

Tunnelling Wormholes¹¹

Sympoiesis

Haraway (2016:58,61) defines *sympoiesis* as ‘making-with’ drawing from molecular biology’s term symbiotic, stating that it is ‘a word for worlding-with, in company.’¹² Throughout this project, sympoiesis is enacted through the development of ethical situations in which Worms conduct agency by decomposing. Sympoiesis is also further investigated against the work of Anika Yi’s *Force Majeure* (2017) (figure 29), in the following chapter.¹³

Sympoiesis began with setting up and feeding the Earthworms in my farm, allowing them to acclimate. This first stage of creation I concluded was limited in actively enacting sympoiesis (figures 3,4), feeding tiny amounts of leftover food created a one-way connection that did not allow for the Worms to ‘respond.’



Figure 3, Authors own images, 2025, photo of Worm colony and vegetation fed to Worms

Journal Note:

Exploring the intersection of the unknown space between humans and non-human entities and beginning to facilitate ethical care conditions to do further tests in.

Fed Worms – 1 cup of food to begin with... see how much they go through.

¹¹ Although Wormholes are listed periodically for clarity and cohesion within this text, they are occurring occasionally concurrently, disordered and very often entangled to one another. As is the interlinking and nebulous form of a rhizome methodology.

¹² In her text *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway acknowledges a Canadian environmentalist graduate student named M. Beth Dempster for suggesting in 1998, *sympoiesis* as defining a ‘collectively producing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. Information and control are distributed among components’ (2016:58). By contrast, autopoietic systems are ‘self-producing’ with defined ‘boundaries that tend to be centrally controlled homeostatic and predictable.’ Yet Haraway (2016:58) mentions that ‘nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing.’

¹³ See context chapter multi-species connection.

Co-creating I become aware of the ethical limitations to sympoiesis, particularly the difficulty of including authentic non-human voices and that creating ethical conditions does not disregard the fact that Worms cannot choose to participate in the artwork, for humans.¹⁴ However, for now, I do believe it is important that I recognise my power over the Worms I am collaborating with and acknowledge it within this text. This power is one I grapple with throughout the year. Through my attempts to showcase the Worm's agency it comes to shape the ways in which the work is presented, how much if any intervention do I enact?



Figure 4, Authors own image, 2025, photo of Worms from starter box

Journal notes 04.04

How interactions with a Worm colony might intersect with issues of care.

I voiced my concerns to Clare, that even observing the Worms feels unethical, possibly it is inevitable.

Because of my concerns about including authentic Worm 'voices,' I was alternatively drawn towards their form. This began my illustrative representation of Worm movements (figures 5-7). Drawing enabled me to follow the paths the Worm's took as they moved around in the dirt or my hand, allowing me to get to know Worm characteristics.

¹⁴ It is at this stage in technology, that I am unable to coherently communicate with the species of Red Wiggler Worms, and if ever this issue is removed in the future, there is a possibility of including other species thinkings and potentially collectively configure a multi-species methodology.



Figure 5, Authors own images, 2025, detail photo of Worms and correlating watercolour and ink sketch

Slowly getting used to holding the squirmy Worms in my hands.



Figure 6, Authors own images, 2025, detail photo of Worms and scan of pen sketch of Worms

Journal notes 05.05

Beginning to explore sympoiesis, using the movements as reference – not actively sympoiesis however as the Worms cannot enact agency.

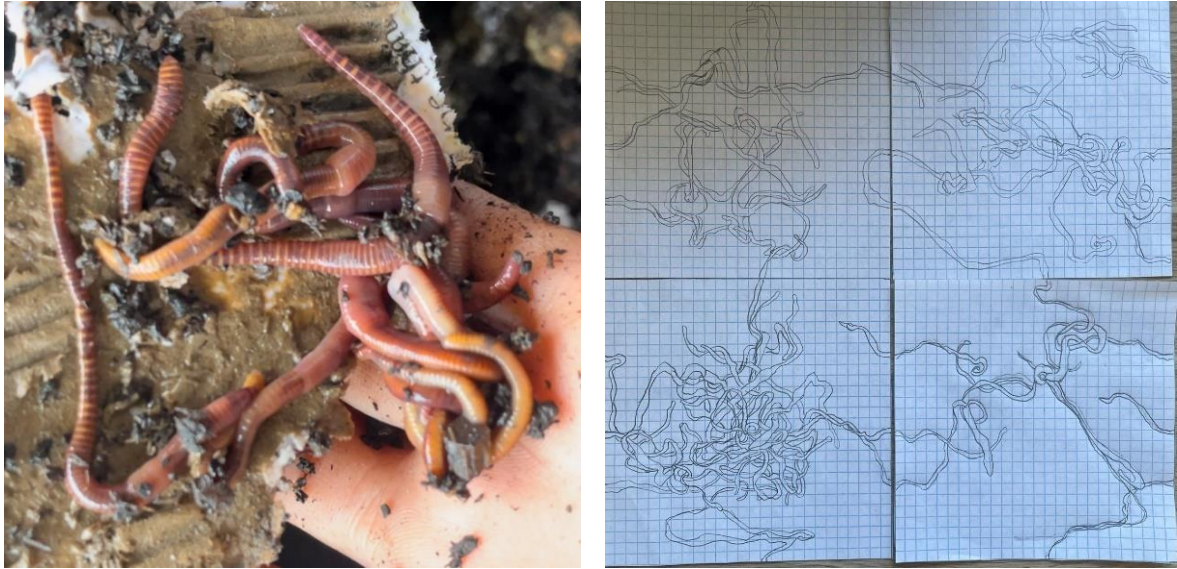


Figure 7, Authors own images, 2025, detail photo of Worms and pencil tessellation sketches

These blind sketches led to the tessellation pattern, printed on the map in my trial presentation (figure 33). The image on the right is the template of the tessellation tiles. I was finding repetitious line drawings calming and a form of deep time.

When adjusting the construction of the farm, I discovered and removed a sheet of fabric from the underside (figure 8). Here, vermi-decompositions eaten by the Worms is visible, what I believe was a first instance of active sympoiesis.



Figure 8, Hana Alison and Worm Colony, *Vermi-decomposition (sym-poiesis) form 1*, 2025, raw canvas, decomposition by Worms (vermicompost, dirt, cardboard, paper), 34 .5 x 37 cm, Site 8 Gallery presented in trial presentation

This cloth was extracted from the farm when I returned from being away. I found the farm was retaining too much moisture and therefore removed it from the base to allow for better drainage.

Journal notes 28.04

I am realising how hard care is. So much sacrifice of time. Go on trip – leave Worms – got mould.

From here, I attempted to recreate extractions like this piece of fabric and its visuality of Worm decomposing. At the time, I was also drawing from Jacina Leong's writings on compost as methodology, positioned by composting feminists Astrida Neimanis and Laura McLauchlan (2022:221) as 'valuing what is often discarded as no longer useful, and growing new possibilities from the mulching together of things sometimes treated as separate... This process is sometimes messy and make-do but always careful and attentive.' Wanting to value compostable materials, I began experimenting with placing various papers types in the farm at different layers (figures 9-12), attempting to imbue the care that is inherent in the act of vermicomposting (adjusting moisture, space and food levels for the Worms), and extending this care and valuation to the situated materials– 'waste': scrap food, paper, cardboard, Grass cuttings. As Leong (2023:3) says '[being] a human facilitator of these tender alchemies I pay attention to what goes into the compost bin.' Placing these foreign materials in the Worm farm, and their iterative check-ins, I found took significant consideration and time and as this time was attuned to the considerations of others, it inherently evoked an attentiveness, and response-ability.

Test #1 – Japanese Washi paper

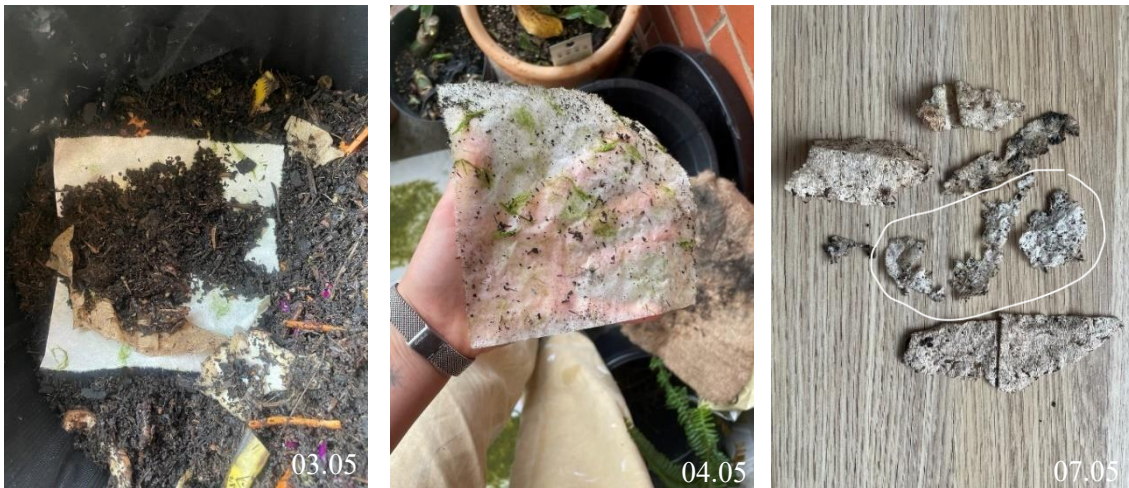


Figure 9, Authors own images, 2025, photos of Japanese washi paper test, a conducted experiment in the Worm colony, tracking the decomposition process

The intention of this experiment was to see the patterns of decomposition the Worms make to then print my tessellation pattern on top. However, the moisture levels in the farm were still quite high and the paper is very water soluble. After only a few days the paper was nearly non-existent.

The Japanese Washi paper in the far-right image is circled; the other pieces are extractions of teabags or filters.

Test #2 – Grass-papyrus and Cardboard balls

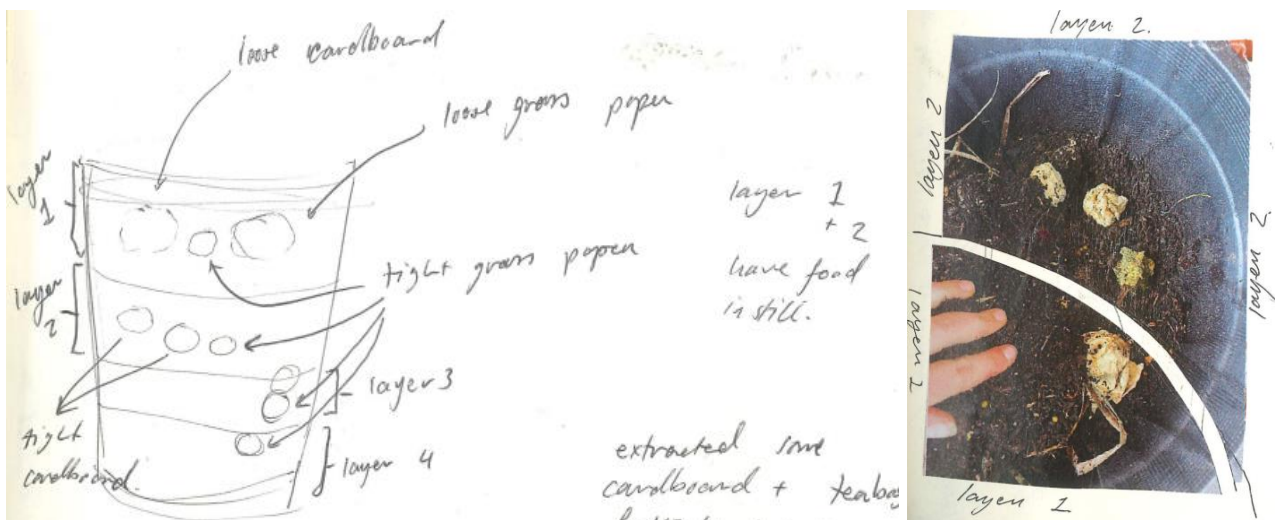


Figure 10, Authors own images, 2025, scans of journal showing set up of test layering the Grass-papyrus and cardboard balls will go into the farm

Journal notes 24.05

Layers 1 + 2 have food scraps in them.

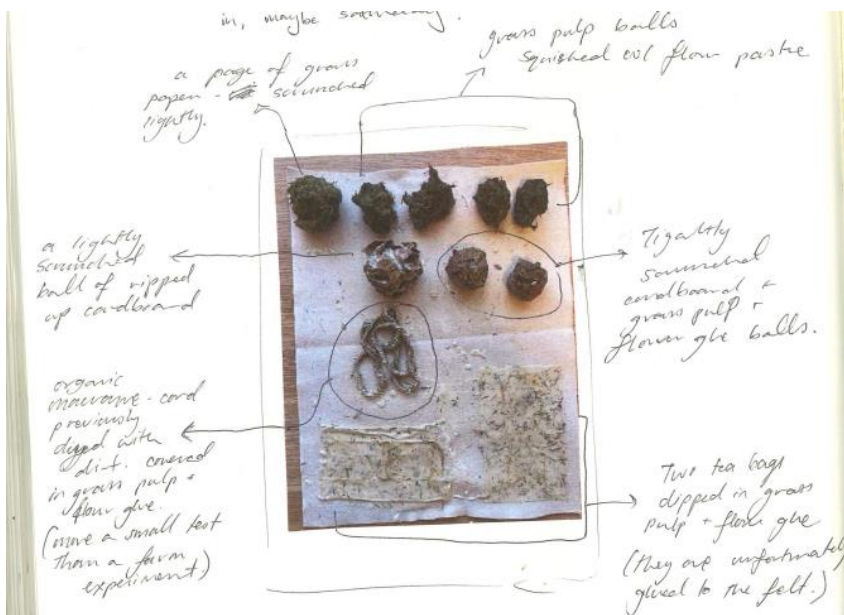


Figure 11, Authors own image, 2025, scan of journal showing Grass-papyrus and cardboard ball tests, tracking the decomposition process

Tests include:

(both bound with flour-paste)

Grass-papyrus balls – 1 x lightly scrunched, 3 x tightly scrunched,

Cardboard balls – 1 x lightly scrunched, 3 x tightly scrunched

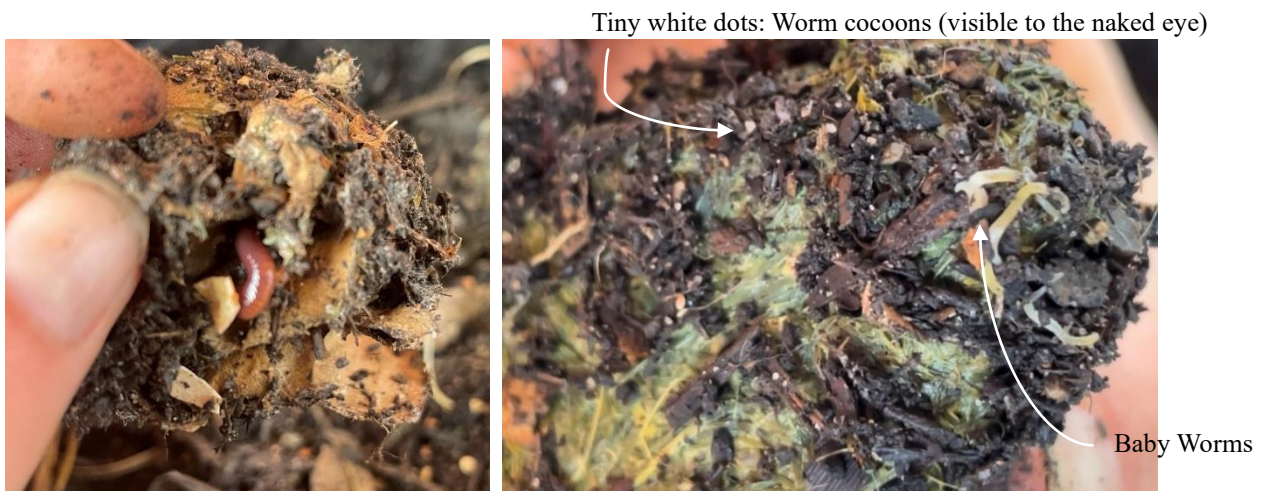


Figure 12, Authors own images, 2025, detail screenshots from video recording of Grass-papyrus and cardboard ball test results, duration: [00:17:37]

Left: Cardboard ball – loosely scrunched, from layer 1

Worms moved through the corrugated cardboard layers, however, did not go through the cardboard sheets directly. They ended up digging deep into the cardboard, so to extract from the colony I would have to pull the ball apart to ensure there are not any Worms inside.

Right: Grass-papyrus ball- tightly scrunched, from layer 3

I found the Worms did not go into the Grass-papyrus balls, loose or tightly scrunched. What was really intriguing however, was that the Grass-papyrus balls in the deeper layers were covered in Worm cocoons and baby Worms. This was exciting to see the baby Worms, reassured me in my efforts. I therefore did not remove these Grass-papyrus balls.



Figure 13, Authors own images, 2025, photos of extracted cardboard, teabags, paper onion skin, capsicum and coffee filters from Worm colony over various dates

Journal note 25.05

I am thinking the little bits of extracted teabags, paper, coffee filters cardboard are quite cool + agency effective. I like the small size, gives a feeling of discovery – fun to the work.

Allowing the Worms to work at their own pace let me come closer to less constrained sympoiesis. Where creating-with Worms, I extracted roughly fifty pieces from the farm over sixteen weeks (figure 13); however, none of which showed vermi-decomposition clearly. This was due to practical factors of the farm: moisture levels, food quantities, depth and thickness of paper. However, these tests provided me with a collection of extractions, some of which were the papers tests I put in, but a considerable amount of the interesting objects were my waste scraps. These included things like onion skins, coffee filters and teabags.

After sixteen weeks of removing ‘decompositions,’ I felt the need to conclude this work, which could go on indefinitely. Trying to strive for a sympoietic work, I found I was ‘nudging’ the Worm’s into creating these pieces, this came about by facilitating materials in the farm and then having to inevitable halt the decomposition process, extracting the materials. In recognising my actions and their contradictions to creating sympoietically, my collaborations came closer to reflecting the complications of the diverse ways collaboration works. And that acknowledging the ethical

considerations did not advert these issues, rather it positioned my work to reflect these contradictions as an ongoing inquiry. Therefore, to truly respect Worm agency and better reflect the new direction my work was taking, I concluded what I began to see as my exploitation of Worms. Thus, I introduced the Worms into my local ecosystem, where they are closer to a natural habitat. Using the pieces I have already extracted from the farm, I decided to construct an artist book (figure 37), made from organic decomposable materials, so that in time, it can be reintroduced to nature.

Phenomenology

As I developed my understanding of my project's limitations, I was heavily informed by own perceptual experiences with Worms, therefore I positioned them as a phenomenological practice, thinking with philosophical phenomenology's desire to illuminate the 'essential and invariant meanings that co-constitute a particular lived experience' (Gupta and Zieske 2024:96). Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a French phenomenologist, follows Husserl's initial conceptions of phenomenology¹⁵ and highlights its ability to be '[amplified]' through the arts. Merleau-Ponty (1962:xxiii) praises the artist's ability to 'engage our bodily senses to convey meaning directly and instinctively.' He notes this is particularly visceral when art is viewed. The sensorial amplification is a key component in my final works and throughout creation, where I believed that being 'sensual embodied beings, embedded in the flesh of the world' (Gupta and Zieske 2024:97) would encourage within myself a responsibility of more-than-human care practices. Where to be in the 'flesh of the world' is to be a part of nature.

Drawing on ideas within phenomenology, my senses and experiences are therefore brought into the work. I document my experiences of composting, walking, drawing and reflecting with photography, video, drawing, notes and audio recordings. These observational methods are recorded with no hesitations or editing, to remove presumptions and cliches, clouding experiences. Homing in on sensorial and experiential phenomena allows personal moments of deep reflexivity. Following in the spirit of composting as practice, I find through these capsules of time a deeper sense of myself in the world (figures 14, 15).

¹⁵ Phenomenology is described by Husserl (1913) as 'going back to things themselves – to how we directly and concretely experience our lifeworld – to sense the 'essence' of any lived experience.' It can be enacted through two methods: (a) phenomenological reduction, which seeks to strip away distractions, habitats, cliches presumptions and received ideas. (b) eidetic reduction, 'which seeks to illuminate the essential and invariant meanings that co-constitute a particular lived experience.' Husserl's phenomenology can therefore be better described as a method over a theory, as it entails living and experiencing.

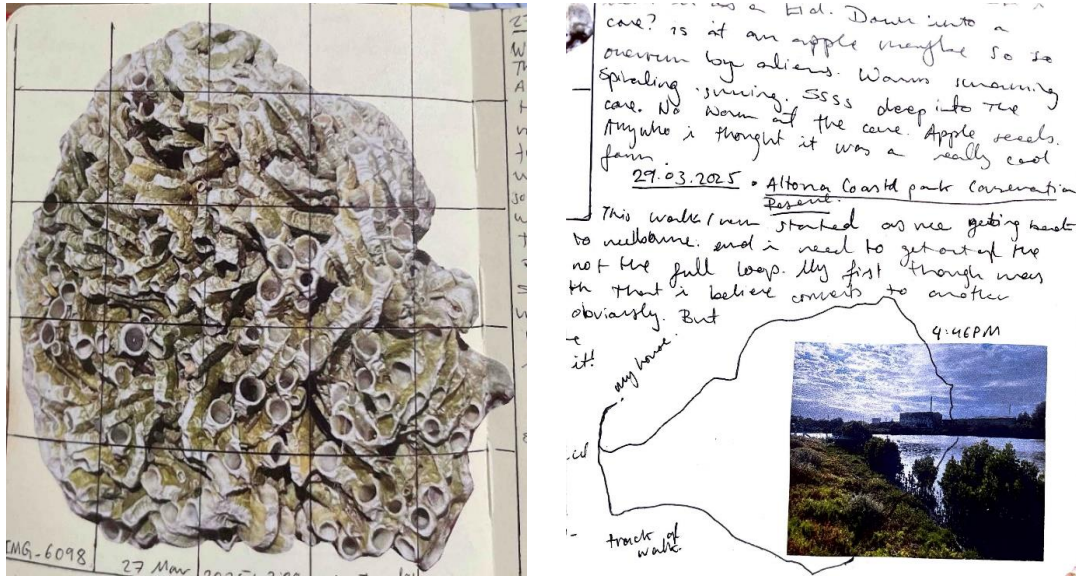


Figure 14, Authors own images, 2025, scans of journal showing photo of coral, Kororoit Creek, Altona Coast Park, Conservation reserve, reflections and map path

Journal note 27.03

This piece of dried coral, it looks like paths. What lives inside? Tunnels like those I went into as a kid. Down into a core? Is it an apple maybe, so so overrun by aliens. Worms scrawling, spiralling, swimming.

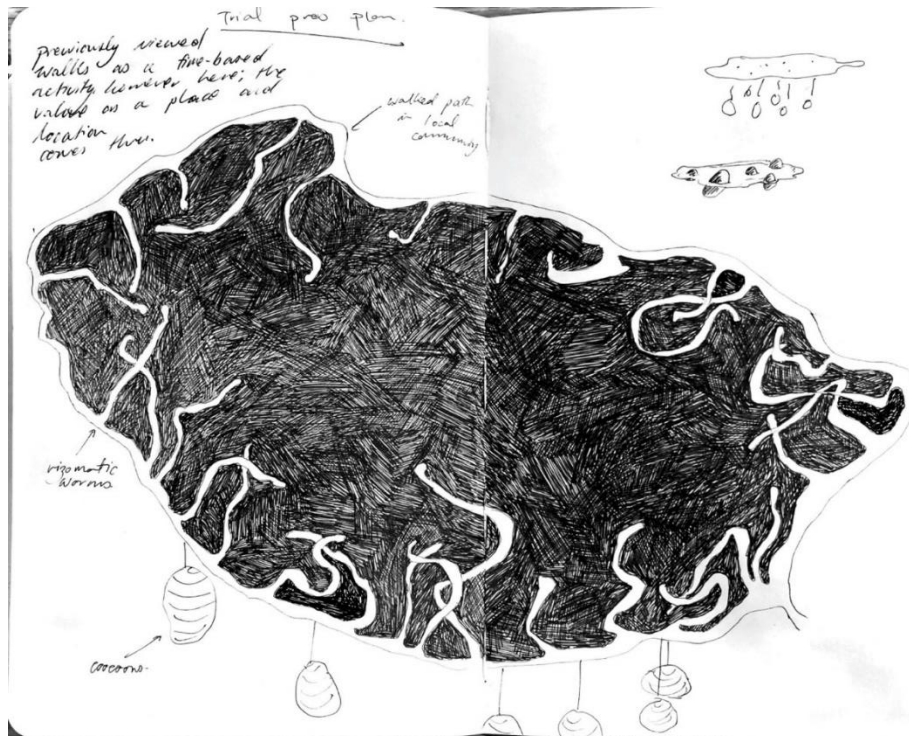


Figure 15, Authors own image, 2025, scan of journal showing a drawn map and idea for trial presentation map construction.

The exterior edge is the path I often walk around the Altona Coast Park Conservation Reserve. The wiggly lines are thought to be Worms, forming rhizomatic structures under the ground.

Journal note 30.04

Where unseen? Dirt, pot, hole, guts, core, mould, Grass.

Drawing my walking paths felt akin to mapping the movements of Worms. These paths are developed into a fictitious map, filled with the movements of Worms (figure 16). Invisible to what I see when walking; I depicted the Worms filling every gap in between steps.



Figure 16, Authors own images, 2025, photos of work-in-progress map presented in the trial presentation. Inspired by the walk and reflections in figures 14 and 15.

Other ways of homing in on sensory phenomenon include looking at localising my positionality to the place I live in Melbourne, where taking reflective walks I discovered an interesting connection with the local bird and Lugworm species (See figures 17, 18). I felt this was a necessary investigation to avoid making broad strokes about nature without experiencing physical connections.

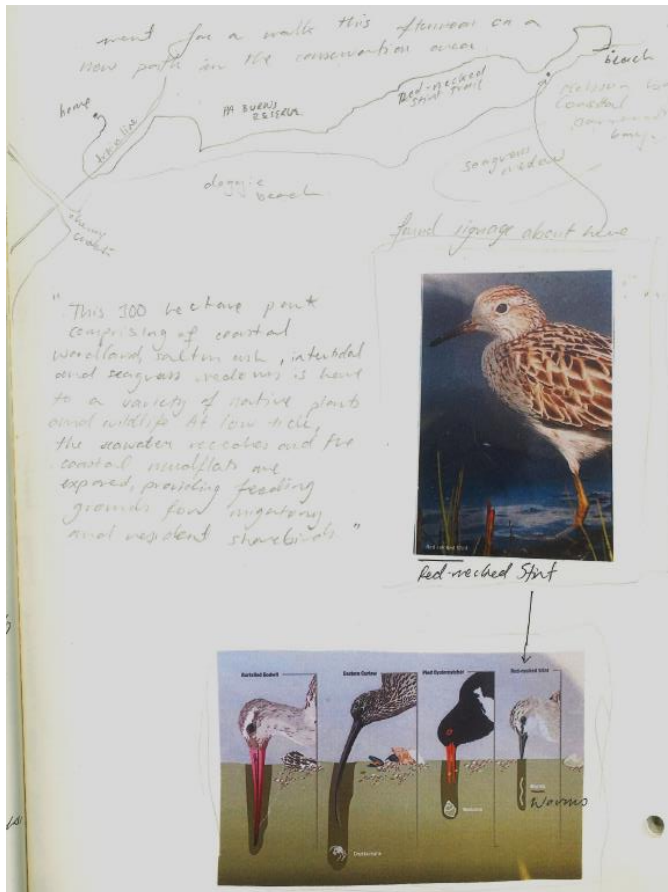


Figure 17, Authors own image, 2025, scan of journal showing local signage around Altona Conservation Park From walk on the 22nd of May. Depicts path walked and signage about the Red-Necked Stint bird.

Journal note 22.05

Seeing the signage made me consider again including some of these elements in my work. Particularly the Red-Necked Stint bird which feeds on shore Worms (Lugworms).

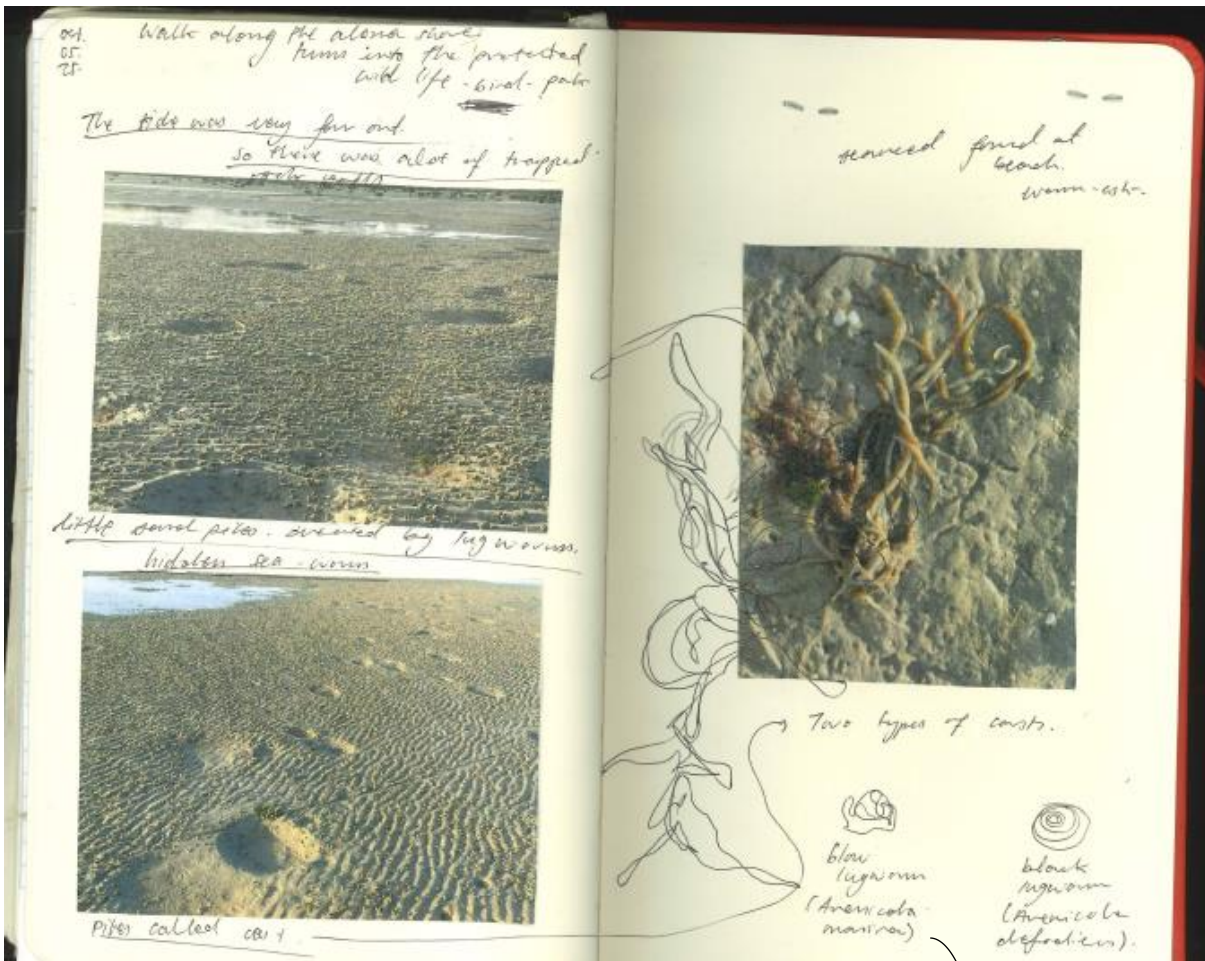


Figure 18, Authors own images, 2025, scan of journal showing photos of Altona beach from the 4th of May. The lower image was taken in a rock pool and depicts a Blow Lugworm (*Arenicola marina*).

Journal note 04.05

Walking along the beach + conservatory parks – seeing Lugworms – really makes me consider the importance and ‘nowness’ of other creatures in my local ecosystem... Could be the next step of this project, investigating the Earthworms but also Sandworms.

Mimesis

A final iteration of my methodology is mimesis, one where I am learning from the Worm's creation, and (de)composing in an attempt at mimicry. I began working mimetically because I felt, considering my responsibility as a human facilitator, using the Worm's decomposition for my academic work was labour exploitation. Therefore, I shifted from sympoiesis and phenomenology to mimesis.¹⁶

Aristotle's notion of mimesis in *Poetics* 'is that human beings are by nature prone to engage in the creation of likenesses.' Aristotle's literature also describes that an imitation is not always a straightforward copy of an object, nor does it need to imitate an existing object (1996:xiii). Imitation is more than a simple replication of an experience of nature, but the ability to create something new through the mimicry of nature's creativity, thus, within this section of making, I am homing in on speculative creation.¹⁷ Mimesis is also supported through Braidotti's (2019) 'strategy of defamiliarisation', both of which entail the creation of a new representation of a subject to invite new readings.¹⁸

Artist Nicholas Mangan engages with a mimetic process using a 3D printer, plaster and soil in his body of work *Termite economies, 2018-20*, (figure 19). Mangan re-imagines termite mounds with mining infrastructure to 'form speculative termite mining infrastructures' (Mangan 2025).¹⁹ His work aims to evidence the 'flow of matter, energies and ideologies' that are produced when human nature relationships are unstable (Mangan 2025). By mimicking the termite mounds, Mangan creates new locations, scales and temporalities of human and non-human collaboration, without compromising or exploiting termites.

¹⁶ Mimesis is used to define this methodology as opposed to other definitions of representation for its thematic similarity to poiesis, from sympoiesis. Providing a juxtaposition of the symbiotic creation, to speculative mimetic representation.

¹⁷ Speculative creation originates from literature's speculative fiction, a literary genre that departs from strictly imitating everyday reality (Vint 2022). Its theorising has been closely tied to the histories of posthumanism, and 'such works continue the project of critiquing the philosophical foundations of humanism, offering even more radical visions by which we must dismantle and remake concepts such as agency, intelligence, affect, and subjectivity in recognition that they are not qualities restricted to *homo sapiens*.' (Vint 2022:2)

¹⁸ Rosi Braidotti's (2019) 'strategy of defamiliarisation' is elaborated upon in chapter two, contexts: multi-species connection.

¹⁹ Mangan's work could be critiqued for its supposed exploitation of termite knowledges, however his work is in response to an anecdote that the CSIRO 'researched termite behaviour in the hope that the insects might one day lead humans to gold deposits; a proposal to exploit the natural activity of termite colonies for economic gain' (Nicholasmangan.com, 2018) Thereby, Mangan's work is a representation of the complex factors in ethical exploitation issues. As supported in a 2018 review: 'his imagined narrative that anthropomorphises the termite is fantastical and offers a brief alternative to the reality of the experiment that in reality was aimed at increasing human wealth.' (Memoreview.net, 2018)



Figure 19, Nicholas Mangan, 2018, *Termite Economies (Phase 1)*, 3D printed plaster, dirt, synthetic polymer paint, plywood, painted mild steel, fluorescent bay lights, 2 Sony Trinitron PVM 2130 QM monitors, 4 Sony Trinitron PVM 9042QM monitors, archival and recorded footage (continuous loop), four channel surround sound of termite warning signals. Source: Nicholas Mangan 2018.

In my own practice, I began making paper object representations of what Worm cocoons could look like (figure 20), referencing previous photographs from the Worm farm (figures 4-7). Initially, using a thin store-bought paper I quickly realised the need to create my own paper. Therefore, I shifted to making my own papyrus out of grass (figures 21, 22), with the intention of having the Worms eat the paper. However, the grass-papyrus is not receptive to any moisture, making it unfeasible to put in the farm. I instead began my own reconfiguring of the paper to emulate the appearance of the Worm's decomposing (figure 24).

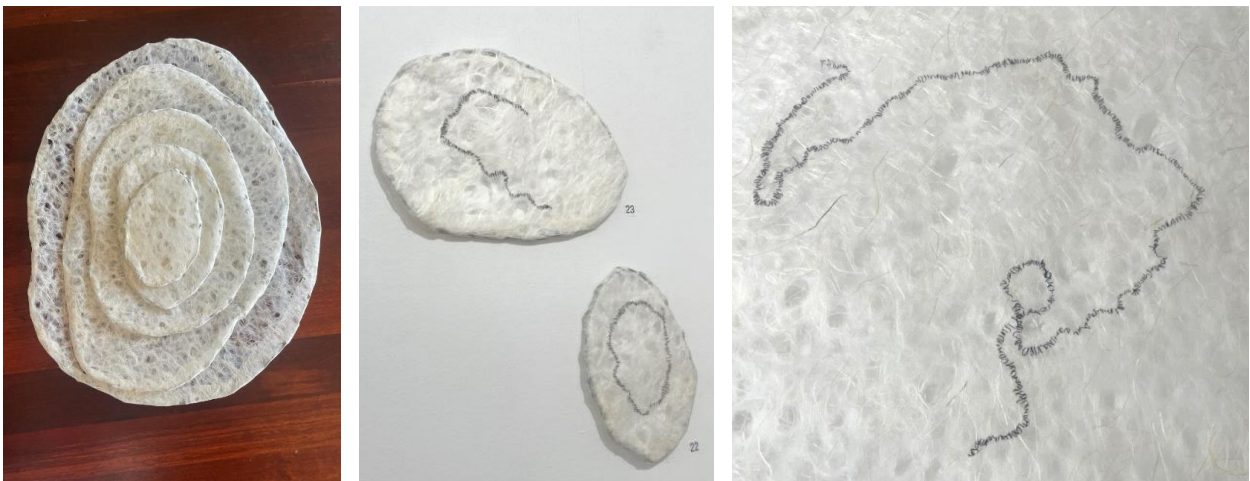


Figure 20, Authors own images, 2025, photos of work-in-progress cocoons displayed at Gallery 42, Norwood, Adelaide:

Hana Alison, *Eisenia fetida*, 2025, Asarakusui Rice Paper, thread, metal wire, 15.5 x 10.5 cm, (versions 1-5)

Largely inspired by Worm's cocooning process, exploring stitching as a form of repetition. I am happy with the stitched Worms, and the texture of the Asarakusui Rice paper, however, I did not make this paper.

Grass test #1



Figure 21, Authors own images, 2025, photos of Grass-papyrus method

The inconsistent translucency of the paper is reminiscent of the Worm's patterns of decomposition.

Grass test #2

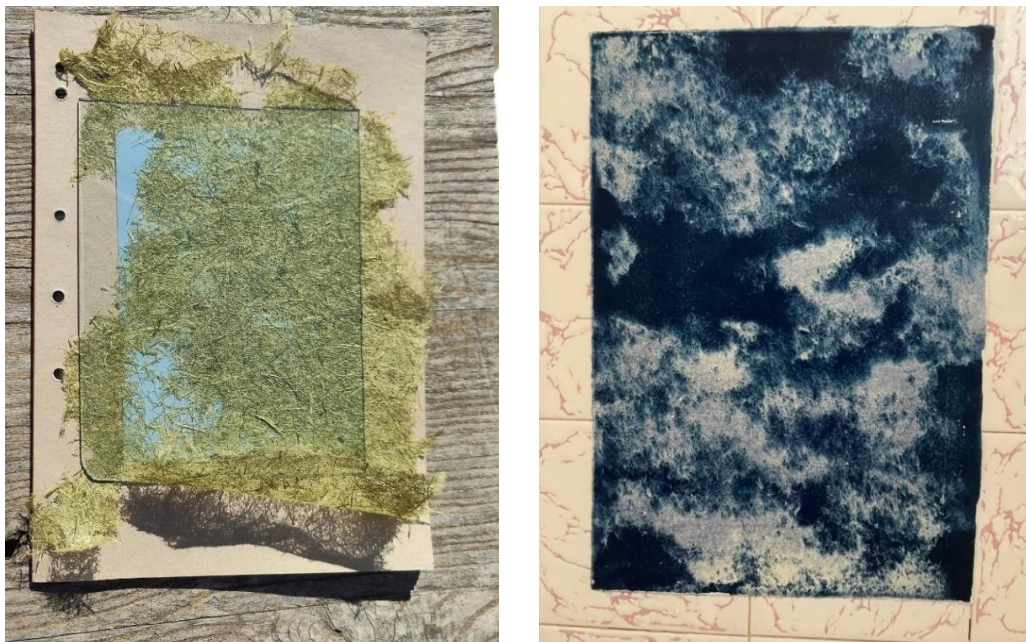


Figure 22, Authors own images, 2025, photos of Grass-papyrus cyanotype method and results
A Wormhole: Using Grass paper, as a block out in the cyanotype process.

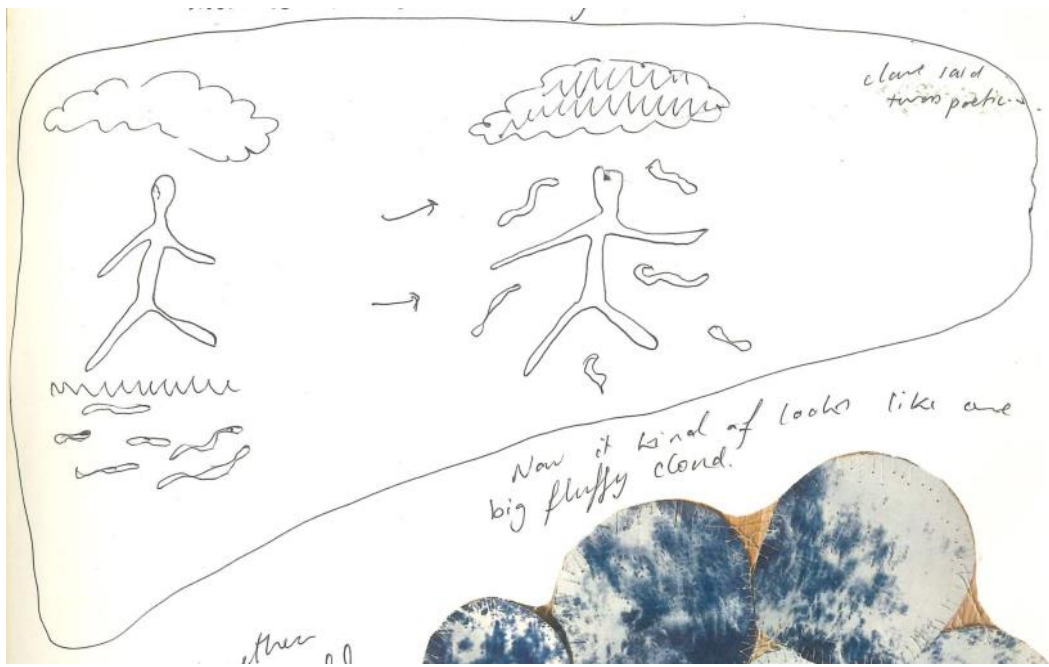


Figure 23, Authors own image, 2025, scan of journal showing a diagram of cyanotype as Grass and clouds

Journal note 05.05

My idea behind this experiment is that the 'Grass' is a denote of the barrier between humans and Worms. Therefore, if the Grass became the sky – by imitating clouds. It is as if we humans are below it, in the soil.

Grass test #3



Figure 24, Authors own images, 2025, photos of work-in-progress Grass-papyrus cocoons

The Grass cocoons are drawing from the initial cocoon ideas with the Asarakusui Japanese Rice paper.

I came to feel like a Worm myself, decomposing, breaking down grass fibres to reconstruct them into new forms. A world where I had learnt from the Worms. The forms of the mimetic representation are further developed into tunnels (figure 25). In these developments I am not only mimicking the decomposition of the grass but also speculating on paths and forms of nesting in the creation of a hanging sculptural work, inspired by previous observations of Worm movements (figures 4-7, 16, 20). In doing so, I create a work that speculatively visualises the unseen maps of Worms underground, by mimicking their movements and decompositions.²⁰



Figure 25, Authors own image, 2025, detail of *wormholes (mimesis)*, grass papyrus, Yamato nori glue, wire, dimensions variable

²⁰ This analysis is further analysed in chapter three: Reflection on Practice.

Chapter 2: Contexts

In Chapter two, I investigate the contexts: multi-species connections and care practices. These two contexts intersect deeply through a shared resistance to productionist and extractive thinking and are intrinsic to one another's formation. This chapter will investigate each contexts origins, contemporary understandings, relevant artists and my implementation.

On multi-species connection: SYM-POIESIS - a symbiotic-making practice
'Roots are taproots with a more multiple, lateral and circulatory system of ramification, rather than a dichotomous one' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:5).



Figure 26, Authors own image, 2025, photo of mint plant's roots, example of rhizomatic structure

The rhizomatic structure described by Deleuze and Guattari (1987:5) operates by offshoots, it is inherently acentric, non-hierarchical and a nonsignifying system (see figure 26), the physicality of rhizomes provides a basis for exploration in my practice, as described in tentāre-rhizome. Researching how posthumanism could be relevant to describing qualities of rhizome structures, I came across the notion of the human/nature divide, coined by Bruno Latour (1993). The division of humans from nature comes from post-enlightenment scientific distinction of subject and object (Latour 1993), resultingly encouraging the primacy of humans, authorising capitalist imperatives to justify the

possession of nature for power and profit (Horton and Berlo 2013:17).²¹ Coming to know more about this dichotomy, its hierarchical model framed the broader context and ethics of my project.

The work of Haraway was key to the development of my understanding of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene is a term from geology for the current geological epoch (Haraway 2015:258),²² where industrial humans have irreversibly enacted damage on the Earth, this is the broader context my work contributes to. Although the Anthropocene aptly names humans as a problem, it doesn't provide a structure to enact change. Instead, it individualises thus vilifying humans, exacerbating the gap between humans and nature (Haraway 2016). Therefore, Haraway alternatively uses Chthulucene, a 'collective, becoming-with, including dying and becoming compost again' (2016:269).²³ I have realised that to promote this inclusive, future-looking perspective to the cyclical relationality of nature (figure 27) –one that will foster a motivation to understand its inherent knowledge, abilities and importance– perceptions of nature needs to be re-grown.

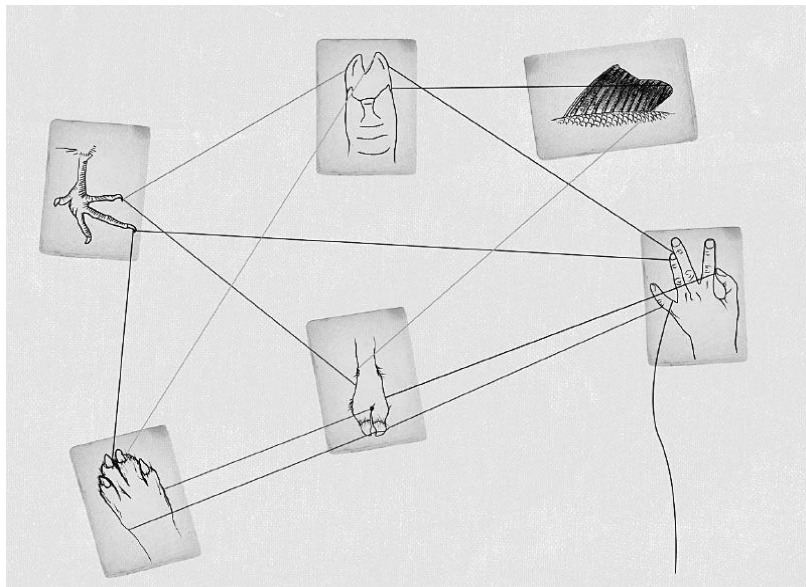


Figure 27, Nassir Mufti, 2011, *Multi-species cat's cradle*, shows a hypothetical string figure map or alternatively, a posthumanism thinking model of multi-species relationality. Source: Donna Haraway 2016.

²¹ A prominent example is the Australian government's recent approval of one of Australia's biggest polluters, the Gas company Woodside and their North West Shelf gas project. As this project will be allowed to continue for another 45 years, it will draw on new untouched natural gas reserves, such as the Scott Reef. (Greenpeace 2025)

²² The anthropocentric epoch thesis was presented in 2016 to The Sub commission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, the international body coordinating ecological definitions. In early 2024, the thesis proposal was rejected, however, the sub commission states that the term has been used prolifically within cultural understandings, 'widely agreed that the Earth is currently in such a state' (International Commission on Stratigraphy 2024).

²³ Following Haraway, I have chosen to also use this collective iteration of the Anthropocene, the Chthulucene, in this text, to be consistent with terminology that recognises the complexity of human-nature relationships.

How then do we better perceive relations between nature and humans? Braidotti in *PostHuman Knowledges* (2019) explores the complex task of understanding and accounting for the perceptions of the transformative landscapes humans live in. Braidotti (2019) uses posthuman thinking, as described in chapter one, to consider the multiplicity of subjects situated in the world. However, Braidotti warns that this mode of thinking can encourage a quantitative web of points without a qualitative shift in practices (2018: 83). Therefore, defining the qualitative indicators of post-humanist thought allows for generative results. Key criteria Braidotti lists are as follows: critical reflexivity, material locations, community-based, affirmative ethics, non-linearity and the strategy of defamiliarization (Braidotti 2013). On reflection, I have found my thinking follows the listed criteria. Material location is applied through locating place (figures 14, 17-18) and community-based through Worm collaborations (figures 8-13). Non-linearity (figure 2) and affirmative ethics is prevalent throughout methodology and critical reflexivity (figure 37) through the refinement of works.

Australian artist Patricia Piccinini's work also follows many of Braidotti's qualitative indicators of posthuman critical creativity and has been profoundly integral to my work's conceptual motivations. Piccinini's oeuvre contains an ongoing narrative of the indicators of humanity and questions our ability to empathise with those who are not human. Piccinini's amalgamation of humans and non-humans are formed as sculptural chimeras.



Figure 28, Patricia Piccinini, 2002, *The young family*. Source: Patricia Piccinini 2025.

The young family, 2002, (figure 28), depicts a mother, with human and pig characteristics, feeding her babies. Here, Braidotti's 'strategy of defamiliarization' (2019:83), a method of presenting common things in unfamiliar or strange ways to gain new perspectives is at play. Evident in the garnered reactions of 'grotesque' but also 'beauty' and 'motherhood,' the culmination lends Piccinini's chimera's to melding human-nature boundaries. Presenting human's 'animal-nature' suggests that an awareness of one's own multiplicity involves an awareness for the rest of nature, as Braidotti (2025) says allowing us to 'move beyond the dualism.' Piccinini (2025) in conversation with Braidotti asked an audience 'would you sacrifice her child for your own?' Prompting the audience to examine their valuation of human hierarchies over nature. Thus, Piccinini's chimeras contribute to the affirmative ethics that ground post-humanist intimate and empathetic relationality. Similar to Piccinini's chimeras, inspired by sympoiesis I created human and non-human mimetic works, these outcomes lent themselves to a defamiliarization of materials and form. Seen in (figure 25) the commonality of grass re-presented as a large-scale installation, encourages a reconsideration of the perceived valuation of the grass-Earthworms.

Another of Braidotti's qualitative criteria: community-based, is a key approach in my work *Vermi-decompositions (sympoiesis) form 2*, (figure 37), as the work's creator is not only myself, but the Earthworms also enacting a process of deconstruction.²⁴ In these moments of collaboration, I have drawn strongly from Haraway's sympoiesis, as described in the previous chapter. In Anna Krzywoszynska's article *Taking soil care seriously* (2023), she describes a process of conceptualising relations, evocative of Haraway's sympoiesis. Krzywoszynska considers how humans can 'encourage connections between people and soils that would create good outcomes for both soils and societies' (2023:395). In their inquiry, Krzywoszynska uses *relational ethics*²⁵ to challenge the limits of embodied perceptions. 'Relational perspectives see ethics as emergent from within situations, rather than as imposed onto them from the outside through formalised moral frameworks' (2023:403). This application is apparent in Haraway's feminist approach to articulating sympoiesis, where care perspectives are foregrounded within the creation of morally healthy relationships with other beings. Considering Braidotti's 'affective ethics' and 'collaboration-based' post-humanist criteria in conjunction with Krzywoszynska's relational ethics to care practices, enacting sympoiesis needs to be

²⁴ It could also be considered that there are other agents present in the work's collaboration. Not just the Earthworms and I, but bacteria and microorganisms present in the dirt, grass or water used in the collaborative creations. The presence of other agencies complicates the process of ethical use and representation, however, do reflect the reality of infinite interconnectedness. Considering a larger network of agential factors recalls Anna Krzywoszynska's notion of the infinitely relational *Soil Care Network*. Considering this broader lens is an interesting prospect, one that could be investigated further in potential future projects.

²⁵ 'Ethics of care (Relational ethics) are a relatively new ethics that is focused on the feminine care perspective rather than instead of the masculine justice perspective... Ethics of care emphasise interpersonal relationships, human interdependence, relational autonomy... and emotions especially healthy relation-building emotions (e.g. sympathy, empathy) in support of morally healthy relationships.' (Krzywoszynska, 2023:443)

approached with continuous consideration of participating entities, ensuring that the resulting relations and collaborations do not hold the assumption that these embodied encounters automatically lead to positive results for all parties (Krzywoszynska 2019).²⁶

Artist Anicka Yi provides an example of ethical sympoiesis, collaborating with microbes. Yi is informed by biology and perfumers, utilising senses to break down stigmas around a fear of the unknown. Creating sympoiectically with microbes, Yi investigates the paranoia of contagion and hygiene in Western society in her ephemeral exhibition *Life Is Cheap* (2017) (figure 29).



Figure 29, Anicka Yi, 2017, *Force Majeure*, from *Life Is Cheap* exhibition at Guggenheim Museum, New York. Source: Anika Yi 2017.

By co-creating with microbial structures, the work is inherently time-based and relies on a sensory engagement. Rendering the source of hygienic unease, the microbial structures, visible, Yi highlights the needs of microbes, showing a relational ethics consideration of her sympoiectic collaborators. To further this highlighted ethics, Yi (2018) applies Braidotti's 'critical reflexivity' to 'raises questions of how... sensory experiences can allow for different understandings of perception and consciousness.' Viewing Yi's work, the sensations of smell and touch stimulate the audience to consider the value of microbes for the Earth and humans. Creating a work that allows the audience to consider their attentiveness, Yi cultivates the first step in developing care ethics for microbes and non-humans.

I have found similar sensorial engagement with the sympoiectic decompositions of my own work. In my artist book (figure 37), I encourage the audience to flick through the pages, where they encounter

²⁶ The consideration of relational ethics and responsibility is investigated and applied to practice further in context chapter two: On care practices.

the touch and smell of dirt. With dirt comes moisture and flakiness, engaging the senses of the viewer, confronting their understanding of Worms as creators. Or my sculpture (figure 38) where the smell of grass is present, drawing in viewers to a new intimate space with a familiar material, allowing for re-configurations of pre-conceived material understandings. Thus, my aim through sympoiesis with Earthworms is to cultivate an attentiveness to their presence, needs and value in our relational ecosystem. In cultivating attentiveness, the ability to respond and care for their needs is fostered. Therefore, to understand an ethical approach to multi-species connection, care practices and its applications is explored in the following context.

On care practices: RESPONSE-ABILITY - ability to respond to responsibilities

This project's investigation into understanding nature through artistic insights and sympoiesis is a stepping stone towards giving insight into the characteristics of my care practices.

As care is an inherently ambivalent concept, the theoretical discussion of the moral and political values it holds is disputed and expanded from a range of perspectives. Feminist political theorist Joan Tronto (1993:88) describes care as 'everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our world.' Considering a multi-species dimension to this definition of 'our world,' care extends to our environment, non-human and non-entities. Furthermore, to understand maintaining, continuing and repairing, Tronto (1993) describes care practices as four distinct phases: caring about, taking care of, care-giving and care-receiving. Care-giving is a practice that includes a temporal weight. practicing care-giving, one must engage with effective, ethical and hands-on agencies of practical and material consequences (Tynan 2021).

Artist Rebecca Mayo engages care in her practice, documented through walking in *Walking the Merri*, (2018). Returning to a slower attentive way of being. Mayo finds, following Tronto's definition of care that maintaining our world can be viewed as a species activity (2018:34). Therefore, she observes in her own practice that care first emerges as intuition. By being attentive, Mayo takes the first step in identifying a need in someone or something. Mayo's walking offers ways of engaging with complex sites, allowing her to detour, meander and think in attunement with her surroundings, where not only space but time passing aligns oneself to a slowness (figure 30).



Figure 30, Rebecca Mayo, 2018 , *Day Four: Lockerbie to Craigieburn Map Walking the Merri artists' book /catalogue*, page 21 *Our passage along the creek is marked in green and shifts to red where we divert around Austral Bricks near Curly Sedge Creek*. Source: *Walking the Merri* thesis (2018) by Rebecca Mayo.

To transform thinking with care through practice, not only theory, Mayo considers sequential and repetitive, labour-intensive processes as a way of paying attention. To care for something or someone is enduring the laborious processes of iterative check-ins and emotional attachment. Performing this repetitive act, the time taken transforms the everyday (Walters 2012). Within my work, this begins with the timely routines of checking, feeding and maintaining the Worms and later enacted through repetitious making acts. The intentions of these acts aim to generate further attentiveness in the audience, in Mayo's work, she notices that 'practicing with care produces new ways of thinking through materials' (2018:49). In my work I have also recognised this and tried to incorporate the imbued essences of materiality through the laborious process of working with delicate materials: grass, paper, extracted decompositions and organic glue.²⁷ Evident in collaging fragile grass-papyrus into sculptures (figure 31) and specifically spotlighting the extraction's un-refined decompositions (figure 13). While the printmaking map's (figure 16) fragile materiality is specifically evident through

²⁷ Throughout the year I experimented with various glue types. I began with PVA but quickly moved onto an organic alternative, to develop the practice along the idea that all works created can be returned to the Earth or easily reused. After secondly experimenting with flour-paste glue I resultingly used Yamato nori (starch paste) glue.

the repetition of tessellations. The combination of repetitive printing, stitching and decomposing, communicates to my audience this deep-time engagement through material sensitivities (Figures 8-13, 16, 20, 37). The repetitious action of caregiving and this engagement with temporalities, allows care to be evident in physical materialities and time to be evident in care.



Figure 31 Hana Alison, *Grass papyrus (mimesis) forms 1-7*, 2025, Grass papyrus, Yamato nori paste, LED lights, fishing wire, dimensions variable

Through haptic engagement care can not only be seen as a moral stance but an affirmative ethos, that once recognised and affirmed, deep-time can be carved out. Acknowledging material and temporal dimensions imbues care with new sensibilities, becoming an act of dissent to lifestyles of post modernity.²⁸ This conversion is what Bellacasa (2017:67) describes as a ‘transformative ethos... a living technology with vital material implications – for human and non-human worlds.’ It is through repetitious practices that reconfiguring agency can be seen and our understandings of who deserves care, not only an attribute but ongoing reconfiguring (Mayo 2018), are reconsidered. As an iterative process, care isn’t about outcomes, but about cultivating attunement to non-linear time, degradation and renewal, transforming our relations with non-humans (Leong 2023) (figure 32).

²⁸ Such as the fast-paced requirements of capitalism’s work-culture and post Fordism consumerism. Feminist theorist Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017:170) furthers this critique by noting that foregrounding haptic care within ‘human-soil relations is not driven to debunk productionist subjugation of soils. But by an aspiration to engage speculatively with imperceptible tendencies that could be troubling and reworking these dominant relations from within.’

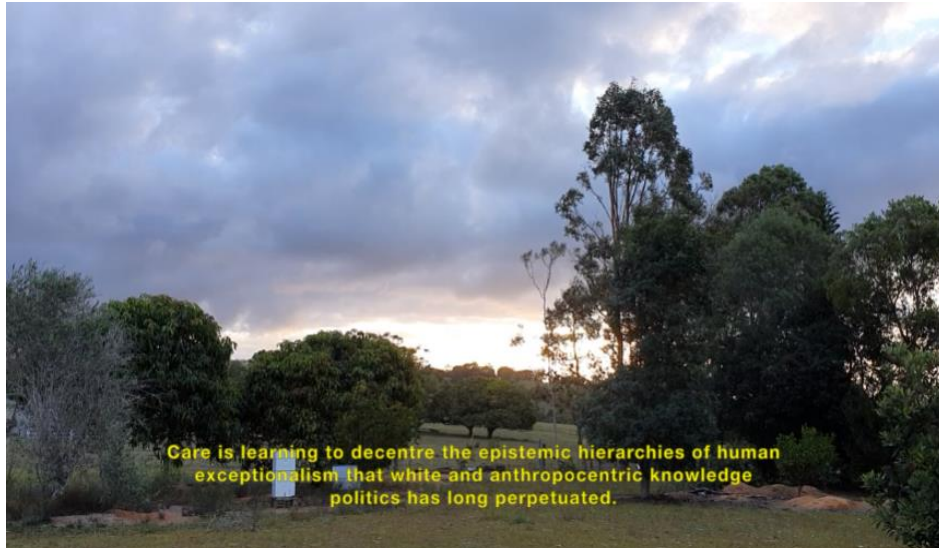


Figure 32, Jacina Leong 梁玉明, 2023, *Care is...*, video work duration: [00:04:04].
Source: Co-unfolding 2023.

Throughout this project, I recognise that composting is not just a practice for production, but also a hands-on material enactment with Worms and the importance of respecting decomposing as generative. Composting as care has led me closer to active reciprocity of interdependence. In the decompositions, Worms repeatedly make their paths, create holes and gaps, showing composing (creating) as decomposing (destroying). The Worm's agency, what they have decomposed, is not negative space, but evidence of nature's life. This process creates an uneasiness within post-modernist temporalities by opposing linear production and 'making time' for alternative progresses '[revealing] a diversity of interdependent temporalities of being and things, human and not' (Bellacasa 2017:127).

Attuning myself to different temporalities, I realise that my creative practice has developed along the theory of '*Staying with the Trouble*.' In this theory, both multi-species relationality and care practices are employed and used as active ways of perpetrating positive relations with our Earth. *Staying with the Trouble* is introduced by Haraway in her book of the same title, as '[making] kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present' (Haraway 2016:1). The 'thick present' Haraway recognises, follows the deep-time composting as practice thinking I find my work reflecting and myself increasingly considering. The 'thick present' of 'staying' in deep-time is crucial in cultivating response-ability, rejecting both a 'doomist dejection... and a futuristic hope that leaves the thinking and actions to the people of the future,' I am thus positioned to enact response-ability and not dismiss (Haraway 2016:1).

Chapter 3: Reflection on Practice

The project's research question can be separated into two components allowing for a clearer analysis and response. Firstly, *in what ways* (how my creative processes and outcomes can demonstrate praxis (theory and practice)). Secondly, *contribute to an awareness of care practices regarding more-than-human entities* (how this praxis has contributed to my contexts). The first segment will detail the key decisions and turning points, along with analysis of the final works. Showing the varied ways in which I have addressed my question, demonstrating praxis, throughout the broader path and individual works. The second section will address how these ways of praxis has contributed to my contexts and the area of practice to which I am contributing.

In what ways

My work began with striving for a deeper attunement to nature and multi-species relations, I soon came to realise, however, I was investigating the characteristics of my care practices. This realisation began with my own shift towards care-thinking, thought through on long slow walks taken in my local area. On these walks, I think about how to really apply sympoiesis. Walking helped define what feelings I wanted viewers to engage with in my work—appreciation, slowing down and reflecting on place in connection with nature—along with understanding how being out of sight, Worms are very often out of mind. How to create-with came later while sitting closely with Worms, drawing their forms and movement paths.

Drawing is the first form of representation I engage with, most evident in *Annelida wayfaring map 29.03.2025* (figure 33), a tessellated print showing how physically close I could be to these hidden creatures, melding Worms together with the paths I had walked. Light tones also contributed to recognising the Earthworms and their invisibility in our day-to-day lives. With printmaking, I was able to expand the work indefinitely and think about repetitious care.

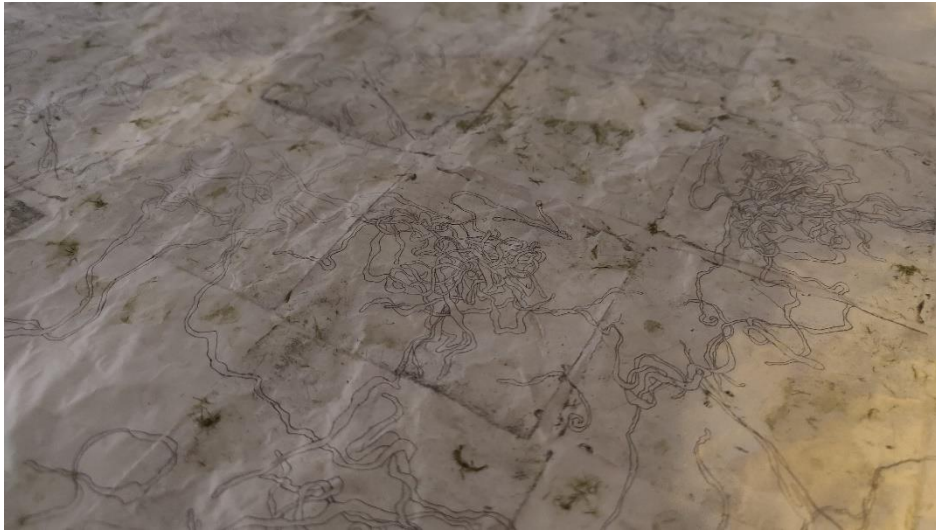


Figure 33 Hana Alison, Detail of *Annelida wayfaring map 29.03.2025*, 2025, intaglio print on Japanese Washi paper with grass pulp, Yamato nori glue, 91 x 130.5 cm

For the second installation mid-year, I attempted to re-create this map, but suspended midair (figure 34). This second print, although intriguing because of its suspension was not as successful: the circular form contains and limits the tessellation, is stiff and does not suspend well creating a visual divide in the suspended sculptural work, interrupting shadows and the weight of the sculpture. However, it has given me insight into how my practice flows; I am more effective at refining a first iteration than attempting to recreate the same idea from scratch. As the re-make comes out stifled, the initial intensity of an idea is key to fluidity in my works.



Figure 34, Hana Alison, *Unnamed mimesis*, 2025, intaglio print on Japanese washi paper, grass pulp, rice paper glue, wire, grass papyrus, dimensions variable

The second form of representation I engaged with, sympoiesis, was a key turning point. Shifting from illustrations and reflections, I conducted tests and extracted decompositions from the farm. Figure 35, *Vermi-decomposition (sympoiesis) form 1*, presented a new path of creating-with Worms.

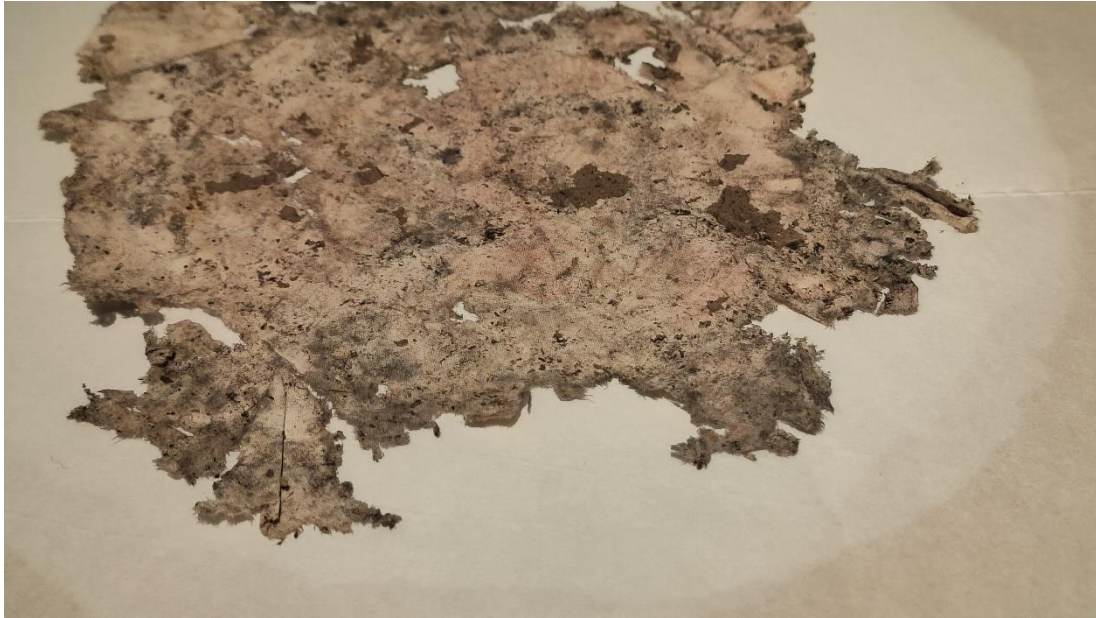


Figure 35, Hana Alison and Worm colony, *Vermi-decomposition (sympoiesis) form 1*, 2025, raw canvas, decomposition by Worms (vermicompost, dirt, cardboard, paper), 34 .5 x 37 cm

Showing this work in the first trial presentation, feedback supported my intentions, the viewers said they felt ‘child-like, and that they haven’t seen Soil so up close in a long time,’ encouraging me to pursue these processes. Conducting further tests, however, again I found attempting to force a recreation did not work. These initial extractions were too water-soluble and most lost completely (figure 9). At the same time, however, I was able to extract pieces of compost I had put into the farm as food for the Worms (figure 13). The unplanned experiments again, better cultivated agency, intriguing forms and less-humanness.

Conducting these experiments over a semester, I became more aware of the ethical paradoxes and felt uncomfortable ‘using’ the extracted decompositions. On the contrary, I was acting as a human facilitator to show the Worm’s agency, which I struggled to justify in practice because of my pursuit for the work to provide me with academic validation. If conducted outside of an institution I believe I would feel more comfortable presenting the work of the Worms, as the intentions would be for the Worms not myself.



Figure 36, Hana Alison and Worm colony, *Extractions 1-50*, 2025, onion skin, paper, cardboard, teabags, coffee filters, Japanese washi paper, dimensions variable

My ethical dilemma became apparent showing these decompositions for the mid-year presentation, presented backlit, at various heights on the walls (figure 36). Although I liked this installation visually, it did not strongly support the work's concepts. The use of pins to 'stab' the extractions and spotlighting created an archival quality, contributing to reading the work as a scientific record. This was echoed through feedback that the height of the larger extraction rarefied the Worm's products. I wanted to avoid rarefication as it suggests a detachment from the creators, their origins and contexts, therefore, moving forward, resolving the decompositions became a key task. At this point, I felt the need to conclude the tests as I could not justify how these extractions and my use of them foregrounded agency. Also, the initial collaboration felt exhausted into producing an archive for humans. An archive would provide no scientific notions, thoughts or discoveries, thus trying to align the work as such was an incorrect categorisation.

The archive, however, was encouraged in feedback received in a critique session, where it was suggested to digitally 3D scan each decomposition. Even though in this form, the decompositions could be returned to the Earth, the idea of digital remnants felt 'icky.' Icky as deep down I could tell this was against my works ethos. Each labelled digital scan would again rarefy the decompositions and counteract the works intention of recognising and caring for the Worms by removing the engagement of discovery to behind a screen. Therefore, to present the decompositions in a way that held onto discovery, cultivating familiarity and care, I began developing an artist book form, one that can be returned to dirt.



Figure 37, Hana Alison and Worm colony, Detail of *Vermi-decompositions (sympoiesis) form 2*, 2025, Japanese washi paper, Yamato nori glue, extractions from Worm farm decomposition by Worms (vermicompost, dirt, cardboard, paper, onion skin, capsicum, fabric), dimensions variable

Vermi-decompositions (sympoiesis) form 2 (figure 37), is a collation of stitched circular pages. The book is made from washi paper and Yamato nori glue, stitched with cotton thread. Decompositions are placed in pages with built up edges, each page a distinct size and shape creating an undulating form. Shown in the second trial presentation it was described as a skeletal system of a giant Worm, and the decompositions, in its digestive track, I found this a refreshingly speculative understanding. Specifically seeing what the Worms are eating was intriguing as if it is inside the Worm, the sinewy strings and pages further support a non-archival reading, that it is difficult to feel authoritative.

Alongside resolving the book and not creating with Worms, I turned to a mimetic process, the third form of representation. Mimicking the Worm's decomposition began with making grass-papyrus, trying to re-create the effects of decomposition in *Vermi-decomposition (sympoiesis) form 1*, this led to creating nesting or cocoon forms (figure 31). During an initial installation I was able to play with dynamic lighting and suspension, techniques with which I had not previously engaged. I could see the potential of these cocoons, however the forms suspension by nylon wire was a contradicting material.

Therefore, the installation of the cocoon needed to be pushed further. Inspired by holding Worms (figure 4-7) and their tendency to wriggle into one another, intermingling, seeming creating a tight knot I created a dense cocoon suspended by tunnelling paths, spindling out, seemingly indefinitely into space.



Figure 38, Hana Alison, *wormholes (mimesis)*, 2025, grass papyrus, Yamato nori glue, wire, dimensions variable

For the second trial presentation, I showed the final grass-papyrus sculpture, *wormholes (mimesis)*, (figure 38). In this space, the roof from which the sculpture is suspended is the ground floor, and the viewers are underground with the Worms—reminiscent of a metaphor from chapter one (figure 23). The sculpture then, is a representation of the negative space created by moving Worms. As the sculpture is an attempt at mimicking Worm’s vermicomposting, it is important that this act of ‘decomposing’ was physically evident. When presenting this work, I was glad to hear feedback that supported this notion. The sculpture seemed to have a ‘sense of life’ or be an organic process that humans have stumbled upon and that our presence viewing is temporary. This highlighted for me a deeper understanding of the de-centring of humans in the work’s processes and viewing.

contribute to an awareness of care practices regarding more-than-human entities

Throughout this project I have come to understand engaging sympoietically, crucially ‘staying with the trouble’ of ethical uneasiness and discomfort, attempting to create in collaborative but considerate ways. I have come to realise ‘staying with the trouble’ requires being truly present. It requires seeing who and what humans already have in new combinations. It re-shuffles the stuff of the world in an on-going cycle, in compost piles. It is in this understanding that my creative praxis not only contributes to an awareness of care practices regarding more-than-human ethics but provides an example of more-

than-human collaborations. Considering future endeavours, I am intrigued to expand my posthuman network of relationality towards technological non-humans, with the care practice introspection I have developed throughout this year.

Conclusion

This practice led research has focused on cultivating care practices through the lens of multi-species relations, investigated through sympoietic, phenomenological and mimetic approaches with Earthworms. Creating with a tentāre-rhizome methodology, my interdisciplinary creative process valued the different tunnels and paths I took, resulting in my processes being entangled with multiple haptic and reflective experimentations, meanderings and conclusions. I shift most noticeably from sympoiesis and phenomenology to a mimetic speculative creation process once I sit with the trouble of facilitating conditions for ethical engagement and representations of Worm agency.

In response to the research question, my practice has developed to reflect the reality of engaging on a haptic level with more-than-human entities. Initially, in my methodology, talking walks, reflections and sitting with the Worms, I developed an understanding of the physical closeness and real-world entanglements of humans and Worms, particularly when noticing other types of annelids, such as Lugworms. Further developed through contextual research drawing from enviro-social scientist Anna Krzywoszynska, on the depletion of soils quality and how reframing soils as ‘living’ provides new understandings.

Drawing from Donna Haraway’s sympoiesis, I extracted fabrics and organic materials from the Worm farm during the decomposition process. Acknowledging the ethical disparities of intervening and using the Worms decompositions, struggling to move forward, I found holding the complex matter of sympoietic engagement showed a truer reflection of care practices: complicated, messy and laborious. Shifting to a mimetic approach allowed me to continue paying attention to the Worms, drawing from imagery and experiences to form new speculative creations of human-Worm worlds, without interfering or exploiting the Worms. In doing so, I learnt new ways of making, mimicking the Worm’s movements and forms. Valuing small unassuming materials, positioned me to be more aware of other ethical disparities, this was particularly important resolving the decompositions. It was also crucial to upholding the values I became attuned too, those closer to the dirt. Thus, I created the final decompositions book with the notion that it could all be re-decomposed in the Earth, continuing the cycle of creation and degradation.

Key insights generated throughout the processes all contributed to recognising and complicating the reality of human-nature relations in the Chthulucene. Drawing from Rosi Braidotti’s post-humanist thought led my research towards attuning with the processes, values and issues within human-nature relations. In doing so, considering the tangled web of nature relations, non-linearity and material sensibilities, I stayed with the troubled present, where intimacy with nature cultivated compassion, where response-ability was recognised. Thus, the work produced and the documented experiences,

has addresses the limitations of current multi-species co-creation, while contributing to cultivating interdisciplinary creative praxis approaches to care practices in reference to relationality with more-than-human entities. Over the year, the Worms have taught me that praxis is not only to make-with or think-with, but to live- and die-with multi-species kin, at every scale of time and space. Down in darkness, deeply dug, displaced dirt is wriggled by Worms.

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