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Grieving with Forests: an Improvisational work toward (Re)wilding Arts Practices

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Submitted for the Creative Practice PhD.

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Declaration

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism and intellectual property.

Digital signature of the candidate: _____

Abstract

Grieving with Forests is an autoethnographic practice-research project investigating the perceptual and creative affordances that emerge when a grieving body sustains multi-modal arts practices in minimally managed forest spaces. Rather than prioritising the production of novel artworks or the development of innovative technique, this project articulates a conceptual and methodological ecology of (re)wilding—a term used here to describe the loosening of creative and grieving practices from anthropocentric, extractivist, and prescriptive frameworks. The central research question asks how a (re)wilding of arts and grief practices can activate shifts in a practitioner's perceptions of and relations with more-than-human ecologies.

(Re)wilding challenges dominant Western models of grief that emphasise closure, severance, and the restoration of a coherent subject. Drawing inspiration from habitat rewilding and resonant practices, theories, and methodologies, the thesis adapts core principles such as *embodiment, improvisation,* and *interspecies collaboration* toward creative and grief-affective practices. Through an articulation of 'peripheral' awareness as it arises in sustained practice, the project takes an onto-epistemological stance that complexity and unknowability are not obstacles to knowing, but generative conditions for relational and perceptual possibilities.

This thesis draws from ecofeminist and posthumanist thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Gilles Deleuze, and Jack Halberstam to build upon Nina Lykke's imminent materialist account of grief-related anomalous or 'miraculous' experience. My forest-based practice, emerging after the loss of my mother to suicide, is read through Lykke's framework not to determine an ontology for such experiences but to examine their affective, perceptual, and transformative capacities. These encounters, whether subtle or extraordinary, are considered for their role in reorganising attention and reconfiguring the practitioner's sense of ecological relation.

With or without the overtly 'miraculous', a (re)wilding of grief and creative practice can abide with bewilderment and disorientation in ways that enliven sensory attunement, deepen interspecies reciprocity, and cultivate a re-enchantment of ecological perception. The project demonstrates—through analysis of practice outputs and techniques—how sustained encounters with decomposition, decay, spectrality, and more-than-human species can transform aesthetic sensibility at the level of abjection, offering new perspectives on death, ecology, and creative processes.

Grieving with Forests contributes to ongoing conversations in new materialisms, grief studies, queer death, and environmental humanities. It offers contributions to conceptual, methodological, and practice-based frameworks—including a *Seasons of Practice* model for (re)wilding approaches

to grief, creativity, interspecies research, and ecological ethics. Ultimately, the thesis argues for grief-affective practice as a mode of reconnecting humans to more-than-human worlds by dwelling within the generative potentials of rupture, bewilderment, and entangled becoming.

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For my mother, who would have had a thing or two to say about all this.

And for Sam and Delilah, who tromped around with me to the end.

Introduction

We live in a time when ecological collapse coincides with a crisis of perception. Species vanish, climates destabilise, and habitats unravel alongside erosions of those relational and affective capacities through which humans have historically sensed themselves as part of wider ecological worlds. Modern Western modes of subjectivity—shaped by dualisms, individualism, and the privileging of rationalist logics—render the more-than-human world increasingly peripheral, muting subtle forms of reciprocity and co-becoming on which life depends. Within this context, grief emerges as both symptom and catalyst. Its intensities expose the fragility of inherited perceptual frameworks and interrupt habits of thought that maintain normative perspectives and keep ecological interdependence at the margins of awareness.

This thesis takes grief's affective and perceptual ruptures as a starting point, asking how a forest-based creative practice might engage these ruptures as a way of reorienting ecological relation. *Grieving with Forests* interrogates a singular grief-inflected arts practice as an affective force capable of reconfiguring perception, relation, and creative methods. Here grief is understood as an intensity—an uneven, bewildering, visceral surge that unsettles the frames through which Western subjects typically orient themselves. Its abrupt dislocations can open apertures in attention, allowing the more-than-human world to appear newly vivid and strange. Rather than mobilising creative practice as a therapeutic return to stability, this project asks how grief's destabilising energies might instead be carried forward: to initiate modes of sensing, relating, and knowing that challenge anthropocentric habits and make ecological attunement newly possible.

From there it is a simple step to the central provocation of this thesis:

What is a grieving body capable of when affective practice reorients toward more-than-human worlds?

To abide within destabilising affect requires a radical surrender of established creative habits. What began for me as a grief-adjacent longing to be outdoors—walking, arranging stones and bones, attending to insects and decay, improvising with the land—gradually revealed an emerging creative process with core principles and recognisable 'seasons'. Initially undirected by research aims, the practice became legible as a mode of inquiry only in retrospect, a lived entanglement of grief, forest, and transmedial art making. From this array emerges a central proposition: *(re)wilding*. Borrowed yet distinct from ecological rewilding philosophy[1], (re)wilding here names a process through which creative and grief-affective practices activate an unsettling of entrenched

anthropocentric habits. It emphasises embodied improvisation, site-specificity, relational responsiveness, and multispecies collaboration. Conceptually, it describes a trajectory for grief's ruptures to move with bewilderment toward ecological attunements and re-enchantments. Methodologically, *(re)wilding* functions as a research orientation rather than a protocol: an openness to synchronising with the more-than-human environments in which practice occurs.

The thesis makes three interwoven contributions:

• **Conceptual:** advancing (re)wilding as a framework for understanding how grief-affective intensities disrupt anthropocentric perception and activate modes of bewilderment, defamiliarisation, peripheral perception, de/re-subjectification, and ecological re-enchantment—exemplified by what Nina Lykke terms *immanent miraculous encounters*: anomalous yet materially grounded assemblages that heighten ecological sensitivity.

• **Methodological:** articulating a (re)wilding approach to practice research grounded in daily forest engagements, autoethnography, improvisation, and posthumanist/post-qualitative inquiry. This includes the development of *peripheral knowing*—a mode of (un)knowing rooted in relational openness and eco-sensation—and the articulation of a transferable *Seasons of Practice* model (excursion, encounter, engagement, assembly, decay), developed through and refined across practice.

• **Practice-based:** analysing a body of multimodal outputs to show how grief-affective encounters generate new perceptual and relational affordances through interspecies engagements—often with decomposition in particular—including forest-based movement, sculpture, soundscape, video, and photography.

These contributions emerge from a cluster of questions that crystallised through practice and are formally articulated in Chapter One. In broad terms, they ask:

- *how grief-affective ruptures interact with forest-based creative practices;*
- *what perceptual and relational affordances arise through this interaction;*
- *how these affordances help articulate (re)wilding as methodology;*
- *how such processes might 're-enchant' ecological perception and interspecies relations.*

To explore these questions, the thesis is organised into two parts: DAWN and DUSK. These twilight markers were chosen for their capacity to engage bewilderment and transition, making legible what light and darkness both obscure.

• **Part One – DAWN (Chapters 1–3)** establishes conceptual and methodological foundations, tracing the emergence of my practice and situating it within ecofeminist posthumanism, new materialism, grief studies, and eco-arts. It introduces (re)wilding as a practice-based research-creation methodology.

• **Part Two – DUSK (Chapters 4–7)** turns to analysis of practice and its implications. It examines the perceptual, affective, and relational transformations made possible through (re)wilding, articulates the Seasons of Practice as a transferable model, and traces how conceptual, methodological, and practice-based contributions emerge, fray, and reassemble through practice. The final chapter returns to the question of how we might 'see in the dark'—in grief, in multispecies relationship, in ecological crisis, and in creative research that values relational complexity over fixed surety.

Dawn is thought of as a beginning, and dusk as an ending. But in fact both are liminal states where beginnings and endings flow into one another. Day dissolves into night, night gives way to day. Too often these concepts are viewed as mere signposts between more 'substantive' states—as if day and night were themselves the immutable pillars of time. Yet some geographies experience extended twilight in which the sun never fully rises or sets. To undergo intense grief within a structured human world can feel akin to living in a persistent gloaming: neither fully illuminated nor fully obscured. Many traditions urge swift passage through these thresholds. Likewise, one might enter a forest but briefly—for resource, catharsis, or clarity. Against such a transactional approach to the liminal, this thesis is concerned with modes of relation that linger and dwell, that refuse extraction, that remain with the shifting entanglements of co-affective intra-action where meaning flickers at the edge of perception.

By moving through the conceptual, affective, and atmospheric margins of dawn and dusk, the thesis develops (re)wilding as a mode of practice that moves *with*, rather than *through*, the bewildering intensities of grief. These entanglements form the heart of the project, emerging from a grief-affective trajectory that unfolded alongside a gradual (re)wilding of both creative process and worldview—not to offer a map out of darkness, but to cultivate new ways of perceiving, moving, and abiding therein.

PART ONE

DAWN

Prelude

As dreams dissolve, the dim light of Dawn sketches a pale line. The mist thins; sap rises; silvery light shudders at the fringes of thought. Here, an amorphous sensorium crystallises in the first raw recollections of the human world, and the morning glow scatters emulsified curtains of night into the brittle fractures of day.

My research emerged from dawn's limitations, at the fraying edges of what might lie beyond its reach. It took place as part of a multi-year practice situated within minimally managed forests, in the aftermath of my mother's suicide and the onset of a chronic autoimmune disease. Crucially, **the structural design of this project intentionally departs from traditional creative practice doctorates that submit a body of original artistic work rooted in a candidate's prior specialist training.** Prior to taking on this research project, my primary creative practice was centred around creative writing and textual art. Here, however, I deliberately engage in a range of distinct multi-modal creative practices—including photography, sound design, video editing, and somatic movement—in which I possess no formal training or specialist knowledge. This multi-modal array is therefore not presented with a claim to technical virtuosity, nor is the substantial written volume of this thesis intended to compensate for the absence of a singular, professionalised art object. Instead, this project treats non-specialist creative processes as adaptive, immediate extensions of an eco-somatic disposition, opening up new sensory possibilities precisely through the layering of grief, movement, and interspecies engagement. Rather than a display of technical craft, this thesis functions as a rigorous, process-focused investigation into how an un-disciplined sensorium, broken open by affective rupture, can undergo material and relational reorganisation in contact with more-than-human worlds.

What follows is an invitation to grieve without guidelines, to drift without aim, to sense without judgement, and to enter the forest attentively and openly, on its own terms.

Chapter One: Origins of the Enquiry

“Beauty…is a nonviolent experience of near death, a warning that one is fragile...”

- Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic*

1.1. Motivations arising from Practice

1.1a. Ecological crisis

Urged by conditions of climate collapse and a world on the brink of its sixth mass extinction, this project joins a movement of theorists, educators, artists, and researchers experimenting with new methods and methodologies for addressing entrenched systemic/habitual intellectual, social, emotional, and economic patterns culpable in the encumbrance of solutions, reversals, and even, in many cases, a basic acknowledgement of the problem and its urgency. While this crisis is material, it is equally one of perception and relation: modern Western subjectivities have become progressively alienated from the multi-species worlds that sustain them, a disconnection reflected in studies estimating a 60% decline in nature connectedness since 1800 (Richardson, 2025). This estrangement is often invisible to those living within it—I did not grow up thinking of myself as alienated from plants or animals; yet sustained engagement in multi-species ecosystems has revealed the gulf with increasing clarity. My project begins from the premise that the root causes of ecological collapse are inseparable from these perceptual and relational crises. In this sense, the crisis motivating this thesis is not only environmental but ontological and ethical: how might we relearn to inhabit a world of entangled, vibrant agencies?

Grieving with Forests investigates how grief and situated forest-based creative practice can co-shape one another. Rather than treating grief as a condition to be resolved, the project examines what the grieving body becomes capable of when engaged in open-ended and ongoing multi-species practice, and how such engagements might shift ecological sensitivities, ethical attitudes, and modes of relation. (Re)wilding names the methodological orientation arising from these dynamics: an approach that reorients creative, grieving, and research practices toward perceptual re-attunement and multi-species reciprocity.

1.1b. The Rupture of Grief

Because precepts and affects are critical to these concerns, my thesis organises itself around an autoethnography—a singular affective forest-based practice inextricably tied to and erupting out of an intensive and prolonged experience of grief.

Grief is a collision of many emotions following irreversible loss. The affects arising from grief exceed the tempos, expectations, and perceptual frames of ordinary life. Grief ruptures and

interrupts. It dislodges, at least momentarily, the habitual coherences through which modernist Western subjectivities are organised and maintained. Precisely because of this disruptive potential, contemporary institutions—psychological, medical, social—have tended to respond with systems of containment meant to shepherd grief out of intensity toward closure, normalisation, and reintegration. The dominant cultural posture treats grief as an aberration to be resolved, a temporary fracture in an otherwise stable subject.

And yet, for many of us in the West, shaped by dualistic and mechanistic worldviews, an alternative response to the 'recovery' from grief might look for ways to unlearn the disenchantment that has made grief's intensities feel like an aberration in the first place—and then to "relearn how to understand ourselves as integrated parts of the world's complex sympoietic, symanimagenic, and cosmically interconnected assemblages, rather than as separate sovereign subjects in control of a world of inert objects in mechanical motion" (Lykke, 2021:185). As Bennett argues, we inherit an onto-epistemology that has rendered the world inert, its animacy muted (2010:65); to grieve within such a framework is to grieve inside a system already stripped of vitality. To unlearn this disenchantment—and to relearn how to sense the world's immanent, material liveliness—is a task that the intensive dynamics of grief can support, provided we learn to move *with* its currents rather than *through* them.

In my research, grief arises not as a psychological wound but as a productive embodied force capable of reconfiguring perceptual and relational capacities. The ruptures of irreversible loss can produce states of heightened attention, sensitivity, and porousness—conditions through which the world's spectral, lively, more-than-human agencies and networks become newly perceptible. It is from within such ruptures that my forest-based practice took shape: not as a therapeutic response, but as a spontaneous, affectively driven reorientation of how I moved, sensed, and understood my place within a living, multi-species field. The next section turns to the emergence of this practice and the ways grief, almost beyond my own awareness, began to reorganise my creative life.

1.1c. The unexpected emergence of my forest-based practice

The forest-based practice grounding this thesis did not begin as formal research, nor did it emerge from an intentional aesthetic design. It arose spontaneously through the intense, somatic, and affective ruptures opened by grief, drawing me into improvisational engagements with minimally managed ecological sites. These early excursions—walking, attending, arranging,

responding—were neither aesthetic projects nor therapeutic interventions, but the raw forms a grieving subject in a sustained relationship with the forest.

To trace this trajectory accurately, it is necessary to explicitly position my own disciplinary background. My foundational creative training is in textual art: I enter this enquiry with an established practice as a novelist and playwright. However, when confronted with the destabilising intensity of my mother's suicide and the immediate somatic shock of a type-1 diabetes diagnosis, the linear and representational structures of text proved fundamentally inadequate. The sheer velocity and molecular weight of this grief required a pivot toward a multi-modal, transmedial sensoria. Consequently, the traces of photography, film edits, slowed-down soundscapes, and raw physical movements found in this research are deliberately non-specialist. They operate not as displays of media virtuosity, but as spontaneous, un-disciplined extensions of an eco-somatic disposition—the lens and microphone become literal prostheses for seeing and listening otherwise. This stance directly engages what Patricia Leavy calls "the art of recognizing and letting go of one's disciplinary training," a deliberate unlearning that yields crucial possibilities for "seeing/experiencing differently, including *seeing and experiencing data differently*" (2020:172).

In this context, the collapse of professionalized artistic boundaries is not a lack of rigour; rather, it is a necessary condition for post-qualitative inquiry. It clears away the conceptual filtering of 'expert' composition, exposing the sensorium to what a grieving, porous body becomes capable of registering when its habituated habits of attention break down. This project therefore asserts that the value of (re)wilding lies precisely in its democratic accessibility: it posits a mode of relational inquiry that refuses to gate multi-species attunement behind years of specialised institutional training. It is an adaptive, intuitive approach to practice research born from experiential intensity and ecological necessity. Only in retrospect did these multi-modal encounters reveal a coherent trajectory: an evolving entanglement of bodymind rupture, complex ecological processes, and a non-discursive, non-specialist creative impulse that would ultimately generate the methodological orientations developed in this thesis.

1.1d. Distinguishing from therapy or eco-art

It is also important to clarify that this project is not an investigation into the psychology or sociology of grief, nor is it an exploration of nature-based or arts-based therapies. Although my practice may incidentally produce therapeutic effects, its purpose, orientation, and epistemological commitments lie elsewhere. Rather than treating grief as a condition to be stabilised, resolved, or

overcome, this research approaches grief as an ongoing affective force capable of reorganising perception, relation, and creative process.

Similarly, while the work shares certain surface affinities with ecological or environmental art, it does not pursue representational or audience-oriented goals typical of those genres. My practice unfolds *with* the forest rather than *about* it. Its emphasis lies not on producing artworks for exhibition but on tracing how embodied, improvisational, and grief-affective engagements co-evolve with multi-species environments to shift ecological attitudes and behaviours. The forest is not a theme or backdrop for aesthetic intervention but an active collaborator and co-composer.

What is at stake, therefore, is not healing, and not the production of eco-art objects, but the cultivation of relational capacities—ways of attending, sensing, and becoming-with that arise when grief, practice, and ecology intersect under (re)wilding conditions. The question animating this research is not how creativity can heal grief or produce new artworks, but rather: *What does a grieving body become capable of when practice reorients it toward a more-than-human world?*

1.1e. Three strands overview (grief, forest-practice, (re)wilding)

This thesis emerges from the entanglement of three strands: a grief-affective rupture, a forest-based creative practice, and the conceptual orientation that later becomes articulated as (re)wilding. Grief established the perceptual ground from which new sensitivities became possible; the forest provided the multi-species milieu through which those sensitivities were tested and transformed; and (re)wilding names the methodological and conceptual frame that retrospectively coheres their interaction.

Together, these strands suggest the thesis's central proposition: that *grief-affective creative practices, when situated within minimally managed ecological environments, can catalyse states of bewilderment, defamiliarisation, and ecological attunement that loosen anthropocentric habits of perception*.

Such encounters do not merely symbolise ecological relation—they enact relational re-attunement and invite new forms of subjectivity grounded in multi-species reciprocity.

Having outlined these motivating strands, the chapter now turns to the thesis's contributions and, in Section 1.4, to a fuller articulation of (re)wilding as a methodological and conceptual ecology.

1.2. Contributions

This thesis offers conceptual, methodological, and practice-based contributions, each emerging from sustained engagement. Drawing on ecofeminist posthumanism, new materialism, interspecies theory, grief studies, and practice research, it foregrounds how grief and creative practice can co-evolve under (re)wilding conditions. Rather than producing generalisable claims, the thesis articulates transferable orientations and processes that can inform future research, creative practice, and ecocentric methodologies.

1.2a. Conceptual Contribution: (Re)wilding as Relational and Perceptual Reorientation

Conceptually, this thesis advances (re)wilding as a framework for understanding how grief-affective intensities can disrupt anthropocentric habits of perception and activate modes of bewilderment leading to ecological attunement.

Here, (re)wilding is not a metaphor for wilderness but a process of loosening: of habitual modes of attention, of the subject's primacy, of representational expectations for art and grief, and of the anthropocentric coordinates through which eco-relations are typically organised.

Through this lens, the thesis develops a trajectory:

rupture → bewilderment → defamiliarisation → desubjectification / re-subjectification → ecological re-enchantment

This trajectory functions as a heuristic rather than a linear progression for reconfiguring human–more-than-human relationality. It reframes grief as an affective force capable of opening the practitioner to multi-species presences and processes, including the distributed agencies of forest ecologies.

The thesis therefore contributes:

- a conceptual articulation of (re)wilding as the co-constitution of grief, perception, and creative practice;
- a reframing of grief-affective intensities as productive sites of ecological relationality;

- and a materialist justification for interspecies modes of attention grounded in distributed agency, spectrality, and ecological reciprocity.

1.2b. Methodological Contribution: A (Re)wilding Approach to Practice Research

Methodologically, the thesis offers a transferable articulation of (re)wilding as a research orientation, rooted in principles adapted from intersections between arts practice and habitat rewilding. These include improvisation, embodiment, site-specificity, interspecies collaboration, complexity, and emergence.

In the context of this project, a (re)wilding orientation involves:

- Daily adaptive forest-based practice as a grief-affective research-creation method;
- A theorisation of practice as both *apparatus* and *object* of inquiry (post-qualitative, non-representational, propositional);
- The articulation of *peripheral knowing*—a relational mode of knowledge generated through unknowing, unpredictability, eco-sensation, and relational openness;
- The formulation of the S*easons of Practice* model, providing a cyclical/spiralic alternative to linear approaches;

Together, these elements demonstrate how research-creation can nurture conditions of possibility for perceptual rupture and ecological attunement, offering a methodology that is rigorous yet situated, speculative yet materially grounded, and accessible to non-specialists.

1.2c. Practice-Based Contribution: Miraculous Perception and Eco-Relational Affordances

In its practice-based dimension, the thesis contributes a situated example of a forest-based practice shaped by grief and its impact on ecological perception and relation. Central to this contribution is what Nina Lykke terms *immanent miracles* (2021:158): anomalous, arresting

experiences understood not as transcendent events but as corporeal–material assemblages that defamiliarise perception and expand ecological sensitivity. Through practice, the thesis demonstrates how grief-affective intensities can heighten sensitivity to more-than-human agencies. It explores how experiences of bewilderment and defamiliarisation open new relational possibilities with plants, animals, decay processes, weather systems, and material flows. Here, interspecies collaboration emerges not as metaphor but as assemblage authorship, and sustained engagement with death, decay, and organic transformation fosters a materially grounded experience of becoming-with, including becoming-forest.

The project also analyses several strands of speculative inquiry emerging from a broader body of practice. It traces the ways grief-affective, forest-based engagements generate multiple lines of conceptual and methodological experimentation. Among these, two strands are developed in particular depth: interspecies sensory temporalities (*Forest Soundscape Temporalities*) and abjection/decay as multi-species choreography (*Carrion Ecologies*). These are not presented as exhaustive, but as especially salient and elaborated examples through which the research's wider speculative potential becomes legible. As such, they function both as proof of concept and as generative points of departure for further inquiry.

Overall, the practice-based contribution lies in demonstrating how materially grounded, ecologically attuned, grief-informed practice can transform human perceptual and relational capacities within multi-species worlds.

1.3. Key Terms and Working Definitions

The following definitions sketch the conceptual terrain of this thesis, clarifying how key terms are understood and deployed within the research.

Practice Research

Practice research is an umbrella term that includes (among others) practice-based, practice-led, artistic research, and research-creation approaches (Mock, 2025). It designates modes of inquiry in which practice plays a constitutive role in generating knowledge—not simply as illustration or artefact, but as a thinking-with method. In this thesis, practice research names the overarching

framework within which practice operates as both method and object of inquiry: iterative, reflexive, and oriented toward what can only be activated through doing.

Research-Creation

Research-creation is the specific form of practice research used in this thesis. It integrates creative making, sensory engagement, and conceptual inquiry as a single process, refusing the separation of practice and analysis. Rather than treating creative activity as data or as an application of theory, research-creation understands practice as a generative apparatus through which theoretical, affective, and methodological insights emerge. In this project, research-creation refers to an improvisational, non-representational, and propositional process through which multi-species encounters and ecological engagements shape the production of knowledge.

Creative Practice

The creative practice at the centre of this thesis is multi-modal—drawing on movement, sculpture, photography, videography, sound design, and writing—but fundamentally forest-based. Situated in biodiverse, minimally managed environments, it relies on embodied improvisation, sensory permeability, and responsiveness to more-than-human agencies. Here, creative practice is not oriented toward producing aesthetic objects but toward cultivating relational inquiry: a way of sensing-with, attending-to, and being altered by ecological encounters.

Grief and grieving practices

Grief refers to the affective and embodied intensities that arise in response to irreversible loss. I avoid the term *mourning*, which in Western contexts implies a time-bound, normative process toward resolution. Grieving, in this thesis, names ongoing, evolving, affectively charged states that exceed psychological models of adjustment and can participate in perceptual and relational transformation.

Affect

Affect denotes pre-conscious, bodily forces that shape emotion, perception, and action. It highlights the body's capacities to register and respond prior to volition (Massumi, 1995:90),

meaning that creative and grieving practices are irreducibly embodied. Affect provides a counterpoint to dualistic assumptions about mind/body hierarchies and supports an understanding of practice as a site where bodies think and sense materially.

Perception

Perception is used here to denote intentional or affectively inflected noticing rather than passive sensory intake. It describes the shifting thresholds of attention through which more-than-human presences, agencies, and phenomena become available to experience.

Relationality / relations

Relations involve the behaviours, attitudes, and perceptual orientations through which one being encounters another. When I write of 'relating *with*,' I imply reciprocity or co-shaping; 'relating to' indicates a unilateral orientation. Relationality foregrounds the dynamic, affective, and often asymmetrical exchanges central to interspecies encounters.

Emergence

Emergence refers to processes or phenomena that arise from relational interactions rather than from predetermined design or singular agency. In this thesis, emergence describes how grief, forest ecologies, and creative practice co-produce unpredictable forms of perception, relation, and knowledge. Emergence is not a passive unfolding but an active, material event in which multi-species agencies, environmental conditions, and affective intensities participate in shaping practice.

Spectrality / miraculous experience

Spectrality denotes the qualities of grief-affective perception in which the world appears intensified, unfamiliar, or strangely animated. Following Lykke, miraculous experience refers not to supernatural events but to moments when corpo-affective attunement renders unlikely constellations of material agencies perceptible. These encounters are treated as immanent, transcorporeal phenomena—arising not from projection or transcendence but from shifts in attention, affect, assemblage coalescence, and ecological participation.

Bewilderment

Bewilderment signals a state of disorientation in which habitual schemas momentarily falter, opening cracks in normative perception. It can be harrowing to experience, but offers opportunities for productive unmooring through which new relational possibilities can emerge. Bewilderment plays a key role in (re)wilding processes by suspending familiar coordinates and inviting encounters with ecological complexity.

Defamiliarisation

Defamiliarisation is used to describe perceptual or affective shifts that render the habituated world newly strange, vivid, or unexpected. In this thesis, it marks the transition from anthropocentric perception to ecological or interspecies attunement—as catalysed by grief, improvisational encounter, or forest-based engagements.

Perceptual affordances

Drawing on Gibson's ecological approach to perception (1979), while reworking it through a grief-affective and practice-based aperture, perceptual affordances refer to the relational possibilities that become available when attention and affect are reconfigured through ecological encounter. These affordances are not properties of the world or of the subject but emerge *between* them. (Re)wilding practice is oriented toward the conditions under which such affordances arise.

Interspecies

Interspecies refers to the entangled, co-constitutive relations through which no organism exists independently. The term signals a commitment to immanent materialism: the understanding that vitality, sentience, and agency are distributed, relational, and often opaque rather than located in discrete, sovereign individuals. More-than-human beings possess their own modes of sensing, responding, and experiencing, and these capacities emerge not in isolation but through intra-active, multi-species processes.

Following Truman and Springgay, I use *interspecies* interchangeably with *posthumanism* to emphasise an ecocentric reading that remains wary of reinstating humanist hierarchies or

romanticising ‘nature.’ Drawing on Livingston and Puar’s framing of interspecies relations as biosocial and political (2011:3), the term decentres the human as the privileged analytic focus.

In this thesis, interspecies denotes the shared lifeworlds in which species interact, co-shape conditions of existence, and affect one another’s capacities and affordances. To relate within an interspecies world is a perceptual, affective, and behavioural orientation: noticing relational dynamics, feeling-with their effects, and acting in response.

Forest-based[2] practice

Forest-based practice refers to iterative, improvisational, somatic engagements undertaken within biodiverse environments minimally shaped by human infrastructure. *Forest* is here a methodological shorthand for any such interspecies zone. These sites enable (re)wilding principles —embodiment, improvisation, site-situatedness, and interspecies collaboration—to shape processes and outcomes.

(Re)wilding

(Re)wilding designates the conceptual and methodological orientation that arises from the entanglement of affect, forest-based practice, and multi-species encounter. It names a process of unsettling entrenched anthropocentric, extractivist, and mechanistic habits of perception, thought, and behaviour through improvisation, ecological responsiveness, bewilderment, and openness to emergence. While indebted to habitat rewilding, the term is used here to describe a human practice of perceptual, affective, and relational unlearning.

1.4. Overview of (Re)wilding Principles

(Re)wilding, in the context of this thesis, is neither strictly method nor system but a field of affective responsiveness: a way of entering into relation with ecological processes such that the human is partially reconfigured through embodied, multi-species, and material entanglements. Rather than seeking stability, mastery, or aesthetic coherence, (re)wilding draws the practitioner

into conditions of dissolution, contingency, and recomposition that animate ecological life. It situates the human within the living field rather than attempting to stand outside or above it.

The principles below function as *orientations* rather than procedure. They provide groundwork for the more detailed articulation in Chapter Four (where (re)wilding and the Seasons of Practice are rendered legible as methodological frameworks), for their theoretical elaboration in Chapter Five, and for their practice-based evidencing in Chapter Six.

Embodied Practice (Ecosomatic Attunement)

At the heart of (re)wilding is a return of perceptual authority to the body. Embodiment here is not introspective but permeable: an ecosomatic attunement to the transcorporeal currents of human, microbial, vegetal, and geological processes. In this register, to know is to be affected. Perception becomes something generated *between* bodies rather than within a discrete self, an ethics of attention, a way of letting the body be reconfigured by its interspecies and ecological contexts.

Site-Specificity (Transcorporeal Relations)

(Re)wilding relies on sites where ecological processes unfold with minimal human design. In this thesis, *forest* names a material organic topology whose compositional forces cannot be choreographed or predicted. Site-specificity recognises the land's own agencies: a forest is an active, shifting assemblage of organisms, relations, and desires. Engaging these sites means allowing the dynamics of ecological process—often slow, cyclic, erratic—to co-compose the conditions of the work, shaping not only what is made but what is made possible.

Improvisation (Thinking-in-Action)

Improvisation offers a means of thinking through action that remains responsive to unpredictability. It resists pre-scripted gestures and conceptual foreclosures, keeping affect mobile and unresolved. Improvisation sustains bewilderment—a perceptual state that interrupts habitual framing—as a lens for discovery that keeps perception open to the periphery. This kind of "thinking in action" (Manning & Massumi, 2014:88) allows the practice to remain adaptive, experimental, and oriented toward encounter rather than outcome.

Multi-Species Collaboration (Assemblage Authorship[3])

(Re)wilding presupposes that plants, fungi, insects, soil communities, weather systems, and material processes participate in shaping practice. Collaboration here does not assume parity or consent, but adopts a willingness to be moved by other agencies. Authorship becomes distributed across assemblages of human, birdcall, fungal bloom, terrain texture, grief-triggered memory, fallen oak, shifting light. The practitioner curates rather than commands, framing moments without striving to solve or master.

Emergence & Complexity

Across these principles, embodiment, site-specificity, improvisation, and multi-species collaboration continually reconfigure one another. In ecological systems, emergence arises from complex interactions among diverse organisms; over time, these interactions privilege new behaviours, relations, and forms of life. Likewise, in (re)wilding practice, a diversity of gestures, encounters, methods, and temporalities provides the strata from which perceptive and creative events arise. Emergence occurs when practice and environment intra-act in ways that cannot be predetermined, allowing unexpected outcomes and novel relational patterns flicker into view.

1.5. Origins of the Practice

The practice anchoring this thesis did not begin as research. It began with life breaking open. On October 26th, 2017, sometime between 7:30pm and midnight, my mother left her Montana house and walked alone across four or five acres of open sagebrush to a dry irrigation ditch that flows only in summer months. There, at the border of her property, official police reports say she died instantly from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. It was in the dark of night under a waxing crescent moon. Her reasons must have been immensely complex and personal, but one possible cause is that she had spent the past seven years on a crusade to keep her husband from dying of cancer, and that earlier in the month a team of neuroendocrine specialists told her it was time to give up the fight.

My mother's name was Alexis. She'd held onto my father's last name of Wagner after the divorce because it was the one her patients knew. She'd been a small-town doctor, running her own medical practice by day and researching new cancer treatments in the evenings. Her second husband Steve had been diagnosed stage four less than a year after their wedding. She was truly in

love for the first time in her life and they gave him six months. With her great medical battle of seven years coming to an end, I don't think she could face the pain and emptiness of finally losing him.

I was living in Osaka at the time, in a tiny studio apartment in Tennoji ward with a little balcony overlooking the Shinkoji temple. That morning I was working on the novel I'd moved to Japan to finish. Mom sent me a Facebook message telling me I was a good son. To this day I'm grateful I was not too busy to respond, and that I felt no hesitation in letting her know what a terrific mother she'd always been. She responded with typical self-deprecation, and I thought nothing of it at the time. I continued my work. But a couple hours later, a strange sense of unease fell upon me. I hopped back onto Facebook and asked her if we could talk. No reply. I called her phone. She didn't answer. I called my step-sister and was told no one knew where Mom was, but that people were out looking for her. I spent the next hour in a frenzy of agony and terror. I took a walk through the temple across the street and made the standard bargains with whatever gods might be listening. I returned to my apartment and waited for the call from Steve that would drag me screaming to the floor.

My ticket to fly home for Christmas was already booked. The airline kindly changed it for me. I would catch a plane from Tokyo to Seattle in three days. Until then, I was completely alone. The crisis of those days brought me as near a breaking point as I have ever been. I had no family or friends in the country, and few options for comfort; but it seemed odd at the time that I could hope for anything like comfort anyway. What comfort could there be for such loss? So I made a choice to dive as deep as I could into the epicentre and intensity of my grief.

The pain felt cellular. I grew burdened beneath a terrible need to *fix this*, to change what had happened, to reverse the horrific event. There must be some way, I thought; and in my dissociated state, I determined to make every effort to travel back in time. I truly believed it was possible. I would go back and stop it, undo it. This would be a process borne out in my imagination, a process I had never attempted or even considered before.

So I closed my eyes and tried to conjure the time and space in which I imagined my mother's final moments. I pictured her sitting on the bank of the ditch in the dark with her pistol in hand. I replayed the horrific moment (as I could only imagine it) again and again, but remarkably I found it impossible to compel even a mental reproduction of events in which I was able to prevent her from pulling the trigger. No force of will could make the scene play out in any other way. After nearly an hour of trying, struggling, begging, I decided that if my consciousness *was* actually traveling to the past to participate in the event, then I truly had no power to change things. And yet, perhaps I might find a way to comfort her in those last moments. Perhaps I could make myself known, and make

certain she at least did not feel alone. When I shifted to this approach, the intensity of my bereavement subsided. I could almost believe I had managed this unlikely feat of temporal communication, and that she had, in some timeless ontology of her final experience, genuinely sensed my presence with her at the end. As incomprehensible as this might sound, I also cannot judge it absolutely impossible. I wouldn't actually be altering any timelines responsible for constructing the present world—so why not? It seemed the best I could do, and at the very least, the exercise got me home alive.

Two weeks later, shortly after my mother's memorial, I would be diagnosed with type-1 diabetes. On the 16th of November at 7:09pm, I posted the following: "limited access to the sea due to inability to leave bed (wacky paradox). Seizures, chronic dry mouth, vomiting and other strange exorcisms." That night, my brother wheelchaired me onto the beach, where I collapsed. My last memory is falling out of the chair, falling and falling into darkness without end. I woke up days later in OSU intensive care (Nov. 19th or 20th). They had induced a coma due to my near inability to breathe and began treating me for severe ketoacidosis. My blood sugar was recorded at over 1200 mg/dl (66 mmol/mol) upon admission. I emerged from my coma heavily buffered by industrial doses of fentanyl. It made for a strange home(world)coming that also included a fair share of temporal distortions, deja vu loops, and other phenomena curiously suggestive of time travel. Since diagnosis, I have been insulin-dependent and subject to multiple daily injections. I use an embedded sensor to monitor my glucose levels. Were I ever to go off insulin, I would not survive long. In this way, death remains a presence in my life, a haunt and a shroud.

My medical circumstances are relevant to my project for at least two reasons.

First, situating myself as insulin-dependent matters when the creative practice in question concerns long walks and sometimes vigorous movement. Even limited exercise can dramatically lower my blood sugar, and it requires consistent monitoring to keep from severe and potentially life-threatening hypoglycaemia. Before diagnosis, I had been a long-distance wanderer. Rambling in urban, rural, and 'wild' areas was one of the great joys of my life. The limitations that T1D has imposed on this practice have been difficult. However, I no longer take the ability to walk freely for granted, and I am able to focus on the practice more critically as both object and methodology for research.

Second, the proximity of my diagnosis to my mother's death is too near to ignore. The dry mouth had begun two days after she died. Before getting on the bus to Tokyo airport, I purchased a water, an orange juice, and a coke. I hadn't had a soda in years, but the carbonation somewhat soothed the irritating mouth sensation that would not ease up until after my hospitalisation. Additionally, as soon as I landed in the US, my friends all commented on how skinny I looked. I

had lost nearly 20lbs in four days, assuming my illness hadn't begun to manifest *before* then in ways I hadn't noticed. Because of these correlations of symptoms, I felt certain in early days that they were 'only' expressions of grief in my body (as if grief weren't serious, as if grief-as-cause somehow inoculated my body from its effects), and I never imagined it might be medical—so wide was the gulf between what I considered 'emotional' and 'physical'. The ultimate question of whether the news of Mom's death triggered a latent condition or *caused* the autoimmune reaction outright is something I may never know. Nevertheless, the notion that there is no connection whatsoever between my physical and emotional traumas is difficult to take seriously.

In fact, accounts reveal that it is not at all uncommon for grief to manifest somatically. Whether it has ever resulted in chronic or terminal illness—or in premature death—remains unverified but more than reasonable. Because my own research imbricates grief within embodied movement practices, these details have the potential to inform analysis, conclusions, and future research. Whether or not my illness and my grief exist in causal relationship, both originated within close temporal proximity, and have therefore enveloped one another, developing together over the past several years like a dance. My senses and concepts have since undergone dramatic reconfigurations, destabilising those familiar coordinates through which I once lived and made art.

An Emerging Practice

Despite a long history of discursive and representational artistic work, I soon found myself moving toward activities that bore no resemblance to my prior practices. Instead of writing fiction, I was now dragging stones across open fields, raising small circles. I wandered iterative paths through forests. I knelt beside decomposing birds, communed with birds, insects, and weather patterns. I tried to empathise with fleeting mushrooms. I spoke to trees. I buried roadkill in the earth.

The practice persisted, though I did not think of it as a practice for a long time. But over months and years, certain patterns clarified: a sense of kinship with particular plants, animals, insects, and locations; perceptual states that operated just outside my usual understandings of self, art, or nature; and moments of vivid relationality—improbable or unusually precise—that would later resonate with Nina Lykke's theory of immanent 'miraculous' encounter. Eventually, there came a point—subtle but unmistakable—when these engagements began to feel less like isolated events and more like a trajectory. Reciprocal interaction between grief and practice hinted at questions I did not yet know how to ask. That was the moment the practice began to fold into research, not because I decided it should, but because its dynamics demanded articulation. I immediately switched gears in

my project. *This* was my practice, *these* were the burning suspicions, and *here* was the work that felt like it mattered most.

In 2020, I moved to Ireland to begin a year of house-sitting/dog-sitting just outside Neidin (Kenmare) along the complex coastal topography of County Ciarraí (Kerry). I stayed in an unfinished cottage heated by a solid-fuel Rayburn that also supplied hot water and doubled as my stove and oven. There was enough electricity to power the fridge, two or three lights, and my laptop. The experience of 'roughing it' out in the Kingdom was where the sporadic practice of raising stone circles and walking rural psychogeographies shifted into a consistent engagement with a specific, minimally managed native woodland I came to call Goblinwoode, situated within the mountainous townland of Mucshnámh (Mucksna). The owner of the cabin where I stayed had been raised here, and he sometimes told me stories of his father traversing the wood on old wagon trails that were now only visible as narrow traces in the undergrowth.

Locating the practice within this particular landscape requires acknowledging the postcolonial weight and cartographic realities sedimented into the Irish terrain. Unlike the vast, public tracts of sub-alpine sagebrush in Montana, the Irish rural landscape is densely layered with histories of enclosure, colonial cartographies, and ancestral patterns of access and exclusion. Walking here is an interloping act of negotiating private land boundaries and fragmented habitats. Goblinwoode sits within this historical fabric, a sanctuary of regenerating native oak, hazel, ash and rainforest mosses whose seasonal rhythms became active partners in the work. As we consider how I was able to work (and play) at this site, both with my grief and with the many changes in how I was experiencing my mother's 'becoming forest', it is important to keep in mind the generations who have worked, played, grieved, and perhaps even killed and died on and over this land. The use and exploitation of territory resulting in biodiversity loss cannot be detangled from how societies, cultures, and individuals have used and exploited one another.

1.6. Why This Methodology? Practice Research and Autoethnography

As mentioned, practice functions in this project/thesis as both method and object of inquiry: iterative, processual, relational, and oriented toward discovering what thinking-through-practice can activate. Within this framework, *Grieving with Forests* aligns with the broader field of practice

research, while its methodology emerges directly from the evolving dynamics of practice. Following Roberta Mock's (2025) typology, this project's primary focus is *process-driven*—its principal contribution lies in articulating the orientations, dynamics, and perceptual shifts of (re)wilding. It is also *aesthetic*, in that it critiques representational, resolutional, and product-oriented models of creative practice and mourning; and *platform-oriented*, in that it theorises the 'technologies' of forest-based practices, including (re)wilding principles and its Seasons of Practice model.

Improvisation, Emergence, and the Shape of the Research

The research design developed improvisationally, not from methodological looseness but from alignment with the project's own ecological and affective logic. (Re)wilding privileges responsiveness, instability, and emergence; it therefore required a methodology capable of evolving in dialogue with practice rather than imposing a predetermined structure.

As in Trimingham's (2002) spiral model, the work moved cyclically—returning, revising, and unfolding rather than progressing linearly. Truman and Springgay's account of *propositional research* further supports this approach: propositions function "as hybrids between potentiality and actuality" (2016:130), enabling inquiry to move through experimentation rather than the demands of data extraction. In this project, relinquishing procedural control opened conditions in which oblique relational, affective, and ecological dynamics could emerge—an epistemic stance akin to adopting productive degrees of unknowing.

Non-representational and Post-qualitative Groundings

The project draws on non-representational theory and post-qualitative research-creation. It is *non-representational* in its commitment to animating lifeworlds in ways that "enliven, render, resonate, rupture, re-imagine, and generate possibilities for fabulation" (Vannini, 2015:319-320), and in its attending to affective, ecological, and relational processes directly, rather than translating them into symbolic meaning. It is *post-qualitative* in its refusal to let inherited methods "over-determine thought and practice, closing off what might be thought and done" (St. Pierre, 2021:164). Instead, it foregrounds immanence, relational emergence, and the generativity of encounter. Within this orientation, interspecies encounters become methodological events: they reorganise perception, shift affordances, and alter the conditions of inquiry. Knowledge arises not through generalisation but through situated, relational articulation and the synthesis of practice and theory.

Autoethnography: Depth, Not Breadth

Because the research engages a singular, situated practice, autoethnography provides necessary depth and texture. Its value lies not in representing a universal experience of grief but in offering a counter-narrative to production-oriented creative process and resolution-oriented models of mourning. Autoethnography enables the articulation of perceptual, affective, and relational transformations that cannot be captured through external observation alone. It also foregrounds accountability: situating the researcher-practitioner within the ecological assemblages they study, and acknowledging the affective and ethical stakes of those relations.

Methodological Lineages

The project draws from multiple practice methodological currents, including walking methodologies, psychogeographies, improvisational movement, ecosomatics, and sympoiesis. It adopts a rhizomatic, syncretic approach—following connections across disciplines and practices while resisting categorical closure. It is informed by discourses of unknowing (Olsen, 2022), opacity (Glissant, 1997), the epistemology of the ferox (Halberstam, 2020), and process philosophies of affect and relation (Manning & Massumi, 2014). Situated within posthumanist, new materialist, and ecofeminist frameworks (Deleuze, Haraway, Braidotti, Lykke), the project contributes to reimagining affective, ecological, speculative, and immanent modes of knowing.

Provocation as Method: "Can Forests Grieve?"

Late in the research, I posed the question of whether forests might grieve. The question was not intended to be answered, but deployed as a methodological provocation[4]. Its function was to surface and unsettle assumptions that had become naturalised within my thinking, opening them to scrutiny. Such questions—speculative, unsettling, and partially unknowable—operate within this project as methodological openings rather than epistemic endpoints, generating conceptual movement by tracing grief's ontological contours and prompting inquiry into interspecies relation and ecological autonomy. In this research, provocations work in tandem with propositions, structuring cycles of practice and sustaining the inquiry's momentum.

Rigour, Play, and the Methodological Stakes of (Re)wilding

Improvisation introduced chance, contingency, and intuition into the practice, but not at the expense of rigour. As Nelson notes, rigour in practice research lies in *syncretism*—the ability to bring diverse materials and influences into meaningful relational play (2013:34). This project embraces playfulness as a strategy: a way of cultivating attunement to more-than-human agencies and of sustaining movement throughout overwhelming affective intensities.

The light-footed bewilderments intrinsic to improvisation support (re)wilding's methodological commitments: receptivity, vulnerability, complexity, and a relinquishing of centralised control. In this spirit, (re)wilding resists the eco-alienation characteristic of modern Western subjectivities, disrupting binaries such as wild/domestic, nature/culture, human/non-human, and subject/object. It embraces not-knowing, instability, and intersubjective agency as generative conditions for research-creation. This methodology inhabits, rather than resolves, the ruptures of grief; it privileges relational responsiveness over certainty; and it positions creative practice as a site for ecological and affective reorientation.

1.7. The Research Catalogue Exhibit

This project comprises two interrelated components forming a single research assemblage.

1) the written dissertation, which integrates autoethnographic, theoretical, and methodological analysis;

2) a Research Catalogue (RC) exhibit, which documents the multimodal forest-based practice grounding the research.

The dissertation articulates the project's conceptual and methodological contributions, while the parallel Research Catalogue (RC) exhibit serves as an integral part of the methodological apparatus, providing situated, sensory documentation of the core practice. Operating not as a collection of finished or coherent artworks, the exhibit functions as an evidentiary archive of processes, encounters, and perceptual shifts that cannot be fully conveyed textually. It records the iterative unfolding of the research—its excursions, encounters, engagements, and transformations—allowing

readers to confront the materials, sites, and multi-species relations through which the inquiry developed.

Taken together, the exhibit materials:

- offer a textured account of a singular grief-affective forest practice;
- provide practice-based evidence for the methodological and theoretical claims elaborated in the dissertation;
- extend the written analysis into sensory registers otherwise inaccessible to text alone;
- demonstrate how (re)wilding arises in and through lived practice.

Because the project asks how intensities of grief interact with forest-based creative practice—and how such interactions shift perceptual, ethical, and ecological sensibilities—the RC exhibit supports the research questions directly. Media referenced throughout the thesis correspond to specific methodological principles, perceptual affordances, or autoethnographic events, and readers are encouraged to encounter each referenced item in situ.

Navigating the RC Exhibit

This exhibit, *An Interspecies (Re)wilding of Practice and Process*, can be accessed at:

https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503234

and its collection preserved at the *Digital Repository of Ireland*:

https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/bc38mm50j

The core element within the exhibit's structure reflects the iterative cycle later articulated as the Seasons of Practice: excursion → encounter → engagement → assembly → decay. Materials are labelled with approximate dates and locations and, where helpful, accompanied by contextual notes. None are presented with claims to originality in and of themselves as finished artworks; they operate instead as practice artefacts—traces of affective shifts, multisensory engagements, and multi-species encounters that illustrate how the (re)wilding methodology developed.

Modes of Practice Included

1. Photography

Photographs document key moments, material outputs, ephemeral configurations, and more-than-human collaborations. Photography operated in this project largely as a *way of seeing*: each lens mediates attention differently, shaping the affordances of observation and relational attunement.

2. Creative Journalling

Short vignettes, essays, and poetic fragments emerging directly from practice sites and grieving encounters. These writings perform thinking-in-practice, suspending explanatory closure and tracing shifts in perception, affect, and relational attunement.

3. Filmmaking

Video journals and edited vignettes expand the written and photographic record. They provide audiovisual perspectives on movement-based exploration, interspecies encounters, and the *assembly* phase of practice, integrating cinematography, editing, sound design, and improvisational movement. While many function as open-ended process documents, others—*Carrion Ecologies* in particular—move further toward more fully articulated outputs, without foreclosing their ongoing relation to practice.

4. Music Composition and Sound Design

Sound work in this project functions as a mode of perceptual inquiry. Through techniques that alter scale, duration, and relational texture, the compositions explore how (re)wilding principles manifest sonically and how listening can open pathways into multi-species attunement. Their purpose is evidentiary: to illustrate how sound practices extend and transform the perceptual shifts emerging from the forest-based work.

1.8. The Research Questions

The following research questions structure the enquiry and guide the practice-led, autoethnographic, and theoretical components of this thesis. While these questions arose through practice rather than providing an initial blueprint, they now anchor the research in its completed form:

1. How do grief-affective ruptures interact with forest-based creative practices?

2. What perceptual, ecological, and relational affordances emerge through this interaction?

3. How do these affordances inform or shape the articulation of (re)wilding as a practice methodology?

4. In what ways might such (re)wilding processes 're-enchant' or speculatively transform ecological attitudes and interspecies relational capacities in the practitioner?

5. What roles do defamiliarisation, bewilderment, anomalous/miraculous perception, spectral or metonymic attunement, and processes of de-/re-subjectification play within these transformations?

1.9. Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into seven chapters.

Part One (Chapters 1–3) establishes the conceptual, contextual, and methodological foundations.

Part Two (Chapters 4–7) develops the theoretical arguments, analyses the practice, and synthesises the project's contributions.

A parallel multimodal **Research Catalogue (RC)** exhibit documents the forest-based (re)wilding practice on which this enquiry is grounded.

Chapter 1 — Origins of the Enquiry

Chapter One introduces the central provocations of the project: the entanglement of grief-affective rupture, forest-based arts practice, and perceptual transformation. It traces the emergence of the practice, outlines the (re)wilding framework and processual claims, introduces the methodological stance and the RC exhibit, and situates the formal research questions.

Chapter 2 — Literature and Practice Review

Chapter Two situates the research within three intersecting fields: ecofeminist posthumanism and new materialism; grief theory and queer death studies; and contemporary eco-arts and forest-based creative practices. It maps the shift from modernist recovery models of grief toward relational and ecological understandings, and distinguishes ecocentric forest-based practices from broader environmental art. The chapter concludes by identifying how these discourses and practices inform the (re)wilding framework further developed in the thesis.

Chapter 3 — Methodology

Chapter Three develops the methodological ecology of the project. It articulates (re)wilding as a creative practice methodology shaped by improvisation, transcorporeality, interspecies encounter, and the affective intensities of grief. The chapter outlines how method and practice evolve reciprocally through cycles of engagement; details documentation and reflexive approaches; addresses ethical considerations; and presents the five *Seasons of Practice* (excursion, encounter, engagement, assembly, decay) as an emergent process model. (Re)wilding is positioned not as a procedural method but as propositional and provocational—an attunement grounded in improvisation, openness, reciprocity, and unknowing.

Chapter 4 — The Seasons of Practice Model: Methodological Contributions

Chapter Four gathers the orientations, gestures, and ethical commitments traced in Part One and renders them legible as an articulated methodological framework. It introduces the (re)wilding principles and the Seasons of Practice model as articulations of the research-creation process—ways of describing how (re)wilding unfolds without reducing it to procedure.

Chapter 5 — From Bewilderment to Re-enchantment: Theoretical Contributions

Chapter Five develops the project's theoretical contributions, tracing how grief-affective forest practice reorganises perception, relation, and subjectivity through bewilderment, peripheral knowing, immanent miraculous encounter, desubjectification, and re-enchantment. It elaborates how these shifts arise immanently from practice rather than being applied to it.

Chapter 6 — (Re)wilding in Action: Evidence from Practice

Chapter Six turns to material evidence from practice, analysing key techniques and representative outputs as demonstrations of (re)wilding in action. It traces how methods emerged, shifted, and sometimes collapsed across forest and studio, and how outputs (e.g., *Autogamy*, *Carrion Ecologies*, *Tired (for the Birds)*) register changing perceptual and relational orientations.

Chapter 7 — Conclusions, Implications, and Future Research & Applications

The concluding chapter synthesises the thesis's contributions and reflects on the capacities, limits, and ethical stakes of (re)wilding as a grief-affective methodology for ecological relation. It considers how the framework might travel beyond this singular practice and what it offers for future artistic and ecological research.

1.10. How Grief Produced a Practice

On April 14th, 2022, I would sit down to articulate what my practice had become—how it looked in a nutshell:

"Every day I walk into the woods. I return to the same paths [or] I take new paths. I see what the seasons and the day bring. I find the fallen bits (the feathers, brackets, clods, shells, bones, leaves, branches) and work with them. I improvise somatic contact with living tree, with moss-covered stone. I move the work through the questions of grief and my personal experience of mourning. I find spaces where the work supports alternative approaches to grief, approaches that take us deeper into the transformative power of grief, into a posthuman turn where the goal of mourning is

not a return to normalcy and stability. What is this transformative power? Gram by gram I encounter the churning of this forest, the death and life in their oscillations, the blurred line between these states of being. It continues to sink in how our deeply anthropocentric perspectives on life and death have engendered myriad dualities within social relations. We can see this intellectually and in hindsight, but the forest practice allows me to understand how it has also colonised my subjectivity and my body. I begin with this flow, and follow the feeling."

When I say that grief produced my forest-based arts practice at the heart of this project, I mean that somasensory patterns emerged spontaneously from affects and conditions of my grieving process. The practice began with the raising and adorning of stone circles in Montana, became a routine of walking in Glastonbury, and expanded to include photography, videography, and sculpture in Ireland. A year later, the practice persisted alongside my research project for nearly a semester before I began to think of it as a 'practice' at all and longer before it began to participate in and as research. Then, the more I leaned into the practice with intention and awareness, the more novel and surprising my daily forest-encounters became.

But *how* exactly did grief produce this practice? In what ways did these forest-based creative engagements emerge as a result of my unorthodox approach to mourning and memorialising in the immediate months following the loss of my mother and in the grief process that endured? What was it about grief in particular that fostered such immense changes in the ways I considered, approached, and produced artistic experience? And how did the transformation and its categorisation escape my own conscious awareness for so long a time? The shift to practice was certainly not 'intentional' as I understand and have experienced intention. Rather, it emerged from somewhere both within and without, in response to or developing from my grieving state and the way that grief first sought out and then responded to 'natural' environments.

Operating from this threshold of spontaneity, what began as an instinctive outpouring of emotion has evolved into a dedicated means for sustaining connection—not with my mother as a static memory, but as she persists in what Elizabeth Grosz (2017) might call an 'incorporeal' process of becoming-with a vast terrain of material assemblages, flows, and processes unfathomable to my personal point-perspective. Nina Lykke names such approaches to mourning 'molecular', defining them as ways of "addressing phenomenally spectral aspects of the deceased, as well as her metamorphosing material remains" (2021:18).

As I work with and among stones, soil, plants, fungi, insects, and the bones of birds and mammals, I find there an imbrication not only of my mother's dissolution, but of my own sense of

self. I have performed with and for trees; I have engaged slowly and sculpturally with decaying forms and imaginings of alternative temporal experiences as a woodworker carves along the grain. I have buried myself beneath inches of mud to experience the 'going-below' so quintessential to how we understand what follows the electrical and muscular cessations of the body. These engagements with the earth have allowed my relationship with my mother to remain alive in the one and only way all organisms maintain life—through *change*. I still sometimes find myself in the habitual mindset of expecting/wishing her death to reverse its course, but I am slowly discovering the joy of recognising that her diffuse mode contains all the vibrancy of her former compact humanity, albeit in radically different and more widely distributed ways.

In shifting toward these iterative, localized deposits, the practice unconsciously began to align with deeply sedimented Irish traditions of vernacular walking and somatic devotion. To repeatedly traverse a specific rural psychogeography in the aftermath of trauma evokes a history of pilgrimage (*oilithreacht*) that is woven directly into the topography of West Cork and Kerry. Placing a sheep's skull on a tree branch, arranging stones, or dressing a forest altar is not a detached contemporary art intervention; rather, it shares intimate affective resonances with the cultural practice of leaving votive offerings—*clooties* or tokens—at Holy Wells (*tobar beannaithe*), fairy trees (*sceach*), and other vernacular sacred sites. In the Irish landscape, these places have long functioned as communal and deeply personal repositories for illness, precarity, memory and uncontainable grief. By returning to the same paths and leaving physical anchor points for my mourning, the practice tapped into an ancient, spatialized methodology of staying-with loss.

Eventually my practice would become a lens through which I could relate meaningfully with my desire to maintain a continuum between the fragments and conceptions of who my mother was as well as what and whom she was materially becoming. Animals played a large role here, symbolically at first, which is not at all an uncommon grief experience, even in urban settings. A lone deer or a herd of elk felt representative of her spirit, as did phenomena such as lightning and rainbows. In retrospect, these early gropings for meaning comprise the inklings of a practice that would challenge my tendency to relate anthropocentrically with more-than-human environments. My grief sparked this practice, but the practice came to influence how I carried, understood, wrangled with, sustained, and transformed my grieving. A dynamics of feedback and reciprocity emerged between process and practice: an affective loop where the body allowed grief the capacity to move without stripping away the peculiar intensities that made it grief in the first place.

This relationship with grief has found no closure; nor does it seek it. As the ninth anniversary of my mother's death approaches, I can pinpoint transformative changes that have permanently altered my approach to the arts, the frameworks by which I experience my life, and the ways I relate to life

beyond the human. This thesis arises from a lived entanglement of grief, ecological encounter, and creative process, serving as the generative ground from which a methodology of (re)wilding becomes possible.

1.11. Conclusion to Chapter One

This chapter has established the conceptual and contextual foundations of *Grieving with Forests*. It introduced the central provocation concerning affect, practice, and ecological perception; and outlined the thesis's contributions across conceptual, methodological, and practice-based domains. By situating the project within ecofeminist, posthumanist, interspecies, and new materialist lineages, the chapter clarified the epistemic ground from which the research proceeds and defined (re)wilding as both a methodological orientation and an affective mode of relational inquiry.

The chapter also articulated why practice research and autoethnography offer appropriate methodological pathways, showing how grief functions here not simply as an emotional condition but as a mode of sensing, a method of inquiry, and a catalyst for conceptual transformation. The research questions distilled in Section 1.8 now serve as the hinge linking the written thesis with the Research Catalogue exhibit, grounding the work as a multimodal assemblage of theory, method, and practice.

Chapter Two turns from these motivations and methodological commitments to the literature review. This first outlines the ecofeminist, posthumanist, and new materialist frameworks that anchor the project and examines research-creation traditions in which practice and theory are co-constituted. It then traces the evolution of Western grief paradigms, the politics of mourning, and the emergence of queer death studies—placing Nina Lykke's *Vibrant Death* as a key interlocutor for rethinking grief-affective perception in ecological assemblages. Finally, the chapter surveys major currents in ecological and environmental arts and arts research—walking methodologies, interspecies collaboration, embodied and site-responsive practices, and artistic engagements with decay and abjection—mapping the terrain from which (re)wilding emerges as a distinct, process-driven methodology.

Chapter Two: Literature and Practice Review

"Always follow the rhizome by rupture … Follow the plants."

- Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

2.1. Positioning the Field

The purpose of this literature review is to position my research at intersections between three interrelated domains: theoretical frameworks, affective lenses, and (forest-based) creative practices.

My theoretical framework draws from ecofeminism, new materialism, and posthumanism. Together, these perspectives challenge humanist onto-epistemological presuppositions that establish artificial boundaries between human and nonhuman worlds—boundaries increasingly undermined by both philosophical critique and scientific understanding. By displacing the human from positions of primacy and foregrounding broader ecological interrelations, this framework exposes anthropocentric assumptions that limit our capacity to perceive and coexist with a multispecies world, prompting a re-examination of how and why we make art, and interrogating ingrained cultural outlooks on life and death.

The affective dimension of this project is grounded in a recent theoretical development: Queer Death Studies (QDS). If posthumanism provides the ontological and epistemological foundation for this thesis, QDS furnishes its affective and ethical orientation. Bringing the body into death and grief theory, QDS shapes my project's aesthetic and perceptual sensitivities and reframes grief as an ongoing process rather than a condition to be resolved. By tracing the intellectual lineage of grief in the modernist West, this review highlights how contemporary thinkers challenge the assumption that grief is a disorder demanding closure, and explores its political, perceptual, and ecological entanglements.

The creative and arts practices section is necessarily selective, given the vastness of the field. Here, I focus on what I term ecocentric—and more specifically *forest-based*—practices, distinguishing them from more general environmental art forms that often reproduce anthropocentric hierarchies. A forest-based approach incorporates improvisation, site-specific engagement, embodiment, and interspecies collaboration. Together, these elements constitute this thesis's development of (re)wilding—an approach to practice that relinquishes human control, embraces complexity and unknowability as generative conditions, and strives toward multispecies egalitarian ethics. Because grief and its affects are central to my practice, this review further narrows its focus to eco-arts practices that engage themes of loss, death, and decay as sites of regeneration and interspecies relation. This section contrasts eco- and anthropocentric orientations and offers a snapshot of emerging practices that contribute to (re)wildings of methodology.

2.2. Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

In the mid-twentieth century, Gilles Deleuze undertook a project of reconfiguring Western philosophical lineages in part by distinguishing between what he called majoritarian and minoritarian strains of thought. Across his oeuvre, Deleuze draws from an undercurrent of minoritarian figures—from Spinoza to Bergson—to formulate a differential ontology that privileges relation and becoming over identity and fixed form. In doing so, he develops a generative philosophy of immanent forces that resists oppositional metaphysics grounded in Cartesian dualism and Hegel's philosophy of negation.

Deleuze and Guattari later extended this philosophical project into social, political, and aesthetic terrain, advancing process-oriented and rhizomatic modes of thought attuned to change, emergence, and transformation. Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of assemblage, multiplicity, and deterritorialisation, for instance, help to displace the human as the central agent of meaning. They foreground a distributed, more-than-human relationality in which human subjectivity and the material world are co-constitutive. This process philosophy has become foundational for late-twentieth and early twenty-first-century critiques of static, bounded, anthropocentric images of reality, in which human culture imposes order upon a passive, anarchic nature. By contrast, Deleuze and Guattari approach the world as a continuous unfolding of forces, affects, and encounters—an understanding resonant with contemporary practice methodologies that emphasise the vitality of matter, ecological entanglements, and creative processes as sites of knowledge.

Several process-relational theoretical orientations have arisen from this lineage, and three in particular ground the arguments developed in this thesis: ecofeminist posthumanism (particularly in its *interspecies* formulation), new materialism, and research-creation. Each of these frameworks extends Deleuzian philosophy into ethical, material, and methodological registers integral to the development of (re)wilding practices.

2.2a. Ecofeminist Posthumanism: Interspecies

Ecofeminist posthumanism emerges from the convergence of two distinct yet resonant frameworks: posthumanism's critique of modernity's nature/culture divide and ecofeminism's attentiveness to the entanglement of gendered and ecological oppression. While posthumanism affectively challenges anthropocentrism and rethinks the human as a distributed and relational assemblage, transhumanist appropriations risk reinscribing the very hierarchies they claim to

dismantle, extending human exceptionalism through technological enhancement. Ecofeminism's intersubjective and ecocentric orientation tempers this tendency, reorienting posthumanist thought toward relational care, embodiment, and interdependence. This convergence is re-articulated in Springgay and Truman's (2019) adoption of Livingston and Puar's (2011) *interspecies* theory, which foregrounds the affective and ethical dimensions of multispecies encounter.

Relevant thinkers and practitioners within and adjacent to these fields include Donna Haraway (2016), whose poetic and speculative writing embraces the chthonic and the composted as vital forms of life—an approach that underpins my analyses of abjection and decay; Rosi Braidotti (2006), whose notion of nomadic subjectivity extends Deleuze's becoming into an ethical framework of transformation across difference; and Nina Lykke (2021), whose work on posthuman death and grief helps reconfigure eco-perceptual orientations. Other adjacent thinkers such as Édouard Glissant and Macarena Gómez-Barris also inform this discussion. Although more closely associated with postcolonial and decolonial eco-humanities, their attention to opacity, relationality, and submerged perspectives resonates strongly with ecofeminist posthumanisms and contributes to an emerging approach to epistemology that I refer to here as *peripheral knowing*.

2.2b. New Materialism

Closely related to the preceding discussion, new materialism reconsiders the agency of matter within philosophical inquiry. It arises from a critique of the life–matter dualism embedded in Western humanist thinking—a dualism that has long extricated vitality and agency from material reality, whether through explicit body–soul hierarchies or subtler ontological assumptions. One consequence of this division has been the stratification of value, whereby certain forms of life, including some categories of human beings, are cast as less-than: soulless, inert, or otherwise marginalised.

New materialism, as developed by Latour, Bennett, Barad, Braidotti, Lykke, and others, argues that even within poststructuralist critiques of binary power systems, matter often remained subordinate to language and discourse. New materialist thinkers reanimate matter as vibrant, active, and affective—an agency of becoming rather than a passive substrate. For Bennett (2010), what is typically dismissed as 'mere matter' is in fact a dynamic participant in shaping social, political, and affective realities. Change, she suggests, does not occur in spite of materiality but through it. Human and more-than-human actants combine in assemblages whose capacities exceed the sum of their parts, producing emergent properties that are creative, unpredictable, and relational.

Alongside this ontological reorientation, Karen Barad develops a distinct epistemological position. In place of reflective modes of representation, which presume clear distinctions between subject and object, Barad (2007) proposes a diffractive methodology by which meaning and matter are co-constitutive. Ethics, ontology, and epistemology entangle: the observer and the observed, the researcher and the researched, participate in mutual intra-action rather than as poles of external observation. In this light, bodies and sites of knowledge contribute to one another's becoming. In my own project, a diffractive approach situates practice and knowledge as entangled processes—each composed of multiple environmental subjectivities, all intra-active and co-creative.

Nina Lykke's (2021) work extends these concepts into affective and experiential realms. Building on Braidotti and Bennett, she explores how miraculous experience can emerge from material-affective assemblages—including patterns, intensities, and other elements not conventionally thought to be living. Her approach draws on Stacy Alaimo's (2010) *trans-corporeality*, which emphasises the porous exchange between bodies and environments. Together, these perspectives articulate a world in which matter, life, and affect circulate through one another, generating experiential fields that exceed the boundaries of the human and the known.

2.2c. Practice Research and Research-Creation

The ontological and epistemological perspectives outlined in posthumanist and new materialist thought find a methodological counterpart in practice research. New materialism reconfigures matter as vibrant, relational, and agentic, and practice research situates practitioners within similar dynamics, enacting knowledge through embodied participation in processes of becoming.

Practice research (a broad category encompassing practice-as-research, practice-led research, and other related designations) has established itself as a viable suite of methodologies for addressing questions and problems at the limits of traditional, discursively-oriented approaches (Rolling Jr., 2010:110). Knowledge and cognition are no longer considered the sole domain of mental structures processing external input; rather, they emerge through embodied and material engagements with the world. Nelson even notes that the locating of cognition in "activity and process rather than objects of knowledge" (2022:71) has long been recognised, even if such perspectives have often been marginalised within modernist Western epistemologies. Recently, this extracranial view of knowledge has gained visibility through research in the cognitive sciences under the banner of 4E cognition, where knowing is understood as embodied, embedded, extended,

and enactive (Alexander, 2025:2). In this view, cognition is distributed not only throughout the body but also across the social, technological, and ecological systems that co-constitute experience.

Practice research is particularly well suited to navigating these dynamics and engaging distributed modes of knowledge. For a project concerned with grief-affective and ecological relationalities, such flexibility is crucial: knowledge can emerge through the entanglement of body, site, and affect, rather than being applied through strict theoretical framing. As Hamilton and Hansen observe, in practice research "theory follows handling" (2024:1758); discoveries arise in the doing, and the tools and techniques of making become methods in their own right. Leavy similarly notes that practice offers access to "elements of the lived experience that a textual form cannot reach" (2020:24), in ways that can disrupt habitual modes of perception and "jar people into seeing and/or thinking differently" (21). Because thinking itself is now understood as "to some extent physical" (Nelson, 2013:57), practice provides a vital means for engaging embodied, intersubjective, and affective forms of knowledge that elude purely representational or analytic approaches.

While this project aligns with the broader field of practice research, I rely on the term research-creation to more precisely describe my methodological orientation. Though closely related, the two have distinct genealogies and inflections. Practice-as-research emerged primarily in the UK and Australia, rooted in performance studies and the articulation of tacit, embodied knowledge (Nelson, 2013; Smith & Dean, 2009). Research-creation, by contrast, originated in the francophone Canadian academy (*recherche-création*) as a policy and institutional category designed to legitimise creative doctoral and grant-supported research (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012). The term was later reinterpreted through Deleuzian and process-philosophical perspectives by Brian Massumi, Erin Manning, and the SenseLab collective (Thain, 2008), and has since been extended by practitioner-scholars such as Stephanie Springgay and Natalie Loveless.

As Patricia Leavy observes, "arts-based researchers are not 'discovering' new research tools, they are carving them" (2015:3). This remark captures the ethos of research-creation: an orientation toward co-constitutionality, in which thinking and making entwine, no component of a project is fully separable from the whole, and process itself becomes a significant site of inquiry. By "[drawing] attention to the conjunctive at work in its process", the hyphen in *research-creation* emphasises the interstitial, relational, and processual nature of the work (Springgay & Truman, 2019:2). It aligns closely with Barad's (2007) concept of intra-action, in which entities and ideas do not precede their relations but emerge through them. Research-creation thus provides a framework for blending theory, practice, and affect in posthumanist and new materialist contexts, making it an apt methodological signifier for transmodal and process-oriented inquiry.

The practice at the heart of this thesis is embodied, site-specific, and improvisational, and I will engage practice-theorists to help unpack how these modes interact with each other and with the broader analysis. One specific area of focus concerns the dynamics of perception—how perception can be limited or expanded, and how practice shapes perceptual attunement. Arts-researchers such as Natasha Myers, Erin Manning, and Anatoli Ignatov have all examined perception in distinctive ways. Myers' (2018) relevant work concerns plant sensing and honing one's sensorium in relation to multispecies environments. Ignatov (2011) similarly explores the nuances of what he calls eco-sensation and the capacity to develop it through encounters with art. Manning's (2016) theorising of the minor gesture considers the importance of movement to perception and the cultivation of a minoritarian sensorium capable of perceiving differently. Her work on affect with Brian Massumi (2014) will help bring practice, perception, and grieving into relation—and it is to the matter of grief that this review now turns.

2.3. Grief Theory

While this project's theoretical frameworks span a wide range of related onto-epistemological perspectives, its affective focus remains singular: my personal experience of grief, around which my (re)wilding practice developed. Yet grief itself is far from singular in its emotional texture. It comprises a vast range of intensities and interactions that shape the complex terrain of bereavement. Although this thesis approaches its inquiry through a single affective lens, it invites future research to consider how other affect-intensive conditions might also engage (re)wilding and related practices.

A global cultural history of grief could fill many volumes; here, I focus on the contemporary Western evolution of bereavement, poised between a modernist past defined by tensions among scientific materialism and religious dualism and a posthumanist horizon that gestures toward multispecies respect, care, and coexistence. How we grieve is intimately entangled with how we live alongside other beings; and the ways in which we approach these practices can shape our ethical relations to the living world.

2.3a. Mourning, Melancholia, and the Birth of Bereavement Psychology

Sigmund Freud's (1957a) *Mourning and Melancholia* marked a turning point in the modern Western understanding of grief. His notion of a 'work of mourning' laid the foundation for a psychoanalytic and increasingly medicalised model of bereavement that sought resolution through the severing of bonds with the lost object. Emerging within a broader rationalist project that aimed to "exercise control over mortality" (Howarth, 2000:128), this framework recast mourning as a process of reintegration into the social order. Once this work was complete, the bereaved subject was expected to redirect libidinal energy toward new attachments, restoring social functionality and economic productivity. Those who failed or refused to complete this process risked pathologisation: the melancholic, in retaining attachment, embodied an excess of affect that threatened the normative rhythms of social life.

Even as Freud later revised aspects of his theory, this early model of mourning-as-severance became enshrined in twentieth-century bereavement psychology (Klass, 1996:7). It resonated with a positivist worldview that displaced the afterlife with a "cult of memory" (Despret, 2021:4–5), installing memorialisation as a secular alternative to salvation. The dead were confined to the past, while the living were urged to move on. Such containment aligned with broader cultural values that linked mass production with hyper-sanitation, nature with the erasure of blemish, and a paradoxical collusion between obsolescence and the preservation of youth.

Institutionalised grief practices thus came to isolate, extract, and overwrite mourning's unruly energies, prescribing finite periods for socially acceptable grieving (Ord, 2009:198) and returning workers to productivity as swiftly as possible. The therapeutic apparatus reinforced this orientation —from Caplan's crisis theory to Kübler-Ross's stage model—each reiterating Freud's logic of release and replacement. Yet Freud himself began to question the value of severance. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), he suggested that the lost other might be taken "into the structure of one's own identity," reframing melancholia not as pathology but as a form of preservation (Clewell, 2004:61). Later, reflecting on the death of his daughter, Freud acknowledged that "enduring bonds of love… remain long after the other has departed" (62). These subtle reversals laid the groundwork for 'continuing bonds' theories that would re-emerge toward the century's end (Klass & Silverman, 1996).

In spite of this, the institutional paradigm of 'breaking bonds' has persisted, bolstered by the authority of psychological expertise and exported through colonial and neo-colonial networks. In Japan, for instance, traditional Buddhist practices of maintaining bonds with the deceased through household altars have increasingly been supplanted by therapeutic models advocating detachment and reinvestment in new relationships (Klass, 1996:296; Oka et al., 2017:9). Likewise, in secular-rationalist Sweden, grief theories emphasising definitive endings of ties continue to dominate

(2017:7). Imported largely from Anglo-American psychology, such frameworks often prove "grossly insensitive to cultural differences" (Klass & Silverman, 1996:56).

By contrast, indigenous and minoritarian grief practices reveal a far more diverse and relational history. These frameworks range from beliefs in the dangerous dead—where continued attachment may hinder transition (Walter, 2018:44)—to ancestor veneration and interactive memorialisation, in which the deceased remain a vital presence within the social and ecological fabric. In many cases, cultural mourning practices strive to balance the social reintegration of the bereaved with the ongoing vitality of the dead. Shamanic mediation at the thresholds between matter and spirit, culture and wilderness, demonstrates how many traditions understand mourning as an act of relational negotiation. Such practices point toward modes of grief grounded in permeability, reciprocity, and care rather than control.

Freud's model inaugurated a paradigm of regulation—a regime of severance that ultimately restrained grief's transformative potential. Its endurance across global contexts underscores the lingering power of a Western metaphysics of separation: between life and death, self and other, human and more-than-human. A wide range of relational and indigenous mourning practices already challenge this paradigm, while posthumanist and queer death studies enter the conversation from different intellectual lineages. The following sections focus on these latter perspectives and foreground the political stakes of death, loss, and grief.

2.3b. Judith Butler and the politics of mourning

Derrida's work on the spectral traces of loss, together with Judith Butler's *Precarious Life* and its exploration of grievability and the intersubjectivity of loss—where one retains within the self something of the (lost) other—marks a turn toward the latent energies and social potential embedded in the affects and rituals of bereavement. Where psychology once identified pathology in those "who can no longer clearly define the borders between [their] own subjectivity and the existence of the lost object within it" (Ferber, 2006:66), Butler locates an intersubjective field: a recognition, through loss, of "some of these ties by which we are constituted" (2004:22). In doing so, she establishes a foundation for understanding grief as a locus of political potential, one that "makes grief itself into a resource for politics" (30).

Butler's argument turns on the notion of precarity—a form of social and existential vulnerability implying that "one's life is always in some sense in the hands of the other" (2009:14). This extends her earlier contention that grief both reveals and is produced by our relational

entanglements, displaying "the thrall in which our relations with others hold us […] in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we may try to provide […and] challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control" (2004:23). Death thus disrupts the psychosocial continuity of subjectivity and the manifold ways that subject was experienced by and for others.

The anthology *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* mobilises an influential rethinking of grief by proposing mourning itself as "a creative process mediating a hopeful or hopeless relationship between loss and history" (Eng & Kazanjian, 2002:2). Drawing on Derrida's spectrality and Butler's account of relational vulnerability, the editors invert Freud's hierarchy of mourning over melancholia to argue that melancholia—understood as a sustained relation to what remains—can function as a politically generative stance. Rather than a failure to detach, melancholia keeps the past "steadfastly alive in the present" (4), producing responses to loss that are "active rather than reactive, prescient rather than nostalgic, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary" (2).

Eugenie Brinkema, however, cautions that this turn toward the affirmative has become too easy. She names this impulse *mournacholia*: a theoretical celebration of melancholia's "positive potential" that risks detaching grief from the "peculiar painfulness" constitutive of its affective force (2014:65). Following Deleuze, Brinkema distinguishes grief's affect—pre-conscious, as "autonomous potentiality," as something that "extracts, produces, and prods" (24). For both thinkers, this pre-discursive quality of affect entails a partial *de*subjectification: grief ungrounds the self, suspends orientation, and ushers in a sensory derailment—a looking without finding, a "presence of absence" (54). Within this state, action itself becomes tenuous.

Yet Brinkema also acknowledges that this very derailing furnishes a singular capacity "to imagine the world otherwise" (68); and the melancholic becomes capable of perceiving and articulating the new. Her concern is that when melancholia is put to work too quickly—when its pain is channelled abruptly into purpose—it risks becoming an updated recovery model, a subtle cathexis transfer dressed in contemporary theoretical vocabulary (69–70): melancholia's unruly affect smoothed into productive adaptation.

To remain with grief in all its pain and difficulty, then, is to enact what Haraway (2016) calls "staying with the trouble"—remaining in the chthonic zone where processes ferment and recombine, where nothing resolves and yet everything transforms (117). Brinkema ends her reading of *Loss* suspended in precisely this tension: grief as paralysing bewilderment and grief as catalytic shock. Protective of loss's inassimilable intensity, she affirms a grief that is "irresolvable—undialectical, unproductive, a bad investment, and peculiarly painful" (75).

If grief's generativity depends on both its overwhelming, arresting force and its capacity to reorganise perception and relation, the question becomes not which version is 'right' but whether and how these truths can co-exist. The paradox may in fact reveal a crisis of representation—less a logical contradiction than an embodied experience, illuminated by Mookerjea's observation that "social contradictions are not reducible to logical ones as they are embodied and unfold over time" (2020:127). Butler's own epilogue in *Loss* gestures in this direction: toward forms of relation that preserve affect's disruptive intensity while allowing that intensity to move, shape, and redirect us.

To hold both sides of the paradox—to remain in the bewildering, painful rupture and allow it to be transformative—requires methods not bound to discursive resolution. Because the body is a dimension orthogonal to logic's linearity, we can look to practices that operate at the pre-discursive, affective roots of grief: in physicality, in sensation, in relation. These tensions resurface in Chapter Five, where (re)wilding practice becomes a means of dwelling-in rather than resolving grief's paradoxes—letting rupture and generativity remain in painful, productive, uneasy relation.

2.3c. Queer Death: Mourning in the 21st Century

Building on the earlier discussion of Freud's legacy and the institutionalisation of grief (see 2.3a), this section turns to contemporary frameworks that further challenge the breaking bonds paradigm. As Klass and Silverman note, the expectation that the bereaved should sever ties with the dead is a relatively recent, twentieth-century development: "[o]nly in the past 100 years have continuing bonds [with the deceased] been denied as a normal part of bereavement behaviour" (1996:5). This severing logic mirrors broader modernist commitments to binary separation and alienated forms of subjectivity. Extending this analysis, Howarth draws on Giddens's (1993) concept of "ontological security" to show how grief destabilises a sense of self (Howarth, 2000:131). When such ruptures are not channelled through a normalising process, and the bereaved are instead encouraged to sustain their connections, the lost loved one can acquire an "ongoing trajectory within the individual's own changing self-narrative" (131), potentially even "dismantl[ing] the boundary between life and death" (134). Such dismantling, however, unfolds from both sides of the divide, in modes of spectral collaboration.

Spectrality, in its contemporary posthumanist formulation, derives from Jacques Derrida's (2006) hauntology—the condition in which someone or something is neither fully present nor fully absent. Written a decade before Butler's *Precarious Life*, hauntology extends Derrida's poststructuralist notion of the trace into an ethical and political concern. In death, traces of the

departed exceed memory, lingering as agents that call for response. Because spectres endure, Derrida suggests that mourning resist closure and asks how we might live ethically within this ongoing condition of presence-in-absence.

Philosopher Vinciane Despret responds to this question when she writes about the 'work' of the deceased: "as when a dead person gives a sign, provides advice in a dream, makes one feel that there are things to be done" (2021:6). She links such experiences to Latour's adoption of Souriau's concept of instauration—a process of fabrication or emergence in which we "must not be in too much of a hurry to embrace the idea that what is fabricated will be totally determined by the person assuming to make or create a being or a thing" (7). Originally formulated as a theory of collective becoming, instauration describes how beings acquire existence and presence through overlapping relational realities. This helps us account for experiences that exceed mere projection: encounters with the dead, neither strictly factual nor fictional, become spectral-material collaborations between events, objects, memory, imagination, and metonymic interpretation. "We help the dead to be or become what they are; we don't invent them," Despret writes (7), echoing Howarth's reminder that "The dead cannot be controlled. They continue to surprise us with their presence" (135).

Despret revitalises Derrida's hauntological inheritance through embodied and ecological registers, aligning with Timothy Morton's (2017) broader claim that there are no stable entities against which to define the spectral. All animate life—microorganisms, forests, species—exists in temporal flux, haunted by what it once was and what it may become. In this sense, grief is not only a human affect but an ecological mode of attunement for perceiving temporal entanglement, interspecies assemblages, and ongoing transformation. I return to this in greater detail in Chapter Five.

To navigate existence in partial terms (as a dance of presence and absence)—as Derrida, Despret, and Morton each propose—is to resist the mind/matter dualism by which the dead are relegated to "either that of nonexistence or that of phantasms" (Despret, 2021:8). Despret's alternative modes of being offer a more nuanced register for the dead to "manifest accountable ways of being present […] of which we can feel the effects," producing collaborative encounters where "[w]ho does what […] remains very fluid," and raising questions about what "enable[s]" the dead and what the dead make "other beings capable of" (8–9). For Despret, such questions are ecological in their concern for ecosystems and the conditions that support emergence and co-agency. "Following via the milieu," she writes, "means attaching oneself to an assemblage; it means experimenting, with a lot of precautions, with ways of creating relationships with things that cannot expect to be intelligible except as relationships" (29). This will become an important hinge in Part

Two when thinking through how grief affect can operate as a mode of relation, not only with the dead but with living alterity.

For posthumanist thinker Rosi Braidotti, death as a purely negative concept is another modern individualistic invention. She contrasts this attitude with her concept of *zoe*, the generative or "productive aspect" of death (2006:210), whereby dead organisms compost new life. In this view, death is cyclic and spiralic—ever mutating as species co-evolve across deep time. From a posthumanist perspective, death is a form of *becoming*, what Deleuze terms a "becoming-imperceptible" (Braidotti, 2006:261): a dispersal of perception and agency beyond intentionality or fixed identity. Memorialisation, by contrast, freezes loss in time and denies becoming. Here lies another tension at the heart of the severing/continuing bonds dichotomy: In Freud, the mourner is asked to move on, but the dead are not. But if one is to continue in relation, the departed must also be permitted movement. This tension will be exemplified in Nina Lykke's *Vibrant Death* (2021), where she distinguishes between *molar* mourning—grieving what has been lost through its identitarian, memorialised form—and *molecular* mourning, which grieves what has been lost in its ongoing becoming. The following section will engage Lykke directly, but it is first important to contextualise her work as a facet of *Queer Death Studies* (QDS), a transdisciplinary field that "critically, (self)reflexively and affirmatively investigates and challenges conventional normativities, assumptions, expectations, and regimes of truth" revealed through death, dying, and mourning (Radomska et al., 2019:5–6). In this sense, QDS provides the conceptual terrain within which ongoing bonds, becoming, and non-normative modes of grief can be understood as critical interventions rather than theoretical exceptions.

Queer Death Studies's inception is most often traced to Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* (2003), which exposes how mechanisms of power suspend certain bodies in a spectral state between life and death—zones of incapacity such as refugee camps, quarantines, and prisons, disproportionately imposed on minoritarian groups. Scholars such as Patricia MacCormack extend this critique beyond the human, showing how posthumanism reframes necropolitics ecologically: "understand[ing] the status of death as it relates to and bolsters human exceptionalism in the continued exploitation of the Earth" (2025:4). Because "human death is understood as exceptional" (Radomska et al., 2019:5), QDS challenges the "normative sovereign subject" and the biopolitical agendas that render privileged human death "something to be eradicated altogether" (4-5), even as countless nonhuman (and dehumanised) lives are sacrificed to sustain it.

In this sense, Queer Death Studies queers not only death but mourning, dispersing it across a network of relations that includes the more-than-human. It invites us to mourn ecologically, to grieve as part of an assemblage rather than as an autonomous subject. This is where my own

practice-based research situates itself: tracing grief as an affective and ecological force engaged in a (re)wilding of practice, perception, and relation.

2.3d. Nina Lykke's Vibrant Dying[5]

I turn now to a key figure in Queer Death Studies whose work on posthuman death and mourning is central to this thesis's exploration of grief's perceptive affordances and its capacity to defamiliarise habitual modes of being and relating. In *Vibrant Death*, Nina Lykke offers an autophenomenographic[6] account of her "strong desire to stay with mourning rather than trying to 'move on with life'" (2021:39). Her language echoes Donna Haraway's call to "stay with the trouble," a stance "not interested in reconciliation or restoration, but […] committed to the more modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together" (2016:10). Through *recuperation* Haraway implies a kind of recovery, yet the modifier *partial* is paramount—invoking her concept of partial connections, in which "the parts do not add up to any whole[,] but […] to worlds of nonoptional, stratified, webbed, and unfinished living and dying, appearing and disappearing" (104). Similarly, Lykke's transformative grief is unconcerned with reconciliation or abandonment of the past; rather engagements with history serve in transit toward new and different futures.

Lykke begins her theoretical exploration of posthuman loss with a meditation on the vibrant corpse, critiquing modernist framings of the dead body's abjection. She links the abject and the uncanny to anthropocentric hierarchies, arguing that the corpse marks the division between "elevated, exceptionally human qualities" and "base, low, inhuman material qualities" (2021:80). Western culture reproduces this hierarchy by "evad[ing] uncanny feelings," codifying it in practices such as embalming, mortuary cosmetics, the closing of the eyes, and the binding of the jaw—conventions that attempt to "slow down the process of becoming-inhuman" (84).

In contrast, Lykke embraces the way death transformed her life partner out of the familiar and into diffused states of (re)entanglement with the earth. She links this molecular state of being to a *molecular* mode of mourning, in sharp contrast to normative *molar* memorialisation. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Lykke distinguishes between molar forms—organised and identitarian—and molecular processes—dispersed and spectral. Molar mourning recalls (and often idealises) the deceased in their former bodily, animate, familiar form; molecular mourning, by contrast, contemplates the beloved as dissolved and distributed, as "that which we become when we die" (2021:106). As Braidotti (2006) suggests with *becoming-imperceptible*, such molecularisation

invites the mourner into a continual mode of grieving that thinks, feels, and imagines with the other. This approach acknowledges the deceased's material ongoingness and attunes to the ways a molecularised body participates in the geological and biological flows of the world.

Lykke's insistence on sustaining material connection through molecular mourning plays a large role in facilitating her experience of immanent miracles. Her account begins on the first anniversary of her partner's death, when she and her son shared a commemorative dinner. Inside one of the oysters they were eating, they found two pearls—an improbable occurrence that echoed an earlier gesture of mourning, when they had placed two pearls in her partner's casket before cremation. The ashes had been scattered in the same waters from which the oyster containing the second pair of pearls would later be drawn.

Lykke calls such seemingly unlikely confluences "immanent miracles" (2021:158). By this she means neither transcendent intervention nor human projection, but "immanent effects of corpo-affective co-becomings of entangled vitally and spiritually material human/non-human actants […] which the human actor may sense as miraculous and wondrous because they occur unexpectedly, and incomprehensibly […] but also because they actualise assemblages that include intense affectivities" (183). The immanent miracle names an event in which material actants and affective relations converge in ways that might otherwise remain occluded or unrecognised within normative humanist frames. These encounters reveal the perceptive affordances of grief itself—intersecting mourning and creativity—in its capacity to sensitise the bodymind to improbable patterns of relation and to the subtle agencies of multispecies worlds. Crucially, Lykke attributes the "sensibilities and sensitivities" (184) that make such attunement possible to the speculative outlook her posthumanist mourning cultivates.

Lykke's notion of the immanent miraculous—emerging through molecularisation and becoming—offers a spectral-material framework for unsettling normative mourning practices. Its significance lies in perceiving vitality, agency, and relation within the immanence of decay. While this theory will be taken up again in the Methodology (Chapter Three), the following section turns toward the lived dimensions of creativity and grief: the third and final aspect of this literature review—developing a framework of ecological arts practices within which to position my own research-creation methodology and practice.

2.4. Practice Lineage

Having traced the conceptual and theoretical fields that inform this project—posthumanist and ecocentric grief frameworks, new materialism, practice research, grief theory, and queer death studies—I now turn to the artistic and practice-based lineages through which (re)wilding begins to take concrete shape. This section surveys a range of ecologically engaged arts practices that both inherit and contest the nature/culture and wild/domestic divides, moving from environmental and land art toward more explicitly ecocentric, process-based, and interspecies orientations. It begins by examining how 'wilderness' has functioned as a romantic, colonial, and exclusionary construct (2.4a), then differentiates environmental art from ecocentric and (re)wilding practices (2.4b). From there, the focus narrows to the key modalities that ground my own practice: walking and sensation in forest-based contexts (2.4c), interspecies collaboration as an implicitly improvisational mode of working (2.4d), and artistic engagements with grief, abjection, and decay (2.4e). Together, these strands sketch an eco-ethico-aesthetic terrain within which my forest-based grieving practice can be situated, and from which the methodological contours of (re)wilding emerge.

2.4a. Art, Nature, and the Wilderness Divide

Contemporary critiques of the nature/culture divide echo a long history of debate that accompanies the emergence of industrialisation and the modern world. As the mechanistic worldview of the early modern period deepened through Enlightenment and industrial expansion, *nature* and *artifice* were increasingly set apart. Philosophers argued over whether human artifices should be understood as imitations or as extensions of nature. This divide widened as industry advanced and the organic, multispecies world became ever more physically separate and symbolically subordinate. Within dominant Western traditions that cast humans as possessing an immortal soul not shared with other life-forms, it is unsurprising that plants and animals came to be perceived primarily in terms of use value. At the same time, the 'nature' beyond human enclaves became mystified and romanticised—a reaction, perhaps, to the alienation resulting from industrial domination. The idea of wildness emerged from this tension as a marginalised zone of danger and longing, whose imaginative pull continues to haunt ecological thought and art today.

In taking up rewilding, this project must therefore wrestle with concepts of the wild/wilding/wildness and their complex genealogies. As William Cronon (1996) demonstrates in *The Trouble with Wilderness*, these terms bear a mytho-constructivist register that has functioned as

a linguistic technology supporting the erasure of Indigenous presence across much of the world. That register persists today in environmental recovery efforts that paradoxically confine wildness to controlled spaces. Far from restoring genuine relationality with the more-than-human, wilderness often "quietly expresses and reproduces the very values its devotees seek to reject" (Cronon, 1996:16). Such spaces remain zones of management and control, "embedded within dominant sustainability discourses and practices where landscape is enjoyed and consumed while maintaining the separation between nature and culture" (Truman & Springgay, 2016:17). Citing Kafer, they also note that "nature reserves and hiking trails are shaped around a compulsory neurotypicality, able-bodiedness, and normativity" (23). In short, the wildness of wilderness frequently becomes an aesthetic commodity—a spectacle of control masquerading as its opposite.

Nevertheless, I align myself with Jack Halberstam's urgency to reclaim the wild as a conceptual strategy for countering the alienating domestication that underwrites the term's own problematics. For this project, such a reclamation provides a critical foothold for rethinking the wild not as an elsewhere but as a mode of entangled relation—affective, ecological, and creative. Any attempt to develop more ethical and meaningful relationships with wild zones must acknowledge the prevailing anthropocentric perspective and seek to mitigate it. Humans and other species co-evolved within vast networks of precarious interdependence, and we will not survive, thrive, or escape our most pressing crises by continuing to dominate or sever the very systems that sustain us.

The next sections of this literature review therefore explore artistic and theoretical approaches that engage environment, ecology, and the wild—examining how wildness, wilding, and rewilding, whether of nature, practice, or the affective and creative self, can, even with their colonial connotations, open onto methodologies of restoration, reintegration, and interspecies egalitarianism. I then consider how artistic approaches to wilding intersect with grief as both method and site of exploration, illuminating shared processes of death, transformation, and regeneration.

2.4b. Environmental vs. Ecocentric Arts Practices of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries

I begin with a brief survey of critical opposition to anthropocentric tendencies in Western societies. As noted earlier, the height of colonial expansion and the rise of industrialisation generated a romanticised nostalgia for natural or wild environments. Yet this nostalgia did not produce an ecocentric turn; rather, material exploitation of nonhuman beings was reproduced into cultural forms. This dynamic re-emerges in twentieth-century 'environmental' or 'land' art—

practices that ostensibly engage nature but often instrumentalise environments to expand human artistic agency through technological mastery and aesthetic spectacle. Lisa Weintraub distinguishes these tendencies sharply from genuinely ecocentric practices. For example, Walter De Maria's *The Lightning Field* (1977) engages vast geophysical forces but remains "loyal to anthropocentric perspectives" (Weintraub, 2012:9): its required conservation and maintenance protocols, she argues, operate as "profound cultural signifiers" of contemporary efforts to defend against decay (14). By contrast, Alan Sonfist's foresting projects embrace organic processes of decomposition, growth, and ecological change, fostering continuity with "the dynamic flux of interacting systems" (14). This distinction anticipates the shift toward an ecocentric turn that relinquishes artistic control in favour of shared, multispecies processes.

Traces of ethical and aesthetic (or 'anti-aesthetic') ecocentrism can be found throughout Western intellectual history, often in minoritarian or marginalised traditions. Pantheistic thinkers such as Giordano Bruno and Baruch Spinoza challenged hierarchical models of nature by attributing value and vitality, divinity, or conatus to all beings. By the late eighteenth century, Romanticism reanimated these lines of thought, resisting Enlightenment rationalism's view of nature as subordinate to human will. William Blake exemplifies the contradictions of this moment: though he often deployed plants and animals symbolically, his work also insists—sometimes with startling materialist intensity—that nonhuman beings possess cosmic significance, that sublimity resides in mundane particulars, and that subjectivity pulses behind the eyes of beings otherwise treated as decorative or instrumental (2002:88,93).

Despite its contradictions, green Romanticism has been reclaimed by ecocritical scholarship as a precursor to the ecocentric stance. Timothy Morton (2007) identifies antinomies within modern ecocritical projects whose tensions might have been made more productive through an anti-aesthetic melancholia not unlike Romantic affective intensities of grief and loneliness that foster a "closeness to the earth" (200) unavailable through detached contemplation. Dynamics between grief and ecological intimacy/attunement recur throughout this thesis, particularly in practices that embrace abjection and decay as chthonic modes of relation (Haraway, 2016). Morton (2017) also traces proto-ecological tendencies in nineteenth-century thought, lurking for instance behind Marx's humanistic commitments. Similar tensions surfaced among American Transcendentalists and early conservationists, whose efforts to counter ecological alienation remained entangled with colonial ideologies. As outlined in section 2.4a, wilderness itself often functions as a managed commodity aesthetic; accordingly, early conservationism tended to preserve isolated wilderness areas within frameworks that maintained separation between humanity and the more-than-human world.

By the twentieth century, more nuanced forms of ecocentric philosophy had begun to emerge, catalysed in part by Darwinian thought. Although Aldo Leopold is often credited with articulating an ethics of ecological interdependence influential to environmentalism and ecofeminism, his work forms part of a wider lineage that includes Susan Fenimore Cooper and Marjory Stoneman Douglas. Meanwhile, the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and, later, Deleuze and Guattari's ontology of difference laid conceptual grounds for countercultural movements rejecting human exceptionalism. By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, posthumanism, ecofeminism, vital materialism, and Indigenous epistemologies converged in affirming the intrinsic value, agency, and interconnectedness of human and nonhuman beings within fluid ontologies of process and flux.

In parallel, the arts were undergoing their own eco-revolutions. Eco artists, prioritising sustainability ethics over traditional or commercial aesthetics, strove to "strengthen the planet's weakened defences and preserve remnants of its vitality," often at the expense of artistic prestige (Weintraub, xiv). Macarena Gómez-Barris's (2017) analysis of submerged perspectives exemplifies this shift through South American artists such as Carolina Caycedo, whose "geo-choreographies" align with the motion of rivers to express collaboration rather than mastery (107). These works "[displace] the ocular centricity of human development" (15) and "challenge the monocultural view of developmentalism and colonial capitalism" (16). Similarly, Joanna Page's *Decolonizing Science in Latin American Art* applies Hal Foster's notion of the "anti-aesthetic" to ecological arts that "radically rework notions of artistic autonomy" through encounters with non-human intelligence (139). Artworks that fail to produce commercial artefacts implicitly oppose industrial-capitalism and its role in the acceleration of ecological collapse.

Deep into the twentieth century, this ethic was embodied in diverse projects that blurred the boundary between ecological activism and art. Works like Helen and Newton Harrison's *Serpentine Lattice* (1990s) combined artistic sensibility with ecological restoration, while Joseph Beuys's *7000 Oaks* (1982) and Agnes Denes's *Wheatfield—A Confrontation* (1982) redefined social sculpture as reforestation and regeneration. Alan Sonfist's *Time Landscape* (1978) planted a precolonial woodland in New York City, collapsing past and present ecologies. Together, these projects marked a decisive move from representation to participation.

Meanwhile, parallel movements such as Arte Povera and conceptual bio-art expanded this relational ethos. In 1960s Italy, Arte Povera artists employed everyday materials to critique "man's demiurgic arrogance" and consumerist warfare on nature (Logé, 2025:85). Hans Haacke's *Grass Grows* (1967–69) explored non-human timescales, its slow performance defying human spectatorship. More recent works extend these trajectories into microbial and decompositional realms. In 2008, Terike Haapoja scraped a culture of microbiome from their own face and produced

a video showing its development over a nine day period (Weintraub, 2012:201). *Succession*, as the work was called, accompanied an installation where a coffin-like case made visible the decomposition of a sample from the forest floor and dramatised the cyclic, ongoing, breath-like quality of something we normally perceive and conceive of as static: *death*. Yet as this work shows, dying is as ephemeral as living, and the material conditions of death are consistently redistributed into new emerging forms of life. Likewise, Nicole Fournier's *EmballeToi!* (2012–ongoing) collaborates with decomposers by "planting" synthetic coats to enable soil and insects to remediate microplastics (Knowles, 2017). Here, ecological process itself becomes medium and message, an ethics of praxis embedded in art.

By placing ecological ethics above aesthetics, these artists make an implicit political and social statement about what art can be. Though anti-aesthetic is often used pejoratively, ecological artworks can evoke meta-narratives of tension, ethics, and care as affecting as any cathartic drama. Yet where catharsis pacifies affect through release, encounters with ecocentric art are meant to activate communities and provoke ethical response. Decentring the human (or re-centring ecologies) might appear anti-aesthetic from commercial points of view, but this kind of work operates on a meta-aesthetic level that redefines beauty as a function of interspecies ethics.

The eco-ethico-aesthetic spaces emerging today provide the conceptual and affective ground for situating my own practice—open-ended, awkward, and unapologetically hopeful. Its research proceeds from the hypothesis that a (re)wilding approach to art can be infectious and transformational, particularly when combined with ecosomatic attentiveness and a collaborative openness to the myriad organisms involved in the practice—whether through proximity and attention or through gestures of consideration, inclusion, responsiveness, and responsibility.

2.4c. Walking, Sensing, and Forest-based Practices

The remainder of this chapter zooms in on key aspects of practice central to my formulation of (re)wilding—specifically, place, movement, and sensation insofar as they destabilise default anthro-perceptual regimes. Each of these is a vast topic, and what follows can only introduce their most relevant concepts and concerns. In my practice, the primary site for sensation and movement has been the forest—zones of multispecies ecologies where human influence is limited—and my primary mode of movement has been walking.

In research contexts, walking is an embodied practice with a rich philosophical and methodological history. While often associated with phenomenology or ethnography—walking

interviews, sensory inquiry, mapping cultural histories—recent scholarship has expanded its scope. Springgay and Truman (2019) identify four established themes in walking research (place, sensory inquiry, embodiment, rhythm) and add four more grounded in critical intersectional theory: land/geos, affect, transmateriality, and movement. Their model is valuable here because it pushes walking methodologies beyond phenomenological immersion and into zones of critical friction (9) and defamiliarisation that deterritorialise and reterritorialise (4), generating a sense of walking-with, even when walking 'alone'. Following Puar, they argue that "theoretical concepts need not be united or synthesised […rather,] it can be productive to hold concepts together in tension" (2018:5). Walking can generate such tension, interrupting not only habits of mobility (or immobility) but habits of thought.

Critical frictions resonated strongly in my grief-attuned practice, where walking became a means of holding the ruptural and generative aspects of grief in tension—neither resolving nor avoiding them, but moving with them. This tension created conditions through which grief's destabilising effects could transmute into the subsequent Seasons of Practice: encounter, engagement, assembly, and decay. Walking generates rhythms of practice and situates perception within the relational flux of movement. It provides a tempo by which thought and sensation can unfold together, enabling a distribution of attention across body, land, and more-than-human presences. This attunement aligns with Ingold and Vergunst, who describe walking as "a way of thinking and feeling" and "an accomplishment of the whole body in motion" (2016:2). Such movement emulsifies one's sensorium into a dynamic means of perceiving one's being and surroundings.

Walking entered Western artistic discourse most famously through the Situationist dérive, which "encouraged participants to experience the world anew through becoming lost and adrift in the world" (Hunter, 2019:647). Richard Long's 1967 meadow-walk, which materialised walking-as-inscription, crystallised walking as both intervention and dialogue with place. Since then, walking has served as an investigative method across bodily memory, counter-cartography, and forms of sensing that resist dominant narratives of movement, access, place, and ownership (Springgay & Truman, 2019:4–6).

In 1968, artist Allan Kaprow developed an improvisational theatrical form known as the *Happening*—a performance without the artifice of conventional theatre, often emerging spontaneously from a simple walking practice. One such event, *Easy*, took place along a streambed and followed an extraordinarily minimal set of instructions that "[stripped] the Happening to such elemental phenomena [that it] cleared the way for the students to experience multifarious sensations they might otherwise ignore" (Weintraub, 2012:179), including subtle environmental changes.

Through its ecosomatic, improvisational, and sensorial character, *Easy* can be understood as a proto-(re)wilding project: an early exploration of sensory expansion and open-ended responsiveness to more-than-human environments that foregrounds improvisation.

With (re)wilding practices, it is just as important to attend to where movement happens as to how one moves. I have long referred to my practice as *forest-based*, but the importance of my site's specificity became apparent only gradually. Site-specific practices have evolved from fixed spatial interventions to reflexive engagements with location as a dynamic field of relations. In this sense, through attunement to ecological sentience and relational processes, forest-based practice both grounds and disperses the notion of site.

Donna Haraway's influential essay on situated knowledges (1988) emphasises the value of perspectival, intersubjective knowledge over the hubristic and illusory 'objectivist' viewpoint. In the context of (re)wilding practices (as with conservation rewilding), this matters because partial knowledge—"always constructed and stitched together imperfectly"—enables the cultivation of new viewpoints in which the "never finished self […] is able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another" (586). This collaborative or intersubjective mode of perception underpins ecological negotiation and forms a crucial ethical ground for multispecies relations.

Building on this, Brittany Laidlaw notes that research incorporating "place-making" fosters connections between place identity and pro-environmental behaviour (2021:104). She also highlights the need to expand understandings of movement in such practices, particularly through a posthumanist lens attentive to Barad's intra-action with the more-than-human (104). Site-specific performance thus entails an ongoing negotiation between body and place, in which milieu itself can participate as performer. Forest habitats are composed of myriad living, feasting, reproducing, growing, and disintegrating assemblages—dynamically patterned spaces in continual process. As we focus attunement, the number of location-performers multiplies until the forest can be perceived not just as a passive backdrop, but as a veritable company of co-creative agents.

Natasha Myers further deepens this inquiry by situating ecological perception within colonial histories of environmental legibility. She argues that the "disavowal of nonhuman sentiences" persists through settler logics and the commodification of nature (2018:74). In asking *What do trees know, and what matters to them?*, Myers calls for tuning "bodies and imaginations into the richly sensory worlds of the nonhuman" through multisensory, ecosomatic modes of attention—kinesthetic imaging, listening, smelling—grounded in an ethic of unknowing (76–77). Her practices seek to "disrupt the colonial ecological sensorium […] and resist the compulsion for legibility, quantification, and grid-like mappings" (86–90). Such an approach can facilitate the (re)wilding of

one's eco-sensorium without imposing preset degrees or thresholds that reinforce the human tendency to claim authority over what is and isn't wild, or wild *enough*.

Becoming sensor, for Myers, also requires attunement to, and integration with, more-than-human temporalities. She proposes cultivating "modes of attention that might help us tune in to the deep time of these lands and the naturalcultural happenings shaping its present" (85). This involves slowing down and experimenting with alternative modes of noticing, and recognising that what appears as vegetal stillness is too often mistaken for inertness (Rufo, 2022:26). Through these adaptive perceptual experiments, practitioners engage creative speculation[7] about how other species perceive the world, unsettling default human-temporal scales.

Where Myers attends to vegetal rhythms and the sensory microtemporalities of life, Ignatov (2014) extends this temporal reorientation to geological scales. Reflecting on Smithson's enduring *Spiral Jetty*, he notes how "the vast geological scale of sensory production always involves an acute durational awareness of multiple modes and degrees of agency, many of which flow from powerful impersonal forces and processes" (169). Working with such scales—gesturally or conceptually—opens practitioners and spectators alike to unfamiliar points of view, undermining anthropocentric privilege and habitual human modes of perception. For Ignatov, to enter such a dialogue is to perform ecophilosophy, "a set of practices of thinking and sensing by way of concepts that 'open lines of flight from an actual order of human bodies' and their habitual modes of perception" (135).

Ultimately, these thinkers and practitioners rely on direct bodily engagement as a precursor to transformation. Raffaele Rufo's eco-somatic practice, for instance, engages daily with parks and forests to "develop some practical and conceptual tools for cultivating a feeling for trees as sensible and sentient beings" (2022:8)—modes of movement and attention that include lying, grounding, and shaping (10). Through this, he explores how "perception is enmeshed in a more-than-human web of reciprocities" (3) in order to upend default modes of seeing and feeling our surroundings, and to "experience our body as the result of the movement of everything else above, beneath, and around us" (27). In a sense, Rufo is testing a collaborative field in which reciprocity can emerge despite seemingly insurmountable difference. The next section builds on these questions by examining what it means to sense and perceive *with* other sentiences through a short lineage of practice-based collaborations involving plants and non-human animals.

2.4d. Interspecies Collaboration and its Implicit Improvisationality

Collaboration with other species in arts practices is a foundational frame for this thesis. In a sense, all art is already multispecies collaboration, given the human microbiome's influence on mood and affective responsiveness (Schmidt and Schnorr, 2015:S15). Nevertheless, attuned engagement with more-than-human others is one of the key principles of (re)wilding, and this section traces selected ways interspecies collaboration has developed within twenty-first-century eco-arts and practice research. The previous section considered the forest as a multispecies site; this section explores the potential for artistic collaboration with those species to activate processes of (re)wilding.

In her essay *Research Theatre*, Una Chaudhuri notes that her performance research with animality "embraced rather than ignored the essential unknowability of the animal world" (2014:18). Such opacity is precisely why interspecies collaboration (or the intention toward it) is well served by improvisatory frameworks: consent, will, and communicative intent remain partially or fully inscrutable across species boundaries. Improvisation facilitates collaboration without shared language, enabling practitioners to respond to sensation, multispecies movement, expression, and affect. Embracing unknowability also becomes an ethical provocation—inviting innovation in improvisational technique that respects other species' alterity. A practitioner may enter the forest with artistic intentions or structures, but too firm a grip risks foreclosing responsive and responsible interaction. There are always more participants 'on stage' than one can consciously register; acknowledging the ubiquity of multispecies networks—beneath, beyond, and upon the senses—is integral to the process. To engage an oak, for example, is to engage with the hundreds or thousands of organisms metabolically and behaviourally entwined with it.

If Chaudhuri foregrounds the ethical tension of interspecies opacity, Lisa Woynarski provides a conceptual framework for understanding how nonhuman collaboration functions materially and symbolically. In *Ecodramaturgies*, she proposes a theory of more-than-human performance attentive to bioperformativity. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's notion of assemblage, she distinguishes between "material and narrative agency" (2020:72), corresponding to the physical and expressive dimensions through which assemblages connect, disconnect, and reconfigure. Trees, for example, can "act in a human-nonhuman assemblage, creating subtle reverberations and repercussions, both material and immaterial (such as ecological consciousness-raising)" (73). Following Barad's process-oriented view of agency as enactment rather than attribute, Woynarski defines bioperformativity as the capacity to produce both "physical effects and symbolic effects" (74). This also aligns with Bruno Latour's (2005) insistence that action is never the property of a single entity but emerges through the circulating effects of many actants within a collective. This view foreshadows the assemblage-based authorship discussed later in this thesis.

Where will, intent, or consent are partly concealed by multispecies opacity, it is ultimately the effects circulating within the assemblage through which agency enters the collaborative domain. Assemblages continuously merge and dissolve, altering their flows, intensities, and distributions of influence. This dispersal finds a tactile analogue in contact improvisation, where movement responds to movement until "participants can no longer tell who initiates the action: who is leading and who is following" (Hermans, 2022:219). The improvisors thus "create a we-space, a space in which [touching/moving/dancing] becomes a coauthored activity" (212). Whether involving humans, insects, trees, or wind through its leaves, reaction and response blur simplistic notions of autonomy and intention, demanding a language of intersubjectivity and partial agencies grounded in flow, reciprocity, and connection.

Among possible forest collaborators, trees offer both accessibility and resistance. They are present and approachable, often durable and rooted, yet stubborn dance partners. Responses often occur below the thresholds of human perception. Their movements—absent external forces—are slow and oriented toward growth, networking, and electrochemical exchange. Even so, forests themselves can move and even relocate: three million years ago, large-leaved beeches attempted to cross the Alps, and climate change is once again inducing arboreal migrations in Central Europe (Wohlleben, 2016:141).

Tree-focused arts practices have proliferated accordingly, seeking contact across temporal and sensory difference. *Sonic Kinesthetic Forest*, for example, adopts a pedagogical approach to multimodal artistic engagement with trees, aiming to cultivate multispecies empathy. Similarly, Sarah Abbott's practice draws on Indigenous studies and filmmaking methodologies to explore how "knowledge of the sentient agency of trees can be perceived and practiced ethnographically" (2021:1060), inciting fresh perspectives on how and to what extent interspecies communication and reciprocity might be possible.

Annette Arlander's work with both *remarkable* and *unremarkable* trees (2025) isolates aspects of interspecies collaboration with particular clarity. Rooted in the recognition that our species' very existence depends on trees' capacity to generate an atmosphere—a continuous, if largely unacknowledged, collaboration—Arlander emphasises interspecies reciprocity. Her attention to plants' long lifecycles and probable dilation of temporal experience (2023:17) underscores the importance of respecting duration. By repeatedly visiting plants "bigger than you, stronger than you, plants that can share some of their energy with you—like trees" (2013:21) in their own sites of growth, she cultivates an ethic of vulnerability and spatio-temporal constraint (19). Combining somatic practice with relational gestures toward vegetation, Arlander strives to "combine somatic awareness and ecological consciousness" (2022:244)—a tension "relevant for developing an

ecologically informed consciousness of our co-dependency with other life forms" (244). Her practice models a (re)wilding of attention and relational ethics through iteration, presence, and care.

While Arlander and Rufo focus on vegetal kinships, other artists turn toward more explicitly interactive multispecies encounters. Musician David Rothenberg, for instance, describes performances in which birds "really seemed to want to join in […] We were making music together" (2016:503). Reflecting on an engagement with a humpback whale, he writes: "the clearest sign of communication comes when I stop, and he begins with a direct sense of response… continuing the very same note I just finished" (514). Likewise, Kuai Shen's ant-centred installations generate bioacoustic environments where humans and insects interact through sensory feedback. One such work, *The Initiate (You) & the Mystics (Them)*, documents ants "actively looking for a symbiotic contact with other species" while revealing "the limitations and biases of human perception" (Shen, 2025).

Late in her influential career, somatics pioneer Anna Halprin developed *Still Dance* (2012), a choreography of near-imperceptible movement. Photographed by Eeo Stubblefield and later documented by Andrew Abrahams, *Still Dance* exemplifies (re)wilding and interspecies collaboration. Halprin uses stillness to decentre the human subject and attune to alternate temporal rhythms—"the pulsing waves of the ocean, or the decomposing bark of a thousand-year-old redwood tree" (Thomas, 2012:119). Proximity to ongoing multispecies networks—into whose rhythms Halprin seeks some degree of perceptual access—fosters relational shifts and opens spaces for embodied improvisation and more-than-human collaboration.

Together, these examples reveal interspecies collaboration as both an ethical and perceptual experiment—one that asks how attunement across difference can ethically (re)wild creative process and reorient affective interrelationship. The next section turns toward work addressing the broader crux of this project: intersections between eco-arts and the affects of grief, loss, death, and decay.

2.4e. Grief, Abjection, and the Art of Decay

Having traced how interspecies collaboration expands aesthetic and ethical horizons, this section turns toward the affective and material intersections between grief, decay, and abjection—zones where life and death overlap, and where processes of decomposition become both artistic and philosophical inquiry.

Mark Dion's (2016) installation, *The Life of a Dead Tree*, features a dead ash tree, displayed not as a monument to loss but as a demonstration of underlying continuity. Attention is drawn to the

fungal, vegetal, and insect life that continues to thrive, unsettling modernist assumptions that death is static, permanent, or total. By remarking on the ways individuation is rigidly constructed—even in life forms we only marginally understand—Dion's installation exemplifies a posthumanist perspective and sees the forest for the trees. When a tree falls, it does not simply die; it becomes forest, continuing to propagate, nourish, and regenerate. The generative nature of death implies generative alternatives for grief. As Timothy Morton notes, "letting the dead stick in our throats" is a less romantic but more ethically sound approach than "digest[ing them] into ideal forms" (2010:269). This generative stance toward death resonates with ecosomatic mourning practices such as Raffaele Rufo's *Tree Mourners*, in which participants enact a ritualistic performance of death and mourning at a site of mass death—where tens of thousands of trees had recently been burned, destroyed, abandoned. Rufo frames these actions as introducing ancient forms of lamentation to explore how they transform "mourning into a shared, embodied and emplaced event—one that reconfigures our relationship with the nonhuman and with matter as a living continuum" (2025). Such modes of abiding-with the dead bring us back to Haraway's sense of staying-with that disavows the modernist impulse to silence ghosts or close the lid on ruptures that might otherwise spark urgency or alter how we perceive and relate to species.

While nature and death are both common topics in the arts, decay remains relatively unexplored. Part of the reason for this involves the repulsive affects of abjection. This aesthetic dimension will hold an important place in my (re)wilding project, particularly in the output titled *Carrion Ecologies*. Abjection, as conceptualised by Julia Kristeva, signifies a particular affective response to processes like decay that are transgressive to our concepts of unified and individuated selfhood. Jeffery Weinstock recognises abjection as "the process through which the self separates itself from the non self, and the repulsion elicited by that which was once a part of the self but no longer is" (2020:29). The accompanying urge to turn away from abjection inhibits our ability to perceive the inseparable entanglements of life and death. Western modernity's treatment of the corpse extends this psychic mechanism into cultural form: the logistical precision by which bodies are sanitised, transported, and concealed distances "the living from decay, dissolution and indeed death itself" (Davies, 1996:60). These systems are in place because the abject "disturbs identity, system and order […] does not respect boundaries, positions, rules" (Kristeva, 1982:97). It is "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (ibid) that evokes abjection, or as Margret Shildrick notes, "unsettle[s] constantly […] the security of the human being" (2020:312).

While Kristeva's account powerfully illuminates how abjection secures psychic boundaries, it remains anchored in an anthropocentric model of subject formation; a more ecocentric approach might instead ask how abjection can be reconfigured and perceived as an opening into interspecies

relationality. In the context of practice, abjection's power lies in its potential to reverse the expulsion—to make visible or draw us back into relationship with what has been cast out. The affective force of decay intensifies as bodies move through the uncanny valleys of decomposition, only later stabilising into the aesthetic legibility of clean, decorative bones. Many artists who dip into this valley either exploit decay's powerful affective tensions via the horrific or the transcendent.

Abby Thomason's (2025) Dark Fern Creations are sculptures made from ethically-sourced carcasses. They stage an uncanny metamorphosis in which skeletons seem to bloom through their own skins, draped in flowers and foliage, suggesting how the living animal who fed on plants is now consumed by them in death. Likewise, Casey Curran's *Carrion Blooms* transforms "degeneration and decay" into captivating kinetic beauty (Ebert, 2023). These works aestheticise abjection, finding allure in the process of dissolution. At the opposite extreme, artists such as Joel-Peter Witkin (*The Kiss, Feast of Fools*) Lady Gaga (*Meat Dress*), and Carolee Schneemann (*Meat Joy*) engage abjection directly, evoking fascination through horrific shock.

Between these poles lies an emergent eco-ethical engagement with decay as process rather than spectacle. *CarcassResearch.com*, for example, documents Emma Spencer's research on Australia's necrobiome, presenting decomposition through a matter-of-fact visual diary that blurs the boundaries between data and art. The absence of affectation invites sustained looking and desensitisation—an aesthetic of attention rather than avoidance. Anna Sigrithur and Joel Penner's *Wrought* (2022) finds a middle path between empirical and affective registers. Using time-lapse photography to explore decaying worlds—fermenting fruit, composting waste, rotting carcasses—the film exposes the invisible kinetics of transformation. The sped-up imagery brings the nonhuman tempo of decomposition into human perceptibility, revealing an ongoingness beneath our desire for ego-permanence. In doing so, the film foregrounds how perception itself is temporally bounded. Decay often exceeds human scales of attention. By emphasising motion and metamorphosis within these processes, their film reclaims decay as life's continuation rather than its cessation.

Returning once more to Halprin, Stubblefield, and Abrahams, their film *Returning Home* (2011) offers an example of the embodiment and performance of decay. Here Halprin enacts her own disintegration into landscape, a performance of ecological becoming. The film documents her gradual subsumption into her surroundings, destabilising the artist's privileged subjectivity until she becomes, as she states, utterly "incidental". This moment of dissolution invites the viewer to perceive the sea in-itself rather than as backdrop, extending grief into a choreography of ecological permeability. A later sequence, in which Halprin merges into a tree through time-lapse photography, translates decay into interspecies continuity: what appears as vanishing to the human

eye becomes persistence through transformation. From a human perspective, narratives of vanishing are narratives of grief, and Halprin asks if she might be "rehearsing [her] own returning to the earth" (00:24:47); but ecologically, these affected moments belong to a parade of elaborate processes unfurling new variations through time from components of the old.

In wild ecologies, the liminal spaces of dissolution and abject indeterminacy become generative ground for new material and affective assemblages. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone observes that the stillness of the corpse characterises "a punctuated existence" (2009:95). Yet this punctuation is only apparent from the narrow perspective of individuality. Every corpse remains a site of immense activity—a habitat and a threshold where interspecies relations intensify. As life gives way to death, the still microbe-rich flesh engages with colonisers, scavengers, decomposers, and finally with organic and geological reorientations and reintegrations.

Abjection, when re-encountered through (re)wilding, becomes a site of relational reorientation rather than repulsion, shifting attention from exclusion toward interdependence and opening an interrogation of the complexities obscured by rudimentary humanist categories. (Re)wilding practices contain rich potential to unhinge abjection: what was once deemed horrific or unclean becomes recognised as indispensable to life's flourishing, perhaps even wondrous and beautiful in its own right. Morton describes the body as an aesthetic site in which what is usually excluded —"the disgusting things that the aesthetic normally edits out"—must be reckoned with (2007:107). Read ecologically, this gesture does not valorise shock but exposes how ideals of purity depend upon the denial of interdependence and decay. Rather, the self is made ambiguous, populated by "trace[s] of other beings within oneself" (Morton, 2016:119). What we call death is always a pluralistic process of bringing about. Grief and abjection, rather than negating life, reveal its collaborative continuity—where boundaries dissolve, and matter, affect, and relation persist in ongoing negotiation.

2.5. Conclusion to Chapter Two

In this literature review, I have traced a genealogy of modern Western grief and its gradual reconfiguration in the early twenty-first century through the lenses of ecofeminism, posthumanism, new materialism, and queer death studies. I then examined a range of artistic projects and practices that pursue ecocentric orientations—particularly those adjacent to affects of grief and ecological associations with death and decay, or related to the human estrangement from interspecies realities.

These practices move beyond the aesthetic extraction of environmental commodity to seek lines of flight between deeply personal mourning and transformative ecological reintegration, recognising the agency and value of more-than-human species. To make grief generative rather than cathartic requires processes that remain open-ended or suspended in grief (Morton, 2010:269). In this sense, such works are already embroiled in processes of (re)wilding.

The following chapter turns now to the methodology and design of this project, outlining the research-creation framework, daily practices, documentation strategies, and autoethnographic context. It also introduces the conceptual and ethical parameters of the (re)wilding lens, which are further articulated in Chapter Four.

Chapter Three: Methodology

"The wild is overwhelming after all in its immensity, its elusiveness, its refusal of the human and in its systems of signification that pointedly ignore human presence."

- Jack Halberstam, *Wild Things*

3.1. Orientation to (Re)wilding practices

This chapter articulates a research-creation methodology that emerged iteratively and reflexively over several years of daily, improvisational, embodied forest practice. Its structure is necessarily retrospective, having grown out of the life of the practice long before it could be named, and only later crystallised into a central outcome of the inquiry. As a result, the primary findings of this thesis are methodological. They contribute to a lineage of arts-practice methodologies in which improvisational, horizontal entanglements with more-than-human worlds are paramount—what I have come to describe as *(re)wilding*[8].

Because (re)wilding engagements function simultaneously as research method and as their own object of study, the methodology is not a procedural tool applied to practice, but a living demonstration of the very knowledge-making it theorises. Method and practice are co-constitutive, each continually reconfiguring the other, tracing the rhythms of (re)wilding as both process and proposition. This self-reflexive approach does not render the project amorphous. Its methodological ground lies at the juncture of theoretical, affective, and practical fields outlined in the previous chapter. Queer and posthumanist frameworks contribute an ontology of difference and entanglement and an epistemology grounded in diffractive, improvisational practice. Because the project is situated within a grief-determined autoethnography, its affects and affordances are not merely thematic but methodological: grief here functions as a mode of perception and a way of knowing in its own right.

At the centre of this practice lies a cluster of four interrelated principles long integral to diverse arts practices—*improvisation, site-situation, embodiment, and multi-species collaboration*. Within the (re)wilding framework, these principles also resonate with ecological rewilding, which relies additionally on *complexity*, *unknowability*, and *emergence*. While these first two are often treated as methodological hindrances, ecology shows them to be preconditions for the generative potential of the third. This thesis argues the same is true for arts practice. Together, these principles and axioms form the operative grammar of the (re)wilding methodological ecology.

This chapter situates (re)wilding through its philosophical grounding and through the seasonal model of practice that emerged out of lived engagement with the forest. Although developed retroactively, the seasonal model reflects the actual conditions through which research took shape, and therefore functions as a component of the methodology. The framework's formal articulation as a contribution is developed in Chapter Four, but here it anchors how the project's methods unfolded as a lived ecology of grief-affective improvisation, documentation, analysis, ethics, and research.

Section 3.2 develops the (re)wilding framework as methodological ecology, describing its core processes and practices, 3.3 outlines documentation and reflexive methods, and 3.4 situates the ethical stance, scope, and methodological limitations of the project (with a return to broader implications and limits in Chapter Seven).

Together, these elements establish the methodology for *Grieving with Forests*: a practice-informed research-creation approach contextualised and elaborated by an autoethnography of grieving. These methods operate in situ through a singular forest-based practice centred on the evolving experience of grief following my mother's suicide in 2017. The project reveals a complex reciprocity: while the practice developed out of my grieving process, the affective and perceptual qualities of grief were shaped by the practice in turn. Grounded in the liminal zones where grief, practice, and theory interact, this dynamic produced a transferable[9] model that reconfigures grief and creative processes within the ecological context of (re)wilding.

The project's central provocation—how grief-affective forest-based creative practices transform a practitioner's perception of and relationship with interspecies worlds—originated in personal experience. As intensive grief altered how I perceived and interacted with multi-species worlds, I turned first to stories, journals, and photographs to articulate experience and process. Encountering Nina Lykke's *Vibrant Death* provided a framework through which to test and embody new modes of relation. Incorporating theoretical ideas reshaped the research design. As improvised engagements generated new questions, the central provocation shifted from a query in search of an answer to that of a propositional tether—a methodological orientation allowing open-ended excursions, encounters, and engagements to unfold within the living ecology of (re)wilding.

3.2. Practice Methods: (Re)wilding Framework as Methodological Ecology

I position (re)wilding as a lens through which to read methodological shifts that have been emerging across disciplines for decades—often under different names, genealogies, and epistemological commitments. Across existentialism, phenomenology, and postmodern continental thought, a twentieth-century perspectival backlash against Western pretences of pure objectivity revealed scientific materialism as always already structured by cultural and political bias. In parallel, minoritarian movements opened alternative pathways for knowing: those grounded in

embodiment (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1981; Erin Manning, 2016; Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, 2019; Thomas Csordas, 1994; Alva Noë, 2004), site-specificity (Donna Haraway, 1988; Tim Ingold, 2000; Anna Tsing, 2015; Lucy Lippard, 1997), improvisation (George E. Lewis, 2008; Danielle Goldman, 2010; Vijay Iyer, 2004; Stuart Kauffman, 1995; Sara Ahmed, 2006), collaborative or partial perspectives (Haraway, 1988, 2016; Manning, 2016; Isabelle Stengers, 2011; Vinciane Despret, 2016; Fred Moten & Stefano Harney, 2013), more-than-human epistemologies (Eduardo Kohn, 2013; Natasha Myers, 2018; Timothy Morton, 2007; Haraway, 2016; Despret, 2016; Deborah Bird Rose, 2004), and the diversification and decolonisation of method (Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 2014; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Édouard Glissant, 1997; Macarena Gómez-Barris, 2017; Robin Wall Kimmerer, 2013; Karen Barad, 2007).

Practically, my methodology operates through sustained engagement with sites of multi-species encounter. It evokes grief-affective relationality and documents significant moments of contact through journalling, photography, video, field recordings, and embodied arrangements. These activities intra-act through creative, grief-affective processes, enabling both research and practice to participate in (re)wilding as an emergent methodology.

Before unpacking this project's methodological ecology in detail, it will be useful to sketch the overall 'seasonal' model that has emerged from this research: a framework through which (re)wilding's practices, outputs, and processes can be situated and communicated.

3.2a. The *Seasons of Practice* Model

Melissa Trimingham notes the challenge of balancing creativity's chaotic vitality with the clarity demanded by research. She proposes the spiral as a model that "returns us to our original point of entry but with renewed understanding" (2002:56), sustained by asking ever better questions over time. Halprin's RSVP Cycles—Resources, Score, Valuation, Performance—likewise provide a method for "making process visible" (1969:1) and communicable without enforcing linearity. Enterable at any stage, the cycle generates feedback through repetition, producing coherence without goal-orientation.

My practice, emerging out of grief, initially had no discernible structure. Over months and years, however, recurrent patterns of action, affect, and interspecies relation began to cohere. A model slowly surfaced: not a prescriptive schema but a retrospective articulation of the dynamics underpinning the work. I call this model the *Seasons of Practice*. Like the Trimingham spiral, it is

both descriptive and generative: as understanding changed, so too did the practice; and as practice changed, new understandings emerged (2002:56).

Each day in the forest involved shifting moods, ideas, and conditions—yet also recurrances to particular sites, species, gestures, and sub-projects. From these iterative rhythms arose the five Seasons: e*xcursion, encounter, engagement, assembly,* and *decay*. These seasons abstract practice into a non-linear ecology of inquiry. They are not stages, steps, or phases, but modes of action that may cycle, overlap, reverse, collapse into one another, or all appear within a single day.

This chapter will look more closely at the first three seasons, but the model's full articulation will be developed in Part Two. For now, a brief sketch will provide a feel for their methodological operation.

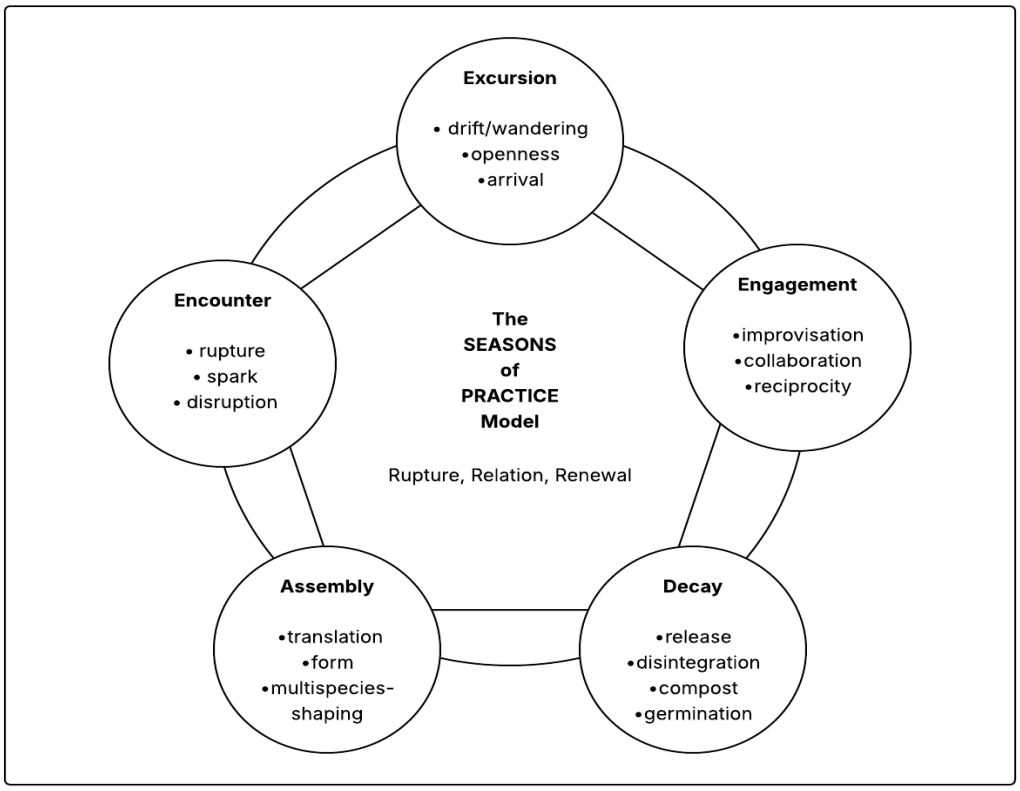


Figure 3.1. The Seasons of Practice Model

Excursion

Daily forest walks—typically 1–4 hours in Goblinwoode or neighbouring commons—constitute embodied acts of *drift-ing*: undirected, affective movement through multispecies ecologies. Walking in this mode becomes speculative rather than goal-oriented. Through grief-inflected motion and openness to disruption, the practitioner attunes to interspecies rhythms and cultivates peripheral awareness: a feeling-thinking that arises from improvisational intra-action and the loosening of perceptive habits.

Encounter

Out of excursion arise unlooked-for interspecies meetings—arresting, subtle, frictional exchanges that disrupt normalised perception and anthropocentric distance. Acts of attention, imaginative speculation, or sensory surprise transform these meetings into sites where affect and curiosity co-compose shifts in relation and awareness.

Engagement

Encounters may pass unnoticed or be acknowledged and forgotten. Engagement describes the choice to extend them: to enter improvisational reciprocity, a practice of sympoiesis (Haraway, 2016:125). Iterative return fosters interspecies collaboration, where grief, imagination, and ecological processes co-compose gestures, materials, aesthetic orientations, and subjectivity. Engagement nurtures an ethic of shared becoming.

Assembly

Here the fragments of excursion, encounter, and engagement gather in the studio. Forest materials and digital technologies intertwine—sometimes nothing more than paper and glue; sometimes video editing, sound design, or chance-based compositional methods. The studio becomes an interspecies site of resonance, where memory, matter, and media entangle and where (re)wilding persists through post-organic processes.

Decay

A generative unmaking through which assemblies fray, compost, or re-enter practice. Decay is both literal and conceptual: the dissolution of artefacts, the relinquishing of authorship, or the co-authoring effects of animals, weather, and time. It resonates with Barthes's "death of the author"

(1977) and Schneider's "remains of performance" (2011). Abandonment becomes technique; abjection, an ecological aesthetic. Decay feeds new cycles while consenting to loss.

In Montana, they say that if you don't like the weather, wait five minutes—sometimes all four seasons can manifest in a single day. Likewise, the five seasons of (re)wilding practice might move in succession or overlap, and arise in any order. Multiple sub-projects may unfold simultaneously; engagement in one context may trigger decay in another; an excursion may erupt mid-assembly; decay may open new pathways of encounter. The model gently frames and responds to the generative chaos of practice without constricting it.

My own process began most often with excursion. Encounters appeared and vanished without expansion until my peripheral awareness sharpened. Then, engagement began to flow intuitively. Assembly entered years later as I sought ways to share the work; and decay, though always active, was the last to be noticed or named. Over time, excursions inaugurated encounters; resonant encounters flowed into engagement; assembly re-contextualised the work and generated new ideas and provocations; decay returned materials, images, and ideas to the compost of practice. Most outputs remain unfinished, abandoned, or ongoing—mulching future iterations and excursions, and holding loosely to form in ways that facilitate a renewal of sense and conceptualisation.

Together, these seasons form not a procedure for generating artworks but a pattern of eco-peripheral attention. They help communicate process, hold space for (re)wilding's unpredictable logics, and articulate a methodological ecology explored more fully in Chapter Four.

While the Seasons of Practice model offers a way of describing how (re)wilding unfolds in practice, it does not yet articulate the operative logics that animate its movements. To move from a descriptive ecology of practice toward methodological articulation, it is therefore necessary to shift focus from *what happens* in practice to *how* practice thinks, feels, and makes meaning. The constellation of processual orientations and practices of engagement that follows distils the recurrent logics that emerged through sustained forest-based work. Rather than prescribing methods or techniques, these orientations describe the conditions, attentional modes, and relational ethics through which (re)wilding operates as research-creation. The remainder of this section (3.2b–3.2g) unpacks each orientation individually, tracing how they arise through practice and are enacted within this project.

Processual Orientations

- (Re)wilding as a Process of Research-Creation and Emergent Analysis
- (Re)wilding as a Process of Peripheral (Un)knowing through Bewilderment
- (Re)wilding as a Process of Queering Grief and Creative Practices

Practices of Engagement

- (Re)wilding through Improvisational Multi-Species Engagement
- (Re)wilding through Speculative Imagination
- (Re)wilding through Defamiliarisation and Re-Enchantment

In my practice, these six modes formed the operational core of a (re)wilding methodology. The first three describe *processual orientations*: how research is enacted and interpreted. The latter three articulate *practices of engagement*: how those orientations materialise in relation to place, affect, and (intra)relationship. None of these modes operate as linear stages or discrete techniques; rather, they constitute overlapping fields of attention. Each is simultaneously a way of knowing, a way of being-with, and a way of making that comprise a methodological ecology for privileging uncertainty, improvisation, and interspecies reciprocity over mastery or control.

By articulating these dimensions, we can see more clearly how practice itself can function as a living method—one that reveals what becomes possible when grief, creativity, and interspecies encounter evolve through open-ended exchange.

3.2b. (Re)wilding as a Process of Research-Creation

Section 2.2 of the Literature Review established research-creation as my preferred practice-research inflection, due in part to its capacity to evoke potentials for outputs, insight, and outcomes to arise—and disintegrate—in flow rather than along pre-conceived structural vectors. Through a queering of both grieving and creative processes, a particular constellation (or ecology) of research-creation methods took shape, which I began to call (re)wilding.

(Re)wilding is not a subset of research-creation; rather, it is a research-creation ecology inflected by grief, interspecies encounter, and emergent improvisation. This distinction matters because what (re)wilding offers is not a method added to an existing toolbox, but a methodological atmosphere: a set of conditions that alters how research-creation proceeds, what counts as knowledge, and how creative inquiry becomes entangled with multispecies worlds.

Emergence—a concept influential in ecological sciences and arts research—describes how relational processes generate novelty that exceeds their individuated source materials. In this project, I use the term to describe how novel properties surface when we design conditions for discovery rather than dictate preconceived outcomes. Natalie Loveless notes research-creation's capacity to "invite us to think interdisciplinary-as-emergence: as productive of outputs that exceed what is demonstrably present in their constituent parts" (2019:26). In this sense, emergence unsettles the boundaries of what is possible.

For instance, (re)wilding processes contribute to the denaturalising of existing disciplinary structures—artifices so entrenched as to appear inevitable, like pastures stripped of biodiversity by short-sighted farming practices. "Alternate (research) stories create alternate (research) worlds," writes Loveless (2019:24), "[and] denaturalise disciplinary locations while nomadically claiming space within all of them" (37). As the ossified boundaries of scientific materialism loosen, more vibrant methodological ecologies are developing rigorous approaches based on emergence, improvisation, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Rather than circumscribed sites of knowledge where specific questions pursue specific kinds of answers, research-creation champions "sites of ignorance and curiosity" (39), where discoveries emerge beyond intention through flexible and open-ended modes of capture.

In this way, (re)wilding strives to "open up [possibilities] rather than consolidate and instrumentalise them" (39). It seeks so-called 'ignorant' sites—where undercurrents of possibility flow through frames of unknowing. The next section turns toward this terrain, to processes of peripheral (un)knowing by way of bewilderment.

3.2c. (Re)wilding as a Process of Peripheral (Un)Knowing through Bewilderment

I characterise my (re)wilding methodology across multiple vectors of process and practice, engaging in part Jack Halberstam's reframing of wildness as "a mode of unknowing, a resistant ontology, and a [speculative] fantasy of life beyond the human" (2020:8). This orientation traverses

creativity and art-making, grief-affective attunement, interspecies encounter, and the project's particular approach to research-creation. Erin Manning argues that research-creation "generates new forms of experience" that are "made up of more than what actually takes form" (2016:30) and "inevitably involves a transversal engagement with different disciplines" (27). Research-creation, therefore, extends beyond the production of objects or structures and into new ways of relating, sensing, and experiencing. Its most fertile results arise "when it is constitutive of new processes" (28), activating potentials that had previously remained virtual.

In (re)wilding practices, the limitations of knowledge are generative. Complexities are encountered through embodied, relational, and affective modes of (un)knowing that situate human understanding as necessarily partial[10], co-constitutive, and fragmentary contributions to broader ecologies of entangled perception (Haraway, 1988:586). Embracing limitation and complexity cultivates openness and humility, enabling new sensual and perceptual possibilities. One cannot know in advance what a process will feel like; to imagine otherwise is to foreclose experience. Pure intellection cannot conjure sensation—it must be lived, and new sensations reach us first as affect, which is always at least in some small way ruptural, a site where change is made possible.

Experiential zones beyond what can be precisely rendered exemplify the concept of wildness as deployed in this thesis. Section 3.4 will elaborate on the critique of the term's problematic genealogy, but for now I turn to Halberstam's generative reclamation of the wild—an epistemology of the *ferox*: a knowing that "does not elucidate but mystifies, does not enlighten but instead bewilders" (2020:53). Methodologically, this bewilderment expresses an "eccentric epistemology, a mode of embodiment in which subjects orient away from social training and toward the wild" (79). The ferox disrupts and erodes habits of perception and understanding, challenging delineations of what does and does not constitute knowledge. It horizontalises and multiplies relations between human and non-human, blurring and unsettling these categories. Halberstam's wilding of knowledge is chaotic, fragmented, and non-linear; yet it is surprisingly generative when engaging the countless living "systems of knowing, signifying, and desiring that simply exceed the human" (82).

Bewilderment resonates with embodied methodologies of unknowability (Manning & Massumi, 2014:45) and with what Hunter (2016, Introduction) and Chaudhuri (2014:3) call "not-knowing"—an openness to the impossibility of fixed knowledge, and to truths that emerge only in motion. (Re)wilding approaches the unknown not as absence but as a condition of possibility—a state of perceptive and creative potential. What emerges is not lexical but comprises "ways of knowing rather than knowledge [itself]"; works of embodiment "release [these ways] into the worlds of those who participate" and can "release ways of being known into society" (Hunter, 2016, Introduction).

This notion extends to the "unfinishedness" (Logé, 2025:46) of creative work, where incompletion becomes a method of openness and discovery.

This "aesthetic of bewilderment" (Halberstam, 2020:53) asks whether un-art or anti-art might "instruct us in new ways of listening, different forms of knowing, and alternative logics of embodiment, aesthetic expression, desire, history, and beauty" (52). Through the open-ended, grief-affective, improvisational nature of my practice, I encountered new perceptual affordances that engage what I call *peripheral knowing*—an approach to accessing that which can only be glimpsed sidelong, or out of the 'corner of the eye'. *Peripheral knowing* refers to perceptual or affective attunements that occur obliquely: knowledge that arrives through indirect sensing or affective resonance rather than direct apprehension. It designates a mode of unknowing that is sensitive to the limits and dynamics of human perception.

Many phenomena—subatomic particles, microbial exchanges, atmospheric flows—are not directly perceptible. Others are too subtle, too large, too slow, too fast, or too deeply submerged within multispecies time. Yet the periphery of the human sensorium is a movable horizon—suggesting senses or attunements we have yet to discover or put into practice. The cognitive sciences now recognise more than twenty senses (Durie, 2005), and research continues to reveal unexpected capacities—such as the ability to locate static objects buried beneath granular substrates by micro-tactile clues (Chen et al., 2025). Peripheral knowing thus refers to oblique pathways into the real: modes of sensation that arise not by extending the dominant senses forward, but by softening them sideways.

Ben Spatz describes the indirect encounter in performance as an "interplay between action and receptivity" (2015:36). Macarena Gómez-Barris proposes a "fish-eye" epistemology that circumvents extractivist perspectives by "elongat[ing] time, linger[ing] within third spaces, imagin[ing] ecologies of rupture, and see[ing] with a fish's eye into the flow of the river and away from the dam's blockage" (2017:5). While her strategies address cultural ecologies, they extend readily to nonhuman lifeworlds likewise "submerged" (4) beneath extractive systems. Unknowing here is not vacancy but an invitation: a recognition that there are ways to know we have not yet considered.

The peripheral contains submerged and affective modes of unknowing—ways to engage with more-than-human others beyond rational formulations, operating within a space where we won't know everything, or possibly even enough. As Natasha Myers reminds us, unknowing "is not about cultivating ignorance or indifference. Rather it is a capacious and humbling space that offers some refuge from the hubris of knowledge systems […] that have too long dictated what is good, valuable, and true" (2018:75). Like all emergent analytic modes, peripheral methods may not yield

certainty, but they foster speculation, alternative meaning-making, and ethical entanglement. This concept returns in Chapter Four, where its implications for interspecies attunement and aesthetic practice are explored in greater depth.

Research-creation as a peripheral practice of unknowing does not uncover pre-existing truths; it creates conditions through which the virtual can actualise within complex conceptual, perceptual, and embodied material ecologies. Doing so requires practice, engagement, and a willingness to affect and be affected. "Making knowledge," writes Barad, "is not simply about making facts but about making worlds […] specific worldly configurations […] in the sense of materially engaging as part of the world in giving it specific material form" (Barad, 2007:91). From this perspective, (re)wilding contributes to an intra-active episteme of ongoing attunement with more-than-human lifeworlds rather than the quest to fill gaps in totalising systems. It operates generatively, exploring new ways of perceiving and relating, and critically, unsettling normative hierarchies of knowledge and value that constrain transformation.

3.2d. (Re)wilding as a Process of Queering the Work of Grief

(Re)wilding's methodology asks what the grieving body can do—what it perceives, knows, relates to, and creates when processes of loss are immersed in an interspecies milieu. This question threads throughout the thesis, but here I foreground how grieving itself carries perceptual, epistemological, and ethical force. Mary-Frances O'Connor reframes grieving as a kind of learning (or relearning), a "painful problem for the brain to solve" (2023, Chapter 1). Anyone who has grieved knows that this problem is not confined to the brain. Grief reorders one's entire sensorium. It is a whole-body recalibration in which the mind-body-lifeworld ruptures and must adapt to a reality reorganised around what is irreversibly lost.

A recent study on grief and perception by Becky Millar illuminates this through the sensorimotor theory of perception. In this view, perception depends on "expectations regarding the sensory implications of one's own body movements" (2023:441). When bereavement shatters those expectations, one's perceptual world becomes unstable, generating "misperceptions, sensory hallucinations, and quasi-sensory experiences of presence" (442). Bereavement, then, can be understood as inciting externally imposed defamiliarisations (see 3.2g): disturbances not only of perceptual reality but also of one's physical, emotional, and social coordinates. Millar notes that the strictly sensorimotor model must be expanded to include affect, since grief profoundly shifts "one's embodied interaction with the world" and renders perceptual engagement more sluggish and

difficult (455). In practice, grief may heighten or mute sensation, clarify or distort, sharpen or blur —often in unpredictable oscillations. This non-normative mode of perception suggests a non-normative mode of knowing.

Other scholars describe longer-term shifts in epistemological, ethical, or ontological orientation. Grief frequently exposes values, capacities, and relations that had been overlooked or taken for granted. Timothy Morton suggests that the "really difficult elegiac work" of grieving ecologically disrupts anthropocentrism by "bringing into full consciousness the reality of human and nonhuman interdependence" (2010:256), unsettling the tacit illusion that the world is a human set-piece. Judith Butler similarly reads grief as expanding our apprehension of intersubjectivity. In grief we often feel we are learning things we somehow should already have known; or we encounter transformations so radical that they recalibrate the very frameworks through which we once understood the world. Joan Didion writes that grief "obliterates the dailiness of life" (2006, Chapter 2). In this sense grief enacts its own methodology—a system of unlearning, re-attuning, and world-reorienting that resonates with and can actively participate in the critical logic of (re)wilding.

(Re)wilding's critical stance aligns closely with Queer Theory. Queering here describes a methodological process that "go[es] beyond and unsettl[es] (subverting, exceeding) binaries and given norms and normativities" (Radomska et al., 2019:6). MacCormack frames queering as an affirmative gesture that rethinks "the capacity for life to thrive […] without conditions of knowledge or hierarchies of value" (2025:4). Within death and grief studies, queering critiques normative, legible modes of grieving (Butler; MacCormack) and destabilises binaries such as human/nonhuman, life/death, or grief-as-paralysis/grief-as-motivating. Grief itself is already affectively a queering of normative perception and emotional regulation, though social scripts aim to guide grievers back toward linear resolution and sanctioned expression. These pressures constrict the ruptural, transformative capacities that grief otherwise unlocks. Within this project, queer death studies frames grief conceptually while underpinning its improvisational methodology, positioning grief-affective experimentation as a form of queer world-making in practice.

My own forest practice enacts a queering of grief through its persistence in open-endedly refusing resolution. Excursions yield encounters that draw me more deeply into both my grief and a posthumanist relation with my dead mother—a relation attuned to her material dissolution and continued becoming, what Nina Lykke calls "molecular mourning" (2021:127). This invites forms of engagement activated by grief's affects—sorrow, regret, elation, guilt, hope, joy, longing—rather than being channelled into the normative 'work' of resolution and return to normalcy. In (re)wilding, grief persists as long as it needs to, transforming alongside the recognition that irreversible loss inaugurates radical becoming.

(Re)wilding also queers grief-adjacent attitudes toward death, mortality, and the corpse, unsettling normative images of decay and abjection. Only grief's intensity could have led me to a hillside at night, digging my hands into the earth to unbury a dead sparrow—afraid that my cultural gesture was disrupting the food chain. The awareness that my mother, too, had undergone putrefaction before cremation gave such encounters an uncanny tenderness. Soon I began collecting carrion—foxes and badgers, sheep from the mountains, a seal from the beach, and a stag found hanging mysteriously where its antlers wedged into the crook of a fallen tree. Sometimes I buried these animals and later unearthed their bones; other times, I let them decompose where they lay, observing and filming the insects and scavengers that visited them (see *Carrion Ecologies*[i] in Chapter Six). Through these acts, the abjection that segregate human sensibility from material processes of death began to soften. One may not always form intimate bonds with maggots or beetles, but one can recognise vitality, value, and agency—an expanded field of relation made possible through the queering of grief, death, and decay.

Across the three methodological processes—emergent research-creation, bewilderment, and the queering of grief—(re)wilding expands research beyond production and reflection into lived entanglements. Emergence describes how conditions for novelty arise; bewilderment sustains the epistemic openness that allows such novelty to register; and queering performs the critical and affective work of actualising the new. These processes trace the inward movements of (re)wilding. The sections that follow extend (re)wilding outward—into interspecies improvisation, speculative imagination, and acts of defamiliarisation and re-enchantment that materialise (re)wilding as a practice.

3.2e. (Re)wilding involves Embodied Practices of Improvisational Multi-Species Engagement

(Re)wilding becomes perceptible not only as a set of conceptual orientations but as lived, embodied practices unfolding in relation to multispecies worlds. Across years of fieldwork in Goblinwoode, my methods emerged iteratively between what I describe as the five Seasons of Practice. The first three—*excursion, encounter,* and *engagement*—expresses distinct modes of embodied relation, while sharing a commitment to situated, improvisational responsiveness within

[i] **RC Exhibit → (Re)wilding Outputs → Year Four → Carrion Ecologies**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503348
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/gq67zt48g

more-than-human environments. What follows sketches how these processes operate methodologically, and how they co-produce the relational ground from which (re)wilding arose[11].

a) Excursion — Entering the Space / Drift-ing

My practice begins with the daily forest walk. Long before incorporating specific creative modes, these excursions functioned as an embodied act of drift-ing and represented the earliest and most persistent mode through which grief, attention, and environment braided themselves together. Even proto-sculptural gestures—collecting bones and antlers, or building and elaborating stone circles—were inseparable from the walk itself. To move for hours through forested and common lands aligns with *dérive*-like drift-ing: movement guided not by objective but by affective openings, sensory disturbances, shifts in weather, or subtle changes in mood. I retain and emphasise the *-ing* participle because it foregrounds ongoingness rather than representing a discrete event, and also because the hyphen signals friction: drift-ing is wandering in response to material conditions, not what the wanderer seeks to find or find out. The etymological connection with *wind* (turn or weave) is apt: wandering bends, eddies, and coils according to environmental forces.

In practice, these drift-ing excursions often began as propositions: grief-affective prompts, theoretical quotes, paradoxes, somatic scores, and occasionally somewhat more structured sessions.[ii] Propositional openness created conditions for unexpected movement, irregular pacing, and altered perceptual fields. Rather than adhering to a rigid design, my excursions adopted a spirit of speculative eventing that "provoked an ethics [and aesthetics] that is accountable to a [multifarious] material world" (Springgay & Truman, 2019:87). As a result, my body often found itself moving in unexpected directions, at differing speeds, and in unconventional ways. The apertures of sensory and mental attention simultaneously narrowed (toward discrete moments) and expanded (toward multispecies presence), creating conditions in which unlooked-for encounters could emerge.

The drift is not a 'random walk'. It is continuous with walks that came before and those that will follow, while always striving to remain fully present. It does not shy away from the internally felt emotional flurries that walking and movement can produce. It is sensitive to collaborative intentionalities, not by pretending to know what the forest 'wants', but as nonverbal responsiveness arising from how our bodies and choices are "impacted at every second by context and companions, even if we don't notice at the time" (Olsen, 2022:xv). Such sensory-affective decision-making takes

[ii] **RC Exhibit → Introduction and Contexts → Movement Journals**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503391
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/my_collections/bg25nh34d

place at a pre-cognitive level, in the "gut", which can "act independently [of the brain], learn, remember, and feel" (Olsen, 2002:53). Excursion is habit busting in situ, where minute internal or external variations carve new and often wildly diverging pathways from the old.

This first season cultivates the openness necessary for encounter. How we enter into the forest matters, as does how we sense and move relationally with our surroundings. Drift-ing generates readiness: the readiness to stop, to follow a fleeting movement, or to respond to what exceeds expectation. As in the *dérive,* it also disrupts habitual pathways that can dull the senses. It is an ethic of arrival that treats each excursion as a threshold into more-than-human worlds rather than as an escape from human ones.

b) Encounter — Witnessing and Attending

Excursion opens into movement, encounter is the pause: the moment when the body arrests its motion because something has drawn it into relation. A shifting shadow, a falling leaf, the scuttle of a spider—an event occurs, and the body feels compelled to attend.

In this second season, the body becomes an instrument of research. Sensation, affective permeability, and perceptual orientation co-compose how an encounter is experienced. This aligns with Springgay and Truman's walking methodologies, which frame more-than-human research as a practice queering the walk (2019:7) in a way that prioritises exemplifications over explanations. Such research remains sensitive to *propositional* rather than procedural knowledge—in order to become "entangled in relations" (84) over time. These "speculative middles" (83-84) mirror how encounter operates in (re)wilding: a moment where the researcher can "become stripped of [their] own assumptions" (2016:259) and "de-familiarize the habitual" (261).

Encounters diverge for each practitioner; they resist standardisation. They reveal knowledge not in extraction but as entanglement. When I pause before a leaf's spiral descent, or spend an hour following the rhythm of a beetle's movement across a stone, it is not to decode meaning but to enter into a co-extensive moment in which affect, duration, and relation are composing something together.

c) Engagement — Participating in Multi-Species Worlds

Engagement is the shift from witnessing to acting-with. It names the third season in which encounter becomes participation, and sensation becomes response. Yet this transition is ethically charged: to intervene in another being's lifeworld—human or otherwise—is always consequential.

Unlike human–human improvisation, nonhuman collaboration rarely affords immediate feedback. Trees, insects, fungi, and carrion bodies operate on temporalities and sensitivities that exceed normative human sensing. Engagement therefore unfolds as slow, durational, sometimes ambiguous improvisation. It requires humility, restraint, and a willingness to be altered by more-than-human agencies.

In my practice, this often meant allowing the forest to lead. In *Carrion Ecologies*[iii], coherence emerged only across weeks of decay; to impose narrative or aesthetic control too early risked occluding the ecological dramas unfolding through animal interaction, microbial bloom, and desiccation. Similarly, in *Skullwillow*[iv], I initially repositioned fallen objects to preserve my sculptural intent. Eventually I understood the project as only becoming collaborative when I stopped obsessively intervening: when I allowed crows to pry bones loose, spiders to lace webs between skulls, moss to colonise bark, and fungi to burst through fissures.

Engagement thus becomes a practice of shared becoming—an improvisation shaped by interspecies feedback, even when that feedback arrives through decay, dispersal, disappearance, or silence. This resonates with Midgelow's account of improvisation as the "midflow, the never to be complete, the messy and amorphous" (2018:62), where meaning is generated through ongoing relation rather than controlled correlation.

3.2f. (Re)wilding involves Affective Practices of Speculative Imagination

In (re)wilding practice and methodology, the body's engagement with the forest works in partnership with imaginative speculation—not as metaphor, but as a methodological extension: a way of continuing inquiry at the limits of perception, generating provisional narratives or gestures through which new relations may be tested and felt. Because the perceptual worlds of other species remain opaque, imagination becomes not a compensatory fiction but an ethical and epistemic response to unknowability.

Speculative space can bridge gaps in knowledge and sketch conceptual or affective possibilities that arise in movement with the forest. For Haraway, fabulation is one way of making kin with beings whose lifeworlds exceed our interpretive reach (2016:101). Her notion of "compostist" (101-

[iii] **RC Exhibit → (Re)wilding Outputs → Year Four → Carrion Ecologies**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503348
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/gq67zt48g

[iv] **RC → Seasons of Practice → Engagement → Skullwillow**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503404
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/my_collections/4742qc448

102) thinking—mourning irreversible loss while recognising our shared material afterlives—aligns closely with the grief-attuned, ecocentric sensibilities of Nina Lykke and Queer Death Studies. Fabulation becomes a spectral methodology, imagining-with what cannot be fully perceived yet continues to act materially in the world.

This section outlines three ways (re)wilding employs speculative imagination: (a) dovetailing relationships with non-human life into our conceptions of our lost dead in their becoming (com)posthuman; (b) entering assemblage fields through fabulation and instauration; and (c) engaging perceptual fissures that open new modes of multispecies relation.

a) Spectral Attunement and Collaborating with the Dead

Encounters with the dead exceed simple categories of fact or fiction. As explored in the literature review, they arise as spectral assemblages of matter, memory, imagination, and affect. In a hauntological register, Despret and Laqueur argue that the dead continue to abide both socially and materially. Scientific materialism may have redistributed our practices of memorialisation, but not the relational persistence of the dead themselves (Laqueur, 2015:210).

Lykke's distinction between *molar* mourning and *molecular* mourning (2021:128) reframes the dead as materially ongoing participants in ecological process. In this sense, the "deep time of the dead" (Laqueur, 2015:31-33) is more than a haunting of the past; it is an animating of the future. (Re)wilding practices improvise with and embody this continuity, imagining where the lost loved one's dispersed materials may have gone, what they might now be becoming, and how their redistribution shapes ongoing ecological relations. Such speculation is grounded—not arbitrary fantasy, but a felt extension of embodied practice, organic process, and affective attunement.

This is the space where grief, imagination, and matter meet: where speculative imagination becomes a form of collaborative continuation, a way of participating with the ongoingness of what has been lost.

b) Active Participation Within Assemblage Fields

Grief, carried into interspecies encounter, becomes a mode of affective attunement through which speculative relations with the more-than-human are amplified. (Re)wilding thus offers a generative methodology for grieving-with: not merely reconciling loss but entering into more attentive and ethical relations with multispecies worlds.

To be in the forest is to be saturated by living communities of overlapping assemblages—ecological, temporal, affective. Grief intensifies sensitivity to these assemblages. Early in my practice, this sensitivity manifested in recurring perceptual events: faces appearing among trees, moss, and stone[12]. I called these apparitions *goblins*, initially recognising them as anthropomorphic projections. But through repeated noticing and engagement, they shifted from fanciful figures to perceptual thresholds: invitations into the slow processes of growth, decay, habitation, and intra-action that materially shaped those forms. What began as projection became speculative participation, where stones, trees, and moss revealed themselves as collaborators in perception.

Souriau's notion of *instauration* helps articulate this process. Nothing new is simply invented or discovered; rather, beings gain reality through relational processes that waver between fabulation and verification. As Latour writes, instaured beings are those who, despite their fuzzy ontological status, are still "capable of worrying you […] of unsettling you […] of making you do *something* (emphasis mine)" (2013:161). *Goblins*, too, in Souriau's and Latour's terms, can be reframed as beings-in-the-making: figures whose existence relies on the ways they trouble, reorient, and demand response. In this sense, the goblins I encounter are not fixed entities but relational forms that condense my grief, attention, and the forest's material affordances: they continue to act on me and with me, organising how I perceive and respond—specifically by pointing, through their own perceptual overlay, toward the underlying bio-networks from which they emerged.

Like Derrida, Despret describes our ongoing relationships with the dead in terms of how they continue to influence our lives. But these dead are changed, they are instaured, for memorialisation is never a perfect recall, but always a "creative act involving fabulation, captioning, and especially fabrication" (2021:47). This raises productive questions: if the dead can be instaured in this way, might these goblin-figures that emerge at the perceptual threshold also be understood as *momentarily instaured beings*—temporary condensations that facilitate the more enduring instauration of those living beings who compose them: the moss and the trees, the insects and birds that inhabit them, the mycelial networks, the decomposers, bacteria, and so on? If so, what futures might such beings co-compose with us? (Re)wilding invites such speculative co-thinking, a willingness to let imagination touch ontology without requiring either to collapse into certainty.

c) Perceptual Fissures and Developing Relationship

Speculative imagination emerges most forcefully in the fissures where affect has weakened habitual strata. A surprising event encountered on excursion—an uncanny shape, a charged object, a sudden movement—can pull perception toward a relational field unfolding on the far side of the

encounter. If engagement follows, this field becomes a space where intra-subjective forces and multispecies agencies might co-compose new experiences, new interpretive gestures, or new stories.

Erin Manning's (2016) concept of *weather patterns* describes the habitual perceptual fields that shape experience[13]. These patterns tend to ossify with repetition, but minor gestures—small shifts in movement, attention, or affect—can slip through their cracks and open onto alternative perceptual worlds. Such gestures "[make] felt how an ecology can become expressive," foregrounding "the intensity of material forces" (Manning, 2016:81,85). This project responds to Manning's call to cultivate practices that open fields in which minor gestures can take hold.

The (re)wilding of grief and forest-based practice can create conditions of possibility for the generation of such openings. Grief-affective intensities destabilise perceptual habits; forest encounters amplify relational variability; together they create conditions for noticing what normally slips by. This is where peripheral knowing begins to take shape: relations sensed obliquely, sidelong, as if from the corner of the eye.

Lykke's *immanent miracles*—events that make the ordinary strange and the strange intimately present—engage this slippage to offer a bridge from speculative imagination toward re-enchantment. Such events reveal how (re)wilding can render perceptible what is often too subtle to register. They transform perception itself, expanding the practitioner's capacity for new interspecies relations.

Across the five Seasons of Practice, such perceptual openings most often arise during encounter and engagement. But it is excursion that cultivates the preconditions for such events. Here, an affective and improvisational approach toward drift-ing through forests combines with the overall cycle of practice to yield a variety of relational possibilities. Speculative imagination thus functions as a methodological hinge between embodied engagement and the perceptual transformations of defamiliarisation and re-enchantment: a hinge where the unseen becomes newly strange, and the strange becomes newly alive to perception.

3.2g. (Re)wilding involves Practices of Defamiliarisation and Re-Enchantment

In the grip of grief arising from unexpected and irreversible loss, affective intensities can short-circuit the familiar, calling the 'self-evident' into question. In grief, one may become preoccupied with a reevaluation of matters that once felt trivial or entirely insignificant. One is thrust into a process of unlearning that imposes instability, resulting in what seems like a loss of ground. A kind

of perceptual regression often occurs: a return to childlike states of wonder, confusion, or startled unknowing. Grief thus acts as an *affective defamiliarisation*[14]—a doubling of perception that exposes habitual modes of knowing as provisional.

A similar unmooring occurs when creative practice relocates from studio to forest. Motor memory adapted to flat floors or familiar streets falters against uneven ground, tangled roots, stinging insects, sudden weather, and the daily fluctuations of a constantly shifting environment. The geometry of the studio and the predictable temporality of rehearsal give way to an organic world in continual flux. In the studio, improvisation can be voluntary; in the forest it becomes inevitable.

In both grief and forest-practice, one stumbles out of the ease of habituated movement and perception. The rules, players, and temporalities are always changing. One becomes a beginner again—startled, destabilised, yet perceptually alive. Grieving with and among the forest compounds these conditions: the practitioner confronts a dynamic ecological world with an erratic, affectively charged bodymind. The resulting negotiation remains open-ended, and the micro-discoveries and learnings are offset by ruptures and reorganisations. Amidst instability, a tentative, shifting ground begins to form where unfamiliarity of place meets unfamiliarity of emotion.

This overlay of affective and embodied defamiliarisations is how I engage the concept of *bewilderment*.

a) Encounters with Ecologies of Life and Death

As a research-creation process, defamiliarisation functions as a generative threshold capable of activating re-enchantment. Originally articulated and elaborated by Shklovsky (1991) as a literary technique, defamiliarisation makes the habitual strange again so it can be perceived anew. In this thesis, it operates both aesthetically and methodologically—a way of renewing perception's capacity for wonder. In Part Two, this thesis will explore in greater detail how defamiliarisation dovetails with the abject/uncanny and is, in this sense, baked into the experience of grief. For now I will introduce this logic and explain how it functions in practice.

Lykke, Aglert, and Henriksen note that defamiliarisation intensifies when "doing research *with*, rather than *about*, more-than-humans" to the point of productive disorientation (2024:5). This resonates strongly with Halberstam's *bewilderment*, which for (re)wilding operates as the unsteady ground for defamiliarising encounters and engagements. Bewilderment, both affective and generative, helps practitioners cultivate "alternative sensibilities and sense-abilities […] in which the human subject becomes able to sense in different ways from the habitual and normative" (6).

Encounters with mud, slime, insects, fungi, and carrion often evoke aversion or abject disgust. Without practice, such affective estrangement tends to collapse into either revulsion or morbid fascination. Yet sustained engagement that abides in these encounters rather than recoiling from them can dislodge perception from preconception and renew one's sense of the world. This is where (re)wilding comes in: guiding the practitioner along trajectories where defamiliarisation can yield re-enchantment instead of shutdown or melt-down.

b) Deep Time Flow-State Entrainment

Bewilderment also arises through temporal disjunctions: the meeting of human attention with the vast and minute timescales of forest life. Forest ecologies operate across a spectrum from the ephemeral lifespan of a gnat to the centuries-long endurance of an oak. Attempts to collaborate along spectrums of time will affect practitioners in different ways, and these divergent temporalities can complicate perception.

Biological entrainment—where organisms synchronise rhythms such as breath, pulse, or movement—occurs across species[15], from insects and fireflies to amphibians and, as early experiments with pendulum clocks suggest, even non-organic systems. Extended immersion in the forest often generates a felt sense of entrainment: subtle attunements to trees, animals, water, and weather patterns, closely related to *resonance* or attunement with a person or place (Olsen, 2022:12).

Improvisation further modulates perception through conditions akin to Csíkszentmihályi's (1997) *flow state*: intense focus coupled with a sense of effortlessness. Research suggests improvisation heightens sensory processing (Limb & Braun, 2008), enhances cognitive flexibility (Norgaard et al., 2019), and produces embodied tensions of coexisting fluidity and intensity (Gang & Zhang, 2024:73) resulting in a diminished sense of time and a softening of self-boundaries. These states loosen habitual perceptual structures, enabling openness to unfamiliar ecologies and emotions.

Through these mechanisms, improvisation functions as a method of temporal bewilderment: an unfastening of normative rhythms that cultivates resonance, empathy, and expanded temporal sensitivity.

c) Miraculous: Transformations in Affective Experience, Perceptual Affordances, and Relational Attitudes

(Re)wilding experiments with what Nina Lykke calls the *immanent miraculous*—encounters that appear uncanny or wondrous but emerge from convergences of multiple material agencies (2021:183). Although Western frameworks tend to interpret such events either as supernatural interventions or psychological projections (2021:170-171), Lykke proposes a third register: corpo-affective events arising from relational fields in which material, ecological, and affective processes converge to exceed easy explanation.

(Re)wilding aligns with this perspective by adopting an ontological stance akin to Glissant's *opacity*—an acknowledgment that human understanding of more-than-human worlds is necessarily partial, and that such partiality must temper any impulse toward "absolute truths whose guardian [one] might believe [oneself] to be" and instead "[sensitising] the limits of every method" (1997:192). The aim is not to assign ontological causes to anomalous encounters but to treat them as openings: into grief-affective conditions of possibility, into multispecies relational and co-creative capacities, and into methodological innovation grounded in practice.

Across the interwoven processes of multispecies engagement, speculative imagination, and defamiliarisation, (re)wilding unfolds as a cyclical or spiralling ecology of unlearning and renewal. Grief's bewilderments and the forest's improvisational compulsions converge to produce shifting sensitivities and responsive capacities. The five Seasons of Practice—excursion, encounter, engagement, assembly, and decay—thus form both a rhythmic field and an epistemic ecology: a lived methodology in which each phase generates the conditions for the others.

The following section, on documentation, traces how these cycles are witnessed, recorded, and translated into multi-modal forms of expression.

3.3. Documentation and Reflexive Practice

The tools and methods used to undertake, organise, and document my practice included journalling and photo-journalling; the development, execution, and documentation of creative engagements and sub-projects in both forest and studio; and an ongoing reflexive process of attending to how encounters altered sensations, perceptions, and affects in the practitioner, as well as shifts in my relationships (attitudes, behaviours, ethics) with a multi-species forest in flux. Several creative outputs arising from excursions and encounters are presented in the RC exhibit. For the purpose of this thesis, many of these have been framed and "inflected to capture and reveal moments of discovery" (Nelson, 2013:28). They do not stand as finished artworks, but as traces and

fragments—provisional experiments with undercurrent, affect, perception, engagement, and relation. Each sub-project forms an iteration in an evolving dialogue with/as documentation.

3.3a. Modes and Materials of Documentation

Over four years of research, I engaged multiple and evolving modes of documentation. Given my improvisational approach to (re)wilding the research process, I followed artistic instincts and gravitated toward media responsive to context, affect, and impulse. Early on, wandering forests in search of a practice I did not yet recognise as already underway, I often brought a camera. What ended up documented were my own interests and attention. In retrospect, these still images reveal the forest as seen through those early sensorial and affective filters.

As I began to consider daily arts practices as an investigative method, it became clear that different circumstances and questions called for different documentation modalities. One could easily approach (re)wilding through a single artistic lens, provided an ecology of methods and techniques within that form were allowed to interact and play. In my case, previous experience with diverse creative tools enabled an ecology of media within forest excursions and engagements: video, photography, sound recording, musical instruments, electronic devices, writing (journalling, fiction, poetry, screenplay), collections and arrangements of found artefacts, and eventually material bodies—my own moving body and voice, and the bodies of living plants and animal carrion encountered roadside or in the forest. These traces functioned both as creative media and as documentation of practice.

Visual documentation (camera, video, stills):

Camera use began as an extension of embodied sensing. Initially I carried only a phone camera, later investing in a Fuji X-T3 mirrorless camera for stills and video. Gradually, new lenses entered my kit, each with its own perceptual affordances. Different focal lengths do not merely add affect to a shot; they extend sensory capacity (telephoto for distance, macro for intimacy and detail). The camera became an instrument for improvisational witnessing and co-perception.

Rather than planning specific shoots or scenes, I approached filming and photography as responsive acts of co-presence, allowing wind, light, and the movements and shapes of the forest to direct the frame. This gave the forest a measure of co-authorship over each image. Projects such as *Skullwillow* and *Carrion Ecologies* exemplify this approach.

Sound and aural documentation:

From time to time, I conducted improvisational listening sessions, often with eyes closed, cultivating deep auditory attunement aligned with my research into flow, entrainment, and multi-species resonance. Disengaging vision disoriented perception productively, opening fresh or speculative perspectives. I used a field recorder to capture forest soundscapes. Though many recordings were technically imperfect, they functioned as mnemonic triggers for re-inhabiting affective memory.

Writing, journaling, and field notes:

Daily and seasonal journals bolstered my project's reflexivity, bridging the immediacy of site-based experience and the analytical distance of later reflection. Writing in situ was fragmentary, sensory, and affective, often produced mid-walk or immediately after encounter. These fragments later became analytic material. While grieving with and among the forest also inspired works of fiction, poetry, and a short screenplay, the most enduringly useful documentation remained embodied and multisensory.

Material artefacts:

Physical traces such as bones, leaves, shells, and other organic matter, were collected selectively, when ethically appropriate, not as specimens but as continuations of relation. Many of them carried an affective charge, resonating with shared histories of forest excursions and collecting with my mother. More complex materials such as carrion found within or brought into the forest were handled safely and minimally, filmed rather than manipulated until time decayed flesh to bone that could then be transitioned to a sculptural space. Occasionally, I also came across non-organic materials like barbed wire or rusted parts of machinery now subsumed into the forest floor. Incorporating these materials into sculptural or on-site installation works (e.g. *Skullwillow*) generated ongoing, open improvisations with other species. Spiders, foxes, birds, trees, caterpillars, fungi, and weather all left their marks. Documentation here becomes material: a record that continues to transform and enact collaboration long after its capture. These sites were then further documented—iteratively—through photography and video.

3.3b. Documentation as Relational and Ethical Practice

Documenting in the forest required constant negotiation between presence and intrusion. The desire to capture an image or sound could conflict with an ethical impulse to refrain. Following Haraway's (2016) notion of *response-ability*, I treated documentation as a relational act of careful witnessing rather than extraction, staying attuned—however speculatively—to when and how the forest might consent to being recorded. Though unverifiable, this consent framework slowed my processes and sharpened awareness of ecological interdependence. Capture, while necessarily extractive, was thus accompanied by an ethical stance seeking to restrain and balance impact.

In line with Barad's (2007) *intra-action*, documentation was understood as a trans-corporeal event through which human and non-human agencies co-produce knowledge. Each recorded image or sound is not a neutral reflection but a trace of entangled relations, diffracted through assemblages of weather, affect, and multi-species co-presence—all contributing to the determination of what could be experienced and captured in that moment.

3.3c. Documentation as Reflection and Analysis

Revisiting recorded material constituted its own form of encounter. Watching or listening in the studio—weeks or months later—revealed temporal layers of the practice: how percepts and affects had changed; how memory reframed experience; how understanding expanded, contracted, or simply shifted. Editing introduced another layer, as disparate images and sounds were juxtaposed along the timeline. This work often began intuitively or by chance, continuing the improvisational ethos of fieldwork. Multi-media documentation thus became an analytic collaborator rather than a static archive.

Reviewing footage and notes generated speculative fragments that folded back into practice, keeping materials alive rather than processing closure. Through iterative review and assembly, documentation also functioned as a form of posthuman memory—extending beyond my own recollection. Digital and material traces exhibited their own kind of agency that sometimes insisted on forgotten events or overlooked details. Returning to them mirrored the cyclical rhythm of the five Seasons of Practice, enfolding documentation within the living ecology of the research.

3.3d. Autoethnographic Reflexivity

This research-creation project is an autoethnographically inflected practice inquiry. Autoethnographic detail threads through and informs research performance and analysis as contextual frame, mode of documentation, and method of reflective inquiry. Writing in and through the forest—often in the immediacy of encounter or in the affective aftermath of grief and its shockwaves—became a sensorium for transcribing shifting registers across a multi-species relational field.

My autoethnographic context is that of a grief-affected creative practitioner working among multi-species environments—someone who, though having lost his mother eight years ago, continues to experience intensive grief in relation to forest-based encounters, some of which I consider miraculous in Lykke's sense, imbricating the work in affective interspecies assemblages.

Descriptions and analyses are reflexive, in that the researcher observes his own improvisational practice unfold, and diffractive, in that this unfolding occurs through interspecies encounters that co-create the conditions of observation. Autoethnography involves "memory work," the engagement of "meaningful artefacts (e.g. diaries, photographs, videos, objects)" and "formative and often challenging life experiences" aimed at disrupting "institutional ideas and practices" (Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2016:3). Autoethnographic method is further one of "doubt and dissent," capable of "[challenging] norms of research practice and representation" (12–13). It therefore becomes an aspect of (re)wilding's queering process, resisting resolution-based mourning, marketable completionist demands on creative practice, and exploitative relations with multi-species ecologies.

As an embodied practice, analysis of (re)wilding and its affects/effects also participate in an autoethnography of the body and the ways it is culturally inscribed (Leavy, 2020:163). Emotions and affects are bodily processes, linked to distinct sensations and physiological responses, capable of generating bodily memory. The physicality of experience informs this autoethnographic presentation in its affective mode, challenging any simplistic conceptual division between body (experiencer/past) and mind (recollector/future).

3.3e. Presentation and Dissemination

Preparing documentation for exhibition and dissemination—editing, sequencing, and framing—became compositional acts shaping narrative and rhythm. Each curatorial decision risked

domesticating the wildness of the source material; the challenge was to maintain openness and contingency throughout presentation.

Translating documentation from forest to screen or page inevitably altered its affective field. Elements such as humidity, soundscape, scent, tactility, and frisson cannot be accurately reproduced. Instead, I aimed to convey affective residue, inviting analogous states of attention or bewilderment.

Carrion Ecologies, one iteration of which featured in FilmEU's *Synthetic Rewilding* exhibition in Bulgaria (Wagner, 2025), zooms in on decay to reveal participatory multi-species ecologies at several stages of life. Juxtapositions of living and dying processes—often split between the aesthetically abject (flies sucking blood) and the conventionally beautiful (butterflies drinking nectar)—expose hierarchies that obscure the wild through lenses of human sensibility; while slowed-down forest soundscapes gesture toward multiplicities of perception and time.

In its presentation on Research Catalogue, documentation serves both as evidence and as a point of dialogue, opening space for conversation about death, decay, and interspecies relation. Weather, geology, multi-species collaborators, and future readers all contribute to the ongoing life of the work. Documentation thus extends from archive to intersubjective meeting ground.

As with the five Seasons of Practice, documentation functions spiro-cyclically. Each act of recording is an excursion; each iteration, a (re)encounter; each edit, an engagement; each exhibition, an assembly; and each dispersal, a kind of decomposition or decay. Through these cycles, documentation sustains the project's ethos: that knowledge is relational, impermanent, and perpetually becoming.

3.4. Ethical Considerations, Scope, and Limitations

The ethical parameters of (re)wilding are conceived not as a fixed protocol but as a lived practice of attentiveness, relation, and restraint. Working within more-than-human ecologies, among processes of decay and regeneration, means each action—embodied, artistic, documentary—bears consequence and responsibility. (Re)wilding's ethical practice begins with language itself: terms such as *wild* and *posthuman* are historically and politically charged, entangled with colonial, exclusionary, and anthropocentric genealogies, and may unintentionally reinscribe the human as its own measure. Acknowledging and wrestling with these tensions is part of the project's ethical stance: to remain within the trouble of language rather than pretend to stand outside it.

This section addresses ethical awareness in embodied, affective, and ecological practice: negotiating presence and intrusion, care and capture, relation and representation. Any attempt to collaborate with non-humans inevitably invokes asymmetries and must grapple with the unverifiability of consent. The researcher's positionality, biases, and emotional entanglements are treated as constitutive rather than contaminating forces within the research process. Finally, I outline the project's scope and limitations. Incompleteness itself is framed as productive ground for (re)wilding's relational, open-ended ethos and potential impact.

3.4a. Relational and Ecological Ethics

Interspecies collaboration invites risks—of danger, or of causing harm. To proceed requires both an ethical framework and a willingness to be changed. In the forest, improvisation is always ethically charged: entering is itself an intervention, one that demands embodied responsiveness to shifting rhythms and ecologies. Following intuitive footsteps across fallen leaves is one thing; reaching toward a spider, or picking up an old skull still harbouring ticks, maggots, or worms, is quite another. Throughout this research I remained aware of how human presence alters ecosystems and worked to minimise impact. Living creatures were approached, when physical interaction was unavoidable, with care and respect[16]. Humility grounded each encounter—an awareness that what I do not know far outweighs what I know or imagine I know.

Ethical practice in (re)wilding aligns with ecofeminist notions of response-ability, a balance of "detachment and attachment" (Haraway, 2016:34) enacted through accountability to multispecies entanglements and careful attention to the affective, ruptural, and material consequences of one's actions (Hustak & Myers, 2012:106). In forest-based practice, this involves negotiating tensions between documentation and intrusion, collection and care, and between making and unmaking in relation to "both absence and presence, killing and nurturing, living and dying" and, in relation to grief, "remembering who lives and who dies" (Haraway, 2016:28).

Because the agency, awareness, and preferences of nonhuman partners cannot be verified, 'collaboration' functions in (re)wilding as a heuristic rather than a guarantee. Engaging with other species requires slowness, sensitivity, and deep listening—not only with the ears but with the whole body (Abbott, 2021:1066). Unlike in human-to-human improvisation, the parameters of the encounter cannot be negotiated in real time, and responses may unfold on temporal scales far removed from our own. Slowing down thus becomes an ethical practice of respect, empathy, and restraint, allowing the possibility that trees, insects, mosses, or animal remains might shape the

encounter, whether or not such shaping is immediately perceptible. Interspecies collaborators may respond in ways unintelligible to humans; therefore, finding ways to let them take the lead and trusting intra-active sympoiesis becomes a generative intention rather than an observable fact, an attempt to participate with the flows, forces, and desires of the forest.

Layered through these ethical considerations is the fraught genealogy of the term *wild*. As discussed in Chapter Two, *wildness* and *wilderness* are inseparable from colonial histories that framed lands and peoples as savage or empty, justifying dispossession, enclosure, and ecological domination. Yet contemporary theorists such as Halberstam (2020) also argue that wildness may be reclaimed as a practice of resisting domestication—an opening that might "propel us into other realm[s] of thought, action, being, and knowing" (46). In the context of this methodology, such reclamation is not a return to a mythic past, but a cultivation of modes of attentiveness capable of meeting more-than-human agencies on their own shifting terms. (Re)wilding thus operates in tension with its own terminology—acknowledging violent imperial histories while experimenting with the concept's capacity for reorientation.

My parenthetical formulation, (re)wilding, makes this tension explicit. Isolating the '(re)' signals that, for most of us in the twenty-first century, wilding will not constitute a return to some primordial state but the invention of new relational modes. (Re)wilding is more posthuman than pre-modern; any 'going back' is towards co-evolutionary legacies and childlike openness to sensory and affective worlding, but always as process rather than target. I also prefer (re)wild-*ing* over (re)wild-*ed* to emphasise ongoingness over nostalgia.

These considerations define the ethical conditions of my methodology: attentive, cautious engagement; recognition of the limits of consent; and awareness of the colonial histories carried by the term *wild*. Thus, (re)wilding sustains an ongoing negotiation—an effort to participate ethically in multispecies assemblages while remaining accountable to their uncertainties and asymmetries.

3.4b. Working with Death, Decay and other hazardous environments

All work with death and decay involved found carrion; no animal bodies were harmed or staged to advance the project. Deliberate efforts were made to avoid aestheticising or romanticising decay. Attractions and discomforts in the forest fluctuated throughout the project, forming part of its reflexive ethic. Fascination and revulsion were subordinated to the goal of presenting decay as a site of ecological multiplicity and affective complexity rather than as mere spectacle.

Working in wild or semi-wild spaces also presents hazards: inclement weather, uneven terrain, toxic flora or fauna, and the remains of human infrastructure. Romantic perspectives on ‘nature’ can be culturally problematic and physically dangerous. Practitioners must cultivate awareness of local ecologies and act with informed respect rather than bravado. Navigating these spaces requires confronting the socio-spatial politics of land ownership. While I argue below that (re)wilding does not require a remote wilderness, the specific drift-ing methodologies of this project routinely unfolded across private holdings in rural Ireland. This structural reality introduces the distinct ethical and legal friction of interloping or explicit trespassing. The act of crossing property lines or lingering at the boundaries of private land transforms the drift from a frictionless communion into a legally and socially vulnerable activity—one where the capacity to traverse without personal or legal consequences is inherently uneven.

Nevertheless, (re)wilding does not require this kind of movement, nor does it demand engagement with the extremes of wilderness. Many of my most intense encounters occurred in semi-cultivated spaces. Meaningful interspecies encounters can be found in gardens, roadside verges, city parks, or paved city spaces where so-called weeds erupt through the cracks. Non-human multiplicities both surround and inhabit us. Wildness, ultimately, is more a matter of relation than location.

3.4c. Researcher Reflexivity and Affective Accountability

Like many practice-based projects, this study explores a single practice through a singular autoethnographic lens. The trade-off between breadth and depth is deliberate: the aim is not statistical generalisation but situated resonance. Such specificity allows for what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call “naturalistic generalisation”: patterns or connections readers may recognise and feel rather than measure. Ideally, relating to the author’s process can contribute to bridges towards empathy with other species.

Acknowledging positionality is essential. I write as a white, male American living abroad, shaped by privilege and by cultural narratives of dominion over nature. Though raised by a critically minded mother who instilled compassion for plants and animals, I remain entangled in patterns of entitlement and extraction. My mobility, able-bodiedness, and social privilege afford access to sites and practices not available to all, raising questions of ecological justice and accessibility that lie beyond this project’s scope but shadow it nonetheless. Specifically, inhabiting a body that is gendered male grants an immense degree of unacknowledged affective safety within

this methodology. To spend consecutive, uninterrupted hours alone in remote, isolated rural contexts assumes a baseline sense of freedom from pervasive threats of gendered or systemic violence—a sense far more precarious for women, trans, or marginalized bodies, for whom isolated spaces continue to demand a hyper-vigilance that can disrupt somatic abandon and opposes the open, bewildered attunement championed by this framework. Similarly, the socioeconomic capacity to secure large blocks of open-ended, non-productive time to wander aimlessly is tied directly to class privileges that shield the practitioner from the immediate demands of domestic care-work, household maintenance, or intensive hourly survival labor.

This thesis does not propose a 'correct' or exhaustive model for engagement with the more-than-human. I do not suggest that the processes explored here call for repetition of my specific practice. Furthermore, the *Seasons of Practice* model is framed as fundamentally non-virtuosic—intentionally rejecting elite institutional standards of artistic mastery or specialized ecological expertise. Nevertheless, these open orientations must not be conflated with unconditional accessibility. The underlying techniques require no elite pedigree, yet the material execution of the methodology remains heavily gated by the structural parameters of safety, class, and geography. Access to old-growth ecologies is unevenly distributed, a socio-economic condition linked to alienation from other species and to an ideology that imagines reconnection as a privilege reserved for those with time, money, and mobility. These barriers must be considered, and warrant further research.

Grief, as both method and affective condition, introduced its own distortions and sensitivities—a methodological gift and constraint I negotiated through practice and reflexivity. My encounters and interpretations are inevitably coloured by projection, over-identification, and anthropomorphism.

Finally, I recognise that research itself alters the phenomena it observes—perhaps even more so in autoethnography. Rather than impose rigid controls, I relied on improvisation to maintain intuitive engagement, documenting around the edges of practice and letting creative modes double as methods of reflection.

3.4d. Representation and Transparency

Historically, arts practices have not always incorporated ethical praxis; performance history bears traces of cruelty and exploitation. Ethical questions are often raised when humans are at stake, but exploitation among trees, fungi, insects, and microorganisms is rarely discussed, perhaps

because we grow more ethically lenient the further we stray from our own likenesses. I am not exempt from this; acknowledging this gradient of empathy became crucial to my practice.

Even with trees and fungi, it remains important to consider degrees of ethical responsibility (and perhaps aesthetic imperative): recognising agency, resisting purely instrumental uses, and respecting opacity. Modelling its practices in part on habitat rewilding—already a more ecocentric approach to interspecies relations than traditional conservationism—(re)wilding aims to relinquish control and trust in distributed agency, shifting from direct authorship towards "accompany[ing] the movements of a place… not imposing, but listening… constantly readjusting one's approach" (Logé, 2025:184).

Rather than speaking *for* the non-human, this research privileges resonance over representation. It avoids objectification, affective manipulation, and moral spectacle, and maintains transparency about process, intention, and limits. The goal is not to present the forest as it *is*, but to render perceptible how relations and affects unfold within a specific (re)wilding practice.

3.4e. Scope and Limitations

A cursory glance at the RC exhibit reveals how strongly this project relies on static visuals for exploration and communication; there are more photographs than video and sound clips combined. No technology exists to transfer smell, taste, or touch across the internet. These limitations of mediation constrain the explanatory power of this thesis and, at the same time, invite readers to consider their own (re)wilding practices rather than treating this project as a vicarious substitute.

This research acknowledges further temporal and perspectival limits: four years of a singular grief-affective practice, tied to particular sites in (more-or-less) a single climate and time zone. Its epistemic limits: interspecies perspectives can never be fully known or represented, only approximated through relation and speculation. Its methodological limits: practice-based insights resist generalisation, offering breadth and nuance in lieu of universality.

Posthumanist frameworks also bring complications. MacCormack warns that posthumanism can "fetishise animals and nature for ultimate humanist purposes" (2025:2). Livingston and Puar similarly identify a "resurrection of humanism" (2011:5) within posthumanism's language of transcendence. This project has had to continually unravel its own romanticising impulses, conscious of how even care can recenter the human. I therefore prefer *interspecies* as a primary term—not to reject posthumanism, but to recalibrate its ethical horizon toward reciprocity rather than transcendence. Whether a truly ecocentric practice is possible remains uncertain, but

(re)wilding embraces this uncertainty as method: the impossibility of fully escaping anthropocentrism becomes the ground for ethical reflexivity.

3.5. Conclusion to Chapter Three

This chapter has detailed the methodological ecology through which (re)wilding unfolds—not as a fixed system of procedures but as a living, ethical, and affective mode of research-creation. Grounded in grief and forest-based improvisation, this approach navigates the five *Seasons of Practice*—excursion, encounter, engagement, assembly, and decay—to cultivate forms of bewilderment, defamiliarisation, and re-enchantment—affective and perceptual shifts that open onto peripheral modes of knowing and new relational possibilities. Grounded in grief and forest-based improvisation, my practice invites openness to what Nina Lykke describes as the immanent miraculous: participation in unlikely, affectively and metonymically charged encounters with strange spatiotemporal multispecies assemblages. Rather than relying on a prescriptive design, the methodology operates as an ecology of attention that balances speculative imagination with a rigorous, posthuman ethical *response-ability*. At this stage, these perceptual and relational shifts remain experiential and provisional, felt within the immediate life of the practice before they are formalized.

Part Two of the thesis takes up the task of articulation. Chapter Four gathers the orientations, gestures, and ethical commitments traced here and renders them legible as a methodological framework, further articulating the Seasons of Practice model as a way of describing how (re)wilding unfolds without reducing it to procedure. Chapter Five then turns to the theoretical implications of this framework, examining how grief-affective forest practice reorganises perception, relation, and subjectivity through bewilderment, encounter, desubjectification, and re-enchantment. Chapter Six returns these methodological and theoretical insights to the ground of practice, analysing specific techniques and creative outputs as evidence of (re)wilding in action.

Taken together, the chapters that follow do not present outcomes or conclusions but continue a living dialogue between loss, perception, and more-than-human worlds. What is traced is not a method completed, but a practice ongoing—one that remains responsive to rupture, relation, and the forest's unfolding ecologies.

PART TWO

DUSK

Interlude

Following Spinoza, Deleuze, and Spatz, I have distilled my central question—*How can grieving and creative practice (re)wild interspecies perception and relations?*—into a deceptively simple proposition: *What can a grieving body do?* My research suggests that this question, though born of personal loss, opens onto wider ontological and ecological reconfigurations. Through grief-affective practice, I explore how the ruptural intensities of loss can generate new perceptive, creative, and interrelational affordances—modes of sensing and being-with that exceed the bounded human subject. Drawing from posthumanist and new materialist thought, as well as ecological and artistic formulation of rewilding, this inquiry approaches grief not as an interior state to be resolved but as a force that unsettles, composts, and reconstitutes relational fields. The findings offered here contribute to *ways of practicing* and *ways of grieving*, each moving with and through interspecies ecologies. What distinguishes (re)wilding, as it emerges in this work, is its capacity to hold together two seemingly oppositional yet dynamically entangled forces: grief's ruptural intensities and its generative affordances—a simultaneity through which the practice itself becomes a site of ecological transformation.

Part One of this thesis established its theoretical and methodological groundwork. It developed the project's blend of improvisational and autoethnographic practice research (or research-creation), and it offered a cross-disciplinary literature review tracing modernist and posthumanist approaches to grief alongside twentieth and twenty-first-century ecocentric arts practices indicative of emerging fields aligned with (re)wilding. The subsequent methodology chapter elaborated my Seasons of Practice model and the principles of (re)wilding upon which it is based. I outlined an epistemology of peripheral (un)knowing, drawing resonance with Halberstam's concept of bewilderment and its capacity to theorise perception beyond normative modes, following Erin Manning's work on the minor gesture and marginalised modes of perception. These frames informed a discussion of Nina Lykke's materialist theorisation of immanent miracles, which opens possibilities for the kind of affective and practice-based encounters that I will argue capable of re-enchanting human perceptions of and relationships with interspecies ecologies.

The first part of this thesis was illuminated by the brightness of the *Dawn*. Now, as night approaches, *Dusk* gathers the remnants of that first light, reshaping them with warmth and haze. The air trembles; particles dance; gold turns to ember. From here, everything is read in the afterglow of

what has come before, even as the sky darkens and the many lights of stars—long occluded by our overwhelming proximity to a single sun—are finally given their hours of clarity.

The second part of this thesis builds obliquely upon *Dawn*'s more traditional foundation. By engaging with the images, videos, and audio works presented in the RC exhibit, *Dusk* pivots toward the lived terrain of the practice itself. What follows moves through forest and studio, tracing threads of excursion, encounter, engagement, assembly, and dissolution. Here, the theoretical propositions of (re)wilding take root in the embodied gestures of walking, grieving, collaborating, and making-with more-than-human worlds. The transformative affordances of (re)wilding arise from within a bewildering grief, accompanying the practitioner into the bewilderments of the forest. In both cases, disorientation interrupts the inertial trajectories of habit, broadening agency. Resonances between these modes position (re)wilding as a way of wielding the ruptural and generative tensions of grief through practice. This process makes possible a condition of re-enchanting resubjectification that, following Deleuze and Braidotti, I refer to as *becoming-forest*.

Chapter Four: The Seasons of Practice Model—Methodological Contributions

"Come my time to dissolve, I am far less brave. Habituated to this one body, anything else suggests oblivion. But the compost heap dreams of another option: to be wrought, that is, transformed."

- Sigrithur and Penner, *Wrought*

4.1. Emergent Methodologies of (Re)wilding

This chapter articulates the methodological contributions culminating from four years of (re)wilding practice. Where Chapter Three oriented the reader to the project's lived methodology as it unfolded *in situ*, Chapter Four reframes those elements as transferable methodological outcomes: a set of principles and a cyclical process model that can be adapted by other practitioners seeking to (re)wild creative and grief-affective work within more-than-human ecologies. These articulations render visible the conditions, orientations, and rhythms through which (re)wilding practice becomes possible in other contexts.

Part Two of the thesis unfolds the project's three contribution streams—methodological (this chapter), theoretical (Chapter Five), and practice-based (Chapter Six). These streams are analytically distinct but practically inseparable, having arisen recursively within the forest-based work itself. What are named here as 'principles' and 'seasons' crystallised gradually across hundreds of excursions, multispecies encounters, and moments of collapse, articulating the methodological ecology that took shape in the doing. The chapter is organised around two core components:

- *Principles/Orientations*

At the foundation are four core orientations—embodiment, organic site-specificity, improvisation, and multi-species collaboration—each undergirded by an openness to emergence and complexity. These working dispositions consistently shaped how practice unfolded in relation to body, land, grief, and more-than-human encounters.

- *Seasons of Practice*

From these orientations emerged the chapter's central methodological contribution: a non-linear process model tracing five recurrent modes and thresholds—excursion, encounter, engagement, assembly, and decay. The model traces a set of relational movements that practitioners can adapt to their own contexts, disciplines, and ecosystems.

Throughout this articulation, grief remains the catalytic affective condition. Driven by irreversible loss, grief-affective intensities loosened habitual structures of perception, authorship, and subjectivity in forest contexts. This dissolved inherited constructs around nature, art-making, and research, opening the practice to the wild relational processes already underway in the forests

themselves. Collapse and disorientation therefore become methodologically generative substrates from which new relations, forms, and practices emerge.

This methodological ecology is transferable precisely because it has already been tested across multiple forms of practice (movement, sound, writing, sculpture, image-making) and in varied forest environments. Naming the principles and seasons here is not an attempt to stabilise what is essentially open-ended. Rather, its purpose is to establish a shared vocabulary that renders (re)wilding visible enough to be recognised, shared, and adapted by other practitioners navigating their own bewilderments.

The chapter proceeds through the following sections:

• Section 4.2 tracks the translation of habitat rewilding into a functional methodological orientation.

• Section 4.3 revisits the four core principles from an explicitly methodological angle, grounding them in concrete forest-based work.

• Section 4.4 elaborates the Seasons of Practice model, drawing on examples from across the project to illustrate how these phases interweave.

Across these movements, the text shifts between a generalisable methodological register and a situated, grief-affective register. In tandem with the written analysis, the Research-Creation Exhibit functions as a non-discursive counterpart. Where the thesis describes, the exhibit attunes—offering images, videos, texts, and soundscapes. Footnoted references such as:

RC Exhibit → Seasons of Practice → Encounter

RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503234

DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/4168nk762

indicate points where readers can move from conceptual articulation to sensory engagement.

4.2. Wilding Grief and Practice: From Habitat Rewilding to Methodological Orientation

My forest-based practice emerged from a wilding of grief—a relinquishing of control to whatever depths loss demanded. One outcome of this process was that my arts practice was

compelled beyond the studio and into scrubland, fields, barren hillsides, and eventually forest environments. I found myself raising standing stones, gathering bones, transporting water, and engaging relationally with place and non-human life. All of this without articulable rationale or justification. The wildness of my grief simply demanded a wilding of my practice. By the third year of the research, this entanglement of grief and practice began to cohere around four overlapping principles: embodiment, site-specificity, interspecies collaboration, and improvisation. These common artistic modes are fundamentally reframed here through the lens of habitat rewilding, braiding them into a relational, ecological methodology.

Rewilding, as an ecological concept, arose from late twentieth-century challenges to preservationist land management models, emphasising the restoration of dynamic, self-organising processes through the reduction of human control. Contemporary rewilding seeks to restore multispecies relations with minimal management and maximal reliance on co-evolved bio-interactions (Hawkins et al., 2023; Carver et al., 2021). Crucially, rewilding does not determine stable outcomes, but creates conditions under which ecosystems can reorganise themselves. It is this orientation that resonates with my practice. As Halberstam writes, "wildness is the absence of order, the entropic force of a chaos that constantly spins away from biopolitical attempts to manage life and bodies and desires" (2020:7). Read through this lens, (re)wilding offers a framework for moving with affective rupture rather than containing it, allowing disorder, multiplicity, and non-mastery to inform artistic processes of "finding vocabulary, narratives, and figurations for the inevitable *disorder* of things" (Halberstam, 2020:15). In my research, the affective shock of sudden loss entered into a reciprocal dynamic with practice. Grief exceeded familiar boundaries, while practice amplified and redistributed grief's intensities, generating feedback loops in which affect and creative process continually reshaped one another. By interacting with vegetal and animal forms of life (Halberstam, 2020:11), this practice aligns with modes that have "no goal, no point of liberation that beckons off in the distance, no shape that must be assumed, no outcome that must be desired" (2020:7). (Re)wilding trusts open-ended engagement with multispecies worlds as a direct source of methodological, creative, and relational value. The following section elaborates each of its principles in turn.

4.3. (Re)wilding Artistic Practices: The Four Principles

This section elaborates the four orienting principles of (re)wilding introduced in Chapter One: embodied practice, site-specificity, improvisation, and multispecies collaboration. It tracks how

these dispositions underwrite the Seasons of Practice model by positioning the researcher as a body among other bodies, within specific more-than-human sites, through improvisational responsiveness, and in participation with assemblages that exceed the human alone.

4.3a. Embodied practice (Ecosomatic Attunement)

Embodied practice attends to the body not as an enclosed subject but as a sensing meshwork continually shaped by myriad relationally interdependent conditions and agencies. Ecosomatic research describes this as a process of "shared agency" and "rhythms of co-becoming" (Laidlaw, 2021:95). In my practice, this manifested as a gradual unmooring of habitual perceptual filters and an increasing sensitivity to relational influence. This shift was a direct bodily consequence of grief. Loss opened perceptual cracks that destabilised the illusion of a bounded subject, making porousness unavoidable rather than theoretical. Repeated somatic engagement rendered tangible the fact that a body is an open assemblage of microbial, cellular, and environmental relations. Grief's affects unsettled familiar bodily rhythms and environmental constructs and opened a vulnerability through which concepts like transcorporeality lost their abstract veneer and became experiential knowing. Ecological relations began to register with greater force.

Instead of extracting material for work, I found myself being moved—literally and affectively—by shifting attentional demands. Entering the forest with no objective other than presence initiated a gradual reorientation: less intention, more attentiveness; less planning, more sensing. Encounters with movement, colour, sound, and atmospheric shifts began to guide my movements. Where studio environments stabilise sensation, the forest actively interrupts it. Slippery roots, abrupt bird calls, bark textures, and the smell of rot became the very structuring forces of the work. Over time, this cultivated a mode of wandering in which the body became a sensing instrument responsive to the forest's subtle cues and alterations. The body shifted from a site that enacts practice to an instrument through which the forest's living rhythmic multiplicity could be registered—a sensitivity to commotion (co-motion). Embodied practice thus became a portal from grief to (re)wilding—a way of entering dynamic relational fields where multispecies entanglement could be felt directly rather than conceptualised from a distance.

4.3b. Site-Specificity (Transcorporeal Relations)

To practice site-specificity in forests is to orient oneself within dynamic ecological conditions and intra-active fluctuations. Far more than a container for practice, the forest is a living tissue that shifts with rain, the fall of a branch, or a fruiting mushroom. Site-specificity in (re)wilding necessarily grapples with the flux of symbiosis—requiring sensitivity to the ways organisms co-create one another's conditions of existence. Even a single tree constitutes a multispecies nexus; oaks, for instance, host hundreds of dependent species, making every encounter an encounter with an ecosystem rather than an individual (SUGi, 2022).

What distinguishes semi-wild environments like Goblinwoode is not ecological purity, but an abundance of relations that have co-evolved beyond top-down human design. Here, old stone walls hold lichens and insects, while dense brambles provide habitat for birds and small mammals—relationalities produced by time and interspecies interaction rather than idealised management. The question for (re)wilding practice is therefore not whether a site is entirely free of human impact, but how its specific ecologies invite or resist interspecies relational diversity.

One's chosen site actively shapes the (re)wilding of practice. Practitioners find themselves altered by the conditions, tempos, resistances, and affordances of the environments they occupy. A (re)wilding practice develops not through mastery over place but through reciprocal exposure to unpredictable conditions: dampness, slipperiness, weather, habitat, and interspecies encounter. Through breath, spores, humidity, microbes, pollen, sound vibrations, and tactile experience, the practitioner's body becomes materially continuous with the location, blurring distinctions between self, land, and collaborators. Biodiversity is more than a metric for variation; it is a proliferation of relations that unsettle fixed categories and invite perceptual and methodological flexibility.

In my fieldwork, Goblinwoode's specific matrix of rotting trunks, fungal blooms, moss-laden hollows, animal tracks, bracken thickets, bird calls, and the sudden appearance of a skull in the grass formed an active set of invitations and constraints, directly shaping how encounters unfolded and what I perceived within the space. Iterative engagements—such as rethinking a movement because the ground had become slick with rain—taught me to follow the forest's tempos rather than impose my own.

Such an approach "arouse[s] and rehearse[s] new ways of being, doing and knowing" (Laidlaw, 2021:98), cultivating an awareness of different experiences of "time, speed and age" (100), and showing how "interactive engagement with place changes us, whereby a sense of relational ethics of care and responsibility emerges organically" (103). Through these shifts, the forest revealed itself as an active, living site complicit in shaping perceptual, affective, and creative experience—a distributed agency in which the site continually interrupts, redirects, and co-authors the work.

4.3c. Improvisation (Thinking in Action)

(Re)wilding is an emergent process that takes shape through situated encounters; it cannot be engineered through predetermined steps, but grows from the ground up, moving with the surprises, interruptions, and contingencies of daily practice. Method here operates as an attentive curation of conditions, out of which structures arise, transform, and crumble through interaction.

Improvisation relies on embodied memory—kinaesthetic vocabularies formed through repetition; yet it also exceeds them, generating "novel ideas that are germane to a given context" (Landau & Limb, 2017:27). Neuroimaging research shows that improvisational activity downregulates the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, reducing executive control while strengthening connectivity across motor regions (Miller & Cohen, 2001; Landau & Limb 2017:28). This aligns with what Massumi and Manning describe as "thinking in action" (2014:88): a shift from conceptual planning to immediate sensori-motor responsiveness where meaning emerges directly from gesture, rhythm, proximity, and touch. The neural systems implicated in this process—premotor cortex, SMA, motor cortex—are tightly linked to affective circuitry (amygdala, insula, ACC, PAG). Improvisation therefore mediates between emotional processing and physical expression; it is a direct conduit for affect.

In practice, improvisation allowed movement to push externally against material worlds—contact with trees, soil, insects—as well as internally against the affects shaping each encounter. Grief altered my responsiveness; improvisation, in turn, modulated grief. A rehearsed performance might guide movement from A to B, but when the body is led by affect there is no fixed destination. Attempts to impose one would inhibit the affective process and limit spontaneous engagement. Improvisation keeps affect wild, resisting domestication by habituated perception, movement patterns, or conceptual filters. As Midgelow notes, improvisational practices can be "transforming and transformative" (2018:76) to the practitioner.

Improvisation is also fundamental to pre-discursive sense-making. Sense-making is "an embodied and situated activity" arising from the inseparability of perception and action (Hermans, 2022:213). Meaning may emerge from gesture, rhythm, proximity, or relational movement. When encounters are bidirectional, non-discursive communication can unfold spontaneously. Touch may "exchange affects, intensities, and forces" (213), generating micro-negotiations that produce emergent meaning without shared codes. These interactions "find their own course" (213), shaping

practice while remaining irreducible to intention. The principle resonates with habitat rewilding, where hands-off adaptive practices "allow nature to find its own way" (Kerr, 2022:6).

Human improvisational arts highlight how collaboration can emerge through shared timing and affect rather than shared language. Dance cultivates "participatory sense-making" as performers attune to internal states and external environments simultaneously (Gang & Zhang, 2024). In musical improvisation, shared timing and bodily resonance generate feelings of connection and empathy (Hart & Di Blasi, 2013 cited in Landau & Limb, 2017:30). Deactivation of the angular gyrus during improvisation (Donnay et al., 2014) suggests that collaboration may occur through direct affective connection rather than semantic processing.

In this sense, improvisation is not merely a technique but a *perceptual infrastructure* through which (re)wilding becomes possible. Improvisation cultivates embodied attentiveness, ecological sensitivity, affective openness, and an inclination toward meaning-making as intra-active. These capacities create the conditions within which more-than-human collaboration can be sensed at all. Most importantly for (re)wilding, improvisation prepares the practitioner to notice, register, and respond to more-than-human agency, whereby collaboration emerges then not as an intention but as a consequence of this attuned, improvisational stance.

4.3d. Multi-species (*ecocentric*) collaboration (Assemblage Authorship)

Where improvisation cultivates the sensorial and affective conditions for responsiveness, multi-species collaboration names what becomes possible when that responsiveness encounters more-than-human agency.

My practice engages with plants, fungi, insects, and microbes in ways that do not attempt to stage, direct, or reconfigure the organism. Encounters with diverse species are inevitable in forest sites, but (re)wilding reframes these as invitations to attentiveness. In lieu of shared codes or explicit negotiation, respect for a collaborator's agency demands that the practitioner not impose, but *adjust*. What motivates a forest being will often remain opaque, and from its perspective human presence may be irrelevant. Yet organisms respond—through movement, vibration, posture, chemical gradients, sonic signatures—and these responses can shape practice. When attended to, such feedback initiates a dialogic relation, however asymmetrical. A malleable practice remains open to unplanned influences and emergent creative responses that might go otherwise unnoticed.

Assemblage theory[17] offers a productive way to think through these encounters. Deleuze and Guattari's assemblages describe heterogeneous agencies linked through contingent, affective

interactions that can emerge into novel properties. Their relevance persists across disciplines: assemblages exceed the sum of their parts. As Lykke shows in *Vibrant Death*, disparate materialities—each with its own tendencies and tempos—can converge to form events whose meaning arises through encounter rather than intention. These emergences may be singularly oriented (as from an assemblage) or as a multiplicity (for its participants) where each component perceives only a fragment of the whole.

(Re)wilding practices reject the use of non-human life as props. Animals, trees, insects, fungi, and weather systems are approached as agential entities with their own trajectories, only occasionally intersecting with ours. To name these intersections without implying mutual consent, I suggest the term *Improvisational Collaborative Assemblage* (ICA). ICAs often manifest as events rather than objects; they produce affects more readily than artefacts. They are never designed and never complete. They emerge, surprise, dissipate, and reconfigure. When their traces become an artistic assembly, the practitioner's role shifts from creator to curator or framer, while authorship resides primarily within the assemblage itself.

For all its complications, collaborative intent remains indispensable to (re)wilding. It signals a commitment to approach more-than-human participation as vulnerable, consequential, and ethically generative. Assemblage authorship does not dissolve the human contribution; it decentres it, situating creative agency within distributed, contingent relations that no single body—human or otherwise—commands.

4.3e. Underlying Orientations: Emergence and Complexity

(Re)wilding practices generate both intentional and unintentional forms of multispecies engagement—relations we might tentatively call collaborative. Collaboration folds into improvisation; improvisation is inseparable from embodied attunement; and embodiment presupposes context, environment, and site-specificity. The four orientations of (re)wilding therefore never function as discrete categories, but operate as an interdependent ecology of practice, guiding attention across the porous membranes where bodies, organisms, and environments meet. At these borders identities mingle, influence, and briefly become-with one another, forming fleeting or sustained assemblages.

Such relational fields require a degree of heterogeneity and complexity for novel properties to emerge. Novelty does not arise from repetition alone but from iterative experimentation among disparate or syncretic elements. Evolutionary biology offers a useful analogy: genetic diversity and

habitat variation (*biodiversity)* foster healthy, sustainable interaction and emergent adaptations. Likewise in creative practice, variations in movement, affect, environment, and material encounter generate conditions for meanings to shift, dissolve, or recombine. Many artistic lineages, however, tend to recycle familiar forms or guard disciplinary borders, limiting the interactive potential that emergence requires. A broader *methododiversity*—variation among and between methodologies, media, and disciplines—can create a richer 'gene pool' for experimentation.

In the next section, I turn to the shape this practice assumed over four years. The Seasons of Practice model is a retrospective articulation of how the work moved—how encounters, perceptions, relationships, and dissolutions arose and collapsed cyclically in conversation with the forest. These seasons describe how my (re)wilding practice emerged from the orientations (and disorientations) outlined above, and offer a transferable framework for ethical, affective, and responsive creative practice within interspecies ecologies.

4.4. Seasons of Practice: A Transferable Methodological Model

This section moves from orientation to process, articulating how the core principles of (re)wilding unfolded over time. Looking back, the forest-based practice that arose out of grief can be described as entering into rhythms across five broadly defined 'seasons': e*xcursion, encounter, engagement, assembly,* and *decay*. Together, these seasons form the central methodological contribution of the thesis.

The Seasons of Practice model sits between the general orientations of (re)wilding and the more detailed practice analyses of Chapter Six. Rather than prescribing a linear sequence, the seasons name recurrent modes and thresholds through which practice tends to move once embodied, site-specific, improvisational, and with multispecies dispositions in play. In practice, these seasons loop, interrupt, recur, and fold back on themselves, forming spirals rather than a circles—each phase returns altered by the feedback of previous iterations.

Moving my studio from a temperature-controlled room to a small native old-growth forest adjacent to my house did not itself constitute a (re)wilding of practice. The shift occurred gradually, as procedural control loosened and drift-led excursions, grief-affective encounters, and interspecies agencies began to influence what counted as practice. This relinquishing of control opened the possibility for unexpected intra-actions, sketching the thresholds at which my practice was most activated (and/or most stilled): in drift-ing, meeting, staying-with, composing-with, and letting-go. The capacity to hold space through apparent inactivity—remaining patient and receptive over

extended durations—constitutes a significant methodological labour. This stance intentionally resists efficiency-driven models of productivity in favour of cultivating attunement to ecological time. The pages that follow trace each season in turn, illustrating how these open-ended movements reliably generate the conditions under which unforeseen perceptions, forms, and interspecies relations can emerge.

4.4a. EXCURSION (Drift-ing or Wandering)

(Re)wilding opens with movement. In my practice, that movement most often takes the form of walking—the first gesture through which grief, attention, and environment begin to reorganise one another. As I enter Goblinwoode[v], my perceptual tempo gradually entrains to place through a slow tuning of breath, senses, and affect to the wider lifeworld. This entrainment reflects how embodied attention recalibrates in response to the forest's patterns, pressures, and atmospheres. Excursion functions as the model's entry condition: a mode of arrival that dislodges intention, heightens receptivity, and makes subsequent encounters possible.

Excursion cultivates a mode of relational entry. Drift-ing in the forest is more condition than technique—an attunement to being moved by that which exceeds intention. It relinquishes perceptual primacy to the forest's tempos, interruptions, densities, and affective pulls. This simultaneity of polyrhythms makes illusions of linear time difficult to sustain: the quick pulse of a robin between branches, the stillness of an oak harbouring its tapestry of habitats, the flickering sequences of insect birth and death that underwrite the gradual disintegration of a fox's kill.

Excursions in Goblinwoode rarely led where I expected. A shift of wind across bracken, the alarm call of a wren, or a sudden wash of light revealing airborne insects could reroute the walk entirely. Over time, the forest began to function as a permeating field: spores in breath, humidity on skin, sound vibrations in bone. Grief's destabilising affects heightened this permeability—slowing my pace, directing attention toward scenes of decay, predation, and transformation, and making me more susceptible to interruption. In this state, drift-ing became a means of being conducted by the forest rather than navigating through it.

Unlike the urban dérive, forest drift-ing unfolds within ecological multiplicity. Movements are shaped by terrain slick with rot, by deer tracks that redirect a path, or by a fungal bloom drawing the eye downward. These shifts invite a form of multispecies solidarity that expands responsibility to

[v] **RC Exhibit → Introduction and Contexts → Mapping**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503389
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/bg25nh34d

attend. Whether taking the form of ordinary walks, climbing a mountainside, or standing motionless at the boundary fence tracing a fingertip along twisted wire, what matters is the *propositional* quality of the movement. Propositions are "speculative and event-oriented," not rules (Springgay and Truman, 2019:83). In practice, carrying a tonal shift in grief, a fragment of theory, a sensory puzzle, or a somatic prompt into the walk generated irregular pacing, unexpected detours, and altered perceptual fields—all conditions through which unlooked-for encounters might emerge. Exploring in this way defamiliarises even as it cultivates a familiarity. Walking and witnessing "[shifts] the logic of place as something fixed and known, to understandings of place as an event, in process, and relationally produced" (Massey 2005; Springgay & Truman, 2019:17).

Throughout the excursion season, grief-attuned wandering lays the groundwork for encounter. Without the distraction of goals, attention absorbs what would otherwise remain tangential: the shimmer of beetle shells in leaf litter, the first scent of carrion before its source appeared, the slight shift of air pressure preceding rain. Many of the works analysed in later chapters—including *Carrion Ecologies*—began as subtle sensations registered during excursions, where grief and forest jointly redirected perception toward the textures and temporalities of decomposition.

More broadly, walking-with grief and with the forest cultivates peripheral forms of knowing: a shift from predetermined objects and interpretive shortcuts toward the "emergent quality of experience" (Manning & Massumi, 2014:11). Through drift-ing, the forest becomes accessible as a relational field—alive, agential, and thick with more-than-human presences. Excursion thus operates as the methodological hinge between theory and encounter: the season in which perception unsettles, receptivity heightens, and the practice becomes sensitised to the multispecies relations that shape everything that follows.

4.4b. ENCOUNTER (Affective Attunement)

Excursion cultivates a mode of wandering-with that opens perception to what exceeds intention; encounter names the moment when this openness is met by interruption. Encounters arise when previously backgrounded multispecies agencies pierce the flow of drift-ing and exert an affective pull strong enough to redirect attention[18]. They introduce sensory, emotional, or conceptual friction that unsettles default perceptual habits, arriving mid-stream as events that arrest movement and confront the practitioner with new perceptual or ethical demands.

Before my practice cohered into a model, it consisted of playful wandering: grief-attuned walks shaped by curiosity and a growing intimacy with Goblinwoode. Early in these walks I often carried

a camera. Macro lenses drew me toward tiny organisms; telephoto lenses clarified easily startled mammals and birds. These optical extensions recalibrated my perception, making me increasingly sensitive to scale, micro-movement, and the layered textures of forest life. Yet these sightings remained within familiar perceptual frames; the moments that truly pierced habit were stranger, less easily assimilated ruptures that unsettled expectation.

Goblins as Threshold Encounter

I call these early ruptures *goblins*: instances of pareidolia appearing on trees, stones, roots, and moss. These proto-faces served as threshold encounters—jolts that halted my movement and provoked shifts in orientation. Although anthropomorphic, they were not confirmations of the familiar but productive misrecognitions. The tension between projection and materiality engendered polysemic thinking, revealing how a tree could simultaneously be the creature I momentarily perceived, a genetic singularity, and a multispecies ecosystem.

More importantly, goblins destabilised habitual frames of reference through defamiliarisation—a deconditioning of anthropocentric defaults that reframed the forest as an active field of complex agencies rather than passive scenery. Many of the goblins I encountered clustered around sites of wounding—storm damage, gnaw marks, metal embedded in trunks, scars, rot, rupture and other inosculations[vi]. These resonances with my own grief intensified their force, transforming a flicker of recognition into an affective fissure through which alterity might enter into perception.

[vi] **RC Exhibit → Seasons of Practice → Excursion → Inosculation**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503402
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/3b59fb880



Figure 4.1. Goblin within a Goblin (GMA on the bark of Griffin in Goblinwoode)

These encounters marked the hinge between wandering and orientation. They raised provocations rather than yielding up answers: *What constitutes a point of view for a tree? Might forests engage distributed modes of sensation or cognition? Do forests grieve?* In this way, goblins functioned as the initial catalysts of alterity in my project—fleeting but potent openings through which the possibility of relation began to take shape.

Insects, carrion, and ethical frictions

As the seasons turned, insects proliferated, drawing my attention into increasingly fine-grained layers of forest activity and fragility[19]. These encounters with minute detail gradually led me toward more complex assemblages organised around decomposition and carrion. One of the clearest examples—what I later came to understand as a high-intensity encounter shaped by distributed forces—involved a young buck[vii] deer I recovered from a roadside and placed in Goblinwoode near

[vii] **RC Exhibit → Seasons of Practice → Encounter → Young Buck**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503400
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/4168nk762

the site of a previous uncanny encounter[viii]. Night after night, trail camera footage recorded birds and foxes consuming the carcass until they finally dragged it several metres off. A powerful storm hit that same night, and in the morning, I found the buck's bones rearranged: the head turned backward, the hide intact but stripped from the skeleton and reflected in vertical symmetry, a leg outstretched as if prepared to run, and a freshly fallen branch crossing the neck like a brush stroke. The scene appeared uncannily composed—an aesthetic tableau produced through interwoven agencies I could not have predicted and did not orchestrate. Camera footage confirmed that foxes and weather, not intention or artful hands, produced this composition. Yet its affective force was no less real for being unplanned.

Such events complicate how practitioners habitually locate authorship and agency, sharpening the methodological importance of encounter as a threshold where attention, ethics, and interpretation are reconfigured. They challenge the practitioner to consider how far collaboration and craft can be extended beyond the human, and what kinds of aesthetic organisation may emerge through multispecies assemblages. Encounters arise without discrete beginning or end; they become *events* only as the practitioner takes them up. Without affective attunement, they would simply pass unnoticed. With it, they become thresholds.

Encounter as Methodological Pivot

Within (re)wilding practice, encounter is the hinge that shifts wandering into relation. Some encounters remain singular flashes; others deepen, moving the practitioner from encounter toward *engagement*—a season marked by the iterative return and sustained attention that gives rise to collaboration. Encounter is the pivot between the openness of excursion and the deepening relational commitments that shape the unfolding of practice.

[viii] **RC Exhibit → Seasons of Practice → Engagement → The Hanging Deer**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503404
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/4742qc448



Figure 4.2. Young deer skeleton configured by foxes and weather

4.4c. ENGAGEMENT (Aesthetic/Ethical)

In the Seasons of Practice model, *engagement* names the moment when an encounter ceases to be fleeting and begins to draw the practitioner back into an unfolding relation. Engagement develops when an encounter carries enough affective weight or curiosity that the practitioner returns, repeats, or responds. These responses may take the form of movement, writing, filming, sketching, gathering, arranging, or witnessing. Engagement marks the shift from chance meeting to *ongoing relational improvisation*. Extending encounter's perceptual rupture, engagement unfolds through participatory improvisation, ethical negotiation, and durable site-specific attunement that reshapes the creative process.

Goblins: From Encounter to Durational Relation

One of the earliest instances of iterative engagement in my practice developed from my goblin encounters. What initially appeared as pareidolic faces became points of return and rich *sites of attunement*. Through repeated visits over changing seasons, the imaginative layer's hold over perception eventually began to unravel; the goblin-image receded and the material being remained: scars, inosculations, fungal and insect companions, barbed wire embedded in bark. The fading of the goblin marked a developmental shift from projection to ecological noticing. Because many goblin-sites were also sites of wounding, material resonances with my own grief activated precisely through this breakdown of the veneer. Repeated visits thickened the relation: tracking how these physical scars and other living processes altered the site, allowing slow temporalities to reshape perceptual habits until imaginative projection gave way to reciprocal attention. The goblin walks thus served as an essential training ground for a widening sensorium, showing how an intuitive imaginative projection could function as a temporary gateway to genuine ecological noticing.

In this sense, *excursion* enacted arrival and moving through presence, *encounter* precipitated perceptual rupture, and *engagement* involved staying-with, iterative return, and relational recalibration. These early engagements would also lay the groundwork for later, more complex collaborations—including Skullwillow, carrion collaborations, and decomposer communities—by establishing attunement, return, and responsiveness as core aspects of (re)wilding practice.

Engagement as propositional, sensorial practice: de/re-territorialisations

Engagement begins with defamiliarisation—the distortions and ruptures of encounter. Truman and Springgay describe defamiliarisation dislodging habitual perception and destabilising human/nature binaries to make room for "radical transversal relations that generate new modes of subjectivity" (2016:261). Braidotti similarly identifies defamiliarisation as key to de-anthropocentrising perception (2013:88–89), linking it to Deleuze and Guattari's dynamic of deterritorialisation → reterritorialisation. Over time, iterative visits reterritorialised my perception as an emergence into an unfamiliar familiarity grounded in the singularity of the site. Reterritorialisation did not restore the old frame; it established new relations.

By moving responsively according to affect, curiosity, and the residue of prior encounters, practice cultivates what Myers calls *becoming sensor*: a perceptual reconfiguration that challenges "the very meanings of the concepts and metaphors they set in motion to story nonhuman worlds" (2019:76) and through which nonhuman sensitivities seep into one's own. Material becomes an interlocutor, and sites become points of return that subtly re-pattern movement and method.

Engagement thus marks a shift from improvisational wandering to *situated improvisation*—a mode of attunement shaped by evolving interspecies relations.

This shift inevitably raises ethical questions surrounding how one might make-with agencially opaque beings whose intentions or vulnerabilities differ from one's own?

(Re)wilding accepts these tensions as generative. It resists the colonial scientific assumption that only humans possess world-shaping intelligence. Trust in emergent ecological processes replaces preconceived design, mirroring habitat rewilding's relinquishing of managerial control. In practice, this meant letting materials decay without intervention, letting sites determine tempo, and allowing more-than-human processes to guide aesthetic outcomes.

The disorienting affects of grief, when interwoven with forest-based practices, catalyse a resonant re-shaping—a (re)wilding of both—that opens space for perceptive re-attunements, subtle modes of attention and entrainment that "might allow plant sensitivities and sensibilities to transform [one's] own sensorium" (Myers, 2018:76). Bewilderment becomes fertile ground for forms of creativity unavailable through more procedural methods. The desire to know and understand the sentient experiences and perspectives of forest life did not precede but resulted from an intuitive-affective playfulness that encouraged encounter and engagement. Sensing practices that incorporate affective and haptic modalities help us to "re-think the assumption that agency and politics begins with the human subject, and that the human is the only animate agent […and re-think] categories previously associated with identity [to consider] the emergence of subjectivity as an assemblage of conscious and non-conscious matterings" (Springgay & Truman, 2019:46). Defamiliarisation here serves a tactical role: affectively unsettling inherited notions of ecology, creativity, and subjectivity as a way of making space for surprising nonhuman sensibilities and encounters to de/reterritorialise the practitioner's own sensorium.

Skullwillow: durational, multispecies co-composition

Sculpture in this context became an open-ended material dialogue. Early sculptural gestures soon gave way to more durational forms of co-composition. The willow tree later named Skullwillow[ix] was the first such site, beginning with a single skull placed in the crook of a branch. Over the next many months, drift-ing excursions carried bones, stones, shells, rusted metal, and other materials to the tree. Each return modified the composition—and so did the forest itself: wind

[ix] **RC Exhibit → Seasons of Practice → Engagement → Skullwillow**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503404
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/4742qc448

knocked objects down, foxes carried pieces away, insects nested in cavities, fungi colonised surfaces, moss obscured arrangements, rain discoloured and dissolved materials. I found myself participating in a process co-authored by decay, weather, animals, and vegetal growth. Objects linked to my mother's memory—bones, antlers, and shells—joined the processes through which her dispersed materiality was already moving: carbon cycling through air and soil, nutrients entering plant and fungal metabolisms. She was somewhere out there, becoming-forest[20]. Her literal assimilation into diffuse organic processes and my own becoming-into-relation-with the same were more than metaphoric mirrors. They were materially entangled trajectories.

As Skullwillow evolved, I read nonhuman interventions as compositional propositions. Slugs sheltered inside skull cavities; spiders wove webs in eye sockets; wasps cocooned under bark; mushrooms erupted through porous bone. Wings sprouted, grass grew, bone crumbled to dust. Over time, I intervened less. If spiders claimed a cavity, their occupation redirected the work. If moss obscured a form, obscurity became the aesthetic. Skullwillow operated now not as an artwork but as a collaborative ecology unfolding along the forest's own time as a shared, asymmetrical improvisation.

Forest Contributions as Aesthetic Direction

Engagements with carrion sites demanded a more visceral attunement, drawing me into corporeal proximities where life and death coexist in unstable, affect-laden ways. These sites confronted culturally conditioned aversion. By remaining present, I allowed sensory overload—smell, sound, insect horde, the uncanny vibrancy of decay—to reconfigure perceptual thresholds into a "messy, shifting ontology", illustrating how "bodies do not pre-exist their comings together but are materialised in and through intra-action" (Springgay and Truman, 2019:50).

Working through cameras preserved the integrity of decomposer networks while revealing temporalities far exceeding human metrics: feeding cycles, rivalries, reproductive waves. Carrion sites engender ecologies and expose porous subjectivity. Far from a terminus, the corpse becomes a stage for swarming life. The abject—blood, rot, the slippage between life and death—defamiliarises the forest and the self alike. But what repels us sustains ecosystems. Here, the inhuman is not the opposite of the human but a force threaded through all bodies, a reminder that each organism is both host and habitat. This confrontation with the uncanny, the spectral, and the inhuman became foundational for the later work, *Carrion Ecologies*.

From Encounter to Engagement: The Grief Vector

From goblins to mossy stone, from Skullwillow to the insect-thick corpses, these engagements formed a vector of deepening collaboration between my grief and the forest's material processes. As my mother's dispersed materiality diffused through soil, air, insects, and plants, my attention followed these trajectories—toward organisms and processes that echoed this dispersal.

Engagement thus operated as a mode of relational recalibration in which grief did not seek resolution but expanded into ecological awareness. Skullwillow began as a grief-saturated homage; slowly, it became an interspecies assemblage shaped by shared temporalities of decay and renewal. As these engagements accumulated, they informed the materially structured phase to follow, converging excursion's drift, encounter's affective rupture, and engagement's ethical-aesthetic improvisations into a substrate for the next season, assembly.

4.4d. ASSEMBLY (Bringing Forest to Studio)

The apparent divide between nature and culture can feel especially pronounced when moving from forest-based drift-ing to an indoor studio filled with screens and instruments. Yet this separation is more affective than ontological: technologies arise from the same material processes that organise bio-organic life. Seen through a (re)wilding lens, forest and studio become two strata of a single ecology, and affects generated in one can meaningfully carry into the other.

The assembly season names the work that unfolds upon returning from the forest to this enclosed space. Here I render images, artefacts, soundscapes, and memories brought back from excursion, encounter, and engagement. Assembling material opened a second mode of attention. In the forest, sensory fields often far exceeded what could be processed and perceived. Reviewing footage, listening back to field recordings, and working with bio-electrical MIDI data generated from forest-based sonification allowed me to catch patterns, relations, and detail that had gone unnoticed *in situ*. These belated recognitions functioned as new propositions for drift-ing—small perceptual seeds that later guided how I chose to move and what kinds of encounter became thinkable.

These (Re)wilding orientations reshaped how digital tools were handled. By the final year of the project, video editing itself had become an improvisational practice, guided by intuitive cutting, stochastic juxtapositions, and responsiveness to emergent rhythms between image and sound. Rather than scoring to picture or cutting to pre-existing audio, image and sound were developed in parallel as co-extensive, mutually shaping processes. Chance operations and pattern-sensitive

adjustments echoed the cut-up methods of Tzara, Gysin, and Burroughs, and aligned with the aleatory orientations already present in drift-ing. This often produced unexpected alignments: small anticipations, uncanny correspondences, or moments where disparate layers seemed to know each other. One striking example involved a wide-angle tilt up into the ribcage of a deer skeleton that coincidentally aligned with a slowed-down deer cry—a guttural resonance that appeared to emanate from the cavity itself[x]. Another occurred when a fly crawling along a spiderweb fell, which happened to coincide with a sudden, almost comic audio cue, giving the impression that the sound had startled the insect[xi].

Following Lykke, such "unexpected, a-causal, but somehow meaningful coincidence[s]" (2021:155) can be treated methodologically as instances of "miraculous excess" (154), events worth noticing because they arise from responsive, non-linear processes rather than from preplanned control. Synchronicities arise when actants within a corpo-affective assemblage—forest footage, bio-electrical data, editing gestures, grief-states, software processes—temporarily coalesce into a meaning-making rhizome (159). In this sense, junctures function as prompts, indicating where responsive editing practices can preserve contingency and allow the work to remain porous to more-than-human temporalities. It is conceivable that consciously staged overlays might lack the same charge as those found through improvisational (re)wilding processes, though questions of audience reception lie beyond the scope of this thesis. For my purposes, the distinction between managed ordering and emergent ordering is methodologically suggestive: it points toward an assembly practice that privileges responsiveness, indeterminacy, and more-than-human influence over authorial control.

These affective junctures also suggest that artefacts may carry traces of the (re)wilding processes that generated them. Because the practices shaping both audio and visual layers were grounded in grief-affective encounters and multispecies collaboration, synchronicities emerging in the studio can be understood as transitive resonances—echoes of drift-ing, encounter, and engagement refracted through technological media. Assembly is thus neither post-production nor a retreat from the forest, but another mode of multispecies entanglement involving interfaces and digitised sensorial imagery rather than direct contact with bark, moss, and bone.

By inviting chance, nonhuman temporalities, and algorithmic contingencies into processes typically subordinate to human control, assembly erodes the figure of the solitary, mastering author

[x] **RC Exhibit → (Re)wilding Outputs → Year Three → Ribcage Synchronicity**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503348
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/jh34hv60n

[xi] **RC Exhibit → (Re)wilding Outputs → Year Three → Fly / Music Cue Synchronicity**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503348
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/j960g292b

and foregrounds the artefact as the contingent outcome of an extended assemblage. This logic naturally gives way to Decay: a season in which materials, ideas, and works relinquish coherence, break apart, and return their energies to the wider field of practice.

4.4e. DECAY (Letting it all Fall Apart)

Assembly and decay's apparent opposition dissolves under closer attention; rather, each presupposes the other. An assembly's materials originate out of prior cycles of decomposition, while decay reconfigures the remnants of assemblies into matter for future configurations. Within this methodology, decay operates as an active, improvisational force of generative abandonment—not breakdown as failure, but breakdown as a directional compost funnel that reorients the practice. This manifests as a collaborative, multi-species dynamic. Forest forces—weather, decomposers, scavengers, growth and rot—repeatedly dissolved my plans, prompting a relinquishment of control that made new relations possible.

What I learned from working with birds, insects, fungi, and weather was not how to impose form but how to stay receptive when form collapsed. Under the conditions of irreversible human loss, decay carried especially strong affective charge: haunted simultaneously by the absent assemblage from which it emerged and by the as-yet-unknown futures into which its remnants might flow. Pairings between forest soundscapes (plant sonification, slowed animal calls, microphonic insect recordings) and minimally intervened macro footage in *Carrion Ecologies* embody this stance, treating abjection not as spectacle, but as an aesthetic and ethical mode of staying with the trouble (Haraway, 2016).

Decay as Ontology

If decay is both process and aesthetic, its philosophical implications reach beyond the breakdown of bodies. Braidotti reminds us that death is not cessation but "the evanescence of the subject"—a becoming-imperceptible through which identity diffuses into "the brightness of phosphorescent worms" (2006:252–253). Decay is dispersal: a redistribution of agency across entangled matter rather than the categorical termination of life.

This aligns with Haraway's invitation to make *oddkin* with decomposers (2016:2) and to understand compost as the literal condition of ongoing life—a chthonic pedagogy in which breakdown is relational, generative, and non-teleological. Ewa Domańska's necrovitalism sharpens

this stance by framing death as a mode of vitality with its own agencies and demands. Death is productive (*zoe*) not only because organisms literally become nutrients for others, but because the dead exert a "material presence of the past" (2006): a corporeal memory that influences ecological and affective terrains. In my fieldwork, a decaying animal carcass formed a multi-species commons where foxes, birds, insects, and fungi inherited the corpse as habitat and nourishment—a terrain for proliferating futures.

Necrovitalism also illuminates the spectral, *hauntological* dimension of the work (Derrida, 2006). Carrion sites functioned as spaces where animal remains—and the lingering affective traces of my mother—exerted a persistent pressure on perception. Temporalities overlapped: the past persisted materially; the present unfolded in active decomposition; and the future was prefigured in larvae and spores. Decay thus operates as a spectral ontology capable of training attention toward layered, recursive, nonlinear time. The decaying body becomes a threshold where multispecies temporalities meet.

Dissemination as Decay

Understanding decay as dispersal reframes dissemination. Once artefacts circulate publicly, their meanings detach from origination and break apart under the weight of new interpretations (Barthes, 1977). Artworks persist only as mutable traces, reactivated or forgotten through encounter (Schneider, 2011). Dissemination, then, becomes another type of decay: a release in which coherence unravels through reception, context, time, and repetition. To disseminate is to allow meanings to erode, recombine, or weather away like fallen leaves. Viewers bring their own sensoria and affects; works fade, shift, or become archival fragments. Meaning turns to compost, and the artefact continues living only through its disintegration.

Fallow and Falling Apart

Decay also takes the form of quiet recession, dormancy, or stasis. A prolonged fallow period followed my move away from Goblinwoode, two and a half years into the project. Though I occasionally returned, the shift severed daily contact with the forest that had structured my practice. What ensued was a six-to-eight-month period where the practice itself seemed to decompose, resembling an ecological wintering or the somatic incubation capable of enhancing problem-solving and creativity (Ariga & Lleras, 2011; Sio & Ormerod, 2009; Ashley, 2020). In Authentic Movement, "harvesting" functions as a reflective phase that feeds the next cycle (Kramer &

Meehan, 2025). Some species—plants, spores, invertebrates—wait for years before the precise conditions for activation arise. The chrysalis, drowsy as it appears, is a site of radical reconfiguration.

During this fallow phase, I wandered Beara in a far more passive mode of drift-ing, seeking smaller-scale wild pockets. This reorientation underscored the importance of deep time and co-evolved relationships, but also showed how (re)wilding can begin at home: our newly inherited garden, once chemically stripped, now vibrates with revived fruit trees, oak saplings, wildflowers, frogs, lizards, rabbits, water beetles, and dragonflies. Now biodiverse, it has become a site that feels newly receptive to practice.

As the fallow period lengthened, the grief-affective charge that had animated Goblinwoode subsided. My perceptual sensitivity dulled; my forest-based relationality thinned. Through its absence, the practice revealed the extent to which it had sustained a grief-attuned eco-sensorium—and how quickly stepping away can re-domesticate sensation and behaviour. In hindsight, this fallowing was a grief inverted: not loss intensifying relation, but relation receding until its contours became visible through absence.

4.5. Conclusion to Chapter Four

Across these seasons, a spiralling interdependence becomes visible: elements from decay return to provoke new excursions, attune perception toward previously unnoticed encounters, or seed fresh engagements. Materials and ideas may re-enter assembly through cut-up, remix, or revision. Nothing is wholly lost; each season composts into the next. The five Seasons of Practice trace the process by which (re)wilding animated the work: looping arcs of movement, attunement, collaboration, construction, and dissolution. By situating these cycles alongside the four core principles, this chapter has outlined a methodological ecology grounded in a grief-affective, forest-based practice. The model renders this work visible and available for others to adapt. What transfers is not the specific content of this practice but its relational logic: a way of working that privileges attunement, duration, ecological ethics, and responsiveness to more-than-human agency. Importantly, these methodological articulations prepare the ground for the project's theoretical contributions. The Seasons model illuminates the perceptual, affective, and relational shifts that the practice made possible. These shifts form the conceptual terrain of Chapter Five, which traces how the methodological movements outlined here *create the conditions* for wilder modes of thinking, perceiving, and interspecies becoming.

Chapter Five: From Bewilderment to Re-enchantment: Theoretical Contributions

"Wildness […] raises the spectre of death of the symbolic function itself."

- Michael Taussig

5.1. Practice-Informed Theory: Grief, Bewilderment, and (Re)Wilding

This chapter offers an exploration of the project's practice-informed theoretical contributions: conceptual findings that have emerged over four years of grief-affective, forest-based practice. To read theory through practice is not to apply concepts to experience, but to return to them after practice has altered perception—allowing theory itself to shift, soften, or extend in response to what experience has made newly sensible. These theoretical contributions arise from sustained attention to how practice reorganised my perceptions and interspecies relations. Although we shall encounter two brief and startling autoethnographic examples of overt multi-species encounter (the 'Cloud' event in *5.3b* and 'Beetle' event in *6.3c*), processes of *perceptual bewilderment → desubjectification → re-enchantment* theorised here unfolded gradually over months and years—owing as much to minor, ineffable moments in the forest and their cumulative force as to the more anomalous encounters. This chapter names and elaborates three interwoven theoretical strands within this process: peripheral knowing and bewilderment, the immanent miraculous, and becoming-with the wild as a process of desubjectification and relational recomposition. These strands address how (re)wilding practices can hold together in tension grief's ruptural and generative forces, engaging their perceptual and relational affordances rather than collapsing them into emotional resolution.

Although the Seasons of Practice model names distinct modes of attention, affect, and relational orientation, it does not propose a linear sequence or prescribed procedure. The seasons describe responsive conditions rather than stages: intensities that may arise, overlap, recede, and recur out of order, shaped by shifts in grief, environment, and interspecies relation. Likewise, bewilderment, desubjectification, and re-enchantment are not steps to be completed. They are tendencies that come forward or fall back within practice. Read in this way, both the model and its transformative potentials remain adaptive and situational, preserving the open-ended, improvisational ethos of (re)wilding.

Chapter Two outlined Derrida's argument for a politics of mourning shaped by the dead who 'haunt' futures, and Butler's extension of this into grievability: the frames through which a life becomes socially intelligible and politically valued. A late twentieth-century shift in grief theory, drawing on both, challenged the modernist imperative to move on, exploring instead how bonds might be sustained. Brinkema's *mournacholia* locates a tension in this turn toward ongoing grief, warning that a cheerful reanimation of loss can neutralise the peculiar painfulness that gives grief its capacity to provoke change—inciting a paradox between paralysis and action.

Rather than resolving this paradox, (re)wilding inhabits it. Grief's ruptural and generative aspects co-exist as a polyphony—containing, at various times and in various combinations, every emotion imaginable—moving affect through paralysis, intensity, and becoming. Practice does not tame this movement; it stays with it, amplifying and transducing its potential. Theory often asks for determination, resolution, or synthesis. In practice, however—through engagements such as burying myself in the forest[xii]—experience opened new perceptual space within paralysis itself. Grief's paralysis became harmonised with practice, rendering them at once porous and affective. This did not immediately enable new action, but it did alter how I felt, witnessed, and related to the world. Read through experience, the tension between rupture and generativity appears less a theoretical paradox than a lived oscillation—an inseparability that practice can hold without resolution.

Through (re)wilding, grief's interior forces generate dynamic sites of unknowing, affective attunement, and ecological becoming—a living ecology of rupture and renewal. (Re)wilding offers a way of staying with these tensions without reconciling or domesticating them. As grief enters the forest and interacts affectively with interspecies ecologies, new perceptual and relational capacities arise through attunement to and engagement with more-than-human worlds. These processes activate resonances of bewilderment between place and affect, resulting in the kind of defamiliarisation that can lead to desubjectification—a pathway toward perceptual (un)knowing and re-enchantment. In this way, (re)wilding emerges as both methodology and ecology: a way of thinking, feeling, and perceiving through loss.

The theoretical findings in this chapter track these transformations—perceptual, affective, ecological—as they unfold through practice. The argument moves:

5.2 from bewilderment as a peripheral mode of (un)knowing into improvisational, embodied inquiry;

5.3 through the specific grief-affective perceptual and relational shifts figured in Lykke's immanent miraculous;

5.4 toward ecological embodiment and desubjectification, where becoming-forest unsettles selfhood and cultivates new interspecies relational possibilities;

[xii] **RC Exhibit → (Re)wilding Outputs → Autogamy v1 & Autogamy v2**
RC link: ***https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503348***
DRI links:
Autogamy 1 (video): ***https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/gh93x180n***
Autogamy 2 (video): ***https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/gm80xx64b***

5.5 into rhythms of re-enchantment that prepare the ground for Chapter Six, which turns to evidence from practice.

To inhabit grief's tensions requires learning to see obliquely—to attend to what shimmers at the edges of sensation. This periphery is where bewilderment becomes method—an approach to disorientations and destabilisations through which perception loosens its grip and makes the immanent miraculous thinkable as encounter rather than exception. Practice itself creates the conditions of possibility for the kind of destabilising encounters that open new horizons for how one experiences and relates with the world. The following section grounds this epistemic orientation by turning to the peripheral stance as a condition for perception's openness to the unknown.

5.2. Peripheral Knowing: Wildness, Unknowing, and the Threshold of Bewilderment

5.2a. (Re)wilding Thought: Theory in Motion

Theory, like the forest, develops in cycles of decay and renewal. Knowledge is not an edifice but an ecosystem: an ongoing process of decomposition and recomposition. Ideas break down to nourish others; structures of meaning become humus for what follows. (Re)wilding thought recognises this oscillation as its epistemic rhythm—a movement between unmaking and remaking, dissolution and assembly. To think (re)wilding is to think compostually: to let theory rot a little so that practice can feed back into the soil of understanding. What emerges is not synthesis but humus —a generative mixture of matter, memory, and change.

The language of bereavement also carries this double nature. *Mourning* derives from Proto-Indo-European (s)mer- ('to remember') and Old Norse mer- ('to die, wither'), binding persistence to impermanence, recollection to decay. Within these linguistic folds sits a tension where irreversibility pulls against *conatus*—the desire for continuity, especially of identity. This is where the gravity of grief threatens paralysis. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *grief* as 'deep or violent sorrow', rooted in Old French *grever* ('to afflict, burden') and Latin *gravare* ('to make heavy'). These etymologies intertwine weight with wounding, graves with engravings—digging into the earth or into stone. One image speaks of permanence; the other of decomposition and mingling with the forest floor. Inscription holds; burial transforms. Loss becomes an engraving that

clarifies and erodes at once, poised between the weight of the past and the buoyancy of what may yet come.

These linguistic roots offer possibilities for (re)wilding thought itself. Each act of thinking carves a temporary inscription—a mark that illuminates while delimiting. Over time, such inscriptions accumulate into theory: stable, monumental, sometimes petrified. To (re)wild thought is to expose these engravings to weathering—letting language, matter, and affect rub against one another until meanings soften and new growth appears in the cracks.

Weathering rejects linear models of theoretical progress in favour of an ecology of iteration—a rhythm of composting and regeneration. Ideas, like fallen trees, become habitats for new conceptual life. Theories mulch into practices, and practices sprout new theories in a recursive loop of decay and emergence. Vibrant thinking is rhythmic rather than doctrinal: it moves between precision and surrender, the urge to frame and the need to unsettle boundaries. From the decay of form springs movement; in the breakdown of meaning, new sense may emerge.

This is the epistemic humus from which (re)wilding practice grows—where grief's heaviness and mourning's transformative potential converge with the forest's seasons. In perception, this rhythm appears in the attempt to catch a glimpse of what shimmers along the periphery. It requires relaxing the eyes rather than straining to see—an attunement that destablises identity and lets relation surface. To (re)wild thought is to accept bewilderment as a form of knowing, to trust decay's promise of renewal, and to recognise that every act of sense carries the seeds of its own unmaking.

Within the Seasons of Practice model, this composting of thought corresponds to an early destabilising phase in which bewilderment may be affectively compelled, but can also be entered deliberately—not as an end point, but as a necessary unmaking through which other modes of relation can later take form. In the ethos of rewilding, things never come neatly together: they tangle, dissolve, and reform. Coherence is always provisional—a clearing briefly opened before the undergrowth returns. (Re)wilding situates grief within the tension between planting and uprooting, persistence and memory, movement and stillness, composition and dissolution—where an ongoing relation to loss meets the lived costs of disrupted perceptual and affective habits.

5.2b. The Peripheral View: Wildness Beyond Capture

Peripheries are a fuzzy kind of boundary. Their ambiguity differentiates them from the more rigid delineations that *boundary* usually connotes. While peripheral vision may come to mind, every

sense operates along a gradient, and at the remote edges of these fields something vital occurs: a zone of in-distinction that feels at once near and far, faint and intense. A sound just out of earshot; a scent familiar yet unplaceable. Peripheries are both generative and affective precisely because they blur the line between signal and noise—broadening the range of sensation and entangling perception with uncertainty and with that which exceeds its grasp. In this sense, *wildness* names the affective corollary of the periphery: a mode of feeling that arises when attention loosens its grip.

This dynamic extends beyond sensation into knowledge itself. Some forms of knowing resist pursuit, extraction, or intentional control; they appear only through oblique approaches or moments of affective permeability. Walking in the forest, for instance, becomes a fundamentally different experience depending on one's mood, intention, or manner of attending. What becomes noticeable —or remains unseen—depends on countless shifting conditions. Vinciane Despret's meta-research of how objective scientific methods can collapse in relational contexts demonstrates this clearly: as when parrots respond only if treated as interlocutors rather than objects of study[21]. Several thinkers offer methods for how to approach such elusive modes of knowing.

Gómez-Barris's 'fish-eye episteme' shows perception to be relational, contingent, and partial. Her "submerged view" arises from Indigenous activist-artists who articulate alternative "territorial relations" within multi-species worlds and temporalities suppressed by extractivist logics[22]. These phenomenologies "animate rather than deaden," (2017:64) foregrounding porous interactivity not only between socio-economic asymmetries, but between human and more-than-human worlds. What her theory recovers are modes of knowing submerged not only politically but perceptually—kept out of view by rigid categories of life/non-life and human/other.

Karen Barad's diffractive method resonates with this submerged view, though from a different register. Diffraction rejects representational accuracy in favour of mapping entangled relations that *emerge* through intra-actions[23]. Diffractive methods attend to "the differences that our knowledge-making practices make" (2007:72)—the generative side-effects of attempts to know. Diffractive knowing resembles the indeterminate shape glimpsed out of the corner of one's eye: appearing through a shift in relation and vanishing when grasped too directly or singularly.

Barad's diffraction reveals how the world bends through its own relations. Yet before the world coheres into concept, it is registered as a quickening, a pulse, a tremor at the edge of sense. Here affect becomes diffraction's felt counterpart, the apprehension of difference before perception settles into judgement. Brian Massumi's notion of "side-perception" (2002:36,140) names the synesthetic field from which conscious awareness carves out focus. This matters for (re)wilding because it frames perception as relational field before it becomes object. Though subliminal, this wider field remains "vaguely felt," on the periphery, and determinate perceptions retain an

attachment to these conditions of emergence (140). Affective eruptions appear as moments of shock or sudden realisation, which, in conjunction with one's "sense of aliveness, of changeability" (36), can facilitate the indirect apprehension of affect, dislodging automatised habits of perception and enabling action rather than reflex. Affect, in this sense, is peripheral: pre-conscious, non-propositional, catalytic.

Together, these thinkers show how perception bends, refracts, and folds material, social, and affective relations into one another. They describe approaches rather than tools: modes of moving-with rather than certainty-seeking. These methods do not simply pursue what cannot be seen directly; they cultivate conditions for participation in what Barad would call an intra-action. They enable one to feel—rather than grasp—how one has been altered by encounter, and what this alteration can tell us about the relational ontology that brought it about. Each reframes perception as co-constituted rather than extractive, replacing mastery with correspondence, distance with resonance—a feeling toward sense through contact, disorientation, and change.

Here a metaphor helps: navigating the periphery is like *dancing with ghosts*—not the ghosts of metaphysics but the *feral traces* of that which exceeds capture. You never see them directly. Instead, you feel your body tilt, hesitate, or respond to something just beyond the reach of clarity. Wildness moves like a pressure at the edge of sense that choreographs attention. One feels how one's own movement has been altered by an (in)sensible relationality. Shifting attention from the centre to the periphery situates the body as an apparatus for diffraction—where knowing and not-knowing remain in flux.

In (re)wilding practice, peripheral attention becomes both method and material. This raises a provocative question: *How does the way one enters a forest—ecological, taxonomic, extractivist, romantic, collaborative—influence whether and how the forest responds?* Whether a forest 'responds' at all depends on one's openness to voices that are not linguistic: gestures, electrical signalling, biochemical cues, resonant attunements. As with human exchange, approach informs response. Thus this project explores indirect, diffused, and peripheral sensory strategies, treating wildness and bewilderment as methodological conditions for inviting new interspecies relations. Within the periods of intensifying affect throughout the Seasons of Practice model, such peripheral modes of attention can unravel habitual orientations to perception before new relational patterns begin to form.

Yet such openness can easily be undone by demands for clarity, hierarchy, and control. Centripetal tendencies pull attention back toward the centre, resisting the diffuse, relational attunement that the periphery affords. To follow the periphery requires undermining these habits—

through a willingness to become unsteady and bewildered. It is toward these normative perceptual reflexes, and the practice-based opportunities for resisting them, that I now turn.

5.2c. Bewilderment and the Untraining of Perception

Andrea Olsen identifies three primary zones of perceptual processing in the bodymind: sensation (feeling), interpretation (deciding what was felt), and response (acting on that decision). Each becomes habituated in its own way, yet Olsen argues that these habits can be unsettled at the space *between* zones. The intervals between "sensing and interpreting" and "interpretation and response" (2022:21) form peripheral, difficult-to-classify sites of physio-cognitive becoming where subtle deviations permit new relational possibilities to enter perception. Their transitional nature renders them flexible, intra-active openings for change—micro-thresholds before knowing or doing settles back into familiar grooves.

Erin Manning zooms further into these mechanisms by contrasting autistic and neurotypical perceptual tendencies. Neurotypical perception rushes toward categorisation, establishing hierarchies that foreground some percepts and background others—most notably the very process by which perception *becomes* reality. Autistic perception, by contrast, "is alive with tendings that create ecologies before they coalesce into form" (Manning, 2016:14) and "foregrounds the heterogeneity of a welling experience before it succumbs to the categorization of its parts" (112). Because autistic sensation takes longer to homogenise, it can witness "perception's very emergence," producing a "lived sense of the malleability of form" (191–192) and making worlding itself visible.

Neurotypical defaults are compounded by cultural feedback loops privileging rationality, taxonomic clarity, and individuation—reinforcing attentional habits that flatten the complexity of ecological and intersubjective relations. Modernist, colonial, and capitalist structures deepen these perceptual channels through saturation and related cognitive biases such as the confirmation bias and the illusory truth effect. As stability is foregrounded and relational flux is sidelined, ecological sensibilities recede into what Gómez-Barris calls "submerged" spaces—pushed down by the scaffolding of the "extractive view", a dominant perceptual regime that devalues the hidden worlds forming the nexus of human and more-than-human multiplicity (2017:5), in favour of perceived utility and instrumentalisation.

Jack Halberstam's epistemology of the ferox (2020:108) can be read through the Seasons of Practice model to clarify how the early and more disorienting stages of (re)wilding unmoor the

habits of perception by which submerged or non-normative modes of experience are suppressed, opening possibilities for re-worlding. The ferox is an operational (un)knowing that interrupts normative capture and reconfigures the periphery as a site of epistemic and affective expansion. At this threshold, wildness functions as both "the space that colonialism constructs, marks, and disavows" (Cronon, 1996:40) and a force that "opens up the possibility of unmaking and unbuilding worlds" (Halberstam, 2020:4). In Halberstam's work, artists and thinkers gravitate toward wildness —external, internal, and relational—as a mode that resists capture and recodes relation.

Halberstam's ferox frames wildness as a refusal of domestication: an unruly orientation incompatible with rigid codification. Disavowing wildness contributes to alienation and disenchantment, while reinforcing attentional habits that reduce ecologies to generic environment. This narrowing supports the extractive view, domesticating the periphery and erasing those bewildering conditions through which novel relations might otherwise be sensed. Yet bewilderment can also *undermine* this gaze: where extractive order contracts perception, wildness reopens it toward uncertainty and indeterminacy. What appears in theory as relinquishing virtuosity becomes, in practice, a sustained exposure to not-knowing—one that, when intensified by grief and enacted through durational, interspecies engagement in the forest, can make failure ecological and affective: a loosening of control that enables perception, relation, and creativity to reorganise themselves beyond instrumental ends.

Such ruptures echo what Manning calls "disturbances of the body" (2016:112): loosening perceptual coordination and heightening sensitivity to relational flux. In my own experience, the body often moved toward the wild long before conscious thought caught up—yet thought frequently *occluded* that earlier, wilder sensory knowledge, which lingered on the periphery as "a form of knowing that depend[ed] on not knowing" (10). Bodily and affective disturbances perform the work of wildness; they shake stabilising systems, clearing space for bewilderment and change. Tracing these embodied deviations as they surfaced within practice became central to how this research generated theory, revealing bewilderment not merely as a theme but as a methodological teacher.

Wildness names relational zones that dominant societies have sought to tame or erase, even though our evolutionary past is marked by porous boundaries and expansive interspecies entanglements. Re-establishing these relations is a form of bodily knowledge requiring renewed participation with other organisms—revealing that the self is neither impervious nor discrete. Wildness becomes "a wide-open space across which an unknowable self is dispersed" (Halberstam, 2020:10). Like peripheral vision, wildness retreats when directly pursued, yet through this evasion

its vitality becomes perceptible, drawing attention toward fleeting, untethered sensations and new trajectories of meaning-making.

This opening—where perception loses its bearings yet remains alive to that which exceeds it—is *bewilderment*. Manning suggests that such perceptual untraining can be cultivated through practices that disturb the body's habitual alignments—movement, meditation, affective shock (14, 112)—each creating small rifts in neurotypical coordination that make sidelong perceptions newly available. These disturbances enact (re)wilding on a somatic level, unhinging domesticated reflexes, recalibrating perception, and expanding the body's capacity to sense within a more intricate body–world ecology (112).

Timothy Morton's account of the human 'severing' from ecological worlds extends this argument. What began as a preventative boundary to limit perceived dangers transformed what lay beyond into an "endlessly exploitable resource or majestic backdrop" (2017, Introduction). One consequence of this was alienation from an uncanny *spectrality* shared by all living beings—a spectrality that is neither nonexistent nor directly present (2016:18)—comprising a dynamic between fragmented pasts and virtual futures. In our determination to categorise and identify, we end up haunted by both. Species, too, are perpetually differentiating through evolutionary processes, rendering categorical boundaries provisional and the real inherently spectral. Read through (re)wilding practice, Morton's severing begins to appear less absolute: forest engagement revealed not a clean break from ecological relation, but a spectral gradient and a conditioned attenuation—one that can be partially retrained through sustained, peripheral attention. Halberstam himself reads wildness through spectrality as well, noting how "bodies plot a different course through history and appear only at the very edge of definition, flickering in and out of meaning" (2020:14). Like spectrality, the wild describes life's mutability, the slipstream between what something was, is, and is becoming. In a grief-affective practice, this ambience becomes familiar: what once was is still almost here.

Ecologically, refusing spectrality sustains the humanist fantasy of nature as static resource. Practically, it closes off the relational awareness needed to meet beings in their own complexity. We often approach non-humans as representatives of a category rather than as participants in unfolding relations. In my own practice, softening perceptual focus made assemblage relations come first to awareness—and through this emergent field, particular beings clarified in their specificity. As I expand upon in 5.3, Nina Lykke's *Vibrant Death* reads anomalous or miraculous experiences in this way: as immanent material events, condensations of "affective intensities and spiritmatterings in human/non-human assemblages" (2021:183). Their recurrence around affective thresholds suggests a potential for perceptual modes made accessible through heightened

subjectivity rather than cool objectivity—intensities[24] that rupture the normative conditioning through which much of the living world is rendered invisible.

It is from within this shared somatic field that a (re)wilding practice of grieving with forests becomes possible—not through certainty, but through speculative gestures within a wider choreography of response[xiii].

5.2d. Grief as a Field of Bewilderment

As discussed in Chapter Three, Mary-Francis O'Connor reframes grieving as a kind of learning or re-learning. *The Grieving Brain* extends this argument by positioning grief explicitly as a form of epistemic recalibration, one that emerges from the conflict between the enduring "semantic knowledge of the everlasting nature of the attachment" and the autobiographical certainty of loss (2022:317–318). Resolving this tension involves "making new predictions" that reflect the permanence of the absence (318). In this view, grief becomes not pathology but epistemic transformation—an unlearning of a world that no longer exists and a tentative learning of the one now emerging.

Other research correlates grieving with personal growth (adapted from posttraumatic growth): a form of self-learning and a reorganisation of relational patterns between self and world. Tan & Andriessen identify a tendency toward "adopting or reinforcing values perceived within or learned from the deceased," alongside "incorporating aspects from the deceased" (2021:6) into one's own life. My own experience, like that of many others, is that irreversible loss reorients one's sense of value, often to a life-altering degree. Former certainties feel strangely hollow; one wonders how the apparently fixed became so quickly undone. Read alongside practice, these accounts support grief as a pattern-shifting rupture—an invitation to methods that re-train perception to remain attuned to the periphery of its own inherent wildness.

Grief, then, is not only a re-education of the mind but a bodily unmooring—a moment when knowing falters and another kind of sense must find its bearings. Many grieving people gravitate instinctively toward forests or wild spaces, seeking a relational field capacious enough to hold emotional intensity. Yet bewilderment already inhabits grief, operating affectively before one ever

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[xiii] **RC Exhibit → (Re)wilding Outputs → Autogamy Entry Statements (Years One and Two)**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503348
DRI link:
Autogamy 1 (text): https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/hh646z201
Autogamy 2 (text): https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/hq388q887

hops a fence or pushes through bracken. This may be why grief's emotional and somatic bewilderments resonate so strongly with the bewilderment of wild spaces, where lostness feels like finding.

For Halberstam, bewilderment's methodological value lies in its "form of lostness and unknowing […It] is simply the space rendered by the absence of meaning and direction" (14). Bewilderment is prerequisite to unlearning, deconditioning, habit-breaking, defamiliarisation—and ultimately to re-enchantment. As a "process of becoming wild by shedding knowledge (as opposed to becoming civilized by acquiring it)" (31), bewilderment challenges the premise that grief is a problem to be solved rather than a force to inhabit. In my Seasons of Practice model (outlined in Chapter Four), I sought ways to cultivate this sense of directionlessness, incorporating bewilderment directly into the excursive or wandering/drift-ing phase. Untethered from certainty, (re)wilding creates conditions for "merging with other systems of space and time that linger in the background to those we have selected as meaningful in the contemporary world" (66). Bewilderment thus becomes a method for approaching the periphery and engaging it as a site of negotiation between the human and that which has been relegated as 'other'. Both grief and forest find common ground in the disorientations of bewilderment: each generates ruptures capable of unmooring entrenched beliefs and reorganising experience. In this sense, bewilderment is not a condition to be resolved or endured indefinitely, but a state to abide in flow—one that recalibrates perceptual and relational capacities and prepares the ground for forms of encounter that cannot yet be named.

Perhaps grief changes us, or perhaps we are always changing and grief simply renders perceptible this processes, commonly concealed by the dailiness of living. When brought into forest-based environments through (re)wilding, personal grief opens intra-subjectively and transcorporeally to surrounding dynamics. By "interacting with rather than separating from vegetal and animal forms of life" (Halberstam, 2020:11), (re)wilding's methods, like wildness itself, have "no goal, no point of liberation that beckons off in the distance, no shape that must be assumed, no outcome that must be desired" (7). These are open-ended practices moving through richly inhabited worlds, reconfiguring perception by resisting closure and embracing intensification.

Having established grief as sharing a field of bewilderment with the forest, the discussion now turns outward toward the grief-affective interspecies encounters that activate bewildered perceptive thresholds. The next section looks more closely at what it meant for this project to participate in a (re)wilding of grieving practices and processes, and how approached engagements with forests, creative arts, perception, and peripheral (un)knowing. Held together—bewilderment as stance, wildness as affective climate, and grief as method—the field opens toward the possibility of what

Lykke calls the immanent miraculous: situated encounters that condense multi-species material relations into affective charge. I now turn from the events of bewilderment to the conditions of encounter.

5.3 The Immanent Miraculous: Encounters and Affective Entanglement

5.3a. Vibrant Death[25]: From Bewilderment to Encounter

As grief-affective conditions intensify and recede, (re)wilding practices aim to privilege encounter over resolution. Sustaining such an orientation opens perception to the periphery—to eco-sensations and interspecies pathways that emerge only when attention relaxes its grip on the centre and on certainty. While the forms these encounters might take are innumerable, Nina Lykke's account of anomalous experience—what she names the immanent miraculous—offers a particularly striking instance of how affect, matter, and coincidence can thicken into sense.

Lykke's *Vibrant Death* provides one of this thesis's central theoretical frameworks, as well as a model for weaving theory with autoethnography. Through a personal account of her partner's death and the anomalous experiences that followed, Lykke develops a speculative approach to the 'miraculous' grounded not in transcendence but in matter, relation, and affect.

Modernist explanations of miraculous experience typically default to one of two reductive poles: a) transcendent intervention, or b) psychological projection. Rejecting both, Lykke proposes that such events emerge from immanent "corpo-affective co-becomings of entangled vitally and spiritually material human/non-human actants" (2021:183). They are experienced as miraculous not because they suspend materiality but because they intensify it—"actualis[ing] assemblages that include intense affectivities, spiritmatterings, and thick clusters of metonymical relations" (183) that exceed habitual sense-making while remaining firmly grounded in the material.

Before turning to my own examples, it is helpful to recall Lykke's. Her experience unfolded during an anniversary dinner, when her son discovered two rare grey pearls inside a single oyster. Their uncanny significance emerged metonymically in relation to two brown pearls that had belonged to her deceased partner—placed in the casket, cremated, and later scattered at sea in the very waters where the oyster was harvested. As she writes:

"I had been struck by the miraculous qualities of a rhizomatic cluster of other events – all somehow related to my own and my rainbow family's process of mourning, and to my beloved's material transitioning from living to dead flesh, cremated to ashes, scattered over the sea (Limfjorden) beyond the island of Fur, and mixed with sand in the seabed, made of fiftyfive-million-year-old, fossilized diatom algae" (149).

Two events from within my own practice resonate with this affective patterning. The first occurred on the one-year anniversary of my mother's death; the second, a year later, unfolded through an interspecies assemblage of stones, soil, carrion, and burying beetles. I refer to these as the 'Cloud event' and the 'Beetle event'. I draw on these accounts not to adjudicate ontological status but to specify conditions of possibility: how grief, matter, and attention can thicken into encounters that reorganise relation. In this chapter the 'Cloud' and 'Beetle' events function methodologically—as occasions that made perceptual shifts legible—rather than as evidentiary claims. It is from those shifts, not from the events themselves, that I mobilise Lykke's framework of the immanent miraculous to think through how grief, matter, and perception coalesce within (re)wilding.

In practice, immanently miraculous encounters do not rely upon particular methods. They are not summoned into being. Rather, they arise contingently within human–non-human assemblages as condensations of affective intensity. What this research contributes is not an explanation of their cause, but a way of working that cultivates the conditions under which such encounters can become perceptible, sustained, and meaningfully integrated within practice. Through recurring cycles of excursion, encounter, and engagement—and their recursive reworking through assembly and decay—(re)wilding operates as an orientation for attuning practitioners to peripheral sensation, temporal openness, and relational vulnerability. In this way, the miraculous emerges as an immanent possibility rendered more likely to register through sustained, grief-attuned, interspecies enactment.

5.3b. The 'Cloud' event: Affective Assemblages and 'Miraculous' Multi-species Perception[26]

The title of Lykke's *Vibrant Death* nods to Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (2010), a foundational text of new materialism that challenges the anthropocentric tendency to reserve agency for entities that most resemble ourselves[27]. Bennett proposes that vitality and efficacy belong to all matter—even so-called inert objects—and that agency emerges through distributed assemblages of human and non-human actants. Lykke extends Bennett's approach to anomalous encounters, foregrounding four features:

a) *corpo-affectivity*: bodily affects (including those generated by grief) actively shape the encounter (Lykke, 2021:159).

b) *transcorporeality*: bodies are entwined with other bodies and environments; agency is always intra-active, partial, and distributed (148).

c) *immanent materiality*: events arise from matter–energy configurations rather than transcendent causes (88).

d) *metonymy*: relations of contiguity and touch whose material performativity activates sense (151).

Metonymy, in particular, offers a structure for understanding how meaning becomes felt. For Lykke, metonymy is not a linguistic shorthand ('the crown' for monarchy) but a material–semiotic operator rooted in proximity, contact, and embodied experience. Where metaphor links distant concepts through resemblance, metonymy links adjacencies through physical closeness. Within grieving assemblages, these connections form "affective relay[s]" (151) through which significance arises not from symbolic projection but from material contiguity.

Recent cognitive linguistics suggests that metonymy is a primary engine of language—emerging "from our practice and experience" (Ding, 2015:1837), and therefore derives from embodiment rather than abstraction[28]. In Lykke's framework, the corpo-affective associations bound up in grief activate metonymic chains that give an event its density, coherence, and affective weight (153–159). The miraculous, in this sense, does not name transcendence but the moment when adjacency and affect converge into immanent sense.

This distinction is crucial for a materialist conception of the miraculous. I am not concerned with verifying whether miraculous encounters are empirically 'real', symbolically significant, or metaphysically explicable. Instead, I investigate the conditions of possibility for such encounters—and what their transcorporeal and affective dynamics reveal about how we perceive, collaborate with, and make meaning alongside more-than-human worlds. "Miraculous excess," for Lykke, arises from human/non-human co-becomings that "coalesce into assemblages" dense with "affect-laden clusters of metonymical links" (159). Such events defamiliarise the familiar world, opening perceptual fields where interspecies relations are engaged collaboratively instead of extractively. This dynamic becomes more clear through an evaluation of the 'Cloud event'.

In the spring of 2018, I applied for a Master's program in Creative Writing at the University of Edinburgh. Knowing I would be leaving the US again, and would not be in Montana on the one year anniversary of Mom's death, I decided I needed to plan for a memorialisation ritual. So I

enlisted my partner at the time to help me pull stones out of the adjacent property and construct a commemorative stone circle on a nearby hill. From there you could look down on the exact spot where Mom had taken her life. The circle consisted of eight granite stones, with an altar stone in the centre capped by a flat granite slab. We positioned the tallest of the stones facing east. It had a notch on top, which we positioned in such a way that Castor and Pollux (Mom was a gemini) would rise from there on the anniversary of her death. The next day I posted the following on Facebook:

"*Something I never knew I always wanted to do. We raised these stones for you … Set in the dark to the music of the stars. Aimed along the trajectory of the ascension of Castor and Pollux (who brought you here) on the night you went away.*"

By raising this circle, I hoped not only to honour Mom's memory aesthetically, but to bind the site symbolically to a location in the UK, where I would shortly be moving. My friend Kathryn, who was living in Glastonbury at the time, had raised a standing stone at a site she chose in field just outside the village. The idea was that this would give me a tangible location to visit on the anniversary of Mom's death—a location bonded through sympathetic materials to the site of her memorial and passing. We got on a Skype and Kathryn walked me through a Neo-pagan ritual to solemnify the link between stones. As a follow-up, she would send me a small rock from the area to place beneath my altar stone. I, in turn, would bring a small rock from Montana to place in Glastonbury.

Fast forward a half year. I caught the night bus from Edinburgh to Glastonbury on October 25th, 2018, arriving in the wee hours. I had breakfast at my favourite cafe and then followed my friend's directions up Wick Hollow and then off into a farmer's field. A gentle rain began. I struggled to find the stone, so I called Kathryn, who helped me pinpoint it where it had fallen or been knocked over by a cow. Before hanging up, she told me that she forgot to mention, but once I'd done what I needed to do, I was to ask one question and it would be answered by the time I left the field.

I set the stone up again, and buried my small rock from Montana beneath it. I spent some time in thought and conversation. The rain continued to fall. I felt no great connection, just a resonance of the loss and a comfort knowing that at least I was on a path she would be proud of. My question, "Are you with me?" was all I could think to ask. After some time, I decided to go. I stood up just as the rain was coming to its conclusion. The sky was half dark clouds and half sunshine, and when I turned to face the north field, I saw the most brilliant rainbow blasting out of the clouds, through the blue sky and framing the distant hills. Then the connection hit me. The answer to my

question, the physical manifestation of some enduring unknown. Enough to wrap me up in joy. I took a few photos, posted one of them on Facebook (with the story), and then spent the rest of the day wandering around Glastonbury, along the field pathways, down past the old oaks, to the white and red springs, and up the tor. All the places I would have taken Mom had she been there with me. It felt like she was now.

In the evening, I returned to the house where I would be staying, with a couple old friends. There, I checked Facebook and saw the messages pouring in. Not just messages, though, photos of rainbows taken that day by friends of mine and of Mom's. Many were from Hamilton, Montana, where she died, but there were others as far off as other states and the Caribbean. If she was manifesting that day, it was not only to me. Naturally, the sensation of connection now extended to others and the feeling intensified. That's when I got the message from Kathryn telling me to zoom in and look closely at the photo I posted. When I did, I found a cluster of dark clouds off on their own beneath the rainbow that seemed to spell out 'Alexis'.

You can examine this image for yourself in the Research Catalogue Exhibit[xiv] not to verify a claim, but to see what kind of perceptual pressure the event exerts when read within its grief-assemblage context. The middle letters are smudged, but the "A" and "i-s" appeared to myself and others as quite clearly presented. Under dominant interpretive modes, such moments tend to be sorted into either transcendence (a sign from beyond) or projection (grief-fuelled apophenia). I posit, rather, that the miraculous nature of this moment can best be read through the theoretical framework of Nina Lykke's *Vibrant Death:* as the affective participation in an immanent, material-metonymic assemblage. Read this way, the event and my perception of it, emerged from an unlikely configuration between the atmosphere, the clouds, the stones, my mother's cremation (by which the majority of her material body had been vaporised into the air), and the metonymical associations provided by my own consciousness.

As Lykke writes:

> "If/when miracles appear to humans, they do so as effects of occurring affective intensities and spiritmatterings in human/non-human assemblages […] Miracles, as they appear to humans, are immanent effects of corp-affective co-becomings of entangled vitally and spiritually material human/non-human actants…which the human actor may sense as miraculous and wondrous because they occur

[xiv] **RC Exhibit → Conclusion/Appendix → Appendix A**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503356
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/4m90tx80z

> unexpectedly, and incomprehensibly from a human perspective, but also because they actualise assemblages that include intense affectivities, spiritmatterings, and thick clusters of metonymical relations" (2021:183).

The miraculous quality, in my example, was not the letter-forms as such, but the brief intensification of relation: a contingent alignment of weather, stone, anniversary, memory, and bodily affect that registered as co-presence. Associations between the anniversary and the significant metonymical relationship attached to seeing my mother's name in the clouds occurred to me as highly charged linguistic carriers of an entire history of physical connection and the lifetime of meaning-making it embodies. Even assuming there is no 'lex' inside the cloudy representation of 'Alexis', the sheer resemblance to my mother's name at that moment in time, within the existing parameters, defies statistical reasoning. These are material arrangements of enormous complexity, movement, and change. But they also involve the complexity of intensive bodymind states and the ways by which their changing configurations impact what and how we perceive the world. According to Lykke, the experience of grief or a state of mourning and its intensive modes are key to participating or even noticing miraculous experience. "My state of mourning led me to spontaneously unfold the sensibilities and sensitivities necessary to sense, experience, become aware of, and act response-ably [...] to the vital and spiritual material agencies of the more-than-human world of animals, plants, sea, winds etc " (184).

It would be no easy task to analyse these sort of happenings, as they tend to occur spontaneously and singularly. It is certainly beyond my abilities. But how my miraculous moments have changed me is easier to track, and finding ways to think through these moments as part of even vaster and ongoing assemblages (or assemblages of assemblages) involved in my own creative movement practice with forests (as of that time still unrecognised and undefined), are at least possible.

Read through Lykke's framework, the sequence of atmospheric and material coincidences around a memorial stone, a sudden rainbow, and a cloud formation became affectively charged far beyond ordinary pattern-recognition. Together these actants stand as an immanent assemblage: grief-intensified corpo-affectivity, meteorological processes, stone geologies, and memorial practice coalescing into a configuration that was briefly felt as more than the sum of its parts. The miraculous here resides less in any single element than in the way metonymic contiguities and heightened affect align to render entangled material relations newly legible.

Such moments illuminate how miraculous experience, understood immanently, emerges when "affect-laden clusters of metonymical links" (159) temporarily assemble into sense. They also

foreshadow the perceptual and relational shifts that recur throughout my forest-based (re)wilding practice: moments when the world becomes unusually articulate not because it has changed, but because habitual perceptual regimes briefly loosen enough for other forms of relation to surface. In this reading, the miraculous names not the appearance of a sign or symbol, but a brief intensification of relation: a contingent alignment of human and more-than-human processes that renders a complex material situation affectively articulate without resolving it into explanation.

Following this encounter, I moved to Glastonbury for a year, where these spontaneous responses began to solidify into a more consistent orientation. With easy access to country routes and a nature-centric environment that incorporated indigenously-inspired (neo-pagan) cultural practices along with alternative attitudes toward humanist systems (most of which I at least attempted to entertain without buying into), I found plenty to explore. Apart from consistent visitations to Mom's standing stone and a nearby old rusted fence where I occasionally added bits and pieces to until it had become a sort of sculptural homage (perhaps a prototype for my Goblinwoode Skullwillow), I traversed fields and farmland in and around Glastonbury and the surrounding villages. My walks put me in contact with domestic and wild plants and animals, who, when the pandemic hit, became my closest companions. I meditated and shared a sense of communion with the ancient oaks (*Gog* and *Magog*), bathed in sacred pools (the red and white springs), ascended the famous Glastonbury tor and became familiar with its varied micro-habitats. I befriended sheep, horses, cows, llamas and more than a few robins. I peered ever closer into the details of the earth, at insects, flowers, trees, and the dens of elusive mammals, as well as their subtle changes with seasonal rhythm.

Lykke emphasizes that the miraculous is "part of everyday life in a vitally and spiritually mattering and vibrating conative world of cosmic interconnectedness" (184), invoking Spinoza's *conatus* as the striving toward persistence. If such events seem rare, this may stem less from scarcity than from perceptual habits shaped by what Myers (2019:98) and Ignatov (2014:33) respectively classify as "hegemonic" or "anthropocentric" regimes of perception. Grief—or deliberate defamiliarisation through forest practice—unsettles these regimes, revealing what ordinarily recedes, not unlike Simons and Chabris's 'invisible gorilla' effect[29] (1999).

For Lykke, the miraculous becomes perceptible when actants "coalesce as an assemblage and become meaning-making as a rhizome of metonymical relations" (159). This differs from metaphorical projection—the dove as peace, the robin as messager—which relegates the nonhuman to human service. A (re)wilding approach instead attends to what Halberstam calls "nonhuman codes of interaction" (2020:77): the corpo-relational logic of an event rather than its symbolic import.

When considering Lykke's 'pearl event', meaning emerges from the material contiguity of the pearls, the ashes, the sea, and the site of grief—a metonymic chain grounded in touch and co-becoming (159). In my own encounters, the role of the pearls is played by stones: the Montana stone brought to Glastonbury during the cloud event, and the Glastonbury stone brought back to Montana during the beetle event[30] (see *6.3c*). The affective relay was intensified by the presence (and return) of the burying beetle, whose choice of the stone altar as a reproductive site produced a literal eco-habitat. A psychological interpretation might fixate on the beetle as symbol (as Jung famously did when formulating synchronicity); yet the metonymic force lay not in symbolic meaning but in the *material* links—the stones, the soil, the decomposition, the death, the eco-parental care—and the body's affective participation in these relations.

In such assemblages, attention decentre*s*: perception does not organize around a singular 'I' but around relations that exceed it. This shift prepares the ground for desubjectification—not erasure, but the reconfiguration of self as a networked participant rather than the organiser of relation.

5.3c. Ecology, the Uncanny, and Defamiliarisation

The uncanny offers a language for the affective texture of immanent miraculous events: one that makes relation perceptible without converting it into certainty. In Freud, the uncanny involves moments when the familiar becomes unfamiliar—or vice versa; but most often in a dynamic loop (1957b:224)—generating an affective disturbance that exposes the instability of the categories through which we organise experience. Because the word *uncanny* is contronymic[31] (at once 'that which is homely' and 'that which is unhomely'), it functions as a hinge between familiarity and estrangement. But uncanny attunement is also resonant with the experience of assemblage encounters, describing how the encounter feels: the way matter and meaning slide out of joint just enough to disclose relation.

The etymological proximity of *uncanny* (unheimlich, 'unhomely') and *ecology* (oikos, 'home') invites further speculation. Timothy Morton's spectral ecology interprets living beings as inherently uncanny: always slightly out of phase with themselves, always becoming. "You can't be a lifeform unless you have this spectral double," he writes—a "mutant shadow" that hovers between one and two (2017:70,72). As with musical dissonance, whose harshness arises from proximity without identity, what we call life is always already out of phase with itself. This affective lacuna between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, between identity and difference, negotiates a dialectic in which

even our satisfaction in musical resolution cannot be divorced from tension; likewise, any expectation of ecological stability or enduring resolution will inevitably encounter rupture.

While earlier sections treat spectrality as an ecological and perceptual condition, the uncanny foregrounds its experiential resonance—the affective strangeness through which beings disclose their porousness. In this way, ecologies and their inhabitants appear both familiar and strange. Dissonance, spectrality, the uncanny, and even the abject are built into the unstable logics of bewilderment. Experiences at these overlapping peripheries disturb our sense of familiarity, categorisation, and permanence.

The uncanny threads through creative processes. The arts frequently play with the familiar and unfamiliar, with common materials worked against the grain of everyday contexts. An artefact's likeness to, or ease of reversion into, its original material form can even serve as a basis for aesthetic critique (Yoshihara, 2015:33): work judged too familiar risks banality, while work too unfamiliar risks alienation. The most compelling pieces occupy the tension between these poles, producing affects that range from the uncanny to its sublime inverse. Two examples from my own practice fall within this frame, at an uncanny intersection between grief and art. Whenever I raise a stone circle in a rocky field, the landscape becomes subtly estranged; repositioning a sheep's skull from the grass where I found it onto the perch of a tree branch enacts both defamiliarisation and a novel re-homing of the object. *Carrion Ecologies* (see Chapter Six) likewise stages the uncanny as insects shuttle between decay and courtship, collapsing categories we assume to be discrete.

The uncanny unsettles because it interrupts perceptual habits—not only exposing our liminality, but activating potential through relational recomposition. At the periphery of perception, where categories break down, the world destabilises just enough to become newly perceptible. This is where (re)wilding begins.

5.4. Becoming-with the Wild: Desubjectification and Relational Recomposition

5.4a. Dissolution and Decay: The Disoriented Self

Grief unsettles the integrity of the self in ways that mirror the forest's distributed (dis)organisation. Where ordinary perception tends to locate agency within a single bounded subject, grief disperses that centre—scattering awareness across sensation, memory, and relation. In

this scattering, the self becomes porous: an open system through which affect and matter pass. The body that grieves does not simply register loss; it reorganises around it, altering the coordinates through which self and world interpenetrate. As Pearce and Komaromy observe, although visceral intensity "tends to subside", transformations involving how the bereaved "inhabited and experienced their own embodied sense of self" (2022:406) endure. These spatiotemporal shifts leave the mourner "uncertain about how to relate to their own environment" (402)—an uncertainty not unlike the bewilderment of standing in a forest where living and dying are so entangled that distinctions lose their edge.

The primacy Western institutions accord discursive knowledge over embodied knowing has long contributed to an emphasis on psychology over physiology in the analysis and treatment of grief. Although Pearce and Komaromy's interviews—describing "spiky" and "stabbing" bodily pain (401)—echo centuries of recorded bereavement symptoms reaching back to the world's oldest surviving literature[32], "the role of the body and embodiment in grief remains noticeably under-theorised" (394). Until recently, dominant discourse treated grief as "something external to the body" (406), positioning physical expressions as mere psychosomatic epiphenomena. Even a 1988 paper comparing three cases of somatic grief—postprandial vomiting, skin rash, severe tremors—concluded that bereavement *might* trigger psychosomatic illness. Such readings illustrate how modernist frameworks medicalised what might instead be understood as the body's improvisatory interaction with loss.

Advances in neuroimaging and psychophysiology now challenge these views, revealing profound entanglements of CNS, endocrine, cardiovascular, and immune systems in bereavement (O'Connor, 2019; Irwin et al., 1988; Szuhany et al., 2021; Wittstein et al., 2005; Fagundes et al., 2013). Research continues to show an "increased risk of mortality for bereaved people in the first six months after the loss event" (O'Connor, 2019:735). Grief is not confined to emotion; it is a whole-body event—an unruly orchestration of physiological, affective, and environmental processes.

The somatic dimension of grief cannot be overstated[33]; and neither can the affective. O'Connor and Seeley suggest that "automaticity may mean the stress of bereavement is primary and outside of awareness" (2022:318)—unsurprising given how widely autonomic systems are implicated. This affective liminality—between physical and emotional processes, between consciousness and the body's (un)knowing—marks the wild zone of grief. Here bewildering bodily experience resonates with potentially fatal degrees of ruptural energy. And yet, recalling Olsen, these peripheral zones may also be where habitual patterns are least resistant to change. Affect and perception collaborate at such thresholds, generating new relational sensitivities.

Disorientation may be less pathology than pedagogy, as O'Connor's learning-based model suggests. Todd DuBose's phenomenology of irreversible loss reads grief through Drew Leder's ecstatic and recessive bodies and Merleau-Ponty's chiasmic structure of flesh (1997:373), revealing not the disappearance of presence but its reversibility: the body that reaches outward is simultaneously withdrawn, touched as it touches. Brandon Shaw's analysis of dance via the phantom limb (2015) likewise exposes grief as a choreography of absence—the movement of feeling through what is no longer there. Both readings transform loss from negation into a field of relational elasticity, a sensing that extends beyond the skin.

In this light, and in line with Butler, grief becomes a process not only of unlearning, but of a desubjectification capable of bringing the human body into resonance with the forest's relational logic. Just as mycorrhizal networks transmit signals and nutrients through unseen pathways, so too does the grieving body communicate across invisible affective threads. The self becomes less a singular consciousness than a node within ecological circuitry. The 'phantom' that lingers after loss is not only the lost other but the trace of connection itself—an imprint of relation seeking new forms.

Rosi Braidotti's conception of *zoe* as the counterpart to bios acknowledges how this all-encompassing life force is also all-consuming—not utterly-consuming, nor by privileging any single species, but by sustaining co-evolutionary processes in which life becomes food for other life. Death is thus "part of the cycles of becoming, yet another form of interconnectedness" (2006:235). Through the interplay of death and life, *zoe* names an immanent wildness: a force of collaborative entanglement rather than transcendent order. Western modernity, by marking human death anathema, engages in a pernicious attempt to extract humanity—physically, culturally, spiritually—out of *zoe*. From a transhumanist perspective, anything that threatens to erase the bounded self is vile; from an ecological perspective, dissolution is vital to interspecies survival. This is part of what Haraway means by "living and dying well" (2016:29). Death is embroiled in life, rather than opposed to it. Any ethic that seeks to eradicate death will ultimately cripple life; a responsive ethics concerns how we live and die *together*.

Engaging such realities demands a different inflection on Myers' *becoming sensor*—one that rethinks abjection and the instinctive revulsions by which we vilify death and declare it *the* end. Old trees die to foster new growth and provide habitation; the death of a bird or mammal nourishes insects, microbes, and mycorrhizae. Sites of decay thus problematise Western concepts of subjectivity in ways that move beyond the posthuman and toward the inhuman—a term that, like interspecies, "offers a broader geopolitical understanding of how the human/animal/plant triad is unstable and varies across time and space" (Livingston & Puar, 2011:5). Such thinking departs from

"companion species" alone to include "incompanionate" pests, microbes, and commodified plants (Springgay & Truman, 2019:59). As J.J. Cohen (2014) notes, the prefix *in-* in inhuman functions "simultaneously as negative prefix and inclusive preposition, surfacing entanglement even at the moments of abjection", and rendering the inhuman "full of affect […] a separation within incorporation". What unsettles us in abjection (and often the uncanny) is the revelation that our ego-identities are more arbitrary than fixed. Yet this desubjectification is as much an awakening to symbiotic participation as it is an unravelling of the constructed self.

The corpse site emphasises how all beings are holobionts—ecosystems in their own right—as well as constituents of larger ecosystems. "Species can be nested inside one another, constitute one another, and depend upon one another—even as they might destroy one another" (Livingston & Puar, 2011:10). The abjectified corpse is a site where multiple organisms gather to feed and reproduce; living bodies are no different, sustained by their symbiotic cohabitants. The ubiquity of "messy, shifting ontology" (Springgay & Truman, 2019:50), where identities overlap, enfold, and transform, becomes palpable at the corpse site—an exemplary terrain for Cohen's (2014) provocation: "What if instead of curving into anthropocentric selves we extend apprehension outward into the ecomateriality with which we are palpably embroiled?"

As I demonstrate in Chapter Six, the dissolution and redistribution of selfhood is not metaphorical. The erosion of bounded subjectivity is materially ecological. Yet it is precisely within this bewildering situation that re-enchantment begins to simmer: pathways to relational knowledge long held at the periphery of attention. When identity softens its borders, perception attunes to correspondences once rendered indiscernible. Like the forest floor, the grieving body receives and reconfigures—decomposing old certainties to nourish emergent speculations. In this sense, grief can initiate (re)wilding pre-consciously: undoing enclosure, widening attention, and revealing that what we call 'self' may always already have been a collaborative composition in process.

What I have embodied in my own practice echoes the molecular mourning Lykke describes—different approaches to the same desubjectifying movement. Lykke's experience, articulated in *Vibrant Death*, opened a pathway to perceiving the material webs into which her beloved had been co-becoming since death—something entirely beyond how she had known her partner in life. This was not an ineffable soul calling from elsewhere, but a becoming-imperceptible that invited Lykke to a "molecular mourning with an alien line of flight" (2021:130). She describes a shift in which "the actualization of the alien encounter demands that the mourning 'I' dissolves all of her desire to reiterate that which was" in order to "[co-become] with the new assemblages" (130).

In my practice, I refer to this process as *becoming-forest*—where a perceived unity reveals its occluded multiplicity: literally, in the case of death, but also epistemologically and relationally

through living practices at the periphery. This “decolonizing [of my] ecological sensorium” (Myers, 2018:77) and “[opening] up to sensing other sentiences” (86) began to overshadow my habituated modes of relating to the forest—extractive, romantic, managerial—through a singular attempt to meet and read these worlds from a more distributed perspective. My own molecular mourning, perceiving my mother as a disintegrated subject whose cremated materiality was already ongoing within atmospheric, geological, and (eventually) biological cycles, initiated a practice of seeking out zones of wilderness where some fragment of her materiality might abide or be diffracted through engagements with ongoing life.

This recognition intensified practice, and more anomalous encounters emerged where reconfiguration and re-enchantment became perceptible through affect-laden participation in metonymically charged multispecies assemblages. If Lykke and I both encountered startling events on the one-year anniversaries of our respective losses, shaped in part by the affective density of seasonal return, then one might ask what drives such assemblages on any other day. Perhaps anniversaries heighten affect in ways that make these events more legible. If so, might iterative practice help cultivate and sustain the affective affordances of grief beyond calendrical thresholds?

What begins as dissolution in molecular mourning also seeds new relational configurations. From decay, recomposition takes shape. In affective terms, this unraveling resembles defamiliarisation: the unsettling of what has become normalised[34]. As Truman and Springgay note, defamiliarisation enacts a pedagogy of perception—a movement of deterritorialisation that dislodges the subject from stabilised relations and opens the field for becoming. Defamiliarised deterritorialisation “requires us to rethink and re/move what has become habitual, and to re-evaluate or upset common opinion […] pedagogy is implicit in de-familiarization in that there is an active effort to change a perspective” (2016:261). Linking defamiliarisation with deterritorialisation situates it as more than a literary device: it is inherent to the processes by which assemblage flows become and unbecome. To territorialise is to adapt, to make familiar, to entrench patterns through time; deterritorialisation dislodges a subject from these relations. These modes are ubiquitous in grief—now there, now gone, now back again—as we navigate a world made strange through absence. Grief unravels the self into a network of correspondences; recomposition begins in that soil. What dissolves into the forest through (re)wilding returns not as identity restored, but as relation redistributed.

5.4b. Recomposition and Relationality in (Re)wilding

To recompose after dissolution is also to reconfigure death. Because few lifeforms survive without being either constituted by or constitutive of complex bio-assemblages with diverse DNA signatures, any organic being already hosts symbiotic movements toward collaboration and ontological intersubjectivity. My goblin walks[xv] involved imaginative collaboration long before I recognised the genuine collaborations underway with the living beings first overlooked beneath my anthropomorphic apophenia. Likewise, Skullwillow[xvi] was a collaboration long before I called it such; only in retrospect did its entangled, participatory lifeforms come fully into view. From the perspective of the myriad inextricable life inhabiting and constituting any organism, our entrenched concept of death—as the unequivocal termination of a singular being—requires expansion.

Posthumanism reframes discorporation more literally than transcendent narratives of a spirit departing the body. Conceptualising death as akin to the dissolution of a corporation into smaller entities shifts the emphasis: instead of a transition from materiality to immateriality, death becomes a translation from coordinated materiality into increasingly distributed materiality. Networks expand across space, while immaterial energetic links and pathways ramify. A body becomes—although it always was—bodies, whose members may carry on in isolation or be drafted into new assemblages. At the lowest metabolic level, constituent parts absorbed as nutrients reincorporate into other living networks, especially in ecologies like forests where the dead are not sterilised or isolated but welcomed into circulations of decay and renewal.

Just as these boundary-blurring entanglements expose the illusion of pure individuation, so too in social and cultural worlds do we find that life and death are less clear-cut than institutional narratives suggest. As these distributed modes of becoming unfold, we are prompted to ask: what kind of world do they make possible?

Max Weber's diagnosis of modern disenchantment signals what he saw as the sacrifice of meaning for progress and the withdrawal of "sublime values […] from public life" (1917:13,30). An institutionalised belief that scientific rationalism could solve every problem and fulfil every need dominated the twentieth century. Yet Weber's declaration of disenchantment rested on a shallow materialism, inattentive to the startling complexity, paradox, and wonder immanent within matter itself[35]. In the context of this project, however, what is at stake is disenchantment's withdrawal into alienation from community with the multispecies material world.

[xv] **RC Exhibit → Seasons → Excursion → Forest Goblins**
RC link: ***https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503402***
DRI link: **https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/3b59fb880**

[xvi] **RC Exhibit → Seasons → Engagement → Skullwillow**
RC link: ***https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503404***
DRI link: ***https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/4742qc448***

Prospects for re-enchantment, therefore, will not serve planetary ecosystems if they merely retreat to faith-based or proto-scientific paradigms. Instead, by attuning to the vibrancy, complexity, and relational wonder of materiality itself, a different possibility comes into view: an ecological re-enchantment grounded in the living, dynamic, and entangled expressions of bodies. Re-enchantment in this sense is not a return to certainty or fixed meaning, but a renewed capacity to be moved by relation. Whatever coheres does so provisionally, opening sites for engagement with what was once unseen, overlooked, or disavowed. It is here that the perceptual reconfigurations described earlier—the defamiliarisation of perception, the dissolution of the self—begin to approach the thresholds of relational re-enchantment.

5.5. Re-Enchanting Compost: Coming together, Falling apart

Bringing it all together

In Chapter Four, I developed four principles or orientations that animate (re)wilding practice: embodiment, site-specificity, improvisation, and interspecies collaboration. We can now look at these principles operating as an ecological cycle of interdependent making and unmaking. Collaboration alongside other species depends on improvisational attitudes; improvisation grounds itself in embodiment; embodiment is always situated within a specific space; and forest-based site-specificity is inherently interspecies and inter-perspectival.

This cycle of intra-active orientations also forms an abstract assemblage resonant with the conditions Lykke identifies as generative of miraculous experience. These conditions—

- **corpo-affectivity:** an attuned, affective, *embodied* state
- **transcorporeality:** *site-specific* interconnection among bodies and ecologies
- **immanent materiality:** vibrant material presence with *improvisational* responsiveness
- **metonymical relationality:** modes of contiguity through which meaning and communication exceed language, forming a basis for *interspecies collaboration*

—together articulate a framework for (re)wilding perception. This alignment constitutes a theoretical contribution of the research: it demonstrates how (re)wilding orientations can be

understood not only as artistic principles, but as perceptual conditions through which immanent, interspecies encounters become thinkable and sustained within grief-affective practice.

Read alongside the (re)wilding orientations and the Seasons of Practice model developed in Chapter Four, Lykke's account helps specify how these perceptual conditions operate in situ. These frameworks do not prescribe procedure or guarantee effects; they name overlapping conditions that intensify, recede, and recur—sometimes aligning, sometimes pulling apart—within the responsive ecology of practice. What this chapter has traced is how such conditions reorganise perception and relation, making re-enchantment possible not as resolution or a return, but as a momentary thickening of immanent sense.

In practice, the holistic nature of these processes emphasises a capacity for drifting from one orientation to another, provided one remains open to slipping out as readily as one slipped in—that is, improvisationally. This looseness, like the fluidity of non-centralised and non-hierarchical assemblages of independent histories and desires, emerges from an embodied balance-in-motion between *reterritorialisation* (flows of connection and stability) and *deterritorialisation* (flows of rupture and disconnect). In this way, (re)wilding practice holds the ruptural and generative aspects of intensive grief in tension, attentive not only to creative and productive energies but to when and how things fall apart, and why that matters.

Letting it all fall apart

To grieve or create within multispecies assemblages is to acknowledge shared material processes and ecological interdependence, but it is also to experiment with mind–body patternings at the wild fringes of experience. My research suggests that (re)wilding grief through practice can cultivate and sustain the perceptual affordances activated by the intensities of irreversible loss.

Modern Western grieving practices typically orient toward integrated (molar) memorialisation as the desired endpoint, overshadowing the processes by which death molecularises a body into new and diffuse patterns of vibrant materiality. But when grief becomes a forest practice, it can engender a new semiotics of life and death—a way of reading the world in which those we have lost transform materially along the continuity of Braidotti's *zoe*, moving through decomposition/recomposition journeys of becoming-forest and becoming-unrecognisable. These perspectives also affectively beckon the bereaved into deeper relationships with more-than-human worlds through the incorporation of their lost loved ones into the nexus of living/dying ecologies.

In this sense, death in circulating ecosystems is no less ephemeral than life. To say that one's lifeform is 'falling apart' in a humanist frame is to overlook how living processes persist and thrive

through the dissolution and reconstitution of individual bodies. Religious, ideological, social, and archival structures attempt to shore up illusions of persistence; the fear beneath these is obliteration. But materially, death becomes a becoming (imperceptible, atmospheric, arboreal) toward regeneration rather than non-existence. Our material selves—confederacies of human tissue and roughly ten thousand microbial species—do not simply perish. I offer the following biological aside to underscore the chapter's claim that re-enchantment can be grounded in material relationality—in the ordinary wild intelligence of decomposition.

When a body dies, oxygen-starved cells begin breaking down through *autolysis*. The byproducts "make excellent food for your symbiotic bacteria," which have "evolved ways to adapt to a dying body" (DeBruyn, 2023). Recent studies estimate that the human microbiome may contain as many or more microbial cells than those classified as 'human' (Lee, 2019) and that the combined microbial genetic information outweighs our own genome by many orders of magnitude (Stein, 2012). If a body is buried or left in the forest, this interior ecosystem liquefies, carrying millions of microbes into the soil where they encounter a new microbial community. Once presumed to be out-competed, host-associated microbes have now been detected for months or years after decomposition—participating in nutrient recycling and nitrogen exchange. In healthy ecosystems, "microbes convert the concentrated pools of nutrient-rich organic molecules from our bodies into smaller, more bioavailable forms that other organisms can use to support new life" (DeBruyn, 2023).

From a subjective perspective, death is the ultimate deterritorialisation; from an ecological perspective, the 'finality' of death is transient—a turn in the cycle, a collision of worlds, a distributed assemblage of reterritorialisations.

Within (re)wilding practice, this generativity of decay transforms our relationships with abjection, rot, insects, and other 'horrors' of the material world. Here, re-enchantment manifests not as transcendence but as immersion: an expanded capacity to perceive decay as participation and material ongoingness. (Re)wilding also embraces processes that continue beyond what might otherwise be wrapped, packaged, and marketed as final creative outputs. A sculpture eroded by weather, a video overwritten into unrecognisability, music generated from seemingly unrelated data, an encounter never codified but retold through shifting perspectives, a performance un-scored, forgotten, and reinvented the next day—all of these integrate the improvisational openness of living and dying.

Death is not only *not* the end; it is immediately both continuation and beginning—a site where meaning, never static, reinvigorates pathways through the dynamics of dissolution and transformation.

5.6. The Political Wild of Perception and Dissolution

The contribution of this chapter lies not in proposing new theoretical categories, but in demonstrating how existing theories of grief, affect, and perception change when read through sustained, interspecies artistic practice oriented to principles of (re)wilding. By composting Butler's grievability, Brinkema's refusal of resolution, Manning's perceptual untraining, Halberstam's bewilderment, and Lykke's immanent miraculous through grief-affective forest work, this research advances a practice-based mode of theorising grounded in perceptual retraining, relational attunement, and ecological duration.

These theoretical contributions did not arise in abstraction, but emerged gradually through the recursive movement of practice—through walking, grieving, encountering, engaging, and attending improvisationally and collaboratively within forest ecologies. Research-creation here names the process by which practice unsettled inherited perceptual habits, and theory arose as a way of articulating what those disturbances made newly sensible. What this chapter has traced is not a system imposed upon experience, but a conceptual vocabulary that became visible through the intensities, ruptures, and reorientations of grief-affective, forest-based experience.

At stake in these shifts is not only personal transformation but a broader micropolitics of perception. What humans are able to sense within more-than-human ecologies has direct social and political consequences: shaping how value, agency, and grievability are distributed across living systems, and how categorical distinctions between living/non-living, domestic/wild, and self/other become grounds for exploitation, erasure, or care. As Myers argues, "efforts to learn how to pay attention to phenomena that have remained intangible, invisible, and otherwise imperceptible" (2019:98) are inherently political acts. Expanding the sensorium is not a neutral aesthetic project[xvii]; it alters how responsibility, response, and relation become possible.

Ignatov similarly reframes anthropocentrism through a micropolitical lens, defining micropolitics as "the myriad processes that shape our political sensibilities, dispositions, and identities" (2011:2). From this perspective, perception itself becomes a site of political formation: a mode of "experiential [affective] self-artistry" through which entrenched habits of attention, feeling, and valuation may be reworked (2). Attending beyond the human, then, is not merely an ethical or

[xvii] Nor can we forget that the political landscape of perception is unevenly mapped: the very capacity to relinquish subjective control and risk somatic dissolution raises questions of bodies tethered directly to systemic factors and demographic accessibility.

ecological gesture but a practice of reconfiguring how bodies—human and more-than-human—are encountered, recognised, and lived with.

Within this frame, (re)wilding practice can be understood as a micropolitics of grief. By extending Butler's critique of grievability beyond the human, (re)wilding resists the domestication of loss and the sanitisation of death. Rather than avoiding what feels abject, uncanny, or destabilising, it invites proximity to the material and spectral dimensions of shared living and dying: the fluids, tissues, transformations, and decompositions that trouble humanist fantasies of separation and persistence. Grief, in this sense, becomes not only an affective rupture but a perceptual event—one that fractures habitual orientations and opens new urgencies for sensing interdependence.

Rothfield's description of affect as "an ability to be affected, to be touched by, an outside or beyond" (2019:94) helps articulate this opening. Such sensitivity expands the capacity to act in concert with alterity rather than against it. Similarly, Halberstam's reading of wildness as an opening into "a larger world of vegetation and animals, rocks and landscapes, water, and creatures seen and unseen" (2020:10) situates (re)wilding as a practice of perceptual reorientation rather than romantic escape. Engagement with one's own peripheral capacities thus parallels engagement with more-than-human worlds at sites of long-neglected relational intensity. Approached in this way, re-enchantment does not signal transcendence or resolution, but a renewed responsiveness to immanent, multispecies worlds.

From this perspective, the chapter's theoretical contributions cohere around a central claim: that perceptual disruption—particularly when catalysed by grief—can function as a generative political force. Liminality, as Turner (1969) suggests, is not simply chaos but a condition of reorganisation. Yet unlike romanticised accounts of the liminal, (re)wilding does not seek to dwell permanently in disorder, nor to instrumentalise disruption for guaranteed transformation. It acknowledges instead the necessity of states that unsettle, de-domesticate, and return attention to the ongoing improvisation of living systems. Grief will lead us into such states regardless. (Re)wilding offers a way of staying with them without foreclosing their potential.

In this sense, the wildness traced throughout this chapter is not a metaphor for ecological restoration but an embodied politics of attention: a reconfiguration of what—and whom—we are able to sense, value, and respond to. To (re)wild perception is to dwell within cycles of making and unmaking, to recognise collapse not as failure but as a condition of recomposition, and to perceive decay not as an abject antagonist but as the forest's ongoing improvisation with itself through time. Grief's rupture and the forest's regeneration thus cohabit a shared field of re-enchanting relation.

These theoretical insights remain inseparable from the practices that engendered them. They are not frameworks designed to shape practice in advance, but articulations of how practice operated as

a mode of navigation through bewilderment, encounter, dissolution, and reconfiguration. What remains at the close of this chapter is not a completed system, but a fertile conceptual compost—a terrain where theory once more gives way to practice. If (re)wilding thought requires letting go of fixed systems of meaning, then (re)wilding practice must likewise embrace the collapse of methodological coherence. The dissolutions traced through grief, decay, and relational recomposition re-emerge as a way of working that learns from its own disintegration.

The following chapter takes up this return. Chapter Six examines specific techniques and creative outputs through which (re)wilding took material form, tracing how methods emerged, collapsed, and reassembled across forest and studio. In works such as *Carrion Ecologies*, breakdown itself becomes evidence: showing how dissolution—of bodies, meanings, techniques, and perceptual habits—can function as a crucial, generative condition for creative and ecological relation and re-integration.

Chapter Six: (Re)wilding in Action: Evidence from Practice

“The dead oblige us to displace ourselves.”

- Vinciane Despret

6.1. Materialising Method: Techniques, Outputs, and Process-Traces

This final contribution chapter presents practical evidence of (re)wilding in action. Where Chapter Three described (re)wilding as *lived method*, Chapter Four articulated that lived method into *methodological principles and a process ecology*, and Chapter Five elaborated the *theoretical implications* of that model, the present chapter extends the arc into practice by examining how these orientations manifested in concrete artistic techniques and creative outputs: the material, sensorial, and aesthetic forms through which (re)wilding took shape in practice.

(Re)wilding is never solely conceptual or methodological; it must be materially enacted. The logic clarified in the preceding chapters—embodiment, improvisation, multispecies collaboration, ecological attunement, seasonal cycling, collapse and renewal—only becomes intelligible as methodology through practice. It is tested, stretched, and transformed through sustained engagement across forest and studio. Chapter Six therefore does not present technique as a set of procedures to replicate, but as a record of what became possible when the principles and seasons of (re)wilding were put into sustained motion.

This chapter focuses on two intertwined tasks:

To trace how the methodological ecology unfolded through specific artistic modalities—including movement, photography, sound design, music composition, plant sonification, video editing, and multisensory studio techniques. These techniques are not the method itself. They are manifestations of how the method attunes practice toward emergence, improvisation, interspecies responsiveness, and ecological entanglement.

To analyse a series of representative practice outputs—including the evolving iterations of *Autogamy*, the multi-modal work *Carrion Ecologies*, and the music video *Tired (for the Birds)*—as evidence of a shifting perceptual field. Across these works, the human figure gradually decentres, and attention redistributes across metabolic, temporal, and multispecies relations. The outputs document not merely artistic development but the reconfiguration of the practitioner's sensibilities over four years of grief-affective, forest-based work.

Crucially, tracing this methodological ecology requires investigating the material conditions of production. A post-qualitative and posthumanist approach to practice research refuses to treat creative tools or social infrastructures as neutral background elements. Therefore, this chapter

explicitly analyzes the technical and relational parameters of the research apparatus itself. This includes examining the material friction of the hardware deployed on the forest floor—such as camera rigging, microphones, and lenses—and unpacking how these tools actively format and mediate attention. Furthermore, this analysis extends to the presence of human technical assistants who shot or supported early performance works. Rather than treating these technical interventions as detached, non-artistic compromises, they are critiqued as highly active parameters within the field of inquiry, charting how their presence fundamentally shaped the variables and limits of an outdoor, solitary eco-somatic practice.

As in earlier chapters, the emphasis here is not on producing stable artefacts, but on tracing the processual, affective, and improvisational dynamics that shaped them. Each technique emerged not from reliance on conceptual design but from the iterative cycling of the Seasons of Practice—excursion, encounter, engagement, assembly, and decay—and each output bears the imprint of those cycles: drift-led discovery, affective rupture, ethical–aesthetic staying-with, collaborative assembly, and composting collapse.

Three clarifications orient the reader:

- **These techniques are exemplary rather than prescriptive.**
  They demonstrate *one* way a (re)wilding methodology can materialise. The methods could unfold quite differently in other bodies, ecologies, and affective conditions.

- **The emphasis is on relational and perceptual shifts.**
  The outputs analysed here serve as non-discursive evidence of how the practice reorganised my capacity to attend, collaborate, and respond to more-than-human worlds.

- **The chapter maintains the dual register of the thesis as a whole.**
  It reads the works both as situated creative artefacts and as methodological demonstrations of (re)wilding in action.

The chapter proceeds in three sections:

- **Section 6.2** examines key techniques that arose from (re)wilding orientations—techniques of camera-based seeing, sonic exploration, forest-based improvisation, plant sonification, eco-spectral editing, and multispecies soundscape construction.

- **Section 6.3** analyses how these techniques coalesced into practice outputs, mapping the transformations visible across *Autogamy* (v1–v4+), the emergence of *Carrion Ecologies*, and the re-enchanted compositional field of *Tired (for the Birds)*.

- **Section 6.4** concludes by synthesising how these practice outputs demonstrate the capacities and limits of (re)wilding as a methodology—and how they prepare the ground for the thesis's final reflections in Chapter Seven.

In turning to the practice itself, this chapter shows how the methodological and theoretical contributions of the thesis were not simply derived from practice but enacted through it. The works presented here do not answer the project's questions; they perform them. Methodologically, they function as process-traces—artefacts through which perceptual and relational reorganisation becomes legible without being reduced to discursive explanation. In this sense, 'evidence' refers not to proof of a singular claim but to shifts in attention, agency, and relation as they materialise through experience. What follows is therefore not a taxonomy of techniques but a tracing of how sensoria, relations, and agencies coalesced through practice, revealing how grief-affective attunement, ecological improvisation, and interspecies collaboration reorganised artistic process in ways that continually surprised, unsettled, and exceeded my own intentions. Taken together, these works stand as evidence of (re)wilding not as metaphor or analogy, but as a lived creative ecology.

6.2. Techniques as Enactments of (Re)wilding

The previous chapter established how (re)wilding engages methodologies of grief and creative practice through affective defamiliarisations at the periphery of perception. I argued that practices of intensive grieving in forest-based settings can expand both our eco-sensorium and sense of self, bringing perception into a state of bewildered openness in which relations with more-than-human worlds become newly evident and thinkable. In Chapter Four, (Re)wilding was framed as a cluster of orientations analogous to those deployed in ecological rewilding. The underlying ethos in both cases involves scaling back managerial control so that the self-organising dynamics of relation—whether ecological or affective—can reassert themselves. Collapse, composting, and decay emerged not as problems to be solved but as integral phases in these processes.

This section turns from theory to implication and technique. I will demonstrate how the methodological contributions as outlined in Chapter Four and the theoretical contributions of

Chapter Five have operated in practice through an analysis of artistic outputs, along with the processual shifts that accompanied them. Here, the theoretical, methodological, and practice frameworks developed in Chapters One through Five are folded back through the lived texture of practice.

(Re)wilding practices are not defined by any single technique or stable set of procedures. Rather, (re)wilding operates as an orientation that can manifest through a wide range of artistic, somatic, and ecological modalities, depending on context, site, and affective conditions. The techniques discussed here are therefore exemplary rather than prescriptive: specific ways the seasonal logic of the practice materialised within my own work. Photography, sound, movement, and film functioned not as ends in themselves but as modes of attunement—ways of extending perception, negotiating collaboration, and noticing relational shifts as they unfolded across forest and studio. Alongside these media-based practices, touch-based sensing, seasonal return, and proposition-led improvisation operated as equally significant, if less easily documented, techniques of encounter. Here I focus on those techniques that proved most generative and transformative within this research.

6.2a. Techniques of Embodied Seeing

The camera in this practice functioned less as an image-producing machine and more as a prosthesis for seeing differently. In (re)wilding, the photographic output is secondary; the camera became a device for encounter—an extension of perception that opened scale, texture, and relational density to view. This matters methodologically because it reframes film technique as attunement: the tool is evaluated by how it alters perceptual conditions, not by the image product it yields. Deploying a mechanical apparatus within a solitary, intimate eco-somatic practice immediately introduces a profound paradox of mediation. To use the camera prosthetically requires negotiating a split consciousness: the practitioner must attempt to remain porous and affectively open to the immediate environment—temperatures, textures, emotional fluctuation—while simultaneously managing focal lengths, framing, battery levels, and rigging. The tool that expands perception also threatens to domesticate it, introducing a technical vigilance that can pull the body out of an emergent encounter and back into a mode of detached, aesthetic calculation.

This friction between somatic openness and technical management must be negotiated dynamically as the body moves through space. When integrated into the kinetic act of walking, the camera alternates between an instrument that slows, thickens, and defamiliarises the process, and

one that demands rigid cognitive oversight. Habitual walking dulls the senses; the camera interrupts that drift toward inattention by continually soliciting and framing (and re-framing) detail. Its risk, however, is not merely visual dominance, but a deeper threat of technological detachment. Methododiversity helped to mitigate this: there were camera days and no-camera days, and these alternations preserved multisensory vitality across modalities.

Working with carrion—unlike working with bone—rendered sculptural manipulation unsafe and ethically inappropriate while insects were feeding. The camera therefore became my primary means of engagement. Wide-angle lenses allowed me to register the corpse in situ rather than isolation; telephoto and macro lenses opened windows onto the decomposer communities whose temporalities and scales far exceeded mine. These shifts in perspective constituted an interspecies visual practice—one that first began to recognise the corpse as a multispecies landscape in flux.

6.2b. Techniques of Embodied Listening and Sonic Exploration

Natasha Myers' (2018) practice of *becoming sensor* provides an important grounding for the listening dimensions of (re)wilding. For Myers, listening is choreographic: the body angles, leans, twists toward sound (88); perception unfolds kinetically rather than passively. This resonates with drift-ing practice, in which listening emerged through motion—branches brushing skin, birdsong ricocheting between trees, insect rustles, shifts in the weather, and unidentifiable sonic events.

Two techniques emerged directly from this sensorium:

(a) Forest Soundscape Temporalities

Field recordings were slowed or accelerated to reveal patterns ordinarily too slow, too fast, or too subtle for human ears. Birds became microtonal arpeggiators; insect movements produced percussive textures; bracken rustle became a distributed heartbeat. These manipulations amplified multispecies temporalities while respecting ecological distance: at carrion sites, directional microphones enabled listening without disturbing decomposer communities.

(b) Spectral Layering and Sonic Translation

Myers' kinesthetic imaging informed a spectral approach to video editing, in which sonic intensities shaped visual composition. Listening guided pacing, layering, and juxtaposition, often revealing affinities between sound and image only evident through slowed time.

Music and sound design entered the project relatively late, functioning not as traditional composition but as a response to multispecies patterns already underway. Research into embodied musical anticipation supports this approach: recent studies suggest that "brain–body dynamics physically embody musical structure" (Harding et al., 2025:293), and that sound becomes a form of somatic communication long before conscious feeling. In this sense, music became an extension of the forest's affective field rather than a superimposed aesthetic frame.

6.2c. Multisensory Ecocentric Techniques

Film extends photography into time, movement, and multisensory layering. It is both archive and interpretation: a way of revisiting encounters and engaging their affective charge after the fact. In this project, film became a medium of intra-action, where editing choices were guided by improvisation, chance, and multispecies attunement.

Editing traditionally imposes coherence on raw material. Here, I aligned the editing process with drift-ing's aleatory logic. Chance juxtapositions, chaotic cuts, stochastic layering, and improvisational sound–image pairings created emergent correspondences reminiscent of 'miraculous' encounter. Moments of apparent synchronicity emerged not through intention but through distributed agency within the editing assemblage. Following Lykke's reframing of synchronicity, these junctures can be read as artefacts of a broader corpo-affective assemblage linking forest, grief, sound, and image. Methodologically, such moments function as prompts for how to edit without closing contingency. They treat the timeline as a site of encounter rather than a site of control.

These techniques also expose the limits of decentring human perspectives[36]. Even without appearing on camera, the human editorial agency remains—framing, cutting, selecting. Yet chaotic and distributive editing introduces other agencies into the process, widening narrative possibilities and extending the collaborative stance into post-production. (Re)wilding therefore operates less as an erasure of the human than as a redistribution of compositional priority.

Across media—still images, soundscapes, video—the practice continually shifted in response to collaborators, materials, and affective intensities. Each medium revealed different facets of (re)wilding: ways of listening, noticing, assembling, and dissolving that could not have emerged

through theoretical reflection alone. Together, these techniques demonstrate the generative friction between intention and interruption, improvisation and decay, form and flux. These digital and somatic processes were tested against theoretical frameworks and transformed when brought into direct contact with the visceral, unpredictable realities of the forest floor.

The next section gathers these threads into synthesis, examining how the techniques I deployed illuminate the capacities and limits of (re)wilding, how collapse and decay operate methodologically, and how multispecies collaboration expresses at its conceptual edges. This analysis clarifies the methodological implications of the project and prepares the ground for my thesis' concluding reflections.

6.3. Synthesis: What Practice Reveals

Dissolution carries generative potential that actuates most readily in biodiverse environments. In a plantation forest, the soil is impoverished and fallen sitka remain hard, inert, and unyielding; in extreme cases, the forest becomes a deadwood graveyard. But in a healthy forest, fallen trees neither petrify nor simply die. Some continue to grow uprooted, sprouting new branches; others soften, collapse, and become nurse logs that shelter fungi, mosses, seedlings, insects, and animals. In a similar way, the (re)wilding of creative practices rarely produces a barren terrain. When projects or meanings collapse—through loss, trauma, or exhaustion—their remnants can form a substrate from which new forms, insights, and relations emerge.

A case in point from my own practice is *Autogamy*, a multi-iterative and ongoing audiovisual project. Over time, it splintered into micro-outputs, grew side-projects, reassembled, and broke apart again into divergences that now bear little resemblance to the early work. Because no single 'final' output anchors the project, *Autogamy* functions as an open-ended ecology. All of its components emerged directly from sensorial forest-based practice; their forms evolved (and in some cases deteriorated) in ways that mirrored those processes.

The impact of (re)wilding on my perceptual and relational orientations can therefore be glimpsed not only in the fragments themselves, but in their *evolution*. A comparative reading of iterations reveals theory and practice imbricating one another: shifts in ecological attention, ethical sensitivity, and multispecies collaboration feed back into creative process, altering what becomes possible or thinkable. These outputs do not claim artistic originality; their contribution lies in how they encapsulate and express a (re)wilding methodology—demonstrating how forms and processes can be used as a lens for articulating ecological attunement.

Because this thesis examines how a (re)wilding of creative and affective processes can alter ethico-aesthetic sensibilities, these outputs operate as *non-discursive evidence* of how forest-based practice reshaped my approaches to perceiving, valuing, and relating to more-than-human beings. Through brief analyses of these media and their iterations, this chapter demonstrates how a (re)wilding methodology both emerges from and informs a singular creative practice, gradually reorganising its methods, values, and relational capacities. Techniques introduced at later stages of assembly—particularly techno-interspecies collaborations, embodied approaches, and ecocentric framing—deepened multispecies dynamics and cultivated greater openness to the theoretical and practical orientations articulated throughout this thesis. The RC Exhibit bears witness to this (re)wilding: it documents shifts in activity, attention, attunement, perception, and interspecies relation that unfolded across the artist's lifeworld.

This section focuses on three strands of that transformation.

- *Autogamy*, in its evolving iterations, tracks a movement from Romantic, human-centred narratives toward more immanent, distributed modes of relation.
- *Carrion Ecologies*—arising partly from the compost of *Autogamy*—repositions decay as a generative multispecies hinge where desubjectification and re-enchantment start to cohere.
- The music video *Tired (for the Birds)* gathers these threads along a deep-time process and arising from miraculous encounter and unfolding over several years. It assembles grief, multispecies attention, and experimental techniques into an re-enchanted audiovisual form.

Threaded through these works is a set of techniques—techno-interspecies collaboration, embodied alignments, and ecocentric compositional framings—that crystallised at the assembly stage and will be unpacked in 6.3b. Together, these examples show how the Seasons of Practice—excursion, encounter, engagement, assembly, and decay—interweave across forest and studio, gradually restructuring what counts as subject, collaborator, and artefact.

6.3a. Iterative Transformations

1) *Autogamy*: *Deteriorating Humanism*

The first year of my project was a period of discovery on both research and practice fronts. As I developed a clearer understanding of practice-as-research, I realised that I had already been engaged

in an informal forest-based soma-sensory practice for several years. Once named, I began gradually tuning its activities toward research questions, propositions, and provocations.

This early period culminated in a cluster of creative artefacts, including the first iteration of a short video titled *Autogamy*[xviii], assembled from disparate encounters: long walks, improvisational movement with trees, and two film shoots in which I buried my body under a mound of mud.

The value of this early video lies less in ecological sophistication than in the contrast it provides with later iterations. Throughout year one, I was still working within modernist/post-modernist and Romantic humanist frameworks I had been culturally trained to idealise. Although the practice had begun to alter my perception of nonhuman species—particularly trees—I continued to treat the forest as an extension of my own emotional landscape. Even when plants, fungi, moss, leaves, earth, birds, and insects entered the frame, the outputs remained romantically oriented and anthropocentric. The early soundtrack—Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*—now reads as an unmistakable sign of that orientation.

In retrospect, *Autogamy v1* shows how easily Romantic tropes can masquerade as ecological engagement. Romantic anthropocentrism often stages the self as dissolving into nature, yet the dissolution ultimately returns to a purified subject who remains the locus of meaning. What resembles a surrender to the nonhuman is frequently a step along a longer re-centring process rather than participation with an immanent field of multispecies relation. The work reads as ecological, but the ecology remains in service of a transcendent human subject.

David Fancy's analysis of geoartistry clarifies why such modes are difficult to escape. He argues that the modernist assumption that "subjectivity and agency are solely to be found in the realm of the human" arises from "identitarian thinking that privileges bounded individuals and objects over processes and events" (2021:150). Even when artists gesture toward more-than-human perspectives, artistic techniques often "recuperate identitarian and transcendent forms of human subjectivity" (151–152). *Autogamy v1* participates in this tendency: wildness is aestheticised rather than embodied, and the narrative arc re-centres the human subject even as it appears to relinquish control.

This aesthetic recuperation is precisely what marks *Autogamy v1* as an instructive instance of 'failed (re)wilding.' The mud-burial scene demonstrates this failure through its material and procedural architecture: by highly choreographing my own burial, I was fundamentally treating the forest floor as a passive, theatrical stage for human catharsis rather than a co-compositional partner.

[xviii] **RC Exhibit → (Re)wilding Outputs → YEAR ONE / *Autogamy v1***
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503348
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/gh93x180n

This structural anthropocentrism was further reinforced by the literal social conditions of the shoot, which relied on a human technical assistant to operate the camera. The presence of another human being standing in the woods holding the apparatus created a relational buffer that insulated my body from a raw, solitary encounter with the environment. Instead of allowing somatic grief to drop into a porous, unpredictable entanglement with the site, the presence of both the assistant and the lens forced the body into a noticible degree of self-conscious performance, externalizing the affect for an implied human viewer. Rather than enacting a true decentering, this configuration staged a spectacle of ecological surrender that protected the human subject at the center of the frame, shielding the practitioner from the un-choreographed friction of a wild encounter.

As such, the first iteration marks a baseline from which later versions diverge—away from romantic self-drama and toward more genuinely multispecies, immanent modes of practice.

2) Recognising the Kin Within

I spent much of year two following threads of practice that did not always seem directly related to my research questions. I allowed myself to be easily and often diverted by contingencies—weather, mood, chance encounters, unresolved curiosities. In retrospect, this was already a highly improvisational mode. I loosened pre-planned structures, stepped out of narrative habits, and trusted the decisions of my feet. My research structure increasingly mirrored the structure of the practice itself: rhizomatic, affect-driven, and unconcerned with outcomes—yet paradoxically became more productive.

Toward the end of year two, I created a second iteration of *Autogamy*[xix] for my annual review. By this point, I could clearly see the humanist tendencies shaping *v1*. The burial scene had functioned as a romantic conclusion—purification, catharsis, symbolic rebirth. The forest served as metaphoric support for a human process.

In *v2*, I attempted to disrupt this. I replaced the emotional soundtrack with my own composition. Though the atonal harmonic textures attempted to evoke inhuman perspectives, the melodic structure still carried human sensibilities, guiding the viewer affectively back to a human centre. Similarly, temporal jump cuts attempted to interrupt individuated focus and linearity, but the work remained anthropocentric overall.

One significant shift emerged, however, not through a conscious, pre-planned change in my on-site filming methodology, but as a retrospective realisation on the editing timeline. When returning

[xix] **RC Exhibit → (Re)wilding Outputs → *Autogamy v2***
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503348
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/gm80xx64b

to re-cut the existing clips for my annual review, the material conditions of the original shoots—specifically the highly staged human performance and the relational buffer introduced by having a technical assistant handle the camera—became visibly legible as anthropocentric constraints. I cannot claim a deliberate or causal methodological pivot at this juncture; rather, new micro-correlations seemed to be emerging between my ongoing, unscripted forest practice and my developing editorial intuition. This friction manifested in post-production: I found myself intuitively pulling the spotlight away from my own actions as a human actor, recognizing that the performance framework insulated the work from the very ecological attunement it sought.

Instead, I found myself re-directing the structural weight of the edit toward a mound of earth that had previously served as one of my burial sets. During practice, this mound had become a site of engagement. On forest excursions, I had begun populating it (like the Skullwillow) with bones, stones, and foxglove seeds. As grasses and flowers began to sprout, I followed an impulse to extend *Autogamy* beyond the human figure's burial—to focus on the continuing life of the forest as it overtook the set. At the conclusion of v2, the narrative centre briefly shifts to the small habitat that was emerging overtop the old film site. The camera drifted now across an assemblage of bones, soil, grasses, flowers, and insects—evoking a scene of distributed materiality arising from the discorporated never-to-return human figure.

Fancy's reading of Deleuze and Guattari's Spinozan body helps articulate this shift. "Onto-genetic and self-producing systems […] depend on a distributed 'autonomy of expression' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 317) […that] precedes the bound individual body [and has] a capacity for agency and expression [that] extends beyond and after the individual subsides" (2021:153)[37]. *Autogamy v2* is not a full abandonment of the human figure, but it marks a move toward this distributed ontology. The human subject's 'afterlife' (or, what continues to happen materially after their life unravels) is reframed not as transcendence but as material redistribution into ongoing ecological processes.

This shift also echoes Morton's reminder that humans "contain nonhuman symbionts as part of the way in which we are human" and how life always "exist[s] in an ambiguous space between rigid categories" (2021:14). Recognising distributed agency interrupts homogeneous subjectivity by foregrounding the internal and external strata of multispecies assemblage.

In this sense, *Autogamy v2* functions as a hinge: no longer Romantic, not yet fully ecological. It signals a reorientation toward emergent processes, multispecies entanglements, and distributed agencies that would later shape the work more radically—a shift not driven by conceptual insight, but by lived practice: returning to a site, witnessing its becoming, and allowing attention to be reorganised by what was experienced.

3) Back to the Studio: Experiments with Assembly and Decay

By transitioning my grieving process and creative practice out of the studio and into the forest, I had enriched my experience of more-than-human species in ways that resonated with and embodied Anatoli Ignatov's eco-ethical immanent naturalism, whereby heightened "awareness of our embeddedness within a larger system of forces" enhances "the powers of perception" toward sensations of "the coexistence of multiple animal and plant worlds, governed by different temporal modes and logics of self-maintenance" (2014:136). For Ignatov, such sensorial strategies operate as affective "micropolitical work[s] on the self", cultivating capacities to experience other bodies "more horizontally and sympathetically" (136). Daily forest encounters repeatedly destabilised ingrained habits, perceptions, and assumptions through a confluence of movement, affective grief, and direct interspecies contact. These encounters accumulated into a gradual reorientation of my perceptual and artistic frameworks.

After more than three years of forest-based practice, and a season of repose, what would have been my fourth iteration of *Autogamy*—but which has since dispersed into myriad other directions—reflects a clear shift toward these orientations. Perhaps most telling is the fact that *Autogamy* has become a project no longer in search of completion. The value of ongoingness followed me from the forest into the studio. While certain sections have been adapted for exhibition (e.g., *Carrion Ecologies* (Wagner, 2025)), the project as a whole has no final form. Accordingly, the discussion focuses on isolated clips and techniques that have been included in the RC Exhibit.

The next section examines the studio-based techniques that emerged from this sensory-affective work—techniques that diffract changing relations with nonhuman species—and elaborates how (re)wilding's ethico-aesthetic dimensions eventually began to manifest even in the studio as collaborative, embodied, and ecocentric approaches to creative assembly. Aligning with my framework, these techniques fall into three interrelated categories: *collaborative, embodied,* and *ecocentric,* each underscored by an *improvisational* stance.

6.3b. Example Techniques of a (Re)wilding Assembly

By the time my practice began to engage an assembly stage, grief was already shifting from a private affect to an ecological atmosphere of creative cultivation. The disorientation and vulnerability that characterised my grieving process had revealed their methodological value: dissolving my impulse to control form, relaxing attachment to coherence, and heightening

receptivity to the improvisational logics of plants, insects, weather, and decay. How (re)wilding manifested specifically in the studio can be articulated through the language of technique.

Three broad approaches informed my assembly choices: *techno-interspecies collaborative soundscapes, embodied techniques for video and sound,* and *ecocentric framing techniques.* These are not discrete categories so much as overlapping modes that emerged through iterative practice.

1) Techno-interspecies collaborative soundscapes

One approach to filmmaking in-particular involved extending the presence and influence of nonhuman species into both the visual frame and soundscape design. Using Data Garden's Plantwave sonification device to generate elements of the musical score became a way of relinquishing architectural, domesticating control and allowing plant bio-processes to contribute to form. The Plantwave measures micro-variations in a plant's electrical impedance and converts these fluctuations into MIDI data. Such signals represent dynamic shifts in the organism's bio-state—though they should not be considered indicative of intentional expression. To preserve the rawness of this bio-electrical activity, I bypassed the device's 'humanising' algorithms (which quantise information into human-based harmonies and rhythms) and worked instead with the unprocessed and far more aleatoric-feeling raw data.

In this configuration, my compositional role narrowed to instrumentation, modulation, and the layering of multiple instances of plant-generated sequences[xx]. Intuition and chance guided these broader choices, but the temporal contour and harmonic relationships of the musical phrases were determined by the plant-generated data. Once brought into the editing environment, I found my visual choices responding to plant-driven aural irregularities—allowing their pauses, bursts, and unfamiliar rhythms to shape clip placement, transitions, and pacing.

Methodologically, Plantwave-mediated techniques redistributed compositional agency by allowing nonhuman bio-processes to structure temporal and harmonic decision-making, enacting (re)wilding's commitment to emergent, asymmetrical collaboration. This marked a quiet but significant reorientation: composition remained a process of shaping material, now inflected by an unpredictable, nonhuman temporal field.

2) Embodied techniques for video and sound

[xx] **RC Exhibit → Assembly →** ***Plantwave Tests 1, 2, and 3***
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503406
DRI links: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/pv63w2566
https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/q237xv24j
https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/q524zr08d

Embodied assembly techniques arose in both film and sound.

2a) Embodied cinematography

Rather than focusing exclusively on the performance movement (as in years one and two), I began improvising movement from behind the lens. Mounting the camera on a shoulder rig bound the frame's motion to my own shifting weight, posture, and orientation. Somatic responsiveness—leaning, twisting, pausing—became directly inscribed into the footage. While still mediated through a human gaze, the improvisational quality fostered a more responsive relationship between cinematographer and multispecies participants. The camera became not an instrument of control, but an extension of drift-ing as I moved among and responded to the forest.

2b) Embodied audio interaction

A similar embodied responsiveness emerged through Plantwave audio engagements. Because electrical impedance is sensitive to micro-environmental changes, the practitioner's presence can influence the Plantwave signal—altering light conditions, temperature, humidity, or pressure through touch or movement. I experimented with touch-based and movement-based interactions that intensified note activity and produced a sense of collaborative feedback.

These interactions created an affective loop: the plant's electrical shifts altered the musical phrases; these shifts, in turn, shaped my movement, breath, and approach to the plant. It often felt as if how I related and responded to the plant were altering the music that was in turn influencing my movements. This reciprocity blurred the line between instrument and performer, and music in this context provided sensations of real-time communication.

3) Ecocentric framing techniques

Ecocentric techniques involve creative decisions through which editing and production reflect the evolving eco-philosophical stance of the (re)wilding practitioner. Here I highlight two such techniques, both of which contributed to *Carrion Ecologies*:

- *more-than-human soundscapes,* which gesture toward multispecies temporalities, and
- *eco-spectrality,* which experimentally unsettles representations of bounded identity and discrete time.

3a) More-than-human soundscapes[xxi]

Although forest soundscapes may seem an obvious accompaniment to multispecies footage, their ecocentric deployment is not a given. Ambient nature recordings have often been appropriated as commodities to soothe human listeners, with little regard for interspecies meaning. While recent decades of critical research have given us practical audio projects addressing the loss of biodiversity in eco-soundscapes due to deforestation and species extinction (Wildsanctuary.com, Wildlifeacoustics.com), the goal of my technique is perceptual. I wanted to create soundscapes that signalled interspecies difference by generating an unfamiliar auditory field.

Slowing down field recordings by a factor of 500–1000% was a technique informed by research on animal temporal perception. Studies led by Kevin Healy (University of Galway) demonstrate differences in temporal perception across species. The first correlated metabolic rate and body size with temporal resolution; the second examined variation in animals' ability to detect visual changes. "Animals with fast paced lives, such as birds that catch their prey on the wing, have fast eyes and detailed perceptions of time, while animals with slow lives […] have slow eyes" (Healy, in Kolitz, 2021). Earlier work by Robert Dooling suggests a similar acceleration in auditory processing: many messages encoded in birdsong consist of differentials that lie outside the threshold of human tracking[38] (Yong, 2023, Chapter 8). What registers as 'normal' speed for a bird is, for humans, too swift for perceptual parsing.

Time dilation thus became a method for gesturing toward the multiplicity of temporal and perceptual realities within the forest. By slowing recordings until previously inaudible patterns emerged, the soundscape began to reveal new rhythmic, harmonic, and timbral relations—a sonic exaggeration of species difference. As a methodological move, this is a practice of 'making-perceptible': it does not claim to reproduce another species' sensorium, but it engineers a perceptual defamiliarisation that re-trains the human listener toward temporal difference. Such re-training has the potential for eliciting interspecies curiosity and unhinging habitual conceptions of alterity.

Morton links ecological awareness to recognising that "there are lots of different temporality formats," (2021:57). My slowed soundscapes do not reproduce avian or insect perception, but they suggest the possibility of other temporal orders and other aesthetic logics. This elicits a collaborative junction within (re)wilding insofar as "the senses dictate what animals find beautiful, and in doing so they influence the form that beauty takes in the natural world" (Yong, 2023, Chapter 8). Slowing birdsong provides access to aesthetic and communicative patterning normally

[xxi] **RC Exhibit → Seasons of Practice → Assembly → Songs of the Forest**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503406
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/tm711x48v

unavailable to humans[39], and thus foregrounds the multiplicity of articulations shaping a forest's sonic space.

These audio-aesthetic choices emerged from the (re)wilding interplay of grief, movement, and multispecies encounter. They formed part of a broader undoing of the habitual, human-centred perceptual mode—a loosening of the self's temporal expectations. As Fancy argues, this begins by "imagining the body differently," opening its disponibilité to other bodies and tempos (2021:151). Continuous engagement with forest environments made such availability increasingly intuitive. Grief accelerated the process: it kept perceptual habits from resealing and rendered the self more permeable to the slow metabolics of the forest. Sonic time dilation thus became a practice of listening-with in which multispecies temporalities could begin to register as forces shaping creative form.

3b) Eco-spectrality[xxii]

A second ecocentric technique experimented with Morton's concept of the spectral X—a haunting shadow of lifeforms becoming-with their pasts and futures. The technique involved layering three staggered copies of a clip at slightly different transparencies and temporal offsets: past, present, and future. The effect was subtle. The 'present' image held the most weight; memory appeared as a soft echo; futurity flickered as a tentative trace. New rhythms of movement entered the frame. Though at times distracting, they consistently drew attention to specific points in space while unfixing the firm boundary between organism and environment.

What emerged destabilised linearity and sensorily enriched the experience of temporal ontology. Eco-spectrality rendered each organism as a temporal multiplicity: a being whose present is always already entangled in ongoing decay, growth, memory, and futurity. This temporal thickening supports (re)wilding re-enchantments: perceiving a being through layered temporalities renders its agency and alterity newly available while gesturing toward a shared temporal structure.

A possible extension—and one I may explore in future work—would be to vary spectral ratios by lifeform. Slower, longer-lived organisms (trees, fungi) could receive subtler, slower offsets; faster beings (flies, birds) might be layered with more dynamic rhythms. This would form a visual analogue to the birdsong time-dilation work: a multispecies temporal chorus enacted through image. The dilated audio could be temporally thickened as well using delay/echo/feedback techniques tethered to the spectral layering of the visual field.

[xxii] **RC Exhibit → (Re)wilding Outputs → Eco-spectrality**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503406
DRI links: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/jq08kn28n

Though still exploratory, eco-spectrality shows early promise as a technique for inviting viewers to perceive the forest as a multiplicity of interwoven perspectives and temporalities, rather than a homogeneous backdrop for human action.

6.3c. Re-enchantment Outputs: *Carrion Ecologies* and *Tired (for the Birds)*

Before turning to specific works, it is important to clarify how *re-enchantment* enters this stage of the project. As outlined in Chapter Four, re-enchantment does not mark a final arrival, resolution, or transcendence. It names an immanent, ongoing reorientation—a perceptual shift through which multispecies alterity and distributed agency become newly sensible. In the context of this chapter, then, re-enchantment is not a culmination but a *condensation,* where ongoing shifts briefly take material form.

With that framing in place, I now turn to two practice outputs that crystallise, in different registers, the reorganised perceptual field that emerged through (re)wilding practice.

1) *Carrion Ecologies*[xxiii]: *Juxtapositions of abject naturality*

Carrion Ecologies marks the point in my practice where the dismantling of Romantic, human-centred aesthetics becomes materially perceptible. If the *Autogamy* iterations trace the gradual erosion of symbolic transcendence, *Carrion Ecologies* is where that process coheres: where grief-attuned forest practice gives rise to a mode of immanent sense-making in which attention, agency, and affect redistribute themselves across the metabolic multiplicities of the forest. The work does not simply depict nonhuman life; it reorganises the locus of expression itself.

This ongoing multi-modal project—one iteration of which was exhibited at the FilmEU Artistic Research Exhibit, *Synthetic Rewilding: between nature and the machine* (Wagner, 2025)—documents not only insects slowly decomposing larger animals but also the broader ecological activity proliferating around these sites. Entire lifecycles unfold: insects fight, mate, feed, lay eggs, and hatch directly on the carcass; spiders anchor webs between ribs; wasps stalk scavenging flies; beetles harvest food for future progeny; fungi infiltrate tissues to extend their network.

[xxiii] **RC Exhibit → (Re)Wilding Outputs → YEAR FOUR / Carrion Ecologies**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503348
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/gq67zt48g
For still images, see: RC → Seasons of Practice → Decay → Carrion Ecologies; and various in https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/4f16s512r

Early iterations such as *Autogamy* gestured toward multispecies entanglement without jettisoning the drag of Romantic humanism. They tended to treat nonhuman worlds as mirrors for human feeling or symbolic transformation. *Carrion Ecologies* marks the moment this inherited orientation gives way. Here, the work no longer seeks to resolve grief or refine the human subject; instead, perception reorganises itself around the dense, unsettling materialities of decomposition.



Figure 6.1. From* Carrion Ecologies*, entanglements of death and life

As ecological theorists have noted, modern sensibilities often hinge on refusing material continuity between human and nonhuman life. Plumwood famously describes "becoming food" as culturally unthinkable—an axis of human exceptionalism (Plumwood, 1993 cited in Alexandrowicz, 2021:138). Morton extends this critique, arguing that late-modern cultures value life as a quantity of growth and production, privileging the continuation of human existence above "any *quality* of existing" (Morton, 2018:25).

Carrion Ecologies turns toward these metabolic realities from which earlier work remained sheltered. It does not narrate a dying human reborn through transcendence; rather, the human is displaced entirely, subsumed into a world of becoming-multiplicities feeding, dying, and ongoing—an organic materiality Western culture has laboured to distance itself from, yet which remains immanently, spectrally present beneath every humanist gesture.

When Morton argues that there is "something inherently weird, even disgusting, about beauty itself" (2021:41), he invites this messy, abject charnel ground back into aesthetic experience—a "porous and oozing zone" (7) that normative aesthetics strive to sanitise. Without this weird, spectral uncertainty—epistemological, biological, aesthetic—ecological engagement remains superficial.

Consider the close-ups juxtaposing blood-fed flies and nectar-fed butterflies[xxiv]. One is celebrated as beautiful, the other abjectly reviled; yet both express *bios* and *zoe* in equal measure. These juxtapositions expose sedimented affective/aesthetic hierarchies: preferences shaped less by biological reality than by cultural perspective. Neither embodies the entangled processes of life and death any 'better'—ontologically or teleologically—than the other; and to accept this is to relinquish the fantasy of nature-for-us and encounter life on wilder, less consolatory terms.



Figure 6.2. Daily life on Carrion Landscapes

[xxiv] **RC Exhibit → Seasons of Practice → (Re)wilding Outputs → Fly and Butterfly**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503348
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/h9905552q
For still images, see: RC → Seasons of Practice → Assembly → Fly and Butterfly; and various in https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/4b29r828d

Sustained encounters with these scenes gradually shifted my sensibility: abjection began to shimmer with its own strange beauty. Grief acted as a kind of feral tutor, opening perceptual thresholds through which even flies coupling on a deer carcass' abdomen radiated with the same expressive becoming as willow blossoms in spring. Out of such glimpses emerged *Carrion Ecologies*: a recognition of layered assemblages of organisms whose interactions exceed simple models of consumption. A carrion site becomes an interspecies social hotspot. There, a feasting fly may be trapped in a spider's web woven between ribs [00:51]; wasps circle a dead seal, not to eat it, but to poach scavenging flies [01:42/02:30/03:00]. I recorded instances of mating rivalry on a stag's teeth [02:07], followed by the victorious pair laying eggs [02:46]. Another sequence shows a bee snared by a spider hiding out in a rose, and the body subsequently fed upon not only by the spider but by tiny opportunistic flies [00:36]. As decomposers break down organic matter, nutrients are released into the soil, feeding bacterial, fungal, and vegetal networks across the forest floor. I filmed a fly, once triumphant at the feast but now fused into the eye socket of its meal through fungal necrosis, revealing a dense entanglement of predation, parasitism, and decay.

While these videos resemble nature documentaries in their observational closeness, they otherwise deliberately subvert the form. Documentaries domesticate wildness through informational voiceover, narrative framing, and anthropocentric moral arcs. *Carrion Ecologies* foregoes narration entirely. Editing is only gently curated, and often aleatoric and more comprehensive than rhythmic. It overlays neither affect or moral perspective. The multiplicity of organisms on screen assert their own trajectories in a field that "resists interpretation" (Manning & Massumi, 2014:181). These refusals cultivate a productive unknowing—an opening through which the defamiliarisation central to (re)wilding can take hold. Macrophotography is employed to bring viewers into close proximity with squirming maggots, blood-drinking flies, and trophic altercations ordinarily pushed to the margins of acknowledged perception.

The expanded film, shown at the FilmEU Online Exhibition, demonstrates how (re)wilding practice can generate aesthetic forms in which human subjectivity no longer anchors meaning but becomes one thread among many within a densely interdependent field of metabolic, affective, and multispecies relations. In this sense, *Carrion Ecologies* is not an endpoint of re-enchantment, but one of its processual expressions: a moment where immanent relationality extrudes into briefly visibility.

2) The 'Beetle' event: a Carrion Ecology Collaborative Assemblage

The material logic of this metabolic field—where abjection shimmers with its own strange beauty—coalesced most acutely in an extended, multi-year encounter that fundamentally anchored my carrion practice. What I term the 'Beetle' event stands as the most narrative and multifaceted of the immanent miraculous encounters to emerge during this research, illustrating how the human element shifts from a position of sovereign artistic control to one of distributed authorship within an active ecological network. Images and video from this event are available as part of this project's Research Catalogue Exhibit[xxv].

The encounter began upon a return to Montana from Glastonbury in the summer of 2020. My brother and I transplanted the original granite stone circle I had raised in 2018 as a memorial to my mother, moving it stone by stone back onto our property—the land where she took her life. Before placing the central altar stone, I dug a small hole to scatter a handful of earth and crystals that my roommate in Glastonbury (now my wife) had commissioned me to bury in the United States as a private ritual of renewal.

When I returned to the stones a week later to reconnect with the site, I found the body of a dead field mouse resting directly in front of the altar. Given the isolation of the property and the absence of human intervention, the positioning felt uncanny—suggesting an intentionality that defied immediate explanation. I speculated that either the cat had killed this mouse and left it at the site of her previous owner's memorial, or the mouse itself had chosen that space specifically to lie down and die. Both of these scenarios could be the stuff of fiction, but reality proved to be far more interesting. As I stood observing the tiny corpse, the mouse began to move. It wiggled and shifted in the sand, its belly bubbling in a manner that initially suggested a horrific post-mortem birth. Instead, a vibrant black and orange beetle, roughly the size of a one-euro coin, crawled out from beneath the flesh and began navigating a clockwise circle around the corpse. A second beetle followed, engaging in a coordinated, rhythmic movement that resembled a dance with the first.

I watched for a long time as these beetles went about their business—nibbling off bits of the mouse, pushing it around, flipping it over, and dragging it ever nearer to the altar stone. This was my introduction to *nicrophorus marginatus,* the burying beetle, whose life cycle depends on a breeding pair locating a small animal carcass, transporting it (sometimes for miles) to an optimal substrate, copulating on the dead flesh, and then burying it where the next generation would have a ready supply of food.

[xxv] **RC Exhibit → Excursion/Encounter → Nicrophorus marginatus pt. 1 & 2**
RC link (ex): https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503402
RC link (en): https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503400
DRI link (ex): https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/3b59fb880
DRI link (en): https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/4168nk762

When I walked out to the stones the next day, the beetles and the mouse were gone. I wondered if they'd managed to secure their prize? Had they buried it right there beneath the altar stone constructed in my grief, to raise their larvae where the crystals and earth from Glastonbury had somehow (who knows!) beckoned them to set up a homestead? Rather than destroying the site through scientific unearthing to verify this, I chose to let the contingency remain closed, treating the boundary as a site of un-knowing.

The narrative reassembled one year later, late in the summer of 2021, following my first year living alongside Goblinwoode in Kenmare. I again returned to Montana for a visit, where I found a family of robins nesting in the deck rafters of my mother's home. I spent days tracking the parents dropping nutrients into the gaping mouths of four fledglings. When the time came to leave the nest, three birds transitioned safely into the trees, but the first to attempt the flight collapsed into the grass below, its body broken. Recognizing the recurring presence of the robin across my wider vocabulary of grief, I carried the fledgling's body to the stone circle and placed it directly onto the flat granite altar slab.

Within twenty-four hours, the corpse had become a site of intense multi-species choreography. Feasting among the flies, I noticed two adult burying beetles, visually identical to the couple who had claimed or dragged the field mouse at this very circle and altar stone the year before. Three smaller beetles were with them—presumably the next generation. I watched them feed, move up and down the altar stone, and crawl into cracks between the base of the stone and the earth.

It seemed as though more than three years after my mother's death, the delicate ecosystem of this place had established a continuity with the creative acts of grief I had enacted to maintain relationship with her. Few creatures could more overtly convey associations related to the concept of life emerging from death than the burying beetle, and their participation added rich metonymical significance to my experience of the assemblage. Additionally, I would soon learn that carrion beetles "document early evolution of elaborate biparental care and defense of small vertebrate carcasses for their larvae" in a research finding that "represents the earliest evidence of parental care" (Cai, C. et al, 2014:14170), traceable at least as far back as the Cretaceous period (and yet remains rare among insects). Thus, the metonymic web of these beetles is associated not only with the more general and ubiquitous tangle of life and death, but also with the deep-time origins of the precise parental relationship at the locus of my grief[40].

I hesitate to suggest any ontological causality between these material unlikelihoods. Whatever drove the beetles to inhabit this precise location may be impossible to sort out or explain in human terms or in terms related to the reasons for which I raised the stones to begin with. Although Lykke's miraculous assemblage relies on corpo-affective relationships between associative links

and material entities, the experiential component of non-human actors remains fundamentally opaque (2021:183-184). What matters methodologically is how this confluence of agencies, processes, intensities, and creative labour (stone, soil, bird, mouse, insect, and grieving body) produced a genuine co-affecting assemblage-event irreducible to its separate parts—one which generated within my sensorium a material and semiotic affinity with an organic process ongoing for over a hundred million years (Cai, C. et al, 2014:14170).

Assemblages are more than collections of objects, entities, meanings, etc… They are inter-operating coterminous zones, where boundaries become sites of transformation, not dissimilar from the way Judith Butler speaks of political borders as "highly populated site[s]," in which a nation is defined through mixture and negotiation rather than delimitation (2004:49). It is at the boundary, the peripheral zones, where collaboration begins. As Deleuze and Guattari famously illustrate through the intra-actions of the wasp and the orchid, separate desiring functions can co-evolve to inextricably envelop one another, yielding enduring transformations without either organism ever fully translating the semiotics of its collaborator. They are held in community by an emergent trans-signification. The perceptual shifts generated by the Beetle event provided the direct, material pivot for my doctoral project: it inaugurated a path toward abandoning entrenched notions of arts expertise and abstract symbolic projection, and planted the seeds for an interactive, transmedial methodology capable of documenting "non-human codes of interaction" (Halberstam, 2020:77). It moved the practice into a space where the camera and microphone were no longer tools used to capture an aesthetic object, but apparatuses used to participate in a wider carrion ecology. This direct immersion in the nesting cycle of *Nicrophorus marginatus* served as the raw material engine for my final practice output.

3) Tired (for the birds)' – a music video

Throughout this chapter, I have traced the gradual transformation of practice through the seasons of (re)wilding and the techniques that shaped its outputs. In this final example, these transformations settle into a different register. *Tired (for the Birds)* gathers key principles of (re)wilding—not as a culmination, but as a concentrated instance of an ongoing shift in perception.

The song itself predates the project by decades, originally articulating a different grief and awaiting the missing third verse that only emerged after my mother's death. In its final form, the song threads both griefs across distant spans of time, echoing the temporal destabilisation traced throughout the chapter: how grief fractures linearity, how birdsong dilation and eco-spectrality

explore multispecies rhythms, and how practice increasingly unfolded in layered temporalities rather than singular events.

The video developed directly out of the pivotal Beetle event described above. Through the process of filming the young robin's decay, I was able to confirm questions from the previous year —that the beetles had not only survived, but propagated beneath the altar stone. They now participated in the small carrion ecology atop the altar stone. I interwove this footage with my own (macro) encounter with the bird. Small Japanese netsuke passed down from my mother appear as emblems of cyclicality—objects resonating with the recursive temporalities of generation, forest, and grief.

In many ways, this work sits downstream from *Carrion Ecologies*, where desubjectification became experientially grounded and re-enchantment exhibited its entanglement with *zoe*. The beetles, birds, and inherited objects that populate *Tired* inhabit the same redistributed field of attention shaped by grief and multispecies attunement. *Carrion Ecologies* brashly articulates the shift from transcendence to immanence, but *Tired* reveals a quieter, more integrated form of that shift: a mode of collaboration where meaning arises not from symbolism but from relational closeness and metonymical density. This was not a traditional artmaking process, but one that emerged directly from a wider encounter with grief-affective immanent miraculous experience arising from practice.

As clarified in Chapter Five, re-enchantment is not mystical uplift but an immanent thickening of perception—an attunement to the spectral, multispecies temporalities that co-compose a world. *Tired* therefore functions as a re-enchantment output in this precise, material sense. It leans more toward listening than declaration, more toward entanglement than representation.

Before moving to the thesis' concluding chapter, I invite you to watch and listen to the video[xxvi], contextualised by this active co-affecting landscape of the beetles, and to bear in mind that it is not presented here as a resolution to the project's questions. Rather, it offers one momentary crystallisation from a perceptual shift that remains ongoing, and a direct result of (re)wilding's engagement with grief-affective interspecies miraculous assemblage.

[xxvi] **RC Exhibit → Conclusion/Appendix→ Epilogue: 'Tired': Practice and Perception**
RC link: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3348187/3503356
DRI link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/tx324m01z

6.4. Conclusion to Chapter Six

Taken together, these movements, mediations, and material experiments show that (re)wilding practice is not simply a set of procedures or techniques, but a reconfiguration of relational, perceptual, and creative capacities. Over time, the practitioner shifted from Romantic–humanist orientations toward an embodied, grief-attuned, multispecies sensibility in which subjecthood dislodged and ecological attunement deepened. Aesthetically, this shift is revealed through eco-spectral temporalities, more-than-human soundscapes, carrion ecologies, plant-generated musical structures, and compositional frames shaped by distributed agency rather than human intention alone.

What began as a form of personal grief work gradually unfolded into a re-enchanted mode of making in which collapse, uncertainty, and cross-species responsiveness became generative conditions. Across the chapter, the trajectory traces a practice being rewoven into the living textures of the forest—no longer oriented around mastery or representation, but participation and open-ended co-composition. Decentring does not mean the disappearance of the human, but a sustained effort to redistribute attention, authorship, and compositional influence within multispecies assemblages—an effort that remains necessarily partial and situated.

The concluding chapter now moves outward. After revisiting the core provocations and synthesising the project's response and contributions, I will consider how this methodological framework might travel beyond my own practice and its potential for enabling future artistic, ecological, and ethical research.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions, Implications, and Future Research & Application

"The ecological society to come, then, must be a bit haphazard, broken, lame, twisted, ironic, silly, sad … Sadness means there's something you can't quite put your finger on. You can't quite grasp it … Which means in turn that beauty isn't graspable either, beauty as such – which means that beauty must be fringed with some kind of slight disgust, something that normative aesthetic theories are constantly trying to wipe off. There needs to be this ambiguous space between art and kitsch, beauty and disgust … A world of seduction and repulsion, rather than authority. Of truthiness rather than rigid true versus rigid false."

- Timothy Morton, *All Art is Ecological*

"This is our lexicon, a lurid alphabet to frame the incantation; conjure the world lost and populace invisible. Reset the fractured skeleton of legend, desperate necromancy raising up the rotted buildings to parade and speak, filled with the voices of the resurrected dead. Our myths are pale and ill. This is a saucer, full of blood, set down to nourish them."

- Alan Moore; *Voice of the Fire*

7.1. How Do We See in the Dark?

Parts one and two of this thesis are titled *Dawn* and *Dusk* respectively, gesturing toward the subtle differences these liminal times hold: both are forms of oblique perception, modes of sensing that refuse the full glare of daylight. In this concluding chapter, dusk itself ebbs toward night. The question implicit throughout has been: *how do we see in the dark*—in bewildering grief, in disorienting multispecies environments, on the creative edge where few signposts exist, in research where the challenge is uncharted territory? What forms of meaning—like stars—become visible only when the central light dims? What kinds of attention must we cultivate to notice them?

Dawn and dusk were introduced as metaphors for the shifts in perception required by (re)wilding: twilight states in which boundaries soften, peripheral impressions flicker, and the world is apprehended less through direct illumination than through affect, resonance, and relational attunement. Now, at the far edge of this project, these metaphors take on a fuller significance. With the practice reviewed and the forest traversed, we can better understand what twilight vision entails: a willingness to sense through bewilderment; to follow what shimmers; to navigate by the faint, changing contours of relations rather than by the brittle clarity of fixed certainties.

Twilight emphasises both the importance of integrating a wide spectrum of traditional and experimental methodologies, and the necessity of working at the edges of knowledge—those zones where perception destabilises, where habitual ways of seeing no longer suffice, and where the world reveals itself in transitional, affectively charged ways. The world spins no faster at dusk than at noon, but here we are able to sense its motion through rapid shifts in tone, colour, temperature, and coherence. These transitions, subtle yet unmistakable, are as constitutive of experience as the bright zenith of the sun.

This final chapter gathers up the strands traced so far. Grief's ruptures, thresholds of bewilderment, forest-based practice methodologies, shifting ontologies, transmodal ecologies, ethical friction, and interspecies relation are brought into view once more to consider how they weave into a (re)wilding ecology of practice. The sub-sections move gradually from theory to practice, from practice to metaphor, from metaphor to wound, from wound to threshold, from threshold to transformation, and finally toward an ethics and storytelling of a practice attuned to the periphery.

7.2. Reframing the Research Problem

This chapter reframes the research problem and summarises the thesis' principal contributions, consolidates the theoretical and methodological claims, and outlines implications and future directions for grief-attuned, interspecies research-creation. It closes by returning to dusk—not as metaphor alone, but as a practiced mode of attention: an ethics of sensing at and beyond the edge of what can be grasped.

From the start, this thesis has asked: *How might grief-affective, forest-based practice transform habits of perception and interspecies relationality?* And, following from this, *what methodological, artistic, and ecological possibilities emerge when grief and forest-based experimentation unfold together as a mutually shaping practice ecology?*

This project began with the intuition that certain kinds of grief-affective forest practices—understood as a (re)wilding of both—can help to sustain in meaningful ways the perceptual affordances that arise from chaotic and ruptural experiences surrounding irreversible loss. By *(re)wilding*, I refer to processes and principles analogous to ecological habitat rewilding: an embrace of complexity, embodiment, improvisation, multispecies collaboration, and organic site-specificity that supports the emergence of novel and unforeseen perceptual and relational affordances. This hypothesis arose improvisationally out of a practice-research project exploring how grief-affective and forest-based practices might interact reciprocally to change the ways a practitioner perceives and relates to interspecies environments.

Rather than pursuing quantitative or statistical conclusiveness, the research generates four substantive contributions. First, it offers an autoethnographic account of a singular (re)wilding practice, tracing how grief-affective, forest-based engagement reshaped the practitioner's attitudes, behaviours, and ethico-aesthetic orientations over time. Second, it applies and operationalises Nina Lykke's posthumanist account of anomalous (miraculous) grief encounters within a sustained practice-based inquiry, situating her framework inside a broader affective process that moves through grief's paralysis, bewilderment, and generative potential. Third, it articulates an accessible synthesis of emerging twenty-first-century methodological tendencies gathered here under the term (re)wilding, condensed as a manifesto (7.4a). Fourth, it contributes a transferable practice ecology —*the Seasons of Practice* model (7.4b)—describing recurrent conditions through which (re)wilding orientations tend to unfold across fieldwork and studio practice.

This project synthesises Lykke's theoretical perspective on miraculous material-metonymical assemblages with other thinkers such as Manning's minor gesture, Myers' becoming sensor,

Halberstam's bewilderments, and Ignatov's work on the interspecies perceptual affordances of eco-sensation. It does so by positioning my own practice—its methods, encounters, and outputs—within Lykke's model for articulating grief-affective anomalous experience. The perceptive affordances theorised by Lykke and others have been explored, activated, and elaborated here as my (re)wilding practice both instigated and followed from so-called miraculous events. Because grief resulting from irreversible loss is a nearly universal experience, its ruptural and perceptive affordances, if cultivated through practice, hold transformative potential for reconfiguring how humans relate to interspecies worlds in a time of ecological and climate crisis.

These questions and trajectories lead to the three major forms of contribution that this thesis offers: theoretical, methodological, and practical. The contributions unfold across the next two sections. Section 7.3 examines the project's theoretical contributions, showing how grief, bewilderment, and interspecies encounter generate new conceptual, epistemological, and ontological insights within posthumanist eco-arts research. Section 7.4 then turns to the methodological and practical contributions, presenting a *(re)wilding manifesto*, the *Seasons of Practice* model, and the wider implications of this research for fieldwork, creative practice, and emerging ecologies of method. Together, these sections articulate the full conceptual and practical significance of the project before moving, in 7.5 and 7.6, to future directions and concluding reflections.

7.3. Theoretical Contributions: Grief, Bewilderment, Re-Enchantment

Having clarified the project's aims and the forms of its outcomes, this section articulates the research's theoretical contributions. Here, the emphasis falls on how grief-affective, forest-based practice activates new conceptual and epistemological possibilities within posthumanist, ecofeminist, and interspecies discourse. The subsections that follow—autoethnographic insight, theoretical transformation, and rupture-as-repair—collectively demonstrate how the project advances understandings of grief as an epistemological force, bewilderment as a method, and ecological re-enchantment as an ontological and aesthetic orientation. These theoretical contributions form the conceptual groundwork upon which the subsequent methodological contributions are built.

7.3a. Autoethnographic Insights: Grief as Catalyst

In spite of its horrific and painful dimensions, the intensity of grief can rupture the constructs and habits through which we order our lives. Social and cultural institutions prescribe timelines, behaviours, and protocols for mourning; dominant theories offer linear paths back toward normalcy. After experiencing perceptual, conceptual, and relational transformations in the wake of loss, I began to question why 'normalcy' should be the end goal at all. What if, rather than moving *through* grief, we could move *with* it? Instead of returning to the habituated worlds grief jolted me out of, what if there were ways to collaborate with grief—allowing it to lead perception and practice into new terrain?

This questioning arose from profound rupture. I lost my mother, one of the most important people in my life. The shock of that loss destabilised my world so completely that, soon afterward, I developed type-1 diabetes—an incurable condition whose cause remains unknown. In this altered reality, I found myself abandoning my indoor studio and stepping into the forest. I left behind familiar forms and methods, experimenting instead with new materials, technologies, and modes of engagement. As grief unsettled my practices, practice began to unsettle my grief, redirecting it away from return and toward unfamiliar pathways.

Through practice, I encountered experiences that Nina Lykke describes as miraculous—material-metonymical assemblages of vibrant organisms, energies, and multispecies landscapes that seemed to respond, however opaquely, to my grieving state. Engaging with processes of death and decay allowed me to reconceptualise the object of my grief (my mother) as an ongoing material process: dispersed, transformed, and yet still present in the world. Becoming imperceptible through death, she became perceptible again as *forest*—as potential fragments haunting every organism I encountered. Plants, fungi, insects, birds, and the ecologies blooming from dead bodies revealed new dimensions, networks resonant with (or perhaps linked to) the living processes in which my mother's material components now participate. Over time, my relationship with these organisms grew more intimate, and my sensibilities shifted from abjection to respect, appreciation, and even love.

Through autoethnography, field notes, and video journals, this thesis documents a practice shaped by grief—and a grief shaped by practice. Sometimes this took the form of anomalous encounters; more often it unfolded through subtle, gradual transformations. The most salient example is the recurring presence of decomposer beetles—encounters through which I first began to perceive my mother not as a lost object but as a distributed becoming within ongoing material

processes. Other experiences, including the 'Cloud' phenomena described earlier in the thesis, further expanded this sense of relational permeability.

I also witnessed the ebbing of such encounters when my practice diminished. As I visited the forest less frequently, both grief's affective intensity and my sense of multispecies intimacy waned. Yet the ecological orientation of my artistic work persisted, suggesting that some perceptual and relational shifts had been more substantially established.

I refer to these reciprocal transformations between grief and forest-based practice—their co-evolution through continual feedback—as *(re)wilding*. Alongside offering an autoethnographic case study of a singular grief-affective practice, this project extends the theoretical frameworks that inform it, testing and elaborating concepts drawn from Braidotti's *zoe*, Lykke's *Vibrant Death*, Halberstam's bewilderment, Ignatov's eco-sensation, Springgay and Truman's interspecies methodologies, and others, embodying theory through lived practice.

These ruptural transformations open directly onto a deeper question: *how does grief and grief-affective practice function not merely as an emotion but as a method—an epistemological force capable of reconfiguring perception and relation?* The next section turns to this theoretical terrain.

7.3b. Theoretical Transformations: Bewilderment and Re-Enchantment

The experiential ruptures of grief are mirrored and amplified by theoretical work that frames grief as a force capable of unsettling and reconfiguring perceptual worlds. My project contributes to ecofeminist and posthumanist approaches to epistemology, creative practice, and ethico-aesthetics by synthesising these strands to show how bewilderment functions as a method—destabilising habitual ontologies while opening pathways toward ecological re-enchantment.

Judith Butler provides the first crucial point of departure. Her critical theory of grief and mourning, grounded in Derrida, reveals how social and political structures determine who is considered grievable—and how such asymmetries shape the distribution of vulnerability, care, and recognition. Butler's work exposes the ways grief is regulated, managed, and constrained, while also pointing to its generative possibilities: grief can unmake and remake the subject, expanding ethical and political horizons. This reorientation paved the way for understanding grief not only as an emotional state but as a destabilising force with transformative potential.

Eugenie Brinkema complicates this generative framing by emphasising grief's affective dependencies. She warns that celebrating transformation risks glossing over the paralyzing, painful dimensions of mourning—the very intensities that give grief its force. For Brinkema, grief's

generativity cannot be separated from the affective rupture that motivates it. This conflict is central to (re)wilding, which refuses to manage grief from above (as conservation forestry might attempt to manage an ecosystem) and instead embraces its tensions. (Re)wilding holds together grief's movement and immobility, its debilitating and its transformative capacities, allowing practice to unfold across grief's full affective spectrum.

Nina Lykke provides a third, more explicitly posthumanist frame by way of Queer Death Studies. Building on Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*, Lykke explores how grief's affective intensities can illuminate material-organic assemblages within a wider interspecies ecology. Anomalous or miraculous encounters commonly reported in grief states have often been dismissed as psychological projection (or relegated to spiritual belief). Lykke instead proposes a third path: understanding these encounters as material assemblages inflected by grief, where metonymical associations and heightened attunement converge. This approach resists anthropocentric psychologism without invoking transcendence. My project tests and extends this model through lived practice, exploring how grief-affective encounters in the forest can generate new forms of perceptual participation, even when the perspectives of nonhuman interlocutors remain inaccessible.

From this theoretical foundation, a key methodological question emerges: *How can (re)wilding create conditions of possibility for perceptual shifts—including miraculous or peripheral encounters—that transform relational and ontological orientations?* In my practice, resonances between the emotional bewilderment of grief and the somatic/spatial bewilderment of forest-based engagement produced a deep defamiliarisation: from myself, from environments, from inherited patterns of belief and perception. Added to this were encounters with abjection and the uncanny—what Morton calls the spectral dimension of life—made present through direct engagement with decay, carrion ecologies, and processes sanitised or obscured by Western cultural institutions.

These multiple forms of bewilderment, when combined with anomalous or peripherally perceived encounters, participate in a process of defamiliarising desubjectification resonant with how one might imagine a body's materials discorporating through an ecology to participate in new emergent living (becoming-forest). This re-orientation of subjectivity into a distributed field makes possible new ways of perceiving and relating with other species by opening into epistemological and ontological shifts I describe here as *re-enchantment*. Re-enchantment is not spiritual or transcendent but grounded in material processes, flows, and multispecies relations—highlighting and revitalising a habitually prosaic modernist attitude toward matter itself. Over time, this produced a re-territorialisation of perception: a gradual reorientation toward more ecocentric modes of relating, thinking, and sensing. In my own case, these shifts endured even during periods of

diminished practice, suggesting that grief-affective (re)wilding can generate lasting perceptual and relational change.

An analysis of practice outputs across the four years of this project demonstrates how these theoretical concepts took form in the field. Works such as *Carrion Ecologies* and *Tired* embody the encounters, intensities, and ecological assemblages discussed by Lykke in terms of collaboration, offering field-based evidence of materialist miraculous experience and the relational capacities of (re)wilding practice. Over time, creative outputs aligned increasingly with ecocentric principles: embracing dissolution, allowing artefacts to decay, privileging collaboration over control, and engaging with forest time rather than human timelines.

Regardless of the ontological status of miracles, these outputs reveal a consistent shift away from anthropocentric frames toward multispecies attunement. Practices were shaped not by predetermined outcomes but by ongoing encounters with trees, insects, fungi, storm systems, and ecologies of decomposition. The choice to reject polished, extractive, or marketable artefacts in favour of processes, relations, and collaborations further reflects a transformation in aesthetic and ethical orientation.

All of this makes visible how *(re)wilding operates as both a practice ecology and an epistemological shift.* If grief catalyses transformation, it also leaves marks—fractures through which new ways of becoming-with emerge. This leads directly to the question of rupture and repair addressed in the next section.

7.3c. Rupture, Repair, and Identity-as-Process

While bewilderment ruptures and destabilises, grief also creates openings for reconfiguration and restoration. The perceptual affordances at stake in this thesis arise precisely from grief's peculiar painfulness and disorienting affects. In this terrain there are no maps, no seven-stage checklist promising a return to equilibrium. To move *with* grief rather than *through* it is to trace the contours of rupture as part of a living history.

The Japanese art of kintsugi uses lacquer infused with precious metals to repair a broken item, not in order to restore it to its original condition, but to create something new and beautiful with a difference that not only reveals the sites of rupture and preserves the object's shattered history, but deliberately accentuates, through scars of gold and silver, the fractures, chips, and other damage that has made it into something both contiguous and new. Scars of silver and gold preserve a history of disruption. Kintsugi sees identity as a trajectory rather than a stable state of affairs. The official

translation, ‘golden repair’, is accompanied by its alternative, ‘golden journey’, adding to the quality by which an artefact has a life owing to its own unfolding processes and timelines. As Morton notes, “to remove the time stain is to harm the actual thing […] To allow things to get dirty is to allow that things are not at war with time” (2021:55–56). Kintsugi’s refusal to erase damage, its insistence on time-stained seams, provides a material analogy for the kind of ongoingness grief makes possible when not foreclosed.



Figure 7.1. Inosculation

In the context of this project, grief fissured the coherence of my identity and practice: the death of my mother, a life-altering illness, and the collapse of long-held creative habits marked a shattering that could not be undone by any attempts at returning to normalcy. Forest-based (re)wilding did not reassemble a prior self; instead, it gradually reorganised the fragments through new relations with trees, beetles, fungi, bones, storms, and soils. The ‘gold seams’ here are the miraculous encounters and multispecies collaborations that emerged through grief-affective practice: decomposer insects that refigured my mother as ongoing material process; the stag, the

foxes, the storm-fallen branch; the repeated invitations to relearn how to walk, listen, and compose with more-than-human worlds. These encounters did not seal the cracks; they *thickened* them, making rupture into a site of relation. The practitioner who returns from such a process is not repaired to resemble a previous template, but reassembled loosely and otherwise—with grief and interspecies entanglements visibly and affectively inlaid into the life and work that follow.

Ecological processes offer parallel figures for this reparative reconfiguration. Inosculation—where trees grow around wounds or foreign objects, binding them into living tissue—produces bark-scars that record both injury and adaptation. Decomposition, likewise, distributes what was once a bounded body into soil, insects, plants, and future organisms without ever fully erasing the trace of relation. These arboreal and decompositional processes do not eradicate rupture; they metabolise it. Grief-affective (re)wilding operates in a similar register: it allows ruptures to remain visible while knitting them into multispecies networks of care, perception, and co-composition.

This reparative mode prepares the ground for articulating the methodological and theoretical contributions of (re)wilding developed in the sections that follow.

7.4. Methodological and Practical Contributions: Methods, Models, & Ecologies of Practice

Building on the theoretical contributions outlined in Section 7.3, this section turns to the project's methodological and practical/creative contributions. Here, the emphasis shifts from conceptual transformation to the concrete methods, practices, and models that emerged through the research. This includes the articulation of a (re)wilding manifesto, framed as an accessible methodological orientation, and the development of the *Seasons of Practice* model—a transferrable ecology of practice distilled from four years of grief-affective, forest-based experimentation. These contributions demonstrate how (re)wilding operates not only as a theoretical proposition but as a method, an ethos, and a practice capable of migration across disciplines and contexts.

7.4a. Methodological Contribution I: The (Re)wilding Manifesto

The preceding sections traced how grief ruptures perception and how bewilderment reconfigures ecological relations. From this trajectory, a framework emerges for (re)wilding practices. What follows is a manifesto distilling key principles out of years of grief-affective, forest-

based engagement. It articulates an accessible framework of methodological orientations with strong resemblances to the underlying principles of habitat rewilding. Although the manifesto refers directly to *practice*—grieving, creative, or otherwise—its implications extend to research methodologies more broadly, especially those involving research-creation.

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(Re)wilding welcomes affect, uncertainty, and emergence into methodological process. It draws on the distinctive ethos of habitat rewilding, which differs from modernist conservationism by trusting environments to self-organise, adapt, and sustain themselves without top-down management. This manifesto extends that ethos beyond bio-habitats to human and more-than-human practices, presupposing that these principles can generate diverse, unexpected, and generative affordances across multiple interacting fields.

(Re)wilding is aimed at creating conditions of possibility for the wilding of processes and relations within and among fields of practice. Modelled on ecological rewilding, these practices support the inherent, co-evolved flows and negotiations of environments—rather than imposing predetermined structures. They recognise that such dynamics have sustained multispecies coexistence long before human extractivism disrupted them, and that similar principles can inform methods in creative, ethical, and research contexts. Finally, these principles describe an orientation rather than a guarantee; their effects remain contingent on access, ecology, the practitioner's constraints, and the ethical demands of individual multispecies circumstances.

1. (Re)wilding practices are *embodied*.
As ecological rewilding resists meticulous, top-down planning, (re)wilding of practice is activated through physical presence, bodily engagement, affective awareness, and direct interaction with the species, materials, and environments encountered.

2. (Re)wilding practices are *site-specific*.
Practitioners recognise that all locations, organisms, and ecologies differ. No general principle should override the intra-active particularities of a site's dynamics, rhythms, or conditions, which shift from moment to moment and shape the practitioner's experience.

3. (Re)wilding practices are *improvisational*.
Arising from principles rather than predetermined plans, these practices rely on responsiveness, adaptivity, and sensory attentiveness. Improvisation respects interspecies

opacity and relies on the interplay of organisms and materials to yield outcomes that could not be designed in advance.

4. (Re)wilding practices foreground *interspecies collaboration*.
Practitioners approach their work with the assumption that collaboration—however asymmetrical or opaque—is nevertheless possible across species, materials, and forces. Interspecies interlocutors possess agency and affordances of their own, and may contribute to creative processes in ways not immediately legible.

5. (Re)wilding practices turn toward *ecocentrism*.
Without claiming a full escape from anthropocentrism, practitioners move toward an ecocentric orientation that acknowledges the perspectives of diverse collaborators, including influences across time. While each perspective is situated, it is co-constituted by the multispecies relations that surround it—this is the core of interspecies awareness.

6. (Re)wilding practices embrace *complexity*.
Complexity is intrinsic to ecological rewilding. Practices engaging interspecies ecologies must accept dynamic, nonlinear relations and the impossibility of complete control or predictive power. In (re)wilding, the complexity of interactivity requires responsive methods for working in uncertain, unknowable, or changing conditions.

7. (Re)wilding practices embrace *methodiversity*.
As biodiversity strengthens ecosystems, methodological diversity strengthens practice. (Re)wilding practitioners notice how methods interact, diverge, and cross-pollinate, and remain open to new methods emerging from context and encounter.

8. (Re)wilding practices leave space for *emergence*, reciprocity, and generative feedback.
Over time, new properties and patterns arise from complex interactions. Reciprocal relations and feedback loops generate surprising outcomes. The hallmark of (re)wilding practice is openness to these emergences—rather than an insistance on virtuosity, efficiency, or completion.

These principles form the methodological ground for the practice ecology elaborated in the next section—a transferable model for (re)wilding: *Seasons of Practice.*

7.4b. Methodological Contribution II: The Seasons of Practice Model

The previous section offered a manifesto for (re)wilding, laying out in accessible language the principles that crystallised over time into the methodological ground of this project. This section builds upon that foundation by outlining a transferable practice ecology I call *Seasons of Practice*—a flexible model describing how (re)wilding principles unfolded in the field.

Grounded in these principles, the research generated a model for grief-affective, forest-based creative practice by tracing how the work tended to flow from its earliest beginnings to its various outputs. This process is not a set of instructions or a linear template. Rather, it exemplifies how a (re)wilding practice may evolve when allowed to remain adaptive, embodied, collaborative, and responsive to context. These Seasons are not stages, but recurring atmospheres—patterns that bend, circle back, or reorder depending on the conditions of a given environment or practice moment.

Chapters Three and Five demonstrate in detail how these seasons manifested within this project. What follows is a concise articulation of each season as a model transferable and adaptable across disciplines and contexts. Framing this ecology as ‘transferable’ should not imply that it can be uniformly or frictionlessly enacted by any body in any environment. As established throughout this inquiry (see Sections 3.4 and 5.6), the baseline conditions of my own fieldwork—specifically the expansive temporal duration of the *Excursion* and the profound isolation that facilitated *Encounter*—are deeply gated by intersectional privileges of gendered safety, class-time, and geographic location. Therefore, the transferability of the Seasons of Practice model does not lie in a literal replication of my specific rural, solitary movements, but in its systemic flexibility: it offers a structural logic that future practitioners must creatively re-situate and recalibrate according to the precise material, political, and spatial interspecies parameters of their own bodies and coordinates.

Seasons of Practice

a) *Excursion* — Entering the world with openness

Excursion begins when the practitioner leaves familiar terrain—conceptual, physical, affective—to enter into a more-than-human environment without predetermined designs. It involves drift-ing, wandering, lingering, following curiosity, and allowing attention to be led by environmental shifts (light, sound, texture, movement, etc). Here, the work begins simply by showing up, moving responsively, and remaining open to encounter whatever a place might offer.

b) *Encounter* — Meeting something that interrupts perception

Encounter marks the moment something in the environment catches attention and unsettles habitual ways of seeing. It is a point of contact where interest is sparked or perspectives are disrupted. Whether minor or extraordinary, these moments introduce difference and open relational possibility.

c) *Engagement* — Staying with the encounter

Engagement involves committing to an ethical, improvisational interaction with the encountered sensation, entity, or process. This may include attentive observation, touch, listening, sound-making, following movement, relational documenting, or simply remaining with discomfort or curiosity. In this season, reciprocities emerge where the practitioner responds to the rhythms, resistances, or affordances of more-than-human collaborators.

d) Assembly — Allowing relations to shape form

Assembly refers to materials, sensations, recordings, artefacts, or energetic residue from engagements as they coalesce into creative form. This may take shape as film, installation, sound design, performance score, or something unclassifiable. Assembly does not impose order but listens for interactive opportunity, downplaying preconceived artistic agenda and allowing interspecies entanglements to shape the work. It is a season of translation, where practice ‘speaks back’ through form.

e) Decay — Letting forms fall apart

Decay recognises that not all outputs should be stabilised, preserved, or polished. Works may be allowed to decompose, return to the forest, fade, glitch, unravel, or remain iteratively ongoing and unfinished. Decay prevents practice from becoming rigid or extractive and honours the ecological reality that endings are openings—compost for future encounters and engagements.

Across these seasons, techniques such as eco-spectral video layering, bio-generative music, forest soundscapes, and multispecies drift improvisations recur in shifting configurations; while collaborators—foxes, beetles, skulls, carrion, fungi, streams, storm systems, old trees—enter and exit the field of practice according to their own rhythms. As shown in Chapters Three and Five, these techniques and collaborators co-shaped the emergent logics and sensorial qualities of the work.

The Seasons of Practice model offers a grounded yet flexible way to think about how creative, grieving, and interspecies practices evolve over time along (re)wilding orientations—and sets the foundation for the broader methodological synthesis that follows.

7.4c. Synthesis of Methodological and Practical Contributions

Drawing these strands together, this project's methodology can be understood as a syncretic, practice-led confluence of grief, (re)wilding, and interspecies encounter. While the *Seasons of Practice* offer a tangible, transferrable model, the project as a whole participates in a broader methodological drift toward relational, improvisational, ecology-attuned modes of inquiry—modes increasingly necessary in the epistemic turbulence of the twenty-first century.

The methodology developed here mobilises autoethnography, practice research, and discursive analysis to weave together a rhizomatic constellation of grief theory, posthumanism, rewilding discourse, interspecies studies, eco-aesthetics, bewilderment, spectrality, abjection, the uncanny, and transdisciplinary creative practice. Practice outputs are read not as illustrations or outcomes but as intra-active evidence—material-semiotic traces that register the perceptive and relational affordances of (re)wilding for a solo practitioner embedded in grief-affective, forest-based work.

Such an approach necessarily forecloses certain forms of disciplinary depth. It does not narrow itself into the familiar logic of specialisation. Instead, it cultivates breadth, responsiveness, and relational sensitivity—qualities suited to the liminal zones where disciplines fray and new epistemic possibilities emerge. These liminal, cross-hatched territories—what I refer to here as (re)wilding

methodologies—constitute generative sites for methodological evolution, where opacity and unknowing are not deficits but part of an epistemological strategy.

A central tension arises from the project's commitment to improvisation. Improvisation resists the rigid apparatus of replicable testing parameters; yet it activates attunement, flexibility, and a willingness to be led by emergent conditions. Because this research concerns processes, potentials, and affective intensities rather than predictive outcomes, I actively separated practice from direct research imperatives where possible. Instead, I relied on memory, journalling, and in-flow artefacts —video drift, field-recorded sound, photographs, free-writing—as reflexive and analytic materials that registered the process from within.

Eschewing quantifiable measurement, the research foregrounds autoethnographic accounts of experience, encounter, affective resonance, and transformation. It pairs rigorous theoretical engagement with a search for openings—gaps, fissures, moments of conceptual slippage—through which theory might be tested, embodied, unsettled, or extended. A purely theoretical PhD might have produced a more systematised architecture; instead, this practice-research thesis aims to articulate an emergent, dispersed, and adaptable methodology capable of migrating across disciplines and publics.

Unexpectedly, the project also generated an evolving relationship with what I call *peripheral knowing*—a mode of ecological and affective (un)knowing that operates at the edges of sense, attention, and conceptual grasp. Though peripheral to the original research questions, these modes proved epistemologically generative, reframing how (re)wilding grief recalibrates perceptual thresholds. Likewise, the *Seasons of Practice*—far from a predetermined framework—arose organically from the empirical, affective, and multispecies dynamics of the work. They constitute a conceptual and methodological contribution precisely because they emerged rather than being imposed.

These considerations can now be summarised as the project's core conceptual contributions:

- *An articulation of grief as an epistemological force*, capable of rupturing habitual structures of perception and opening onto new ecological and relational affordances.
- *A development of (re)wilding as an emergent methodology*, grounded in long-standing ecological and creative principles, but revealing generative resonances at their interstices.
- *A theorisation of peripheral (un)knowing and perception* as modes particular to affective, interspecies practice.

- *The creation of the Seasons of Practice model*, a transferrable conceptual ecology describing the temporal, affective, and relational dynamics of (re)wilding.
- *A contribution to posthumanist and eco-artistic methodologies,* demonstrating how embodied improvisation, multispecies collaboration, and situated affective responsiveness can function as both method and epistemic orientation.

The project relies on practice not only as method but as object of study. Practice enables theoretical propositions to be tested at the level of encounter—where concepts must withstand the unpredictability of weather systems, organisms, decay processes, affective intensities, and grief's volatile currents. Because the autoethnography concerns a practitioner deeply entangled with ongoing grieving processes, the project could not exist without practice; the work itself becomes a living archive of shifting orientations, recalibrated sensoria, and evolving ethico-aesthetic commitments.

These methodological choices are not ancillary—they instantiate a *(re)wilding ethos*: a preference for process over procedure, relation over mastery, embodied encounter over abstracted analysis. From this vantage, we can begin to glimpse where such methodologies might travel next, both within research and within the wider ecologies of practice that this thesis invites into being.

7.5. Possibilities for Future Research

Building on the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions outlined above, this project opens multiple pathways for future research. These trajectories arise from the limitations of an autoethnographic, practice-led inquiry and from the unexplored dimensions and provocations generated through (re)wilding. What follows is not exhaustive. It is a constellation of possible directions for extending, complicating, or transforming the methods and concepts developed in this thesis. This selection clusters around (i) expanding the assemblage (nonliving matter/technologies), (ii) testing transitivity (audiences/reception), and (iii) scaling ethics and access (climate grief, equity, public space).

1) Materiality, Non-Living Matter, and Expanded Assemblages

Further research could explore how (re)wilding practices engage with non-living matter in a more focused way—stones, bones, skulls, sediments, metals—objects that often operate in

collaboration with mosses, fungi, insects, and weather systems yet are still framed as 'inert'. Practice-based inquiry here could develop productive understandings of Bennett's new materialist theories by asking questions such as: *How might sustained, embodied engagement alter one's perceptual and ethical relation to non-living materials?* or *What implications might such shifts hold for wider ecological assemblages, politics, and interspecies relationality?*

This line of inquiry could deploy (re)wilding practice and principles to clarify how material processes shape—or disrupt—human perceptions of agency, vitality, and ecological embeddedness.

2) Audience Reception, Affective Transmission, and the Transitivity of Encounter

Because this project focused on the practitioner's experience, questions remain regarding how (re)wilding artefacts communicate, transmit, or transform affective states in audiences. The project's spectral synchronies—particularly those arising in the video-editing timeline[41]—suggest the possibility of a *transitive resonance*, where trace affects of the encounter survive its translation into media.

Future work could explore: *whether carefully staged or improvisational assemblages transmit different kinds or degrees of affective charge? how audiences perceive or intuit multispecies entanglement in media? whether miraculous or encounter-like events have correlates in reception studies? whether affective drift, synchronicity, and spectral coincidence can be methodologically tracked?*

Such studies might involve qualitative reception research, studio-based trials, group-led forest excursions, and collaborations across media studies, psychology, creative practice, and multispecies ethnography.

3) Solastalgia, Ecological Grief, and Climate-Attuned (Re)wilding

Two related concepts not fully explored here—Albrecht's (2005) solastalgia (loss of home environment) and ecological grief—offer urgent avenues for future research. These affective states emerge from climate catastrophe, land dispossession, habitat destruction, and interspecies displacements. They represent the experiential and affective dimensions of ecological collapse.

(Re)wilding may offer new routes for studying how grief-attuned creative practice intersects with environmental trauma; interspecies collaborations shaped by damaged, altered, or disappearing ecosystems; and the politics of affect in communities facing ecological loss.

Such work would deepen the ethical and ecological stakes of (re)wilding methodology in climate-precarious contexts.

4) Access, Politics, and Structural Barriers to (Re)wilding

This project benefited from rare access to old-growth forest environments. Yet such access is neither universal nor apolitical. Future research might investigate: *how disenchantment and environmental inequity limit access to multispecies encounter; structural and socioeconomic barriers to meaningful (re)wilding practice; strategies for enabling more democratic, community-based, or urban forms of (re)wilding;* or *how policy, land management, and public space design intersect with (re)wilding principles.*

Such inquiry is crucial for moving (re)wilding beyond personal practice toward collective, informed, and equitable forms of ecological engagement.

5) Multispecies Timescales, Biofeedback, and Experimental Technologies

Emergent experiments in biofeedback, spectral imaging, and generative music (see Section 6.3b) suggest further research possibilities. These technologies can simulate or amplify multispecies temporalities, sonic ranges, or sensory scales. Future work might pursue: *micro-experiments in multispecies sonic translation; bio-electrical or biofeedback-driven musical improvisation; spectral imaging that visualises more-than-human temporalities;* or *interactive installations that foreground ecological timescales and gesture toward multispecies perspectives.*

These kinds of experiments could expand the aesthetic and epistemic capacities of (re)wilding practice by opening experiential access to non-human rhythms, patterns, and durations.

6) Anomalous Encounters, Miraculous Experience, and Multilayered Ecologies

While this project intentionally avoided ontological claims about miraculous or anomalous experience, these events nonetheless warrant further methodological and philosophical attention. Future studies might explore: *how such encounters arise within forest-based or grief-affective practices; more deeply the ecological, perceptual, or affective conditions that give rise to such events; what anomalous synchronicities reveal about interspecies relational fields;* and *how these events might be theorised causally without recourse to pure chance, psychological projection, or supernatural explanations*.

Work like this could bridge affect theory, sensory ecology, and interspecies semiotics to articulate how improbable events become meaningful within dynamic, multilayered ecologies.

7) Media, Artefacts, and the Afterlives of (Re)wilding Practice

Entangled worlds do not remain in the forest; they adhere to, haunt, and influence the artefacts produced. The spectral synchronies encountered during editing suggest that creative works may carry residues of (re)wilding encounters. Future research could explore: *how media forms carry traces of multispecies relationality; whether audience members experience affective transfer or resonance; how studio-based processes might echo forest-based improvisations;* or *whether artefacts can drift, encounter, or engage in analogous ways.*

Momentary junctures—glitches, coincidences, artefactual echoes—may constitute media-based correlates to encounter, raising questions about the temporal, affective, and spectral afterlives of practice.

Beyond these trajectories, the potential applications of (re)wilding for creative practice, research, and pedagogy are extensive. This project opens pathways for more detailed, analytical, qualitative, and even quantitative approaches to the syncretisms, perceptual affordances, and relational ecologies developed here. (Re)wilding involves an ethico-aesthetic stance grounded in non-extractive, egalitarian, multispecies collaboration—not for the purpose of producing marketable outcomes, but to shape new modes of co-inhabiting damaged worlds.

These speculative directions sit alongside a more immediate question: *what kinds of ethical, perceptual, and ontological shifts does (re)wilding ask of us now, in the midst of planetary precarity?*

The following section steps away from models, summaries, and conclusions, offering instead a vignette-based synthesis of how a re-enchanted ecology of practice emerges through grief-affective multispecies encounters. Moving through atmospheric thresholds of wounding, bewilderment, and relation, it traces how a (re)wilding practice reconfigures perception, ontology, and modes of becoming-with the world.

7.6. Re-enchanting Ecologies of Practice

In this final section, I step away from models and manifestos and return to the forest at dusk. Here things have become very nearly dark. What follows is less a summary than a gradual fade: a movement from arboreal wounds to grief's bewildering thresholds, from shifting ontologies to transmodal artworks, from ethical friction to the stories that carry these entanglements forward. Taken together, these flickering vignettes sketch a re-enchantment of practice ecologies—a way of

thinking, feeling, and relating that unfolds in the half-light, that permits us, somehow against all odds, to see in the dark.

Forest as Epistemic Metaphor

No organism grows strictly according to its blueprint. When a sapling first pushes through the earth it contends with deer, insects, soil and atmospheric conditions, water supply, fungi, and other trees. Intra-actions between these materials alter the sapling's growth in innumerable complex ways. When a tree reaches maturity, it might find itself bumping up against another tree or growing into human-planted objects like fences. The friction from these interactions wounds the tree, scraping and tearing at its bark, a crucial organ of communication and nutrient transfer between roots, leaves, and the rest of the tree. As the tree heals this wound, it sometimes bonds with the invasive material, entangling it with another tree or seeming to swallow metal posts or wires into itself. We call this *inosculation*. The result, entangled or not, transforms the tree forever. It leaves a physical trace of the wounding/healing process on the tree's surface. Sometimes this site will become a habitat for insects, or if large enough, for small animals and birds. Sometimes it will make a human onlooker think the tree has a face. Such wounds, scars, and grafts offer a way of thinking about grief: not as a temporary injury to be smoothed away, but as a site where contact, damage, and healing are literally grown into the body of a life and its becoming.

Loosening: Letting Go Without Severance

A thread runs through the nodes of this project, but gently. Not a line stitched, but a slackened thread: tensile enough for sensitivity, relaxed enough to shape and re-shape. With every loss, the impulse to release confronts the impulse to hold on. Between clinging to what has been and orienting exclusively toward what comes next, is there a space of inhabitation that neither grips nor abandons—a presence that moves, shimmers, and flows?

Many of us were raised within cultures of capture, schooled in habits of securing: of naming, defining, holding fast. Grief unsettles these habits. Yet the language we inherit offers few tools for this disturbance, presenting release as severance and continuity as grasp. Proverbs warn against clinging—*let go or be dragged*—but rarely teach us how to loosen without loss of relation.

The practices traced throughout this thesis suggest another way. Improvisation, negotiation, and collaboration allow continuity to persist within conditions of inevitable and irreversible change.

They demand not detachment, but adjustment; not erasure, but reconfiguration. When we drift, we are not unmoored. We become a moving bridge, maintaining contact between what has been and what is becoming. Drift, here, is not aimlessness but attunement. It is a way of staying-with as shape shifts, of allowing bonds to stretch, slacken, and re-knot in response to changing conditions. Through attenuation rather than separation, connection remains alive.

In this sense, loosening is not a failure of attention but a mode of care. It is a practice of trust in relation itself—trust that continuity does not require stasis, and that care does not depend on possession. To loosen is to allow grief, practice, and world to keep moving together, bound not by capture, but by the quiet labour of perception.

Bewilderment and the Wound: Bewilderment as Threshold

The responsive art of *kintsugi* we encountered earlier is not dissimilar to those arboreal processes of inosculation. Neither aims to return an object—or a tree—to its pre-damaged condition. Instead, both preserve the memory of breakage, embedding in the future of the form a record of its past. By contrast, institutionalised grief practices in the modern West tend to minimise rupture, seeking to restore the grieving subject as close as possible to the condition preceding loss. But grief is wild; it is part of the rupture itself. Grief shatters and reconfigures beliefs, behaviours, perceptions, and practices. To (re)wild grief is to embrace the potentials inherent in its painful, disorienting affects, and to treat bewilderment not as failure or breakdown, but as the beginning of an opening. It situates practice *within* wounding—accepting the fracture as generative rather than as an aberration to be smoothed away.

Bewilderment plays a crucial role in this process. It marks not only destabilisation but a threshold condition in which other relations, other worlds, become thinkable. To be bewildered is to be disoriented, yes—but also to be reoriented toward what had previously gone unnoticed, unfelt, or excluded. Bewilderment softens the edges of the self, loosens habitual perceptual scaffolding, and heightens sensitivity to peripheral impressions. In this widened, unsettled space, the seams of rupture glint like the gold-lacquer traces of kintsugi.

This is the mode in which (re)wilding grief operates throughout this project: not erasing the wound, nor hoping to undo rupture, but working from within it. The wounding of grief creates apertures for connection—attuning us to moments when the boundary between self and world grows permeable, when interspecies relations shift, deepen, or become possible in new ways. Over

time, these connections may take root and inosculate into the practitioner's perceptual and ethical orientation, grafting new sensitivities onto the scar tissue of loss.

Such wounds do not remain purely interior. They reshape how a practitioner perceives and participates in the world, and consequently how they create, listen, compose, or collaborate. In the (re)wilding of grief, rupture becomes both a record and a resource—a way to keep the aperture open longer and wider, until it becomes not simply a crack in the familiar world, but a passageway to another.

Ontologies of Relation and Becoming

Grief's wounding opens us to new thresholds of feeling, and in doing so alters how the world appears and how we understand our place within it. What emerges is not only a shift in experience but a shift in ontology—a different sense of what exists, how entities co-emerge, and how relations take form across species, materials, affects, and atmospheres.

How we perceive our worlds determines how we respond to and relate with them. Andrea Olsen, drawing on J.J. Gibson, reminds us that "the world is full of rich, higher-level information" to which we can attune, gradually sensing "finer and finer differentiations of meaning" (2022, xvi). This insight resonates especially with (re)wilding practice, where perceptual refinement allows rigid boundaries to soften, revealing—often at the periphery—flows of becoming and unbecoming that exceed habitual humanist frames. In my project, grief created openings for such perceptual dissolutions. Affective intensities ruptured the hierarchical structures I had long been conditioned to see through, while forest-based practice sustained these ruptures, preventing them from scarring over prematurely. Over years of embodied, improvisational, collaborative engagement, these wounds inosculated with specific beings and sites, reshaping my perceptual and ethical orientation and forming spectral fusions and affective bonds.

(Re)wilding, as it unfolds here, is process without procedure. Rather than prioritising interpretive frameworks or fixed methodological structures, (re)wilding entangles itself in relations (Vannini, 2015:319–320). It opens to the perceptual affordances that arise from attending to the bewilderments of grief—bewilderments that at first feel impossibly painful, but which gradually make new relational and ontological modes available. As the emotional bewilderment of loss resonates with the somatic and spatiotemporal bewilderment of forest practice, conditions of possibility arise in which dissolution becomes generative. What is shed in twilight—habitual patterns, perceptual armours—is reconfigured into more porous, responsive ways of being.

Within sustained bewilderment, sensoriums destabilise and reorient. Practice settles in, and inosculation begins. A new world becomes inhabitable: not as fantasy or solace but as an altered mode of participation. Where one once perceived passively, new impulses arise to look, listen, and feel across the edges of attention. One enters the forest one imagines; then, as perception renews, one opens to the forest as it actually unfolds; and finally one does not conclude at all, but wanders on along the unending pathway of becoming-with the forest—a mode of life this thesis proposes as both possible and necessary.

Such an ontology prepares the ground for questions that might otherwise seem naive or unaskable—questions like whether a forest might grieve, or how grief itself might become a shared, multispecies mode of worldmaking.

Transmodal Ecologies of Grief

In this atmosphere, certain works of art begin to look less like representations and more like sites of practice. In Chris Jordan's documentary *Albatross*, the narrator admits that before making the film he didn't realise he could care about an albatross. It is as if the rupture of loss upon a previously stable perceptual world generates affects capable of dismantling modes of being we assumed were essential but were in fact merely habituated. Grief reveals dimensions of relation previously unrecognised, as well as latent capacities within the grieving bodymind. Jordan's comment suggests not merely that grief allowed him the capacity to care for an albatross, but that grief itself revealed the condition as a possibility—one he may never have thought to consider before the encounter.

Part documentary, part poetic meditation, *Albatross* explores the relationship between remarkable avian lifecycles and the distant human systems that haunt them. Manufactured waste, set adrift on the waves, finds its way into bodies on remote islands with devastating consequences. Plastic passes from mother to chick like some terrible Deleuzian machine linking stomach to generational stomach, petroculture to extinction. Although the structure retains elements of nature documentary, the role of witness becomes complicated as the filmmakers are gradually drawn into the narrative, becoming reluctant pathologists navigating the interior worlds of poisoned bodies—spaces the neutral lens cannot reach.

Albatross pairs intimate footage of seabird life on Midway Island with the horrific autopsies in which masses of petrochemical debris spill from their stomachs. As the film arced to its conclusion, the filmmaker himself succumbs to tears, cradling a dead chick in one hand and a tangle of plastic

in the other. It is a rupture that breaks the logic of documentary distance. One senses the aesthetic frame strained open by an unexpected grief, an unwilled intra-action between practitioner and subject in which affect overtakes intention. Jordan later articulates this shift: "When we surrender to grief, it carries us home to our deepest connection with life. I didn't know I could care about an albatross."

From this point onward, the project succumbs to porousness: less a documentary about birds and more an embodied act of mourning with them. The film becomes a site of (un)knowing. Jordan learns something new about himself that had been long occluded. He learns about the relational field he inhabits; grief reorganises perception.

Boundaries blur further when the film breaks form altogether: the editor reverses footage of dying albatrosses so that their collapse appears briefly undone. The gesture foregrounds the irrevocability of death even as it invokes grief's pull toward the impossible, the spectral, the miraculous. The reversal does not deny loss; it acknowledges its material persistence, its affective residue within ongoing ecological entanglement. These backflowing images then cede to scenes of albatross corpses sloshing in the surf, their bodies animated by the same waters that nourished them, poisoned them, and now usher them into a new becoming.

What *Albatross* stages is not grief-as-theme but grief-as-method: a transmodal openness in which affect breaks the frame and creates conditions for new knowledges to emerge. Jordan's encounter with grief grants access to altered modes of perceiving and relating within multispecies ecologies. Timothy Morton's (2010) call for the "really difficult elegiac work" of ecological mourning—work that refuses to re-centre the human while drawing interdependence into sharper consciousness—resonates throughout the film.

More importantly, Jordan's willingness to improvise with form, temporality, and interspecies presence renders the project far more wild than any scripted account of nature could be. In this sense, *Albatross* enacts a form of (re)wilding grieving practice: grief ruptures disciplinary frames, affect spills into method, and new relational and perceptual possibilities unfold. Jordan's encounter echoes what this thesis has traced within my own project—that grief, when allowed to destabilise habitual patterning, can open pathways into transmodal, interspecies modes of knowing.

Radical Openness, Ethics, and the Spectral Ecology of Death

Albatross demonstrates how grief can reconfigure perception at the level of artistic practice. My own encounters reveal how such reconfigurations unfold in moments of ethical consequence.

Grief-affective practice repeatedly brought me into situations of ethical friction—encounters where the boundary between intervention and witnessing became indeterminate. One of the most charged instances occurred when I accidentally bisected a wasp during a movement practice. I found it moments later, missing all but the first abdominal segment and still crawling. Faced with its struggling body, I felt torn between ending its suffering or allowing the moment to unfold without interference. I realised I had never seriously questioned whether or how 'putting an animal down' might be an unquestioned projection of human assumptions. How far did the conatus of an insect extend? Would it prefer continued life in pain to death? Why had I assumed I had the right to decide at all?

This was not a symbolic or metaphorical encounter; it demanded attunement to material responsibility and to the weight of interspecies entanglement in situations where no 'right' action was available. The moment became a kind of aperture, recalling other times in my life when I had caused harm to animals, intentionally, inadvertently, or out of mercy. Such events accumulated into a larger pattern in which grief, ecology, and entanglement felt ethically overwhelming.

As my practice deepened, my understanding of death also began to change. Rather than a static endpoint, death appeared as part of a spectral ecology—a continual process of decomposition, redistribution, and emergence. To engage with death in this way altered my relationships with other species and with the forest itself. It also made me recognise how sharply modernist Western culture delineates life from death, as if death were the only irreversible condition. Yet nothing can ever be truly undone; consequences ripple outward, folding into time and matter. Kintsugi's golden seams —once metaphorical for me—came to feel ethical: a way of acknowledging rupture, holding responsibility, and refusing the illusion of clean repair or erasure.

Through such encounters, a new orientation took shape: a practice concerned less with recovery, closure, or artistic product than with cultivating a radical openness to ongoingness. Perceptual miracles arising from interspecies assemblages acted as catalysts, prompting forms of attention that resisted linear resolution. Instead of restoring habitual modes of sensing and knowing, (re)wilding invited a continual reorganising of relations—with insects, decaying matter, weather systems, grief itself, and the processes that unsettle human centrality. This openness is not a destination but a stance: a willingness to inhabit shifting, spectral ecologies in which life and death intermingle, and to meet these worlds with ethics shaped not by certainty but by responsiveness and responsibility.

Ecological Storytelling

One challenge this thesis poses for ecocentric projects is how an affective ethico-aesthetic might develop ways of imagining human identity beyond the simplified boundaries of skin, tribe, nation, species. Our current ecological precarity is inseparable from the kinds of stories we have been telling for centuries (Haraway, 2016:49). Artists and researchers must therefore attend closely to the narrative forms we use—how they shape perception, structure relation, and contour attitudes toward an interspecies world.

Donna Haraway calls for stories that navigate between the poles of denial and despair, tales not of saviours but "of the ongoing" (76): dense, sympoietic networks of care and consumption that sustain a damaged world. *Carrion Ecologies* turns toward the stories that disgust us—the stories of impermanence and unbecoming that are also stories of regeneration and the ongoingness of material-organic process, a world we will have to turn and face sooner or later, and one we may do so more adaptively if we can allow the strangeness and vitality of it all to (re)wild us in some way.

Timothy Morton identifies a "melancholy region" beneath the horror of climate crisis, "where things become less horrifying and more uncertain," and where a "realm of unspeakable, nonhuman beauty not confined to normative anthropocentric parameters begins to open up" (2021:20). It is toward such shores that my grief-affective forest practice rows its small craft.

(Re)wilding, in this sense, is also a storytelling practice—one that cultivates narratives capable of holding bewilderment, decay, and regeneration together without collapsing them into either complacent optimism or paralysing despair. By the time we reach the forest's half-light, practice and world have reconfigured one another, and our senses have grown slightly more scotopic. What remains is not a conclusion but a mode of attunement—a way of dwelling with what glimmers, refracts, and recedes at the edge of perception, and of telling stories that make such fragments perceptible enough to matter.

Coda

Threaded through this thesis is the sense that multi-perspectival stories—discursive, embodied, sensorial, collaborative—emerge readily from the living textures of ecosystems, and that grief-affective practice can attune us to innumerable ways of imagining and participating with and within them. (Re)wilding asks us to dwell not in the bright certainties of daylight but in the shifting penumbras of dawn and dusk, where perception loosens its grip and another kind of sensing—peripheral, relational, bewildered—becomes possible. I end, then, not with a conclusion but with a glance.

Look upon a quiet forest on a calm day and it might appear motionless as a painting. Yet even in that dim light the forest teems with stories—of weather and stone, of organisms thriving, migrating, decomposing, and feeding the compost of unrealised futures. Sap rises, spores drift, insects burrow, robins hatch, bodies feed and are fed upon, relations form and dissolve in the half-visible weave of tangled roots and branches. Within these stories lie deeper strata of narrative, spiralling away from one another, intersecting at strange angles, slipping in and out of view like silhouettes in the half-light. Everywhere, organisms forage, shelter, bloom, and recede into cycles far older than our personal griefs and yet strangely resonant with them.

There are the stories we carry into the forest, and those that arise as we pass through—partial, provisional, entangled. In the dusk, some stories blur while others start to glow. Grief-attuned practice resists the urge to grasp or extract; instead, it attends. It senses the shimmer at the edge of perception where human and more-than-human narratives brush against one another. It is here, in the bewildering half light, that (re)wilding becomes a way of abiding with what flickers at the edges of our world.

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END NOTES

[1] Ecological rewilding philosophy promotes practices of minimising human management and re-establishing natural processes toward the restoration self-sustaining ecosystems.

[2] The term 'forest' has a complicated origin in English, but the specific nature of this complication also charges it with a double inflection capable of commenting on key social and environmental problematics at the heart of (re)wilding and the exploitation of ecologies across the globe. The word itself derives from the Latin *foris*, meaning 'outside of', and first came to designate a space set apart for the Norman-English kings. The application of the term in royal decrees and enforced impositions on the lives of commoners was the first time in recorded British history where the people were denied access to the commons land they had used for countless generations. Nick Hayes (2020) notes how our contemporary understanding of the word *forest* has flipped on its head. When, in the mediaeval literature, one went into the forest looking for adventure, they were officially in the king's domain, but this did not grant them absolute authority over the wild creatures who inhabited the space. The quest was a test of one's dedication to a hierarchical order, not entirely unlike how, in more ancient stories, the forest tested the mettle of those who would enter seeking to claim its resources (a trope that goes back to one of the world's oldest written narratives, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*). These days, however, forests tend to be organised and thought of as zones of common usage—a sanctuary from rampant privatisation and exclusionary control over land and resources by corporate interests that still carry echoes of colonial histories, their reckless destruction of ecologies through expansion and industrialisation, and their displacement of indigenous communities. Albrecht's (2005) *solastalgia*—the lived experience of losing one's home environment—and other manifestations of ecological grief and anxiety are affective counterparts to the politics of ecological exclusion, and might be worth exploring in future research involving affect and 'wilderness'.

[3] The concept of 'assemblage authorship' builds upon posthuman and new materialist accounts of distributed agency—particularly Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblage, Barad's intra-action, Latour's actor-network theory, Bennett's vibrant matter, Haraway's sympoiesis, and performance-based accounts of multi-species co-creation (Woynarski; Chaudhuri; Arlander; Tsing; Ingold). These frameworks collectively foreground creativity as emerging from relational fields rather than from a sovereign artistic subject. This framework will be explored further in Chapter Two.

[4] Even were the answer to such a question truly unknowable, its very asking can open a path toward a more nuanced understanding of grief. In other words, to ask whether a forest has capacities for grief might never yield a definitive yes or no; but that does not prevent the question from meaningfully contributing to what we know about grief—about what it is, how it operates, how it changes us and changes the ways we relate to our world, forests included. The question can work backwards toward ontology. What are the conditions of possibility for experiencing and practicing grief? How might different lifeforms grieve differently? If forests *do* exhibit signs of grief, what might that tell us about them, about the autonomy and community of plants and trees? Do they grieve individually or all together? Is such a thing as collaborative grief possible, and how might grief activate collaborative activity? Seemingly naive or unobjectifiable questions such as "Can forests grieve?" can be highly generative provocations for thinking differently, for asking unexpected questions or approaching research from underutilised, ignored, or discarded perspectives.

[5] Selections in the following subsection have been adapted from my essay published in the Routledge anthology, *Creative and Aesthetic Ways of Grief: All Things Reimagined.*

[6] Lykke defines autophenomenography as "a branch of autoethnography that uses phenomenological accounts of the lived experience of the researcher-subject as lens and material for the analysis" (Allen-Collinson, 2010 cited in Lykke, 2018). Both autoethnography and autophenomenography use the researcher's lived experience and autobiographical accounts as research material, and there are clear overlaps between the two methods. But they differ insofar as the former takes its point of departure in ethnographic methods, while the pivot for the latter is a phenomenological approach focusing on a corpo-affective, transcorporeal and relational 'orientation' and 'attentiveness' (Allen-Collinson, 2010:283)" (2021:21).

[7] e.g. Observing a tree for longer than impulse dictates reveals continuities and events otherwise overlooked, engaging our imaginative sense of a life that exceeds our experience of time.

[8] The parenthetical '(re)' distinguishes this methodological praxis from ecological 'rewilding' while still drawing on that field's emphasis on complexity, emergence, and noninstrumental ecological processes. The parentheses also mark becoming rather than return—signalling that (re)wilding here is not a nostalgic restoration of a lost wild but rather a gesture toward cultivating new modes of relation that attend to more-than-human entanglements. A fuller discussion of its ethical and historical tensions appears in Section 3.4.

[9] The transferability of this model is evidenced through its emergence from practice over four years, that took place in a variety forest-based settings and engaged multiple practice modes and expressive mediums. Whether I was gradually developing sculptural work with the *Skullwillow* in Goblinwoode, or producing iterations of close-up short video work with *Carrion Ecologies*, the Seasons of Practice model accurately describes the movements from excursion to decay (although not necessarily in their given temporal order) that characterise my process.

[10] What is typically considered 'objective' knowledge is often tautological (confined according to pre-defined closed systems), and Gödel has demonstrated that even these systems are necessarily incomplete.

[11] While my Seasons of Practice also extend into assembly and decay, these latter phases function more as sites of synthesis and reflection; the first three, however, articulate the core methodological principles through which (re)wilding becomes embodied, improvisational, and collaborative.

[12] Interestingly, these occurred far more frequently in older, wilder woods than in managed plantations. This may be related to the incidence of goblins appearing at sites of wounding or inosculation where the unmanaged nature of old growth forest permitted a wealth of interaction.

[13] Manning more explicitly evokes Gibson's *ecological perception*, articulated by Ingold as "not the achievement of a mind in a body, but of the organism as a whole in its environment, […] tantamount to the organism's own exploratory movement through the world" (2000:3).

[14] Defamiliarisation is closely related to bewilderment, but they play different methodological roles. *Bewilderment* is an epistemic stance, an openness to the limits of knowledge and the disorientations of affect that vitalise productive (un)knowing. *Defamiliarisation* is a sensory-

aesthetic technique: the tactical unsettling of habitual seeing which becomes generative in modes of bewilderment.

[15] Entrainment is not limited to human/human interactions. Endogenous rhythmic (neural) entrainment has been observed in fireflies (Wilson and Cook, 2016:1647), arthropods (i.e. bushcricket chorusing), and anurans (Greenfield and Merker, 2023), but various forms of vocal, motor, and social (interpersonal) entrainment are known to exist among and between species (Wilson and Cook, 2016:1651-1655). Indeed, the earliest observation of physical entrainment—pendulum clocks synchronising in 1655—suggest a pre-organic material origin for the phenomenon.

[16] However, mistakes were made. I crushed a beetle in the process of filming other beetles. I accidentally bisected a wasp and agonised over whether I then had a responsibility to end its suffering (or if such a decision would further compromise its agency). These instances were emotionally harrowing. In a forest-based practice, these are not managerial concerns. To engage affectively with other species is to form attachments, increase empathy, and wade through emerging ethical paradigms and problems. Like Jordan, when I began this project, I did not know I could lose sleep over killing a beetle.

[17] The word D&G deploy, *Agencement,* might also be translated as 'arrangement' (Buchanan, 2021:20). The connotations of 'assemblage' help us to imagine disparate parts working together to generate novel properties or effects; but it is also important to remember that arrangement matters. The assemblage is not a hodgepodge of elements, but a specfic combination of relations similar to what Deleuze, in his psychoanalytic context, called 'desiring machines': each with its own perspective interconnected (or breaking down) at particular junctions in particular ways. The precise arrangement of individual agencies interact in ways that other arrangements of the selfsame elements would not.

[18] Often it is the assemblage itself that fades into the background, even when the individually differentiated entities and objects involved are given attention. This is partly because attempts at becoming 'neutral observers' inhibit our taking on the kind of affective role with the assemblage that might activate the encounter.

[19] One grief-inflected encounter in which an accidental collision with a wasp forced an immediate ethical dilemma: whether to intervene to terminate its suffering or allow the moment to unfold without interference. Such moments became anchors of ethical friction surrounding life and death, revealing the stakes of interspecies encounter—not as metaphor, but as material responsibility.

[20] Deleuze and Guattari's general process of 'becoming' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:233-309) concerns relational transformation and affective and transduction deterritorialisations, and it would be more accurate to speak of my own relational journey with the forest in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's *becoming*. That said, there is a sense in which my cremated mother's body—much of which is released into the atmosphere in the form of CO2 and water vapour, likely to eventually get absorbed by trees—is/was/has been assimilating her components into literal forest processes. Her material becoming and my becoming-into-relation-with resonate metonymically at such moments as finding a skull in the grass and then carrying it to place into a crook on a branch of the willow.

[21] Despret notes that parrots "cannot speak if they don't feel they are speaking to someone" (2008:125), a point that exemplifies how methodology itself can foreclose communicative possibility.

[22] Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone*, especially on "territorial relations" and submerged Indigenous phenomenologies (2017:40–41, 64, 91).

[23] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*—particularly the definition of intra-action (2007:33, 89).

[24] As with Manning's bodily disturbances, such intensities mark peripheral thresholds where affect activates the capacity to reconfigure perception—in this and other ways. These thresholds are not exclusive to humans. Ecological research suggests trees register losses in ways that rhyme with grief. Chin et al.'s forty-year study of US Northwest forests reveals growth suppression after the death of mature neighbours, especially among smaller conspecifics (2023). The pattern indicates facilitative networks disrupted by death: not simply resource redistribution but a somatic-ecological disturbance. Without psychologising trees, their responses echo the physiological heaviness of human grief described by Lindemann (1944) and cross-cultural surveys (Averill, in Lewis, 1988). From this perspective, grief's bewilderment appears not as private pathology but as a phylogenetic sensitivity to rupture across species and scales. If so, grief may already be *wild* in an ecological sense—a diffused capacity for sensing loss that ripples across organisms, networks, and durations.

[25] The following section has been adapted from parts of my essay in the Routledge anthology, *Creative and Aesthetic Ways of Grief: All Things Reimagined.*

[26] The following section has been adapted from parts of my essay in the Routledge anthology, *Creative and Aesthetic Ways of Grief: All Things Reimagined.*

[27] In general, our tendency seems to grant less and less agency or subjectivity the more an organism or entity's constitution and appearance diverges from our own. We have made this decision somewhat tautologically, based solely on the human experience of consciousness, aka the only consciousness we experience. Another word for all of this is *anthropocentrism*.

[28] While metaphor reaches *across* adjacencies to coordinate disparate concepts through resemblance, metonymy instead reaches *along* to conjoin adjacencies through proximity or touch. The result relates experience to experience, and/or experience to concept. When considering metonymy in this way, it is useful to follow Ben Spatz who insists that embodied practices encompass, "[i]n addition to the physical, [a] space of possibility [that] includes much that we might categorise as mental, emotional, spiritual, vocal, somatic, interpersonal, expressive, and more" (11). To enjoin cognition and embodiment problematises the normative western dichotomy in which mind and body are treated as separate, even irreconcilable, entities. Metonymy, therefore, can function as a vehicle for navigating theoretical spaces where distinctions between physical and mental categories break down; and it can be a way to think with those "things unnamed by words" (Ding, 2015:1836).

[29] Recent experiments in cognition and attention demonstrate a shocking gulf between how much humans actually perceive compared to how much we think we perceive. The most salient example may be the well-known 'invisible gorilla experiment', first carried out by Daniel Simons and Christopher Chabris (1999). In the experiment, subjects are asked to observe a

video of a group of people in motion passing around a two basketballs, and to count how many times a ball gets passed. During the video, a person wearing a large gorilla suit enters one side of the frame, walks among the ball players, and then exits off frame. According to the results, only 50 percent of subjects report noticing the gorilla. Writing in response to these findings, Ramachandran and Rogers-Ramachandran consider how our brains are "constantly trying to construct meaningful narratives from what we see. Things that do not quite fit the script or that are not relevant to a particular task occupying our interest are wiped wholesale from consciousness" (2005:96).

[30] The presence of stones in bidirectional transfer or 'binding' of the two sites also generates metonymical links between these events, making a deep time miraculous chain that could be analysed together.

[31] The contronymical nature of the *uncanny* is further illuminated in the concept of the 'uncanny valley' coined by robotics engineer Mashahiro Mori (1970). The uncanny valley represents a zone of affect derived from artificial renderings of the human face that appear too lifelike without quite landing the realm of realism. It remains therefore suspended, unresolved, haunting, and usually a little uncomfortable. A similar effect can occur when face to face with a human corpse. Here, familiar features are unsettled by a peculiar stillness whose totality suggests (by negation) life's persistence of movement, be it ever so subtle. Yet even dead bodies exhibit a kind of animation—the uncanny sort that runs along irregular scales of time where decay orchestrates gradual physiological transformations. Likewise, the uncanny corpse can be experienced through implication and dichotomies of presence and absence. Think of walking into an empty room where a loved one once laughed and will never laugh again. And if the loss is devastating enough, as is common with a spouse, parent or child, we might find their absence saturating every aspect of our lives with its uncanny veneer.

[32] "grief has tied knots in my neck" ; "what hollowed your cheeks, bowed your head, wrecked your heart, and broke your body? Why is your mind full of grief?" (Helle, 2021:21,89).

[33] In my own case, symptoms of what would soon be diagnosed as type-1 diabetes manifested within days of my mother's death.

[34] Habitual patterning in humans has likely evolved astride physical principles of energy conservation. Without intervention, perception defaults to preconception, making sense of the world through "small amount[s] of new sensory information [which takes less cognitive effort] than to constantly form entirely new perceptions from scratch" (Sheldrake, 2020:14). Practices of active awareness and attunement can remap these shortcuts, overriding habitual patterning and broadening perceptual possibility.

[35] Emerging mathematical and physical theory of the twentieth-century exposed the inescapable incompleteness of its own rationalism (Gödel, Heisenberg, Lorentz) and revealed material properties we have yet to comprehend.

[36] Because countless stories can be told from the same collection of film (depending on how clips are ordered and timed), emergent cuts also highlighted how difficult it is to sidestep the human perspective. Even when human subjects are kept out of frame, there is still a human behind the camera determining the shots, as well as a human determining the narrative composition in the edit. Both factors ensure that the human point of view remains primary, even in interspecies

collections of clips. Random, chaotic, and distributive editing techniques widened the possibilities and extended collaboration into post-production; but the human 'I' remains, judging which outcomes are worth keeping and which experiments should be left out.

[37] Distributed agency is central to Fancy's concept of geoartistry, in which all living creatures have potential for creative activity and reception.

[38] Although the communication signals were well within the range of human audible perception, because "[birds] encode meaning in aspects of their songs our ears can't pick out and that our brains don't pay attention to" (101), the fine structure of these songs involved microfluctuations too fast for the human brain to distinguish. The cognitive-perceptual nature of these findings (as opposed to physical-sensory limitation) suggests that birds' temporal experience might be far different from that of humans.

[39] By providing access to the otherwise indistinguishable rhythms of birdsong, even if the project fails to demonstrate a sense of what it is 'like' for a bird to hear the forest, it is amalgamating access to aesthetic articulations by which the beauty of the forest can be seen both for and by species beyond the human. It is an element of my contention that when a practitioner approaches these kind of techniques through a spirit of interspecies collaboration via (re)wilding forest-based practice methods, there will exist a greater chance that these properties and qualities might ultimately be made transitive through the medium of artistic experience.

[40] Additionally, the aforementioned 2023 tree study of how loss of mature trees triggers grief-like behaviours in saplings also demonstrates the possibility of ancient evolving support networks in forests that exhibit what one might call *parental behaviour,* or at least community support by the elderly of the young.

[41] Synchronic junctures in the editing timeline might be read as encounter-borne imprints lodged within the artefact itself—affective knots where different temporalities and agencies have entangled to produce resonance—as if the co-presence of forest footage, bio-electrical sonification, improvisational editing, and grief-affective orientation were forming a spatiotemporal assemblage where affect circulates and recombines.