

# Cultivating Connivance *with* Landscape: Deepening Care Through an Immersive Creative Art Residency in Porongurup

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## Abstract

This paper addresses the guiding principle of care, as a sustainable practice, through my visual arts doctoral research. Framed through practice-led research methodology, this sensorial project details my immersive interaction with nature, focusing on integrating slow practice and relational care into arts practice. The environment as a complex site of varying entanglements (Haraway, 2016) is central to this study and specifically discusses a residency undertaken in the biodiverse region of the Porongurup Range, (Borongor-up)—the traditional lands of the Minang Peoples in Western Australia. The writing unfolds through encounters, responses, and improvisations in situated contexts (Ingold 2021), guided by intuitive non-intentional practices (Tsing, 2015), such as slow walking, meandering, extended periods of stillness, and noticing. An overview of the broader research enquiry contextualises care in developing reciprocal understanding enacted in embodied practices of micro level intimate natural-world, and sensorial material encounters. Aesthetic cosmopolitanism informs the research through the writings of Nikos Papastergiadis (2023), in which sensory responsiveness to place enables shifts in perspective from the immediate material world to more relational imaginaries. This paper unfolds through a bricolage informed by an experiential approach that adopts methods that move away from consumptive practices toward processual relational attunement.

*Keywords: Care, Collaboration, Reciprocity, Slow practice, Immersive*

## **A Sensorial Project: Seven Sites**

This paper addresses the guiding principle, care, as sustainable practice through a sensorial embodied project devised in a collaborative exchange with the natural world. This case study outlines the methodological approach taken within my current creative arts PhD research. The creative project, which is ongoing, is located in the National Heritage Listed and internationally recognised biodiverse hotspot of Porongurup Range, (Borongor-up), the traditional lands of the Minang Peoples, in the Great Southern region of Western Australia (Australian Heritage Database, n.d). The title given is *cosmicisation*, borrowed from theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1996, p. 342), aligning the intent of the arts project with the unpredictable, emergent processes of the world, such as the interplay of natural forces, ecological interactions, and the molecularised materiality of existence.

The project was formally initiated through proposals made firstly to the local organisation, The Friends of the Porongurup Range (2024), and secondly to the WA State Government Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attraction (DBCA) Albany. The research has been further enabled through a residency on a private property on the southern side of Porongurup Range which commenced in June 2024 and will run in intervals towards the final stages of my PhD candidature in 2026. The residency was offered through an unprecedented gesture of hospitality by Judith MacKinnon who was unknown to me prior to the project proposal and has profoundly supported the creative research. The ongoing nature of the residency, now midway through its nominated period, has highlighted the importance of commitment, alongside a sensitivity and responsiveness to the interconnections and relationships encountered throughout the project.

Amongst thirty hectares of Karri, Marri, and Jarrah Forest adjoining with the National Park, seven sites were chosen to place a prepared ten-metre length of calico fabric in each location, for a duration of up to twelve months (Figures 1&2). The durational aspect of the project brings to the forefront the processes of cyclical and linear time (Lefebvre, 2013, p. 18), adopting immersive methods that reinforce an awareness of the fragility between the elements in interdependent systems. The span of the project has productively influenced my adaptive and responsive approaches within creative practice, shaping my thought processes and deepening my understanding of the relational aspects within the ecological system.

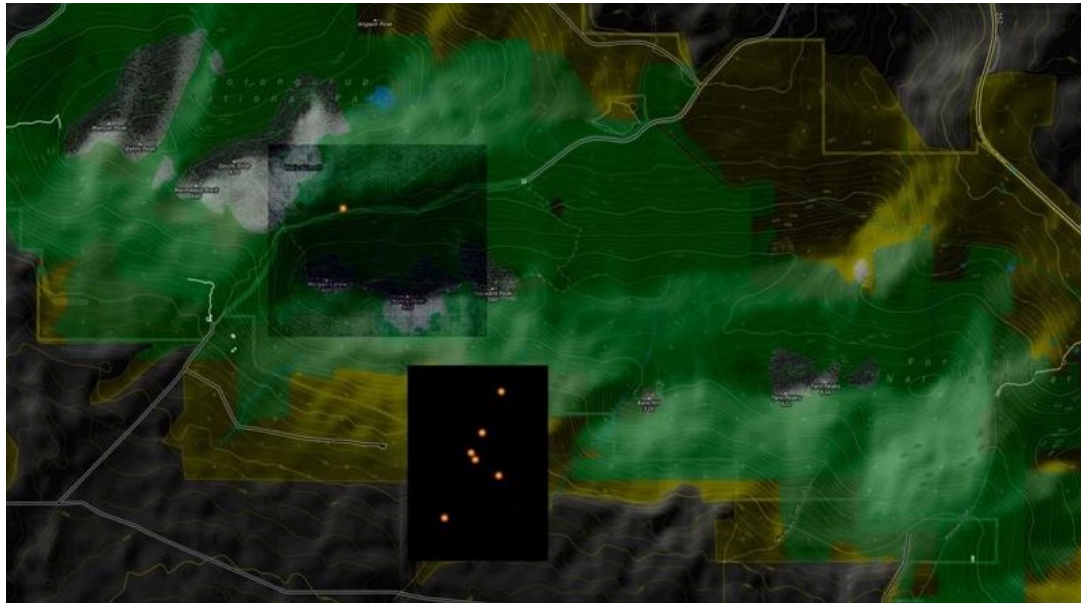


Figure 1. A. Allerding, 2024, Adapted topographical map of Porongurup Range, overlaid with seven orange dots mapped to the geo coordinates of seven sites.



Figure 2. A. Allerding 2024, Seven sites 'cosmicisation', composite photographs taken in situ of the installations at Porongurup.



**An Interplay between landscape garden and studio practice: collaboration, reciprocity, and care**

The broader PhD research is generated through a series of iterative exchanges moving between landscape, gardens, and studio-based practices over three distinct places of enquiry—Porongurup Range, a classical garden in Suzhou, China, and the making space of the studio. This paper begins with a brief contextual synopsis of the broader research and the central scholars informing the methodology, followed by the case study giving an overview of the residency.

The research is undertaken using a practice-led research (PLR) methodology specifically informed through scholars, Barbara Bolt (2010), Paul Carter (2010), Robin Nelson (2022), Henk Borgdorff (2011), Carole Gray and Jullien Mallins (2016) alongside quantum physicist Karen Barad (2007). Embodied practices are employed such as posited by sensory ethnographer Sarah Pink “as a *process* that is integral to the relationship between humans and their environments” (2015, p. 4), or as anthropologist Tim Ingold regards “a movement of *incorporation*” (2021b, p. 240)—developed in conjunction with the landscape and garden sites, and in the materials and processes of studio making. The interconnected methods that inform the outputs of artworks and writing include reading across two languages of English and Chinese, reflexivity through exhibitions and engaging in critical feedback with peers, and critical thinking using diffraction (Barad, 2007, p. 88) to attend to the specificities of entangled differences, and collaboration with artists in intercultural critical exchanges.

At the outset of the research a primary consideration was how to bring together a set of seemingly disparate elements, vicariously connected through practice and lifeworld, within an ethical methodological framework. An interdisciplinary approach (Bal, 2012; Borgdorff, 2011; Carter, 2010; Gray & Malins, 2016) such as cultural theorist Mieke Bal informs, “espouses different discourses and brings them together” (2012, p. 95), is used to foreground the connections that build the research.

The exchanges between the three sites of enquiry illuminate the ethical sensitivities inherent of culture–nature relationships within which I am situated. My theoretical approach to understanding these ethical sensitivities draws on diverse sets of ideas: aesthetic cosmopolitanism as articulated by philosopher Nikos Papastergiadis (2023, p. 26); decolonial thinking, explored through semiotician Walter Mignolo (2018, p. 365), an engagement with the more-than human world through the perspectives of feminist scholar Donna Haraway (2016, p. 116), along with anthropologists Ingold (2021a), and Anna Tsing (2015). Barad’s (2007) concept of intra-action, provides a productive framework for examining processual dynamics, and deconstructing dualistic notions (2007, p. 211).

The possibilities extending from the preceding ideas relating culture, nature, and artistic practice in places are visualised in a topographical interface (Figure 3) as relational multiplicities to the research, using an adapted spatial model (Barad, 2007, p. 389). The interface functions as a method to trace the differential relations between phenomena, materials, practices, places, philosophies, and theories—conceived here as “intensities” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 145) that pertain to the research field. Words are posited as “signs” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 20) corresponding to an internal relational space further explored

through aspects of the research beyond this case study, and documented within a corresponding archive.

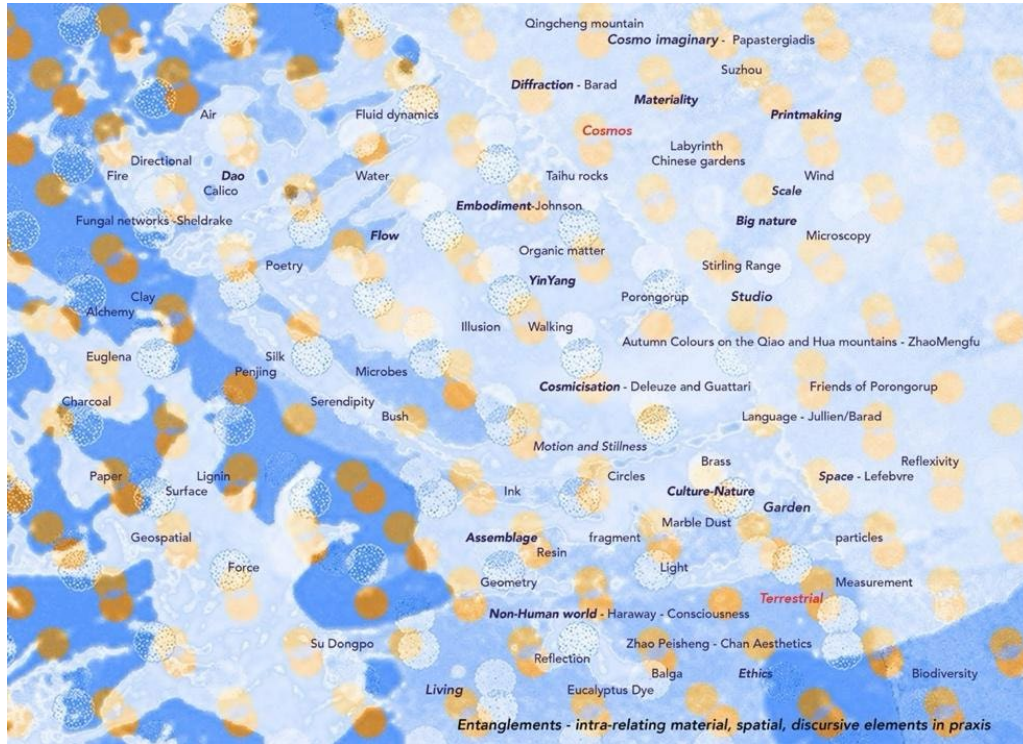


Figure 3. A. Allarding 2024, Entanglements and possibilities, composited analogue–digital image, adapted from Barad’s *Entangled Genealogies* (2007, p. 389).

In supporting my practice, I make use of theories and philosophical thought that critically reflect on mind–body dualisms. These include scholar Mark Johnson’s insights into “how human beings experience and make meaning” (2007, p. 212), along with Sinologist François Jullien’s expanded concept of *connivance* (2018) which emphasises subtle and profound attunement within relational contexts of landscape. Cultivating *connivance* with landscape, as the title of this paper, draws on Jullien’s interpretation of this concept in defining *connivance* as a “primordial coinvolvement with the world” (2018, p. 129), becoming a profound, tacit understanding between self and landscape. For Jullien, *connivance* dissolves the Cartesian subject–object divide, transforming encounters into affinities and establishing relationships with place (2018, p. 110). Cultivating *connivance* in my research shapes the approach I have taken towards immersive and embodied practices in the methods. My encounters in both landscapes and gardens probe questions on perspective, ways of seeing, and duality (Barad, 2007, p. 140; Ingold, 2021a, p. 270; Johnson, 2007, p. 6; Jullien & Rodriguez, 2018, p. 127) in embodied, situated, and sensorial modes of creative practice. Emerging insights are devolved through the practices in the sites and within studio practice.

With over three decades of experience working in a culturally hybrid manner related to my involvement with China, decolonial thinking informs the research through Walter Mignolo (2018, 2020). Remaining open to knowledges beyond “Western concepts guiding our ways

of knowing and being” (Mignolo, 2020, p. 614), underscores the critical value of holistic Indigenous knowledges—such as Australian scholars Simone Bignall and Daryle Rigney (2019, p. 160) make explicit—and was powerfully demonstrated during the 23rd Sydney Biennale (Roca, 2022), titled *rīvus*, where artistic director José Roca, foregrounded the importance of Indigenous knowledges in managing the waterways of Country. This was in conjunction with *River Voices*, presented as stories by First Nations custodians. Barkandji Elder and artist Uncle Badger Bates representing the Darling Baaka, emphasised the urgent need to recognise the interconnectedness and interdependence of the once vibrant river and all its tributaries, as a precarious matter of future survival (2022). Clyde Rigney Jnr, Tangane/Yaralde Ngarrindjeri, from Murrundi and Kurangk, South Australia, who spoke on behalf of the Murrundi / Murray River, Australia’s largest river; the Coorong Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth region as being one of Australia’s most important wetland areas—urged that we “sit by the river, take in its flow, *kungen* listen, *nukkan* see it” (2023:1:54 min).

In intimate micro-level natural-world, sensorial, embodied, material encounters, acts of care can emerge in collaboration and reciprocity. Acknowledging the deep interconnections between human and non-human worlds (Haraway, 2016, p. 33; Ingold, 2021a, p. xii; Jullien & Rodriguez, 2018, p. 130; Tsing, 2015, p. 156), I draw on Haraway’s assertion that worlds come into being through the dynamic enactments of relating as “conjoined process” (2007, p. 25), as resonant with reciprocal understanding. The intent of my research creative project is informed by the perspectives presented through both *River Voices*, and Haraway’s idea of how “diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another” (2007, p. 4), with a focus on relational and ecological concerns.

Care becomes present in time given—in attention to, and consciousness of the relations in any given environment. The research is marked by complex entanglements, linking the values collaboration and reciprocity to also frame artist-to-artist exchanges, and multimodal arts practices (Carter, 2004, 2010; Haraway, 2007; Papastergiadis, 2023). Sensory perception and experience in artistic practice can deepen understanding and connection with others and the biological world enabling transformative shifts in perspective (Papastergiadis, 2018, 2023). As Papastergiadis suggests, the human capacity to create seeks to uncover “material connections that establish moral order and an ethics of care” (2023, p. 26) which is of significant relevance to my overall research.

#### **A bricolage: unfolding context**

The following quotes—by writer and artist Paul Carter (1996) alongside Haraway (2016), Deleuze and Guattari (1996) and Tsing (2015)—perform a bricolage towards some of the concerns that have emerged through this project.

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*“Let the ground rise up to resist us, let it prove porous, spongy rough, irregular—let it assert its native title, its right to maintain its traditional surfaces—and instantly our engineering instinct is to wipe it out; to lay our foundations on rationally-apprehensible level ground” (Carter, 1996, p. 2)*

*“The order is reknitted: human beings are with and of the earth,  
and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story”  
(Haraway, 2016, p. 55).*

*“A material is molecularised matter which must accordingly  
“harness” forces; these forces are necessarily of the cosmos”  
(Deleuze & Guattari, 1996, p. 342).*

*“If we are interested in livability, impermanence, and emergence,  
we should be watching the action of landscape assemblages.  
Assemblages coalesce, change, and dissolve: this is the story”  
(Tsing, 2015, p. 158).*

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### **Seven Sites as *Cosmicisation*—A Case Study**

Prior to selecting the seven sites, my local host Judith MacKinnon and I walked extensively together where her knowledge and guidance concerning the biodiversity—flora, fauna, bird calls, invertebrates, soil, fungi—past extreme events, conservation values and histories has been freely given. In each site where a calico was unfurled, it was done with care to avoid impacting priority flora, damaging plants, mosses, lichens or disrupting the habitat of creatures. In terms of caring and preserving the original condition of the landscape, each site was repatriated after an installation, for instance, wet earth exposed by our footprints in a localised area was covered over by redistributing dry fallen branches and leaves. No digging took place; rather foraged organic material was used to embed the calico with the ground. Foraging was also done with care. Rather than remove a heap of organic material from one exact place, small loose materials were collected as single intact items from locations around the installation site such as loose rocks and fallen branches and pieces of wood. Any matter that was embedded into the earth was left undisturbed. A track was followed wherever one existed from previous routes, including those made by kangaroos. Being guided through these careful ways of minimising impact to the environment continues to be tremendously insightful and challenging.

The project *cosmicisation* interrogates the environment, re-envisioned such as Ingold terms “as a domain of entanglement” (2021a, p. 87), through the calicos which are currently installed between seven diverse sites on the Porongurup Range. The calicos participatory interactions and subsequent intra-actions that take place in this project between human and non-human elements are central to the project’s exploration. I draw on Tsing’s concept of disturbance which “opens the terrain for transformative encounters, making new landscape assemblages possible” (2015, p. 160), to view these engagements with nature as fluid interactions. Tsing’s perspective informs a critical awareness of my actions, prompting reflection on the nature of disturbance itself and the extent to which such disruptions remain “bearable” (2015, p. 160) within the ecological and artistic contexts of my practice.

A recently fallen Karri log (Figure 4) was the first site for one of the ten-metre calico pieces washed and prepared in a soy mordant to enter an environment where it will affect and be affected, using Deleuze and Guattari’s term *haecceity* to describe an “individuated



aggregate” of relations (1996, p. 261).



Figure 4. A. Allerding, 2024, Mackinnon property, fallen Karri, Site 1.

The log was initially chosen because no mosses or lichens had yet appeared on it, therefore the intrusion of the calico into its cavity was not seemingly disruptive of established microhabitats or noticeable interrelations of forming symbiotic or colonising communities. From a chosen entry position on the log, the calico roll was tossed from the previous top of the tree towards its middle, generally aligning with the direction of the visceral red fibres of the inner tree. The exposed lignin fibres were moist, and the toss allowed the calico to fall in a gestural movement along the cavity. Further guiding ensured contact between the fabric, the fibres, and other organic matter to encourage the possibility of intra-action through staining or from the growth of organisms using the calico as a substrate. I was curious of how this human-made material would embed and then become part of the decay process. Fallen branches on the ground from the original tree were already interacting with lichen and moss and from a large shard splintered off the trunk, the process of wood becoming soil was evident in a hollow. Organic matter gathered from around the tree was placed on and between folds of calico to install the calico as part of a biological assemblage, tree shards provided weight against winds (Figure 5). The process of decay is one of visible affect such as by other organisms such as termites or lichens as well as “nonvisible forces” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1996, p. 342), such as are produced in the variations of climate. The rapidity of fungal movement was evident after only two days after rain (Figure 6), when intra-actions between the fabric, organic matter and organisms could be seen in staining, and mould spores embedding in the calico substrate across different sites where they were installed.





Figure 5. A. Allerding, June 2024, Making new relations, Brass, Calico, Carbon, Karri, Lichen Moss, Site 1.



Figure 6. A. Allerding, June-August 2024, Calico interactions with fungi, colonised by fungi after six weeks (left), pink mould spores after two days (right), documentation site 1 and 2.

During the residency, responsiveness and adaptability to weather systems are essential, not only for personal safety but for remaining attuned to fleeting opportunities that arise in various conditions—whether during dry weather, after rain, in wind or in the still, absence of windy conditions. Intuitive responses guide the research emphasising non-intentional practices, such as in slow walking, meandering or significant still periods and in “noticing” (Tsing, 2015, p. 160). I perceive modal interactions with the landscape through motion and stillness, that I relate with the idea of slow practice. As historian Arden Reed elucidates, slow practices create opportunity to deepen experience and focus attention (2017, p. 11)—a mode of practice that I align with Jullien’s concept of connivance (2018, p. 129). In this perceptual place of Porongurup, time passes, or I pass time, through drawing and frottage (Figure 7), writing, watching, or listening to birds, getting close to the ground to peer at fungi and leaf litter, inventing techniques for taking photographs (Figure 8), video and sound recordings (Figure 14). These embodied methods incorporate analogue, digital, and ephemeral techniques that are further developed as ideas within the making spaces of the studio.



Figure 7. A. Allerding, 2024, Shards, a frottage, detail, documentation photograph site 1. Figure 8. A. Allerding, 2024, Extending views, Brass disc installation, 12cm site 1.

In walking between or around sites, I use a phone app that generates a diagram of a route taken (Figure 9). The app uses global positioning satellite GPS data to show a walk through its duration from start to finish and time stopped during the walk, with additional information about altitude and weather. The data reveals the walk from a topographical perspective. The type of movement recorded shows travelling from place to place, or as a concentrated movement that takes place in a location. Consequently, the macro view of the walk appears as linear or haphazard at times, mapping a relational view to my perceptual experience as one immersed in terrain.

Emerging questions from the use of this technology to record the walks arose following the sighting one evening after a walk, of a SpaceX *starlink* travelling across the dark sky. While critically reflecting on my ease of using this technology, I also consider the dimensions of connectivity linking humans across places on earth through the interspace that satellites traverse. Icelandic astrophysicist Sierra Solter warns, however, “we are entering uncharted territory, and moving forward with the construction of mega-constellations with no clear idea of the environmental ramifications that they might engender” (2025, p. 380).



Figure 9. A. Allerding, 2024, Walks documentation, Porongurup Range, Walkmeter app.



The calico project is a becoming collaboration (Carter, 2004; Haraway, 2016; Johnson, 2007) where things and processes happen beyond my control. The calico—industrially woven threads of cotton fibre—through its “intra-actions” (Barad, 2007, p. 210) taking place with elemental and organic processes will potentially loosen, decay, fray, and as mycologist Merlin Sheldrake (2021) illuminates, become a “collaborator” (2021, p. 205) with fungal networks (Figures 10)—existing between human, non-human, place and time until the pieces are collected, analysed, and re-enter the studio space for potential further development. As the project has progressed and signs of life have emerged even through a single moss threading itself into the calico substrate, I am uncertain of how to approach the removal of the calico pieces from their embedded habitats which will cause another disturbance (Figure 10). This is a work in progress informed by care and reciprocity, linking to the concerns of this paper.



Figure 10. A. Allerding, November 2024, Calico collaborator, a single thrilling moss thread, (left), a biological assemblage with calico, (right), composite photo left and right, documentation Site 6.

The slow practices have recalibrated my awareness of the ground. In taking time to see what is happening, overnight rain is enough to provoke all kinds of fungi to emerge and to push out from the ground or wood (Figures 11). In this way, attention to the microcosmic relates to the macrocosmic—a key premise of the broader research concerns.



Figure 11. A. Allerding, June 2024, Emerging coral fungi with mycelium (left) Upward thrust after rain, (right), MacKinnon property Porongurup.



Immersed in the site to carry out the installation, the initial apprehension that I had felt walking into a tangled environment of vines, Karri Hazel, fallen logs and thick bark cover shed from trees, was overcome, and gave way to a deeper sense of connection. In this immersion, the microhabitat revealed itself to me, and in turn, I behaved differently. For example, in recognising that a smaller, more intense field of movement in time passing is different from the experience of a travelling motion from point A to point B, I became aware that this constituted a different kind of engagement—one that encouraged a greater perceptual awareness and a noticing of what is living on the ground, off the ground and the micro-relations. From these experiences I have become acutely aware of my potential impact on the environment even through walking. As Jullien suggests, “our simultaneous sinking into the world’s physicality and into our self’s intimacy cannot be hurried” (2018, p. 55).

An intent to harness the elemental forces such as wind, rain and light in creative methods has developed through my use of various chosen mediums focussing on time weighted experiences and process, and by being attentive to the intra-actions that emerge in these relations (Figures 12 & 13). Through the residencies, a new creative approach that has evolved is prioritising embodied experience and playful exploration in practices of making. These are practices that encourage a closer attention to elemental processes with the natural world for guidance and engaging with the material world in my artistic methods. This approach makes a transformative shift from usual methods I would employ in creative research where work is often generated from the properties of materials and associated processes as primary instigators to generate the artwork in the studio. Rather, in following Ingold’s view such that, “the properties of materials regarded as constituents of an environment, cannot be identified as fixed, essential attributes of things, but are rather processual and relational” (2021a, p. 37)—also incorporates my interactions with the environment, with the world of materials.

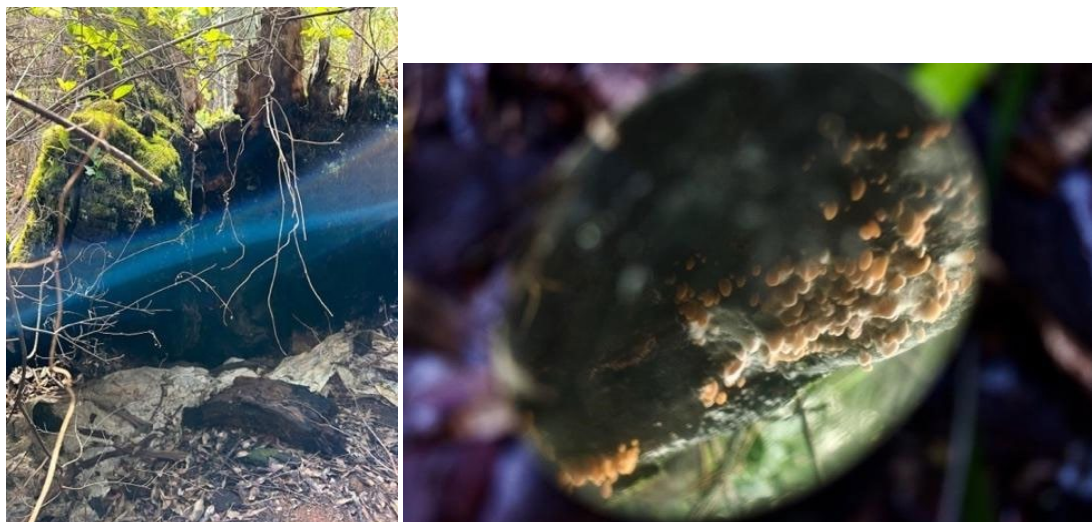


Figure 12. A. Allerding, 2024, Internal reflection, site 4. Figure 13. A. Allerding, 2024, External reflection, site 2.

One new practice adopted involves the sensorial processes combined to make eucalyptus

dyes (Figure 14). The preparatory work before extracting the dye requires being attentive, and carefully collecting. It relies on the wind, and the seasonal cycles to fall branches, leaves, and shed bark. It brings attention to the processes of osmosis and diffusion through soaking the collected matter in rainwater, and to the aromatic, sensory, transformation that occurs with the thermal energy of a fire in releasing the latent scent and dye from the plant. The collecting of wood, making a fire to boil and extract dye, is an immersive practice of looking, careful attention, and is bodily active. The dyes, charcoal, and ash from the fire are collected for re-use in creative studio processes. Re-using or re-combining these substances and materials in new contexts interfaces with the broader ideas of the research. These are exploratory methods in the field that I have adopted in attempt to shift away from consumptive habits, towards a processual more open-ended and relational engagement with the places that I inhabit through the artistic research.

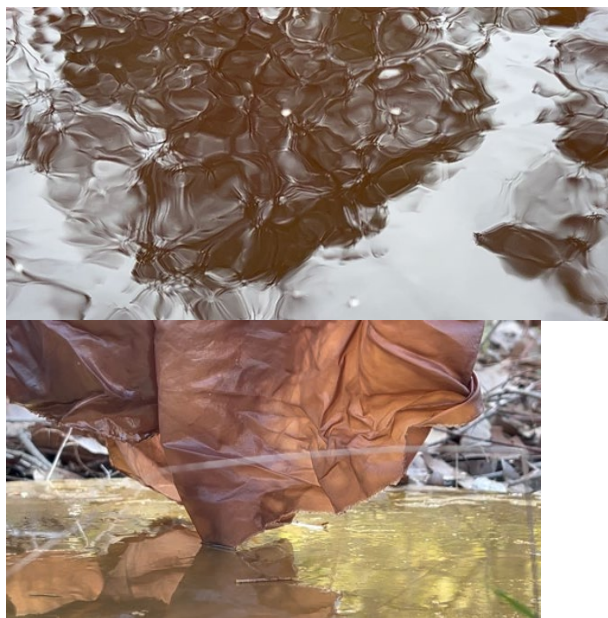


Figure 14. A. Allerding, 2024, *Fugitive Gestures*, video stills.

### **Concluding Statement: Towards Care as Sustainable Practice**

A key grounding phrase of Papastergiadis—“how ideas generated in one place develop resonance and diversions in another” (2014 00:34:00min)—has provided a cornerstone from which I can relate key ideas between the diverse and messy places of enquiry that the research has invested. The interdisciplinary nature of practice as research is made possible in the imaginative connections, that as Carter asserts, make “new families of association” (2010, p. 15) in new contexts.

At the heart of this arts research is a dialogue with nature and culture interrogating my material interactions with the environments I inhabit, as “relational fields” (Ingold, 2021a, p. 58). This orientation takes on an urgency in the context of global climate change where, as geographer Ashley Fent and colleagues suggest, relational understandings have become increasingly important (2022). A question posed by comparative philosopher Graham Parkes—“Who, then, are we, if we’re not good consumers?” (2023, p. 46)—resonates

deeply in my approach to practice. It prompts a reflection such as Ingold draws in *Being Alive*, “on how lives go along together and answer to one another” (2021a, p. xv).

Across the seven sites of the Porongurup Range, in lingering encounters with the landscape, in moving and making, I aim to cultivate deeper connections. Through the entanglement of fieldtrips, residencies, and diverse practices, a processual way of encountering the environment has shaped my practice foregrounding creativity in embodied experience and aesthetic engagement. Drawing on Ingold’s notion of wayfaring and correspondence, “to improvise is to follow the ways of the world, as they open up” (2021a, p. 261)—care emerges not as a predefined outcome but as something cultivated through responsive, sensitive, material encounters.

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