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Reclamation Ground: Material Reckoning with Gendered Subjectivity through Site-Responsive Art Practice

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Reclamation Ground:
Material Reckoning with Gendered
Subjectivity through Site-Responsive
Art Practice

Victoria Anne Lucas

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Abstract

This research enquiry has tested and established a sequence of practice-based methods, as Reclamation Ground, to question what a critical reclamation of female subjectivity might mean, and how it might manifest, through a feminist site-responsive art practice.

The Reclamation Ground sequence involves a deconstruction of a material encounter with site that responds to each site's varying parameters. Physical, geological, cultural, material and historical properties are interrogated, primarily through an autoethnographic methodology and through an excavation of material from each encounter. Digital technology is positioned as an intra-active agent throughout the Reclamation Ground sequence, a virtual tool for reimagining, speculating and becoming in response to the sites physically encountered. A process of material reckoning is formulated through a studio-based reconstitution of these excavated materials, transforming ground into new 'aggregates' to reveal critical territories of gendered subjectivity. These reckonings are subsequently terraformed as new artworks in a gallery context, formulating critical feminist renderings of subjectivity through encounters and reckonings with site.

This site-responsive research enquiry has formulated a material language that has activated three metaphorical Reclamation Grounds exploring alternative manifestations of female subjectivity. At their most provocative, these new formulations enabled a transformative process of change that questions the very grounds of subjectivity.

Reclamation Ground One focuses on rupturing the stymied representations of female subjectivity in Hollywood cinema in response to the desert through a tech-grotesque aesthetic. Reclamation Ground Two focuses on psychological female subjectivities in a decrepit hotel room through the collective voices of #MeToo. In Reclamation Ground Three, the site of a disused quarry is encountered materially, bodily and affectively using technologies, and a disjuncture from patriarchal constructions is revealed via the birthing body. The subjectivities that manifested in this final iteration of Reclamation Ground are multiple, trans-corporeal, intra-active, affective, symbiotic and completely entangled with the more-than-human. Reclamation Ground thus formulates a practice-based method of recontextualisation, a material renegotiation of subjectivity, in a time of planetary crisis.

This practice-based research has activated the collective within the subjective, manifesting qualities that can be applied to all genders, all species, all matter, in a way that initiates a metaphorical dissolution of hierarchical power. Thus, working through the virtual properties of artistic practice, new critical ground that agitates the concept of the individual has become manifest. The term 'symjectivity' establishes a feminist critique of subjectivity, in response to the plurality of human and more-than-human intra-actions encountered through the practice-based methods.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This feminist, site-responsive artistic research enquiry is an exploration of gendered subjectivity, through a series of embodied encounters with site-based material, reconstituted through image-making technologies. Fundamental to this approach is an engagement with and response to specific geo-political landscapes across different sites as part of a *Reclamation Ground*; a constructed sequence from which a process of material reckoning unfolds. Material Reckoning describes a method of literal and metaphorical deconstruction and reconstitution, so that new aggregations (formulations) of ground are manifested through the practice. Thus, the Reclamation Grounds of this enquiry actively reclaim gendered subjectivity from reductive, systemic patriarchal constructions prevalent in the Global North, through a practice-based response to site. Reclamation Ground includes the encounter and digital extraction of site, the material reckoning of material gathered in the studio, and the terraforming of new ground in a gallery context. The Reclamation Ground sequence is a literal process and a metaphorical working of the geo-political ground, through three specific locations and subsequent encounters with artworks that reenvision female subjective agency.

Through this work I will critically explore my embodied relationship with my immediate environment, encountering matter and metaphor on site with technology to test the reclamation of female subjectivity. My enquiry, which began in 2016, is to question how female subjectivity might alternatively manifest when extracted from dualistic patriarchal constructions, developed out of a practice that draws from embodied experiences in response to site. What can gendered subjectivities offer in an environmental context that necessitates a reconciliation with the more-than-human? What can a site-responsive material practice contribute to a transformative mode of thinking in relation to female subjectivity?



Figure 1

Victoria Lucas
Remedy 2012
Photographic Series
Dimensions Variable
Installation View, Millennium Galleries, UK



Figure 2

Victoria Lucas
Interruptions (Alexanderplatz, Berlin), 2008-2013.
Photographic Series
Dimensions Variable
Installation View, Bloc Projects, UK

1.1 Responses to Site

Through my art practice I interrogate entangled ecologies and cultural heritage through embodied site-responsive encounters. Creative projects are initiated and sustained through field visits to selected sites and through an investigation of related historical, social and political research material. In earlier artworks, such as photographic series' *Remedy* (2012) and *Interruptions* (2008 – 2013), post-industrial and post-institutional buildings and structures were explored in relation to political and economic ideologies and their effects on the communities and individuals that inhabited the sites encountered.¹ These earlier photographic series and films were often characterised by a deadpan aesthetic, in which simple compositions worked to document the site with objective clarity. Frustrated with the limitations of this approach, which jettisoned any subjective expression, this enquiry has opened a space to investigate how my own subjective female experience might be reclaimed in the site of the work, and what implications this will have upon representing gendered experience more broadly.

The Reclamation Ground sequence comprises the deconstruction or agitation of the geo-political site encountered through a digital extraction process, before the critical, social and political contestations of the patriarchy are materially reckoned with through methods of artistic practice. What manifests from this process is the reclamation of matter, through this agitation and through its reconstitution and aggregation as artwork in a gallery context. This reconstitution, as a reclamation, forms new manifestations of female subjectivity in relation to the site encountered. Using the Reclamation Ground sequence as an approach to artistic research, this enquiry's contribution interrogates and renegotiates what subjectivity might be in a posthuman context, in which psychological and systemic borders between all genders and indeed species are being deconstructed and readdressed. I seek to reclaim the term subjectivity from patriarchal legacies in both the context of

1. Refer to Figure 1 and Figure 2

my artistic practice and the broader socio-political and ecological landscapes of the 21st Century. Thus, this research works to agitate and decentre notions of the female subject through a deconstruction and reconstitution of on-site matter, as an active reclamation, through the establishment of the Reclamation Ground sequence.

In this enquiry, sites are physically encountered, experiences are documented, and digitised material is 'extracted' before the generation of site-responsive artworks translate my physical and embodied experiences. This agitation of physical, visual and conceptual material proposes a radical reshaping in which engrained, subjugating power dynamics are materially and representationally destabilised through Reclamation Grounds. Thus, this research enquiry is about becoming and transforming notions of the gendered subject through artistic practice, examining the unexplored potential that 'female subjectivity' might hold in a posthuman, contemporary context through testing methods of reclamation. Through the resulting artworks of the Reclamation Ground sequence, I will analyse manifesting subjectivities as a critical contribution to debates on gendered subjectivity.

1.2 Autoethnographic Material

As Reclamation Ground is situated in relation to my subjective experiences on site, this research enquiry draws on embodied, autoethnographic principles. The enquiry begins at the site of my own body, which is contextualised by the post-industrial landscapes of Northern England where I live and work. This enquiry includes research, practice and storytelling methods that "connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political",² in a way that seeks to make sense of, and challenge, assumptions around female subjectivity; how it is constructed and how it is situated in sociopolitical and cultural landscapes. It explores the messy, material interplay between culture and nature, deconstructing gendered categorisations and constructions of identity through a

2. C. Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA, AltaMira Press, 2004, p.xix

physical, embodied exploration of the geological, social, political and biological sites selected. Through materially led agitations onsite I generate insight in relation to my own body politic, investigating associated experiences through the artworks produced as part of the Reclamation Ground sequence. These autoethnographic principles allude to the broader social issues from which they have originated, so that the ground reclaimed transcends the 'local environments of the individual'³ and explores what is at stake culturally, socially and psychologically. Thus, this thesis is an inclusive enquiry that seeks to contribute to a multiverse of gendered experience, through a prodding-at what it means to be a gendered posthuman material subject.

1.3 Posthuman Context of the Study

Posthumanism is an important feminist context in this enquiry, as a theoretical framework that actively de-categorises patriarchal essentialist hierarchies. It interrogates a cultural condition in which the intersections of technology, environmental issues, and social changes are transforming the very concept of humanity and its relationship to the more-than-human world. The term is associated with the philosophical approach of critical posthumanism, which questions anthropocentrism and instead suggests a more interconnected view of life and systems.⁴ Posthumanism therefore challenges traditional human-centred attitudes prevalent in the Global North, emphasizing the material interrelations that exist between all organisms and complex systems, and instead treats the human "as an assemblage, co-evolving with other forms of life, enmeshed with the environment and technology."⁵ Critical feminist post-anthropocentric reflections on essentialist, Eurocentric conceptions of history and progress are in effect breaking open humanist-centred hierarchies and revealing a plurality of histories and

3. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1959, cited in K. Woodward, 'Auto-Ethnography' in J. Fulton and C. Costley, *Methodologies for Practice Research: Approaches for Professional Doctorates*, London, Sage Publications Ltd, 2018, p. 138

4. P.K. Nayar, *Posthumanism*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2014, pp.1-5

5. P.K. Nayar, *Posthumanism*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2014, p.13

realities.⁶ For posthuman feminists, this destabilising approach focuses on “power relationships that shape words and worlds.”⁷ This is rich, fascinating ground upon which to situate an act of reclamation. This critical interrogation of gendered subjectivity, situated within a posthumanist feminist context, works to destabilise, deconstruct and reconstitute traditional human-centred attitudes through this posthuman framework.

1.4 Technological Context of Study

Disentangling my subjectivity from internalised, culturally constructed notions of ‘female’ will be explored through materially *thinking-through*⁸ artistic methods and embodied experiences on site through technological media. Employing practice-based methods, I ask if technological mechanisms can record, deconstruct and reform subjective experience through pixels, as a translation of geo-political matter. I seek to explore my posthuman relation to technology, so that a machine is perhaps regarded as not just a medium or tool, but as an active posthuman, technological agent in the enquiry. Thus, digital image-making processes and software is a key part of this investigation, as photography, 3D modelling and moving image technologies are utilised in a way that potentially contributes to female agency through a method of deconstruction and reconstitution. In a human-centred society, technology “reflects the society that produces it, including its power structures and prejudices”.⁹ I ask if technology can be worked with agentially in the process of materialising a Reclamation Ground sequence. What tensions might arise through this dynamic? How might an artistic strategy for working with digital image-making technology, in combination with autoethnographic material, be used to offer agential methods for rematerializing posthuman female subjectivities?

6. S. Alaimo and S. Hekman, *Material Feminisms*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2008, pp.1-17

7. C. Åsberg, ‘Feminist Posthumanities’ in R. Braidotti and M. Hlavajova, *Posthuman Glossary*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, p.157

8. P. Carter, *Material Thinking*, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 2004, p.13

9. L. Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, London, Verso, 2020, p.23

1.5 Aims and Objectives

This research enquiry interrogates Reclamation Ground as a site-responsive sequence through artistic practice. It questions how Reclamation Ground might critically examine what it means to reclaim gendered subjectivity, through encounters with site-based material and cultural properties, in combination with digital technologies. Practice-based processes and methods as Reclamation Ground constitute a transformative material reckoning, interrogating cultural constructs of subjectivity in relation to contemporary posthumanist, feminist and artistic debates.

Aims:

- 1. To critically examine, through a feminist site-responsive art practice, what it might mean to 'reclaim' gendered subjectivity.*
- 2. To explore in what ways artistic site-based strategies, processes and methods, in combination with digital technologies, might constitute a material reckoning.*
- 3. To critically examine how Reclamation Ground might contribute a transformative process significant for feminist art practices, engaging with sites and debates on subjectivity in a posthuman context.*

Objectives:

- 1. Examine site-based experiences through an autoethnographic methodology to test what it might mean to 'reclaim' female subjectivity.*
- 2. Respond to the cultural, historical, ecological and / or material histories of sites using digital technologies, experimenting with methods of material reckoning as part of the Reclamation Ground sequence.*
- 3. Exploring how the Reclamation Ground sequence might constitute*

a transformative process, through the methods, which contributes to posthumanist, feminist debates on subjectivity in a posthuman context.

Reclamation Ground as a sequence begins with autoethnographic, embodied encounters on and with site using the female artist's body. Using technology as part of a posthuman approach, experimental practice-led methods deconstruct sites and experiences that are then reconstituted in an exhibitionary context. The research tests whether current posthuman re-immersions with our environment have the potential to "move [us] beyond the horizon of the present" moment, through concepts that "can supply us with the provocation to think otherwise, to become otherwise."¹⁰ The significance of this research therefore encompasses my personal desire to 'become otherwise'; to reassemble the (pixelated) molecules¹¹ of matter (human and more-than-human) through the resulting agitations of the reclamation process I formulate.

Throughout this work, an awareness of the privileged dynamic of my position as a researcher is held, and I write through my own experiences as a female subject while not wishing to exclude or obscure others. The hegemonic cultural definition of woman is a narrow construct, and through this contribution I ask what else lies beyond these simplified patriarchal constructs. The boundary expanding work undertaken by LGBTQ+¹² communities and feminist black theory¹³ has created critical shifts away from outdated gendered and racialised dualisms towards a much more inclusive, hopeful and revolutionary approach to gender politics. This is the terrain I seek to interrogate through my own embodied, site-specific encounters with the more-than-human, through the Reclamation Ground sequence, contributing a critical examination of gendered subjectivities as part of

10. A. Neimanis and R. Loewen Walker, 'Weathering: Climate Change and the "Thick Time" of Transcorporeality' in *Hypatia*, vol.29, no.3, 2014, pp. 558-575

11. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 1987, pp.322-323

12. S. Faye, *The Trans-gender Issue: An Argument for Justice*, London, Penguin Books, 2021, pp. 224 - 261

13. K. Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Minneapolis, The University of Minnesota Press, 2018, pp.65-101

current intersectional feminist debates.

1.6 Chapter Outline

Chapter One introduces this site-responsive research enquiry, setting out the key contexts from which the Reclamation Ground sequence has developed.

Chapter Two outlines antecedent artworks and theoretical frameworks that situate the contribution of this enquiry, focusing on 20th Century and Contemporary practices that seek to agitate gendered patriarchal constructs through the materiality of site, the body and technology.

Chapter Three outlines the materialist, exhibitionary and autoethnographic methodological principles that ground this enquiry, and also outlines the four core methods that form an active base for Reclamation Ground, guiding the research through the act of physically encountering a site, the extraction, deconstruction and reconstitution of the material revealed, and the aggregation of that reconstituted material in a public context.

Chapter Four investigates the resulting formulations of the methods in response to three different sites; the Californian desert, the seaside hotel; and the regenerative quarry.

Chapter Five discusses insights that have manifested through the research process, including the significance of the technological agent and feminist critique of the word subjectivity.

Chapter Six concludes the research, setting out the contribution discovered through the practice-based research enquiry.

Chapter Two: Locating Site-Based Subjectivity in Historical and Contemporary Precedents

Introduction

This chapter outlines antecedent artworks and research that situate the contribution of this enquiry within posthumanist and feminist theory in relation to female subjectivity, 20th Century feminist artworks, Land Art movement works, contemporary feminist digital art practices dealing with subjectivity and site-based practices. Feminist and ecological artworks from the latter half of the 20th Century have recently been recontextualized in a variety of institutional shows, such as *The Botanical Mind* at the Camden Art Centre,¹⁴ *Radical Landscapes* at Tate Liverpool,¹⁵ *Re/Sisters: A Lens on Gender and Ecology* at The Barbican¹⁶ and *Women in Revolt: Art and Activism in the UK 1970-1990* at Tate Britain,¹⁷ to name just a few. The renewed interest in these feminist art movements and artworks is perhaps partly the result of the #MeToo social movement that, particularly in 2017, changed the landscape of mainstream feminism for some and rocked social norms in a way that ultimately enabled more victims of sexual abuse, harassment and violence to speak openly for the first time and - in some cases - be heard.¹⁸ This, combined with the very real effects of climate change, and the significant technological advances impacting the way that we engage with the world, provides a lens through which to recalibrate the reading and importance of these avant-garde artists. The recontextualization of the relationship between interconnected and problematic women/nature, male/female and culture/nature binaries have been a reoccurring theme for female artists for several decades, providing a rich canon. Ana Mendieta, Francesca Woodman, Laura Aguilar, Barbara Kruger and VALIE EXPORT are just a handful of examples of female artists who sought to challenge and complicate these reductive dichotomies through the language

14. *The Botanical Mind*, Camden Art Centre, 29 September 2020 - 28 February 2021

15. *Radical Landscapes*, Tate Liverpool, 5 May – 4 September 2022

16. *RE/SISTERS: A Lens on Gender and Ecology*, The Barbican, 5 October 2023 - 14 January 2024

17. *Women in Revolt: Art and Activism in the UK 1970-1990*, Tate Britain, 8 November 2023 – 7 April 2024

18. A. Tambe, 'Reckoning with the Silences of #MeToo', *Feminist studies* 44.1, 2018, pp.197-203

of photography, performance and moving image. Positioning the human as the centralised subject, these artists document female bodies (often their own bodies) in a variety of interactions with natural landscapes.

In Barbara Kruger's *Untitled (We won't play nature to your culture)* (1983)¹⁹ for example, nature (represented by two carefully picked leaves) is positioned precariously over the supine female subject's eyes in a manner that obscures her vision. The text 'We won't play nature to your culture' politicizes the image, rejecting the binary in which women are deemed synonymous with nature.²⁰ Stacy Alaimo tells us that "philosophers and theologians from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries expanded nature's domain to engulf "woman" herself", thus constituting woman as 'woman', that is, as a completely sexed being" naturally determined for reproductive labour.²¹ Engulfing *othered* bodies, human and non-human, living and non-living, into the machine of nature-as-resource continues to systemically marginalise and segregate communities and populations in support of these well-practiced colonialist and economic ideologies.²² When I look at Kruger's image through a contemporary lens, I find myself wondering if the 'we' in the written statement refers to just women, or both women and nature, as represented in the frame. Is Kruger standing-with nature through this artwork, or rejecting it entirely as part of her opposition? Is nature being redefined here as an ally to women, rather than a construct that has traditionally mired women's positionality and thrust her gender "outside the domain of human subjectivity, rationality, and agency"?²³

19. Refer to Figure 3

20. A. Pardo, 'Reweaving the Web of Womanist Ecopolitics' in A. Pardo (ed) *RE/SISTERS: A Lens on Gender and Ecology*, London, Prestel Verlag in association with Barbican Art Gallery, 2023, p.15

21. S. Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting nature as Feminist Space*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2000, p.2

22. K. Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Minneapolis, The University of Minnesota Press, 2018. P.10

23. S. Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting nature as Feminist Space*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2000, p.2

Figure 3

Barbara Kruger
Untitled (We won't play nature to your culture), 1983
73 x 49 inches (185.42 x 124.46 cm)
photostat and red painted wood frame
Photo: Ron Amstutz
Note: Image removed due to copyright restrictions

This research enquiry explored the socio-historical framing of female subjectivity as synonymous with nature and in binary opposition to culture, providing a context for understanding women's subordination in many societies. Gendered characteristics, in which the term 'nature' is used to describe a collective group's supposedly inherent traits and features,²⁴ are appropriated, patriarchal, colonialist methods of cultural control that seek to blur the defined boundaries of what constitutes nature, enabling further potential for exploitation with a view to capitalist growth.²⁵ This is where notions of subjectivity fall short for the majority of people, as culture – nature's dynamic antithesis within the current structure - is defined through the classical ideal of man (white, wealthy and from the Global North) as "the measure of all things".²⁶ Biological determinism has been used against women since the scientific revolution of the Enlightenment Age,²⁷ and feminists have long critiqued this dominant civilisational model, specifically as one that has been used "by those with various paternalistic, patriarchal, racist, and class commitments to rationalise their various positions".²⁸ The use of the term 'nature' is complicated further in this context when brought into the environmental realm to describe more-than-human living matter constituting the 'natural' world. Putting woman in the category of nature separates her from the modes of culture that have, traditionally, defined what nature is, and as a result she has over the centuries become subsumed within the highly maintained undergrowth of the constructed pastoral landscape. Thus, the engrained construction of the term nature converges "at the site of woman, fixing her in a vortex of circular arguments: woman is closer to nature and is thus inferior; woman is inferior because nature has made her so".²⁹

24. S. Alaimo, 'Nature' in L. Disch and M. Hawksworth (Eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p.330

25. S. Alaimo, 'Nature' in L. Disch and M. Hawksworth (Eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p.330

26. R. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2013, p.13

27. V. Plumwood, 'Feminism and Ecofeminism' in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, London, U.K.: Routledge, 1993, pp. 19-23

28. E. Grosz, 'Darwin and Feminism: Preliminary Investigations for a Possible Alliance' in S. Alaimo and S. Hekman, *Material Feminisms*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2008, pp.23-24

29. S. Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting nature as Feminist Space*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2000, p.3

Yet 'Nature', defined as the natural "phenomena of the physical world",³⁰ has been depleted and exploited by extractive capitalism to the point of collapse.³¹ In fact, through its continual misuse, we have now entered the postnatural era,³² in which "our prolific and continued use of fossil fuels has altered the earth's atmosphere, fertilizers and pollutants have changed the nutrient balance of waterways, plastics are clogging up our oceans and bodies, and agriculture is depleting the health of the soils."³³ 'Nature' is facing mass ecocides, mass extinctions and postnatural disasters. It seems that we are living in a time where 'nature' isn't natural at all; compromised by human activity.³⁴ Thus, as hierarchies of 'nature' are being disrupted through both the postnatural and posthumanist frameworks outlined, this research enquiry questions whether the deeply engrained nature / culture constructed binary is undermined enough to present new opportunities for a deconstruction and reconstitution of what is deemed to be 'nature'; thus generating new practice-based insights that enable a reclamation of female subjectivity. The postnatural is "not exception but condition: every site is already hybrid, already mediated", already tainted by human activities.³⁵ Although bleak, this is rich terrain in which to explore a Reclamation Ground sequence, specifically as in recent years - in the context of climatic breakdowns and political turbulence - there is a renewed movement to renegotiate the positionality of the human subject through an assisted agitation of the term nature.

30. Oxford English Dictionary, 'Nature', *The Oxford English Dictionary* (website), https://www.oed.com/dictionary/nature_n?tab=meaning_and_use#34906657 (accessed on 23rd August 2024)

31. D. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, USA, Duke University Press, 2016. pp. 47 - 51

32. B. McKibben, 'PostNatural' in *Aperture*, vol. 150; Art and Architecture Archive, 1998, p.5

33. V. Lucas, 'PostNatures' (Exhibition Text) in *PostNatures*, Sheffield, Graves Gallery, 2023

34. T. Morton, *Being Ecological*, 4th edn, UK, Pelican Books, 2018, pp. 26 - 27

35. Landezine: Landscape Architecture Platform, 'PostNatural', *Landezine*, Ljubljana, Slovenia, <https://landezine.com/topics/concepts-theories/postnatural/> (accessed 2nd December 2025)

Posthumanism and New Materialism are theoretical frameworks that seek to substantively redefine our understanding of the 'phenomena of the physical world' in a way that de-categorises essentialist biological, geological and synthetic material hierarchies. Posthumanism critiques what the human subject is and can be beyond limiting humanist and anthropocentric constructs, as a convergence of scientific, technological, and social shifts unfold in our contemporary context. Rosi Braidotti for example theorises posthuman subjectivity as embodied and embedded, multifaceted and "rhizomatic",³⁶ or indeterminate and anti-essentialist, catalysed by technology and humans' relationship with the environment.³⁷ Braidotti's definition of subjectivity, as "both post-personal and pre-individual, relational and hence in constant negotiation with multiple others and immersed in the conditions that it is trying to understand and modify, if not overturn",³⁸ is an invitation to test how a new structure might be formulated through reclamation as an active process. As an embedded, embodied subject working with technology and the materiality of site, and in the context of environmental destruction, Braidotti's definition of subjectivity reveals a theoretical principle through which to deconstruct and reconstitute my own subjectivity using artistic methods.

Autoethnographic principles therefore extend outward rhizomatically as the enquiry develops,³⁹ revealing the relational dependence I have on multiple posthuman agents that challenge the traditional view of agency as exclusive to humans. Posthuman agents therefore recognize a distributed agency, where the ability to act is shared between human and more-than-human agents - including technologies - within a complex "assemblage".⁴⁰ This context considers the

36. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 1987. pp. 1-27

37. R. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2013. pp. 186-190

38. R. Braidotti, *Posthuman knowledge*, Polity press, Cambridge, 2019, pp.42-43

39. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 1987, pp.12 - 13

40. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 1987, p. 357

interconnected and co-constituted nature of both human and more-than-human elements in shaping events and actions. My methods of deconstructing the materiality of site, through technological processes and embodied experiences with post-industrial and post-institutional landscapes, draw on what I understand to be 'nature' to learn about subjectivity as part of an organic network of permeating bodies that potentially make up a whole *in-flux*. Reclamation Ground agitates notions of subjectivity using an imaginative approach to thinking through the connectivity of subjects, forming a creative strategy that can psychologically, metaphorically and conceptually re-entangle notions of 'selfhood' in the works developed as Reclamation Ground. Denise Ferreira da Silva asserts that, "released from the grip of certainty, the imagination may wonder about reassembling the fundamental components of everything to refigure the World as a complex whole without order."⁴¹ This assertion excites me, and aligns with Rosi Braidotti's invitation for creative minds to "enlist... the imagination to the crucial task of inventing new figurations and new ways of representing the complex subjects we have become".⁴² I aim to test the structural relational capacity of subjectivity, not necessarily with an intent on finding conclusive definitions, but as an exploration of entangled and fluid modes of being that is situated in posthumanist thinking and what those inflections might mean for a reclaimed female subjectivity.

This enquiry explores a materialist, embodied and relational female subjectivity in response to geo-political sites to test critical posthumanism through artistic practice in a postnatural world. New Materialist feminisms are what Iris Van der Tuin broadly defines as "the non-dualistic study of the world within, beside and among us, the world that precedes, includes, and exceeds us".⁴³ Intertwined with posthuman theory, Material Feminism is a theoretical approach that

41. D. Ferreira da Silva, 'On Difference without Separability' in Volz, J. and Rebouças, J. (eds.) *32nd Bienal de São Paulo – Incerteza Viva*, São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo Catalogue, 2016, pp. 57-65

42. R. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2013, p.193

43. I. van der Tuin, 'Neo/New Materialism' in R. Braidotti and M. Hlavajova, *Posthuman Glossary*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. p. 277

reconceptualizes feminist thought by focusing on the active role of matter, the body, and the more-than-human environment. With this research I ask what technology can bring to these entwined theoretical concepts (postnatural, posthumanism and material feminisms) through site-responsive practice, as a sequence that enables a material deconstruction and reconstitution through the pixelation of the physical world. What does the pixelation of geo-political matter enable, when deconstructed, reconstituted and aggregated into another form? What impact does this subversion have on the translation of material encounters, and how does the digital form effect the reading of site in relation to the embodied subject? How does this treatment of site effect how we understand the nature/ culture dichotomy?

As a feminist approach to using technology, this enquiry draws on feminist critical discourses that challenge the socio-political constructs of technological developments. For example, cyberfeminism is a broad term for a feminist approach to technology that first emerged in the 1990s, utilizing cyberculture and feminist ideas to “re-theorize gender, the body, and identities in relation to technology and power”.⁴⁴ Since the beginning of this research enquiry, there has been a variety of cyberfeminist manifestos and publications that explore the role of technology in ‘reprogramming’ systems of race, sexuality and gender through the virtual. For example, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* was published in 2018,⁴⁵ *Glitch Feminism* was published in 2020⁴⁶ and the consolidating *CyberFeminism Index* was published in 2023.⁴⁷ Xenofeminism is an anti-naturalist movement that sees technology as a tool for liberation, advocating for its use to move beyond the limitations of ‘natural’ gender towards a posthumanist future. Glitch feminism is a cultural movement that uses the language of digital errors as a tool for activism

44. ‘Cyberfeminism’, *Oxford Reference* [website], <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095655557>, (accessed 29 October 2025)

45. L. Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto*, London, Verso, 2018

46. L. Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, London, Verso, 2020

47. M. Seu, *CyberFeminism Index*, L.A., Inventory Press, 2023

and as a process of resisting oppressive, binary social systems. This enquiry finds ground within some of the reoccurring themes of these techno-critical movements, which explore how technology can be utilised to challenge entrenched inequalities. In this contribution, technology is co-opted and worked with to deconstruct and reaggregate notions of female subjectivity through Reclamation Ground. Crucially, I do this through the earthly material I physically encounter. Thus, this contribution to practice-based research sits in the space between the (new materialist) geographical, material, bodily and the (cyberfeminist) digital, virtual, immaterial; offering an enquiry that acts as a critical interface between material and virtual through creative practice. As a contribution it rejects the separation between nature/culture and mind/matter, as well as human/more-than-human, through the Reclamation Ground sequence developed. It also finds some common ground with ecofeminist perspectives, connecting the oppression of women with the degradation of the environment; both consequences of a patriarchal system.⁴⁸ Drawing upon aspects of posthumanist, new materialist, cyberfeminist and ecofeminist theory and practice, this contribution finds ground between these fields, drawing in nutrients and growing outwards, across and through these interrelated movements and themes.

2.1 Feminist Art Practice

Carol Hanisch, along with *Notes from the Second Year* editors Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, coined the phrase 'The Personal is Political' in 1970.⁴⁹ Referring to the politics of power relationships, this phrase encapsulates the 1970s and 1980s Feminist art movement that has recently gained so much recognition through big art museum retrospectives and surveys.⁵⁰ Suddenly in today's context,

48. V. Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, London, U.K, Routledge 1994. p.21

49. C. Hanisch. 'The Personal is Political', *University of Victoria* (online), <https://webhome.cs.uvic.ca/~mserra/AttachedFiles/PersonalPolitical.pdf> (accessed 12th June 2025)

50. The Feminist Duration Reading Group, 'What is Feminist About 'Feminist' Shows?', *Art Review*, 2023, <https://artreview.com/what-is-feminist-about-feminist-shows-women-in-revolt-tate-resisters-barbican-ridykeulous-nottingham/> (accessed 30th October 2025)

their personal *matters*. This spate of second-wave feminist exhibitions provides well overdue recognition for an intersectional generation of women artists and activists, highlighting their social relevance to ongoing contemporary inequalities and injustices. Yet, it is a personal that is half a century old, having been ignored and censored by major institutions at the time.⁵¹ Perhaps this distance is what makes these artworks and personal issues more palatable to a mainstream audience, or less threatening to the institutional frameworks that now hold them in high esteem.⁵² As pointed out in a 2023 article in *Art Review*, “Contemporary art is notorious for coopting forms of resistance after the event, fetishising past or distant struggles as ‘archival’”.⁵³ *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970-90*, first shown in Tate Britain in 2023, was a survey exhibition that highlighted female artists that had been “snubbed by the art world” in 20th Century Britain.⁵⁴ In her research while developing *Women in Revolt!*, Linsey Young asked each exhibiting artist why feminist art seemed to slow in the late 1980s. Many responses centred around “emotional and physical exhaustion” and “the difficulty of obtaining well-paid, relevant work”; a side effect of Thatcher’s deep cuts to arts funding nationwide and the “fiercely commercialised and commodified art market in the late 1980s”.⁵⁵ Significantly, this exhausted and effectively silenced feminist artworld was the one I entered in 2000 when I began my arts education.

51. S. Sherwin, “It starts with women getting angry’: the giant exhibition giving art’s feminist trailblazers their due’, *The Guardian*, London, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2023/nov/04/women-in-revolt-tate-britain-exhibition> (accessed 30th October 2025)

52. S. Sherwin, “It starts with women getting angry’: the giant exhibition giving art’s feminist trailblazers their due’, *The Guardian*, London, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2023/nov/04/women-in-revolt-tate-britain-exhibition> (accessed 30th October 2025)

53. The Feminist Duration Reading Group, ‘What is Feminist About ‘Feminist’ Shows?’, *Art Review*, 2023, <https://artreview.com/what-is-feminist-about-feminist-shows-women-in-revolt-tate-resisters-barbican-ridykeulous-nottingham/> (accessed 30th October 2025)

54. S. Sherwin, “It starts with women getting angry’: the giant exhibition giving art’s feminist trailblazers their due’, *The Guardian*, London, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2023/nov/04/women-in-revolt-tate-britain-exhibition> (accessed 30th October 2025)

55. L. Young. “The Personal is Political” in L. Young (Ed.) *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970-90*, 2023 p.27

While walking around the *Women in Revolt!* exhibition installed at The Whitworth in Manchester, my thoughts turned to my mother, and how she might feel walking around this exhibition had she still been alive. I wonder what conversations it would have initiated between us, what memories it would have triggered, what emotions it would have stirred. The *Women in Revolt!* exhibition included artworks that expressed what my mother and I could not have done at the time they were made. It encapsulated a sense of collectivity and solidarity to which we simply did not have access. Equal Pay, equal opportunities, women's domestic and maternal experiences and class oppression are some of the significant facets of struggle against the patriarchy that resonate through the research I now undertake.

Significantly, this socio-political exhibition opened in the same year as *Re/Sisters: A Lens on Gender and Ecology* exhibition, first shown at the Barbican in London in 2023. Less focused on direct socio-political activism, this ecopolitical, ecofeminist survey sought to draw together a web of systemic connections between the oppression of Othered human beings and the degradation of the planet,⁵⁶ which forms a significant theme in the artworks developed as part of this research enquiry. Works by Laura Aguilar, Francesca Woodman and Ana Mendieta were particularly captivating and important to revisit in this context. Bodies self-documented in place, their surroundings enveloping, reflecting, entangling, disguising and transforming their respective bodies as nature, as form, as landscape. Experiencing these bodily encounters with landscape also reminded me of VALIE EXPORT's *Body Configurations series* (1972-73), in which she moulds her body to the forms of institutional architecture and rural environments in a way that questions the patriarchal relationship between landscapes and women.

All of these works position the female body in the landscape and are pertinent to the construction of the Reclamation Ground sequence in this enquiry; in relation to the embodied encounters on site and later, how these engagements are then materially reckoned with in both the studio and gallery to test out new formulations

56. A. Pardo (Ed.) *RE/SISTERS: A Lens on Gender and Ecology*, London, Prestel Verlag, 2023. p.10



Figure 4

Laura Aguilar (1959-2018)
Nature Self-Portrait #1, 1996
Gelatin silver print
16 x 20 in.
© Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016.

of female subjectivity in the context of a climate crisis. It is relevant to also note that Ana Mendieta, Francesca Woodman and VALIE EXPORT were developing works at the same time as the Land Art movement in the United States. Site based interactions with nature is what connects all these practices, and yet these feminist works do not leave permanent traces of their presence in the landscape in comparison to many Earthworks and, specifically, explore site-based subjectivity. Many of these works are quiet, respectful, unassuming, sensuous. EXPORT's postproduction alterations reject this softness in the context of Land Art, cutting open and reconfiguring her environment with markers and paint in a manner akin to the act of bringing in the bulldozers.

Laura Aguilar 'becomes' the landscape in her photographic self-portraiture, carefully positioning herself within her environment.⁵⁷ Made in the 1990s in the rocky desert landscapes of the American Southwest, Aguilar presents us with a body that is defiantly non-conformist in relation to the unattainable beauty ideals that proliferated the media in this decade. In *Nature Self-Portrait #1* (1996) for example, the crevice in the rock beneath her prostrate body is continued in the crease across her lower back, resulting in a material relation to the natural world.⁵⁸ The artist in this image also denies the viewer her gaze, instead focusing on the shape and form of her body in relation to the surrounding environment that she carefully occupies. The curve of her arm and thigh follows the curve of the step that she occupies, her dark hair joining a shadow so that her body is almost absorbed, chameleon-like, into her surroundings. The landscape in turn becomes fleshy, the undulating rock with its irregular forms and bumpy texture become an expansion of Aguilar's horizontally positioned body. Is the human becoming landscape in this image, or is the landscape becoming human? There is a visual synthesis here that plays with the relational dynamics between Aguilar and the desert, and it is this dynamic that this contribution agitates further, using a process

57. Refer to Figure 4

58. A. Pardo (Ed.) *RE/SISTERS: A Lens on Gender and Ecology*, London, Prestel Verlag, 2023. p.208



Figure 5

Francesca Woodman
Untitled, c. 1972-75
Gelatin silver print
3 7/8 x 5 7/8 in. (9.843 x 14.923 cm)
© Woodman Family Foundation / DACS, London

of technological material reckoning to blur the boundaries of the body and with it the limitations of female subjectivity within contentious essentialist binaries.

Francesca Woodman's earlier work is similar in that she also photographs herself in relation to the natural landscape, entwining her body with natural props found on site as a form of camouflage.⁵⁹ For Woodman, this was a feminist strategy, as she seeks to become part of her surroundings through a series of fleeting yet memorialised gestures. Woodman's photographic work *Untitled, (c.1972-75)* is particularly striking because of how she positions herself in relation to the tree root that encloses her body, so that her naked form becomes situated between the organism's root system and the river water that sustains it. Her hand is placed on the root in a manner that suggests immanent movement, however it is unclear if she is attempting to pull herself loose or is drawing herself closer to the entanglement of woody matter. Thus, this is a slippery image, the body simultaneously emerging and becoming submerged. If she lets go of this tree root, will she disappear beneath it, pulled into the watery matter of the muddy riverbank and beyond? Or is she in a process of pulling herself out of the gap, born into the world from the unknown depths below?

In the background, we see a graveyard, where other bodily transformations are taking place just below the earth's surface. Thus, we might read this image as a bodily transformation in, with and as part of nature, whilst also picturing a tussle - a pulling away from - the cultural reading that the naked female body might conjure in a patriarchal context. With this image, we can see a subversion of the female body in direct relation to the transformative entanglements of nature, read through a posthumanist, new materialist, feminist lens. With this research enquiry, I ask how 21st Century technology might be worked with to disrupt traditional essentialist tropes that determine universalist female subjectivity while at the same time, re-immersing the body within the natural, material, biological



Figure 6

Ana Mendieta

Tree of Life, 1976

Color photograph

Photo: 20 x 13 1/4 in. (50.8 x 33.7 cm)

© The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC. Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / DACS / Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery.

entanglements through earthly encounters. Thus, the cultural reading of the sites I physically experience become central and specific to the conceptual and material reckoning of an 'embedded and embodied' female subjectivity that ensues using technology, as part of Reclamation Ground. Donna Haraway uses "becoming-with" to emphasize the interconnectedness and co-creation in all relationships, not just between humans but between all living and non-living things.⁶⁰ In this enquiry, technology takes an active role, enabling a transformation through a becoming-with both the technology and the landscapes encountered.

Ana Mendieta's earth-body sculptures are documented as a series of postures, with and through the selected landscapes, which combine "ritual with metaphors of life, death, rebirth and spiritual transformation".⁶¹ In *Árbol de la Vida* (1976) for example,⁶² mud is smeared across the skin until Mendieta is visually consumed by the landscape. There is a process of disguising the female form and what it represents here, working with a thick, earthly substance to erase the objectified female form from view. What we are left with is *the matter*, connecting the materiality of the body and the land together as the same earthbound tissue. Yet the female body continues to act as a signifier, and although these works begin to move the viewer beyond the body, beyond the flesh, in a way that disrupts their respective politically charged positionalities, for me the patriarchal tropes attached to the female form undermine this image. This rich complexity is where this research enquiry begins, as I develop representations of the female form that act as a severing from this pattern using digital distortion, storytelling and the voice. Taking control of my image and agency as the artist, as a way of negotiating female subjectivity in response to site, is where this contribution expands the rich concepts found in these early works.

60. D. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008. pp.16 -17

61. A. Pardo (Ed.) *RE/SISTERS: A Lens on Gender and Ecology*, London, Prestel Verlag, 2023. p.200

62. Refer to Figure 6



Figure 7

VALIE EXPORT

Konfiguration in Dünenlandschaft, 1974

Configuration in Dune Landscape

© 2025 VALIE EXPORT / DACS

Courtesy the artist and Thaddaeus Ropac gallery, London, Paris, Salzburg, Milan, Seoul.

VALIE EXPORT, fully clothed and with an awkwardness that activates the surrounding landscape, visually externalises inner states through her interactions with buildings, surfaces and living matter.⁶³ These active poses, such as in *Konfiguration in Dünenlandschaft* (1974),⁶⁴ mimic surrounding shapes in a manner that suggests a pushing and pulling between fitting in to a landscape that has, historically, not been conceptualised for women; reclaiming it through a non-conformist act that disrupts our understanding of the site entirely. EXPORT also works in to these images through postproduction, punctuating the points of interaction with lines and colours that are playfully aggressive in their desire to amplify the psychological dislocation between the 'Othered' body and patriarchal space. In *Konfiguration in Dünenlandschaft* (1974) we are provided with a thick black line that perhaps is the shape that EXPORT is trying to recreate with her body. The line follows the shape of a thicket situated directly behind her, yet it also evokes the shape of a sand dune, which is how this landscape is described in her title. There is a physical adaptation to her surroundings taking place here as well as an incorporation of the visible (and invisible) shapes through her pose. EXPORT's reference to inner states, to the psychological impacts that patriarchal contexts have upon female subjectivity, is a theme that is explored through this contribution, using an autoethnographic methodology to test out these complexities in direct response to selected sites and their specific cultural qualities.

These works form important antecedents for this research enquiry. They seek to agitate readings of female subjectivity in the context of what is deemed 'natural', within a nature/culture dichotomy, which in today's postnatural context is more relevant than ever. In this contribution, I take control of my body and with it my agency as a posthuman female subject, in response to sites and the specific cultural framing that forms part of their reading. I investigate a slippery, embedded, embodied and entangled subjectivity through the Reclamation Ground sequence,

63. W. Moser (Ed.), *VALIE EXPORT*, Italy, Prestel, 2023. p. 214

64. Refer to Figure 7

leading to new formulations of becoming-with the postnatural that transforms and reclaims gendered subjectivity.

2.2 Robert Smithson

As a context to Reclamation Ground as a site-response sequence, it seems important to revisit aspects of the 1960s / 1970s Land Art movement; specifically Robert Smithson's Site / Nonsite series.⁶⁵ Site-responsive art practice is a term that defined the Land Art genre, describing a dialectical relationship between artist and site.⁶⁶ Site visits are essential to the development and testing of artworks in this enquiry, as are the gallery contexts in which Reclamation Ground is presented to the public. Robert Smithson is significant to this research enquiry, as a Land Artist who works with a different set of relations to site and gallery as context. His practice focuses on the disturbance and reorientation of the relations between culture and nature, as part of a wider conceptual art movement that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. Using machine technology, Smithson altered, distorted, extracted and repositioned post-industrial (postnatural) landscapes. Unlike the careful performative works of Mendieta, Woodman, EXPORT and Aguilar, in which they situate their bodies in the matter of the 'natural' scenes captured, Smithson used mechanical earth-moving construction technology to make artworks in response to compromised, post-industrial landscapes. Crucially to this research enquiry, Smithson reformulates those encounters in a gallery context as Nonsite, which refers to a series of works that are three-dimensional, indoor sculptures made of materials collected from a specific geological or industrial site; presented alongside maps and photographs of that site as a virtual reference.⁶⁷ Through

65. R. Smithson, 'A provisional Theory of Nonsites', *Holt Smithson Foundation* (website), 1968, <https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/provisional-theory-nonsites>, (accessed 2nd October 2024).

66. M. Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 2002. P.11

67. P. Cummings, 'Oral History Interview with Robert Smithson conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art in 1972', *Holt Smithson Foundation* [website], <https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/oral-history-interview-robert-smithson-conducted-paul-cummings-archives-american-art-1972> (accessed 31/10/25)



Figure 8

Robert Smithson

A Nonsite (Franklin, New Jersey) (1968)

Painted wooden bins, limestone, gelatin silver prints, and typescript on paper with graphite and transfer letters, and mounted on mat board

Bins installed: $16\frac{1}{2} \times 82\frac{1}{4} \times 103$ in. ($41.9 \times 208.9 \times 261.6$ cm);

framed: $40\frac{3}{4} \times 30\frac{3}{4} \times 1$ in. ($103.5 \times 78.1 \times 2.5$ cm);

sheet: $39\frac{7}{8} \times 29\frac{7}{8}$ in. (101.3×75.9 cm)

Collection: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

© Holt/Smithson Foundation / Licensed by Artists Rights Society, New York

his Site / Nonsite series, such as in *A Nonsite (Franklin, New Jersey)* (1968),⁶⁸ Robert Smithson explores what it means to be a part of the landscape and its processes; through these physical acts in the land and through its geological and material extraction. In this sense the work he produced informs the development of the Reclamation Ground sequence in this enquiry, as I unravel and entangle representation and reality in a way that agitates the understanding and communication of subjective encounters with the materiality of site. Through his site visits to disused quarries and mining areas, Smithson constructed artworks that sought to translate and reconstitute sites as artworks, using displaced geological matter and representation in a gallery context. There is something between the site and what he termed nonsite here that is potentially generative, in relation to the establishment of Reclamation Ground, which I examine through the practice via an exhibitionary methodology. With this research, I will recontextualise Smithson's artistic practice through the lens of feminism, posthumanism and new materialism, specifically as a rich counterpoint for exploring site-responsive art practice as a form of reclamation.

Robert Smithson's Site / Nonsite series explores the relationship between a specific outdoor physical location and its abstract representation within a gallery or museum setting. Smithson defined Site as "the physical, raw reality - the earth or the ground that we are really not aware of when we are in an interior room."⁶⁹ Site is a place that offers possibilities for discovery without borders. It is the wild reality that mirrors the slippery substance of thought.⁷⁰ Site here is perhaps the encounter and experience of a chaos that is limitless and outside of the artist's control. There is something here about what happens to a site when it is no longer maintained by humans – the magical unravelling of material order and function that happens in the post-industrial, post-institutional or simply abandoned sites encountered

68. Refer to Figure 8

69. R. Smithson, 'Earth', 1969, in J. Flam (ed.) *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, CA, University of California Press, 1996, p. 178.

70. R. Smithson, 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects', 1968, in J. Flam (ed.) *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, CA, University of California Press, 1996, p. 100

that result in a blurring between binary notions of nature and culture. Nature (in the form of flora and fauna) encroaches, reclaims and reinhabits these postnatural landscapes. Materials break down, crumble, fall apart. In contrast, Smithson describes Nonsite as an “abstract container”;⁷¹ a transference of geological and aggregated fragments indoors that then generates a dialectical rhythm between the complex strata of the earth and the gallery, which Smithson positioned as a spatial “submission to the neutral.”⁷² Through a process of assemblage, Smithson’s Nonsites create an imaginary anchor to site as a geographical, ever-transforming expanse, creating an opening in the viewer’s awareness to what exists beyond the gallery or studio. Thus, the art object is symbolically enmeshed within the limitless entanglement of the world beyond the white walls of the gallery, and this is a form of agitation, as the chaos of the earth is brought into the highly controlled space of the gallery. My contribution builds on this notion of site as a constantly shifting entity, positioning gendered subjectivity as a similar situated network of continuous transformations that cannot be categorised, and that problematise the nature / culture dichotomy within a posthuman, postnatural context.

Through these critical reorganisations of extracted matter within a gallery context, Smithson initiates a process of mirroring and signposting, so that a construction of new meaning is built through these materially charged methods. It is this process of working in the landscape and finding ways to reconstitute it meaningfully, in a gallery context, that informs the methods of deconstruction and reconstitution that are the basis for my approach. The Reclamation Ground sequence of this enquiry generates a construction of new ground, visualised as new works exhibited in a gallery context. These parallels between my contribution and Smithson’s Site / Nonsite support an articulation of the Reclamation Ground sequence developed through the methods and processes undertaken. The next section of this chapter

71. R. Smithson, ‘Earth’, 1969, in J. Flam (ed.) *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, CA, University of California Press, 1996, p. 178.

72. R. Smithson, ‘Cultural Confinement’, 1972, in J. Flam (ed.) *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, CA, University of California Press, 1996, p. 154



Figure 9

Robert Smithson,
Nonsite "Line of Wreckage," Bayonne, New Jersey (1968)
Painted aluminum container with broken concrete,
framed map, and photo panels
Container: 59 x 70 x 12 1/2 in. (149.9 x 177.8 x 31.8 cm);
three panels: 3 3/4 x 49 in. (9.5 x 124.5 cm) each
Collection Milwaukee Art Museum
© Holt/Smithson Foundation / Licensed by Artists Rights Society,
New York

provides an analysis of Smithson's Site / Nonsite work entitled *Line of Wreckage, Bayonne New Jersey* (1968), to further contextualise the relevance Smithson holds for this posthumanist enquiry; in relation to the tensions generated through material engagements with site, and how these have been translated in an exhibitionary context.

2.3 Analysis of Line of Wreckage Bayonne, New Jersey (1968)

Smithson's nonsite *Line of Wreckage Bayonne, New Jersey* (1968)⁷³ includes a series of carefully composed colour photographs depicting a variety of broken concrete, asphalt and metal forms, a small map and a manufactured metal container holding a collection of concrete fragments. The photographs are a series of cropped visualisations, taken on-site, and are positioned in three horizontal strips on the wall of the gallery, situated below the sparse map plotting a 'fill-zone' situated in New Jersey, USA. They capture differing perspectives of a crumpled tangle of old roads, which have been ripped up and dumped on the site by construction workers as landfill. Much of the imagery is closely cropped, so that the viewer can imagine the proximity of the debris in relation to the body of the artist holding the camera in his hands. With these photographs, Smithson places himself in the landscape, the camera acting as a mechanical eye capturing the undulations of material that Smithson navigates directly with his bodily movements.

For me there is something deeply powerful about this series of photographs; each image acting as a square aperture that allows the viewer to peer in and look at the site as it was when Smithson occupied it. The body of the artist becomes important here in terms of positioning - visually absent but nevertheless central in terms of Smithson's embodied discourse with geology. We know that it was his hands that held the camera, his index finger that pressed the shutter, his movements that took him to each view of the folds of material documented and, perhaps, his muscles and bones that supported the weight of the concrete fragments as he loaded it

into the car to transport as Nonsite. It is important to consider the materiality of Smithson's body in the context of this research enquiry and his presence on site, specifically in contrast to the works of EXPORT, Aguilar, Woodman and Mendieta. Smithson is present in the work, but he is also visually absent. We see no pose, gesture or action and yet the images, maps and material presented in the gallery tell us that he was there, he was bodily and materially engaged with the landscape either directly or through the use of technology. Technology allows Smithson to be entangled with site yet not centralised as the subject; foregrounding and abstracting his encounter with site as the crux of the work without dominating the scene.

Analysing this work through a posthumanist, new materialist lens, what is also striking is the thought that the asphalt and concrete presented in different forms once comprised the lines of an old map... strips of nature-as-resource manipulated and then drawn on to the surface of the earth like graphite on paper. The materials we see are a former network of surfaces that have been traversed by vehicles powered by fossilised algae and plants. Asphalt can be obtained as residue from the distillation of petroleum, and so both the car and the road are fuelled and built using these material bodies. Concrete combines limestone, shells, and chalk or marl with shale, clay, slate, blast furnace slag, silica sand and iron ore. Even the photographic emulsion that made the existence of these images possible comprises the chemical element silver, and so we see through the matter-of-geological-time capturing geological-time-matter. These images pull the viewer on a virtual journey through the medium. I can almost feel the cold damp surfaces brushing my cheek as I slip in-between the debris and fall towards the centre of the earth. But falling is relational, as Hito Steyerl points out: "If there is nothing to fall toward, you may not even be aware that you're falling."⁷⁴ I am claiming here that these images make it possible to virtually access the entanglements of geological time, actualising an understanding of life on earth beyond the humanist

concept of the individual.⁷⁵ This is something I seek to interrogate through artistic practice, using 21st Century digital technology as opposed to Smithson's 20th Century film and industrial machines. My enquiry interrogates what can be claimed of subjectivity through material encounters on site, specifically when using technology to manifest a bodily presence in ways that are not literal; providing space for new ground and new subjectivities to emerge through these methods.

The physicality of *Nonsite "Line of Wreckage" Bayonne, New Jersey* (1968) brings the content - the aggregate - of the landscape encountered by Smithson into the real space of the gallery for the viewer, as the geological forms captured in the images on site by Smithson materialise as concrete in the gallery space. Fragments have been gathered from the site, transported to the studio and framed by a constructed painted aluminium container. Openings (absences) in this container expose the concrete fragments held in place, and these slits mirror the narrow dimensions of the photo panels on the wall. Each strip of rust-coloured metal is shallower in depth as the eye moves up across the surface of the object, suggesting a formal reference to perspective as if one is looking across a landscape toward the horizon. The map is a referential point of departure, a cartographic familiar subsequently undone by its photographic and sculptural counterparts. The images and the object take the viewer deeper, beyond the lines and place names, to the deep time of geological existence through their dynamic visual rendering and physicality. The work is a mirror image of site that reveals an unbreakable and constantly evolving enmeshment of creation and entropy within the Nonsite. Thus, the site is a spectre - an "actant"⁷⁶ - haunting the stillness of the gallery. There is something radical here that sits between the physical and virtual that effects the possibilities of deconstruction and reconstitution in this enquiry, through both the Reclamation Ground sequence and the resulting artworks' transformative qualities in the gallery space. Reclamation Ground is not

75. S. O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters: Deleuze and Guattari. Thought Beyond Representation*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2006, p.100

76. B. Latour, 'On actor-network theory' in in *Soziale Welt*, vol. 47 ,1996, pp. 369-381

just a representation of a site-based encounter; like this reading of Smithson, it is a sequence that generates transformational new ground that enables virtual manifestations of gendered subjectivity to evolve in to being through the methods developed. Site-responsive practice is used as a means of testing how subjectivity might be deconstructed and reconstituted as a reformulation in a posthuman context. This active questioning of female subjectivity through site-responsive artworks, as Reclamation Grounds, contributes to an examination of gendered subjectivity in response to geopolitics, landscape, technology and embodied, auto-ethnographic experience. Working with the materiality of ground, via the site, becomes a metaphorical container for working within the political space of reclamation, and what that might mean in a posthuman/material/cyber/ecofeminist context.

2.4 Cyberfeminism

Over the past three decades, Cyberfeminism has become an amorphous term that incorporates a variety of radical articulations and positions, as Mindy Seu has brilliantly established in her book *The Cyberfeminism Index*.⁷⁷ Seu states that the index, which continues to grow and develop in its online form, might reveal potential actions we can take to reclaim cyberspace “as a space for skepticism, growth and entanglement”,⁷⁸ which in a post-truth, postnatural, posthuman context is a vital counterpoint. Broadly defined as a feminist approach that explores the relationship between technology and gender across techno-critical theory, art practice and activism, cyberfeminism has been described by Julianne Pierce, co-writer of the seminal 1991 text *A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century*, as “a hex and incantation that summons up the dissident spirit of chaos and the transformative powers of language, systems, webs and performance.”⁷⁹ For example, Linda Dement’s *Cyberflesh GirlMonster* (1995) is a conglomerate of female body parts, scanned and animated as a “macabre comedy of monstrous

77. M. Seu (ed.), *Cyberfeminism Index*, Los Angeles, Inventory Press, 2022

78. M. Seu (ed.), *Cyberfeminism Index*, Los Angeles, Inventory Press, 2022, p.13

79. M. Seu (ed.), *Cyberfeminism Index*, Los Angeles, Inventory Press, 2022, p.8



Figure 10

Tabita Rezaire
Inner Fire: Pimp My Brain, 2017
Diasac print
170 x 100 cm
© Courtesy of Tabita Rezaire and Goodman Gallery

femininity, of revenge, desire and violence”.⁸⁰ This work subverts and gives agency to the female image born out of digital capitalism, such as the “cyberbabes and fembots” that proliferated science fiction genres of the 1980s.⁸¹ More recent works from the index include *Inner Fire: Pimp My Brain* (2017) by Tabita Rezaire,⁸² a digital image that “embodies an archetype of the black womxn” in relation to technology and capital in a way that transforms the power of this stereotype through imagery, text and performance.⁸³ Rezaire’s multi-agential hybrid, in which womxn, gecko and technology intersect, draws on the postnatural to imagine new ways of conceptualising the posthuman subject. Image-making technology is key to this enquiry, as a posthuman ‘relation’ that provides a virtual space for visually agitating and reformulating female subjectivity through auto-ethnographic reflection in a postnatural context. Technology is thus positioned as a potential transformative force, a position that is shared with many participants (artists, hackers, activists, academics) of the Cyberfeminist movement.

Radical movements such as Xenofeminism and Glitch Feminism fall under the fluid category of cyberfeminism, and both movements inform this research contribution. The Xenofeminist Manifesto rejects naturalism, working towards an abolition of gendered oppression through the posthumanist embrace of technology.⁸⁴ Yet naturalism, as the irreducibly cultural and symbolic discriminatory ordering of human beings through race, gender and class, is enmeshed with the ‘natural world’, depleted and postnatural as it may be, via its historical mediation. Without careful distinctions between “ecological and ideological conceptions of nature”,⁸⁵ the Xenofeminist rejection of naturalism is complex and potentially damaging

80. L. Dement, ‘Cyberflesh Girlmonster, 1995’, *Linda Dement*, <https://www.lindadement.com/cyberflesh-girlmonster.htm> (accessed 31st October 2025)

81. M. Seu (ed.), *Cyberfeminism Index*, Los Angeles, Inventory Press, 2022, p.11

82. Refer to Figure 10

83. T. Rezaire, ‘Tabita Rezaire: Exotic Trade, Goodman Gallery Johannesburg’, *Tabita Rezaire*, 2017, p.17, https://tabitarezaire.com/onewebmedia/EXOTICTRADE_TABITA%20REZAIRE.pdf (accessed 31st October 2025)

84. L. Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto*, London, Verso, 2018. p.15

85. K. Soper, ‘Nature/ ‘Nature’’, in *Futurenatural: Nature, Science, Culture*, Oxon, Routledge, 1996, pp.22 - 23

during times of ecological instability, as it also theoretically rejects ecological nature in favour of technological alienation and a universal matrix “assembled from the needs of every human, cutting across race, ability, economic standing and geographical position”.⁸⁶ Critiquing postmodernist theory in 1996, Kate Soper states “while the ecologist refers to a pre-discursive nature which is being wasted and polluted, postmodernist theory directs us to the ways in which relations to the non-human world are always historically mediated, and indeed ‘constructed’ through specific conceptions of human identity and difference.”⁸⁷ Similarly, Bogna M. Konior critiques Xenofeminism as a movement that “embraces the artificial and desires to drive a stake through the heart of ecofeminist affirmations of women as caring parental and environmental protectors.”⁸⁸ Xenofeminism then is a universalist, human-focused ideology that echoes the postmodern feminist position, placing culture (masculine) in opposition to nature (feminine) by rejecting the latter entirely; potentially perpetuating essentialism rather than deconstructing it and shifting the focus away from the need to formulate some sort of solidarity with the environment.

If we go back to Barbara Kruger’s artwork *We Won’t Play Nature to your Culture* (1983),⁸⁹ and the questions I raised in relation to whether the ‘we’ incorporates or excludes the ‘natural world’, we can perhaps map out the linearity of the Xenofeminist position through the work of Cultural Historian Stacy Alaimo. When Kruger in 1983 rejects the position of “playing nature”, she means to critique gender essentialism and how the signifier of *woman* has been aligned with nature, rather than culture.⁹⁰ Stacey Alaimo sees this work - in which the ‘we’ signifies a political movement for the emancipation of women, not nature - as one that

86. L. Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto*, London, Verso, 2018, p.13

87. K. Soper, ‘Nature/ ‘Nature’’, in *Futurenatural: Nature, Science, Culture*, Oxon, Routledge, 1996, pp.22

88. B.M. Konior, ‘Automate the Womb: Ecologies and Technologies of Reproduction. Helen Hester, *Xenofeminism* (Polity, 2018)’, *Parrhesia*, vol.31, 2019, p.233

89. Refer to Figure 3

90. S. Alaimo, ‘Nature’ in L. Disch, and M. Hawkesworth (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Oxford Handbooks, 2016, p.532

epitomises what she calls the “feminist flight from nature”:⁹¹

*“Kruger depicts an upside down woman’s face, lying on the ground, with leaves covering her eyes. The photo suggests that being associated with the earth has meant that women are linked to something mute, passive, lowly, even vulnerable—as the woman’s head looks like it is at risk of being stepped on. Significantly, the woman is displayed for the viewer, but she cannot, herself, see. The feminist caption, however, “We Won’t Play Nature to your Culture,” spoken by a politicized group, the “we,” refuses to assume the position of the object–like head. Refusing to “play nature,” has meant both the critique of gender essentialism and the critique of how woman has been aligned with nature, rather than culture”.*⁹²

By ideologically rejecting nature, Stacey Alaimo asserts that postmodern feminists such as Kruger are in effect separating themselves from the ‘natural’ world entirely (of which all humans are, on a biological, molecular level, a part).⁹³ The construct of the nature / culture binary is perhaps more visible than ever in a context in which there is no eco-system on this planet that hasn’t been affected by human activity. With this contribution I investigate whether, in this postnatural context, the mutable boundaries of ‘culture’ and ‘nature’ can be conceptually readdressed in a way that makes a dismantling and reclamation of gendered subjectivity from these outdated, essentialist categories possible, without forsaking what is left of the natural. I agree with the Xenofeminist statement that if ideological nature is unjust, we must change how we perceive and conceptualise nature.⁹⁴ And yet, I suggest with this contribution that there is value in learning through the complexities and histories of the nature/culture binary and its relation to female subjectivity, so that a transformation is entangled, inclusive and supportive of the more-than-human.

91. S. Alaimo, ‘Nature’ in L. Disch, and M. Hawkesworth (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Oxford Handbooks, 2016, p.531

92. S. Alaimo, ‘Nature’ in L. Disch, and M. Hawkesworth (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Oxford Handbooks, 2016, pp.531 - 532

93. S. Alaimo, ‘Nature’ in L. Disch, and M. Hawkesworth (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Oxford Handbooks, 2016, p.532

94. L. Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto*, London, Verso, 2018 p.93

In contrast to Xenofeminism, other contemporary artists are using technology to deconstruct and subvert the nature / culture binary,⁹⁵ to highlight and disrupt 'naturalist' depictions of female subjectivity without perpetuating this dualism. Amy Cutler's 2018 video work *All Her Beautiful Green Remains in Tears*⁹⁶ is a good example, as she re-edits footage from Walt Disney's *Nature's Half Acre* (1951),⁹⁷ a short 'nature' documentary film directed by James Algar and produced by Walt Disney. In a context that was reeling from unimaginable loss of life following the devastating effects of World War Two, this 1951 film is a thinly disguised call to action for women to embrace their 'natural' role as the 'homemaker'. Cutler's feminist reworking uses the same visual footage yet replaces the original paternal voiceover by Winston Hibler with a vocalised narrative generated by an Artificial Intelligence neural network, which "has learned its existence entirely from reading the female protagonist voice in 14 million passages of romance novels."⁹⁸ The AI neural network acts as an agent, separating out the human woman signifier from the 'natural' in order to disrupt and deconstruct *Nature's Half Acre's* problematic content.

In Cutler's video work, vocalised, gendered readings of nature collide, intersect and dissolve through time. Her posthumanist reworking draws upon and subverts the gendered intentions of the original film, inserting a 'female' protagonist's voice via the use of artificial intelligence in a way that collapses notions of female subjectivity into a fragmented and glitchy repositioning of nature in the 21st Century. Using a technology that has learned to read imagery through engaging with female protagonists across thousands of romance novels, the fast-paced, reactionary, descriptive narrative is peppered with moments of melancholic

95. For example Tabita Rezaire, Sin Wai Kin, Melanie Bonajo, Emily Hesse, Tai Shani

96. A. Cutler, 'All Her Beautiful Green Remains in Tears', *Dr. Amy Cutler // GeoHumanities & New Storytelling*, 2018, <https://amycutler.net/all-her-beautiful-green> (accessed 28/08/2024)

97. 'Nature's Half Acre' (online video). Director: James Algar, 1951, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooWb-prFOhE (accessed 28/08/2024)

98. A. Cutler, 'All Her Beautiful Green Remains in Tears', *Dr. Amy Cutler // GeoHumanities & New Storytelling*, 2018, <https://amycutler.net/all-her-beautiful-green> (accessed 28/08/2024)

reflection and poetic insights that begin to form a posthuman fragmentation of the nature documentary genre. The A.I agent, armed with data that is supposedly representative of romantic female experiences (read through the lens of literary fiction), visually analyses the imagery via this computer-generated voiceover. Generated sentences such as “I made a mental note of the ground and it was covered in goosebumps” and “I couldn’t help but think about what it would be like to have children, like a group of bees eating at an apple still on the tree” couples fragmented literary representations of female experience with the visual images of the film to provide a wholly different encounter of embodied womanhood, while prodding at the biological determinism present in *Nature’s Half Acre*.⁹⁹ What happens in this work is a repositioning of nature and humans’ relationship to it, in what can be read as a romantic outpouring by the technological agent towards the natural, spoken through literary constructions of female romance. This technologically derived interpretation forms a dislocation - a severing - of the human subject from these cultural tropes, via the posthuman narrative using technology, and this is an interesting counterpoint to my enquiry. In this contribution, I seek to explore the gendered tensions that arise when a material agitation of the nature/culture dualism takes place in response to postnatural sites, using the agential properties of technology. Working directly with the geophysical, materiality of site, rather than a filmic representation of it, will allow me to deconstruct and reconstitute tropes directly enmeshed with the postnatural sites I encounter, through a process of material reckoning.

99. A. Cutler, ‘All Her Beautiful Green Remains in Tears’, Dr. Amy Cutler // *GeoHumanities & New Storytelling*, 2018, <https://amycutler.net/all-her-beautiful-green> (accessed 28/08/2024)

2.5 Material Feminisms

Material Feminism is a movement that brings the materiality of the human body and the natural world into feminist theory and practice, specifically in response to postmodern feminism's retreat from the material in favour of the cultural, linguistic and discursive.¹⁰⁰ A branch of New Materialism, Material Feminism brings together thinkers and philosophers such as Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Karen Barad, Donna Haraway amongst many others.¹⁰¹ Materialism recognises that "our existence depends [...] on myriad micro-organisms and diverse higher species... as well as socioeconomic structures that produce and reproduce the conditions of our everyday life".¹⁰² This contribution foregrounds an earthly materialism, geographically encountered with technology, which deconstructs and reconstitutes the selected geo-political landscapes through embodied, embedded on-site encounters from a feminist perspective. Astrida Neimanis defines Material Feminisms as a framework for "thinking-with" matter to destabilise "anthropocentric and humanist ontological privilege".¹⁰³ There are crossovers here with Xenofeminism and ecofeminist practice in the context of posthumanism; Xenofeminism is a technomaterialist movement and ecofeminism is a movement grounded in embodiment and the environment. However, Material Feminisms move beyond the problematic essentialist Woman/Nature and Nature/Culture dialectics that stymie these movements; grounded in the field of social science and natural science to offer a meta-physical "return to matter".¹⁰⁴

100. S. Alaimo and S. Hekman, 'Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory', *Material Feminisms*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2008, pp.1-5

101. S. Alaimo and S. Hekman (Eds.), *Material Feminisms*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2008. pp.1-19

102. D. Coole and S. Frost, *New Materialisms :Ontology, Agency, Politics*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010, cited in M. Casselot, 'Ecofeminist Echoes in New Materialism?', *PhœnEx*, Vol.11, No.1, Spring/ Summer 2016, p.77

103. A. Neimanis, 'Material Feminisms' in R. Braidotti and M. Hlavajova, *Posthuman Glossary*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, p.242

104. M. Casselot, 'Ecofeminist Echoes in New Materialism?', *PhœnEx*, Vol.11, No.1, Spring/Summer 2016, p.73

There is a materiality to technology that I interrogate through this enquiry, specifically in relation to whether pixels can be molecular, granular, fluid. This digitised liquidity¹⁰⁵ of matter – on site and of the female body – seeks to deconstruct and reconstitute matter to reclaim notions of female subjectivity through the Reclamation Ground developed. Thus, the digital is materially significant in that it potentially enables a deconstruction of site without employing heavy machinery to extract earthly material. My methods and methodologies aim to *think-with* the physicality of specific sites using the *virtual-actual* potential of technology;¹⁰⁶ drawing on the fluidity of the sedimentary pixels I aim to deconstruct, reconstitute, reclaim and re-materialise as digital artworks. I draw here from Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy in which the virtual (language, memory, discourse) is considered a dimension of reality that is fully real but not possible, and the actual (earthly matter) is the observable world of formed bodies and lived experience that is continuously being produced by / through the virtual.¹⁰⁷ It is not a coincidence that the term ‘virtual’ is also used in the technological world to describe something that does not ‘physically’ exist but is “designed to perform the same function as a physical equivalent; that is a computerized or digitized simulation of something.”¹⁰⁸ What the virtual enables in this enquiry is a dislocation from the limitations of the real, as a process of finding something out, in a way that cannot be actualised in the material sites visited alone. Thus, the virtual offers a space to generate some sort of meaningful and materially grounded transformation.

In *The Question Concerning Technology*, Martin Heidegger states that “Technology is a way of revealing”.¹⁰⁹ More than a means-to-an-end (a tool), I see technology

105. E. Leslie, *Liquid Crystals: The Science and Art of a Fluid Form*, London, Reaktion Books, 2016, Ltd p.232

106. S. O’Sullivan, *Art Encounters: Deleuze and Guattari. Thought Beyond Representation*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2006, p.103

107. S. O’Sullivan, *Art Encounters: Deleuze and Guattari. Thought Beyond Representation*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2006, p.100

108. Oxford English Dictionary, ‘Virtual’, *The Oxford English Dictionary* (website), https://www.oed.com/dictionary/virtual_adj?tab=meaning_and_use (accessed on 28th August 2024)

109. M. Heidegger, ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ in D.M. Kaplan, *Readings in the Philosophy of Technology*, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC, 2009, p.12



Figure 11

Jan Hogan
Thinking with Rocks I (2021)
Lithograph on Paper
© 2025 Jan Hogan
Reproduced with the permission of the artist

as an agent in finding something out in this material, feminist context. Technology in this sense is posited as an agent that assists in the process of ‘becoming-with’ site; a process of revealing truths in relation to the nature-culture ontologies this research seeks to rupture. Material feminist Stacey Alaimo writes in favour of “thinking as the stuff... as a body that is part of the substantial interchanges, flows, and substances of the co-extensive world.”¹¹⁰ Thinking-as-stuff-of-the-world affirms that we are inherently entangled with multiple material agencies, flows and processes that “connects human bodies, animal bodies, ecosystems, technologies, and the wider world.”¹¹¹ Through an engagement with site, technology and I explore creative methods of embodiment together and in relation to the earthly material of post industry. Karen Barad’s term “intra-action” might also be useful here, a term that “signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies”.¹¹²

Thinking-through the material nature of the landscape using practice-based methods, to make sense of cultural, social, ecological and / or material histories of specific sites, can be traced through the work of artistic researcher Jan Hogan.¹¹³ Hogan considers place-based human / nonhuman entanglement through materially embedded and embodied methods of lithographic printing techniques.¹¹⁴ This is a practice-based response to Karen Barad’s argument that space, time, and matter are not pre-existing, independent entities in which events occur, but are mutually constituted and inseparably entangled in a dynamic, ongoing process of “intra-action”.¹¹⁵ In reference to the colonial histories of Hobart, Tasmania, the materiality of Hogan’s lithographic stone becomes an interface in describing the

110. S. Alaimo, ‘Thinking as the Stuff of the World’ in *O-Zone: A Journal of Object-Oriented Studies*, Issue 1: Object/Ecology, 2014, p.16-17

111. S. Alaimo, ‘Thinking as the Stuff of the World’ in *O-Zone: A Journal of Object-Oriented Studies*, Issue 1: Object/Ecology, 2014, p.16-17

112. K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Croydon, Duke University Press, 2007, p.33

113. See figure 11

114. J. Hogan, ‘Surfacing’ in *Lo squaderno*, Vol.13 (48), 2017, p.37

115. K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Croydon, Duke University Press, 2007, pp.179 - 182

constant becoming of the city:

*Two Hundred years of colonial settlement has violently pitted the surface of the valley, reconfiguring mountain and river structures through bridges, dams and dredging, overlaying previous systems and networks. To think through the meaning of the city's surfaces, the storied matter of 'flesh and stone' that comprise this place, I propose a creative and process driven concept of 'surfacing'" [...] "from my engagement in the artistic processes of printmaking where surfaces are altered, given meaning, and placed into cultural circulation. My experience, in particular with lithography, has assisted in conceiving, I would even suggest witnessing, matter itself as having agency with intention, purpose, and action."*¹¹⁶

Hogan considers the deep-time materiality of the lithography stone as an agential surface - or interface - that actively *reveals* the dialogue between "the earth, the stone, the atmosphere, the social and political pressure and the imagery developed by human intentions".¹¹⁷ Interestingly, Don Ihde states that, in relation to the interconnection between the "embodied being and environing world", it is "what happens in the interface" that is important.¹¹⁸ Situated at the interface, at Hogan's lithography stone for example, the creative act becomes a symbiotic partner in the process of encountering the wreckage of a site (Hobart's colonial past); working as part of the intra-active, stuff-of-the-world to make meaning out of matter. In relation to Ihde's claim, Donna Haraway posits that "technologies are not mediations, something in between us and another bit of the world. Rather, technologies are organs, full partners, in what Merleau-Ponty called "infoldings of the flesh."¹¹⁹ Through this embodied infolding, I would like to investigate whether

116. J. Hogan, 'Surfacing' in *Lo squaderno*, Vol.13 (48), 2017. p.37

117. J. Hogan, 'Surfacing' in *Lo squaderno*, Vol.13 (48), 2017. p.38

118. D. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p.249

119. D. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p.249

technology can be a materially active partner in the reconfiguration of site-based histories through a posthuman, material and embodied process of entanglement. Entanglements of subjects, over surface and through strata, might also generate a fluid process of materially thinking-through entrenched dualisms. The sites that we inhabit - cities, caves, quarries, deserts - provide a context through which to negotiate the materials we can creatively activate - ink, pixels, sound, paper, rock, mineral - and this becomes a mode in which to deconstruct and reconstitute matter and meaning. Artists engaged with new materialism are also implicated bodily in this process of entanglement, and thus it becomes an important frame when interrogating notions of belonging and subjectivity, specifically in relation to my own body on, with and in site. This speaks back to the artwork of Woodman, Aguiar, Mendieta, EXPORT and Smithson, in relation to how their material bodily presence forms an intra-active entanglement with the technologies, bearing witness to their respective approaches to earthly entanglements with site.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the instability of 'nature' as an ideological construct in a postnatural, posthuman context, revealing potential for what it might bring to discussions around female subjectivity in relation to site-responsive practice. It identifies antecedents in Land Art, Feminist practice and theory, establishing the context for this contribution in rich postfeminist, ecofeminist, cyberfeminist and material feminist territory. I have discussed the potentiality of technology in developing processes of material reckoning, in which matter is virtually deconstructed and reconstituted as part of the Reclamation Ground sequence. I have foregrounded a posthuman approach to subjectivity, as situated, embedded and embodied in relation to the sites I as the artist-researcher materially encounter and through the work of Kruger, Aguiar, Woodman, Mendieta, EXPORT, Smithson, Dement, Rezaire, Cutler and Hogan. I also question how the female body can be visualised post-literally, so that naturalised stereotypes can be reconfigured

through site-responsive art practice and through digital methods. Specific geo-cultural framings of sites encountered are also deconstructed and reconstituted as a part of the Reclamation Ground sequence, as matter becomes metaphor. The fluidity of matter and the disintegration of boundaries, through technology, have the potential to be liberating and generative; virtually, materially, theoretically and psychologically. Investigating what it means to be female, to be of the Earth, in amongst the ruins of capitalist progress in the Global North and in the context of an environmental crisis, is an action that is pertinent and critical. The next Chapter will introduce the research principles employed while undertaking this research enquiry.

Chapter Three: Reclamation Ground: Methodologies and Methods

Introduction

In this Chapter, I outline the practice-based research principles that enable this investigation. I build on the site-responsive materiality of antecedent Feminist and Land Art movements through these principles, contextualising the enquiry through a critical posthuman, feminist, postnatural lens using contemporary artistic methods to develop the Reclamation Ground sequence. Established materialist, exhibitionary and autoethnographic principles ground this enquiry. Active reclaiming methods are tested and made manifest through these methodologies, which I put to work via the practice to interrogate and complicate my experiences of female subjectivity. A loose cyclical structure incorporating four core methods has evolved and developed through the making processes tested, and findings from these earlier works inform the development of subsequent methods through artistic practice. Each core method therefore provides space in which to experiment with a variety of making processes, and these are developed directly in response to the sites selected. Therefore, this chapter also outlines the four core methods that form an active base for Reclamation Ground, guiding the research through the act of physically encountering a site, the extraction, deconstruction and reconstitution of the material revealed, and the aggregation of that reconstituted material in a public context.

3.1 Methodologies

The following three methodological principles have been informed by my contextual references and developed through early practice. Material thinking, exhibitionary practice and autoethnographic approaches are established principles in the field of practice-based research and run through all the research methods subsequently developed. In the sections below I will outline these established methodologies in addition to the four core methods that will initiate the research findings.

3.1.1 Methodology One: Material Thinking

Paul Carter's book *Material Thinking* forms an important methodology in this enquiry, which flows through and interconnects my proposed approach to the new materialist, posthuman feminist contexts explored. Indeed, this research enquiry is not about practice but *of* it, and Carter's focus on the process of making as research, rather than what a work of art might tell us from the outside-looking-in, is intrinsic to developing the Reclamation Ground sequence. Practice-based research principles deeply engage material thinking practices to formulate new insights through the malleability of matter; forming a relational and transformational dialogue between ideas and material.¹²⁰ Barbara Bolt states that "in the place of an instrumentalist understanding of our tools and material, [material] thinking suggests that in the artistic process, objects have agency and it is through the establishing conjunctions with other contributing elements in the art that humans are co-responsible for letting art emerge."¹²¹ Materially thinking through practice as a methodology is thus a strategy of becoming-with; of working through-and-in the "situated knowledges"¹²² of earthly matter that are central for "revising the world and refiguring a "different" politics of practice".¹²³ Donna Haraway's situated knowledges is a concept arguing that all knowledge is partial and shaped by the knower's specific context, rejecting the idea of a neutral or universal position. Instead, she proposes that knowledge must be situated and embodied, making the knower accountable for what they see. Situated knowledge therefore "demands a practice of positioning that is about carefully attending to power relations at play

120. P. Carter, *Material Thinking*, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 2004, pp.186-187

121. B. Bolt, 'Material Thinking and the Agency of Matter' in *Studies in Material Thinking*, Vol.1, No.1, 2007, <https://materialthinking.aut.ac.nz/papers/37.html> (accessed 1st December 2025)

122. D. Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, London, Free Association Books, 1991, pp.184-201

123. B. Bolt, 'Material Thinking and the Agency of Matter' in *Studies in Material Thinking*, Vol.1, No.1, 2007, <https://materialthinking.aut.ac.nz/papers/37.html> (accessed 1st December 2025)

in the processes of knowledge production”,¹²⁴ and material thinking, as practice-based research, mobilises the agency and situatedness of matter in the production of new knowledge.

The encounter with matter is imperative to the development of material thinking, or becoming-with, as a methodology. Material thinking enables artistic researchers engaged in this practice-based methodology to “demonstrate the great role works of art can play in the ethical project of *becoming oneself in a particular place*.”¹²⁵ Thus, the term ‘material’ is not limited to the artistic medium in this sense; it extends to all worldly matter in place (or on site) that the artist’s body uses and encounters in order to ‘think’ through and become-with as part of a practice-based research strategy. Rachel Jones asserts that “part of the ‘artistic work’ of becoming... lies in remaining open to the strange in its strangeness; being prepared to lose ourselves in the encounter; risking not knowing as the condition of possible transformation.”¹²⁶ Beginning with a not-knowing positionality opens possibilities for becoming-with through feminist material thinking, in the context of developing new practices that do not conform; ones that challenge, resist, revolt, repair and reclaim in opposition to dominant capitalist cultures.¹²⁷ This not-knowing then sits in radical opposition to the human-centred ‘knower’, which Haraway defines as a white, patriarchal, capitalist social construction central to the objectification of the world as resource.¹²⁸ Significantly, Haraway goes on to say that “Nature is only the raw material of culture, appropriated, preserved, enslaved, exalted, or otherwise made flexible for disposal by culture in the logic of

124. M. Rogowska-Stangret, ‘Situated Knowledges’, *New Materialism*, 2018, <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/s/situated-knowledges.html> (accessed 5th September 2024)

125. P. Carter, *Material Thinking*, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 2004, p.XII

126. R. Jones, ‘On the Value of Not Knowing: Wonder, Beginning Again and Letting Be’ in E. Fisher, and R. Fortnum, *On Not Knowing: How Artists Think*, London, Black Dog Publishing, 2013, pp.16-17

127. N. Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2019, p.102

128. D.J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, London, Free Association Books, 1991, p.198

capitalist colonialism”.¹²⁹ A material thinking methodology forms a political position in this sense, providing space to reimagine the complexities of the world through a process of reclamation with the more-than-human. This is a subversive, unruly and dissenting strategy, which seeks to break open normalised and traditional approaches to academic research. It is also a methodology that is intrinsically interrelated to the very context that this research seeks to reclaim; through the lens of material feminisms and its relation to cyberfeminist thought via the agential qualities of technology; and also through Smithson’s methods, as exemplified in his 1968 article ‘A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects’:

*The manifestation of technology are at times less “extensions” of man (Marshall McLuhan’s anthropomorphism), than they are aggregates of elements. Even the most advanced tools and machines are made of raw matter of the earth.*¹³⁰

Smithson in this quote gives agency to technology through its earthly components, opening a relational dialogue between the artist and his tools that reveals a process of material thinking and the natural raw materials as basis for technology. The elemental agency of these earthly machines contributes to a becoming-with, which Smithson evocatively demonstrates when he says “one’s mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brain waves undermine cliffs of thought, ideas decompose into stones of unknowing, and conceptual crystallisations break apart into deposits of gritty reason.”¹³¹ Smithson here presents a clear example of material thinking that “explores the irreducible heterogeneity of cultural identity, the always unfinished process of making and remaking ourselves through our symbolic forms.”¹³² Here, Smithson rejects Haraway’s knower, generating instead a “homology between matter and

129. D.J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, London, Free Association Books, 1991, p.198

130. R. Smithson, ‘A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects’, 1968, in J. Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, CA, University of California Press, 1996, pp. 100-101

131. R. Smithson, ‘A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects’, 1968, in J. Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, CA, University of California Press, 1996, p. 100

132. P. Carter, *Material Thinking*, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 2004, p.13

mind”; between the “qualities of the material” he worked with and his imaginative creativity as an artist.¹³³ In summary, material thinking is activated through this enquiry through the agential malleability of human and more-than-human matter, which is visualised using technology. Technology in this sense forms a posthuman collaborator that activates the sites encountered through a process of digitization and pixelation as material reckoning. Material thinking as a practice-based principle draws on situated knowledges through a site-responsive Reclamation Ground sequence, as I think-through and become-with living and non-living agents.

Post-industrial landscapes are abundant in the North of England, relics of the Industrial Revolution that transformed the landscape and then, subsequently, abandoned these industrial strategies in favour of the neoliberal offshoring of manufacturing around the time that I was born in the early 1980s.¹³⁴ Thus, Yorkshire and Lancashire, counties in which I live and work, demarcate a landmass that is defined by the forces of both extractive and neoliberalist capitalism. Mills, workshops and factories of the industrial revolution pepper the rolling hillsides, and cluster in cities, in various states of disrepair. A small number of these buildings are still used for their original purpose as part of a dying industry, but most feature as empty ruins, or have been repurposed as luxury apartments or retail hubs. These relics to industrial progress stand as monoliths in a landscape that has been depleted of natural resources for the betterment of a small percentage of human beings.¹³⁵ For me these post-industrial sites, along with the network of mines tunnelling deep underneath them, also represent localised ecocides, poor living standards, human rights violations and exploitative working conditions for communities that were simultaneously propped up by the

133. P. Carter, *Material Thinking*, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 2004, p.186

134. C. Browne-Amorim and M. Lynes, 'The Forgotten Land: A Look at Northern England', *The New Global Order, Rome*, The New Global Order, 2018, <https://thenewglobalorder.com/world-news/the-forgotten-land-a-look-at-northern-england/> (accessed 18/08/24)

135. M. Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, Portland, Oregon, Zero Books, 2009. pp.1-11

enslavement of people, and the exploitation of land and non-humans, across the globe.¹³⁶ It is also the context in which working-class culture has been increasingly vilified and devalued over the last four generations by the political elite.¹³⁷ Val Plumwood used the term “master model” in her ecofeminist philosophy to describe the “exclusion and domination of the sphere of nature by a white, largely male elite”, leading to interconnected systems of oppression against subordinate others.¹³⁸

I was born in West Yorkshire, and on a cultural level, Yorkshire is where I feel a deep sense of belonging. While the imperialist and colonialist history of the UK evokes a deep sense of shame for its political, social and economic actions over the centuries, as a Yorkshire woman I hold deep respect for my working-class ancestors in surviving against all odds. It is from this position that I have always set myself against the master model; as a woman, as a ‘northerner’, and as someone with a working-class background. My dissenting position is the cultural context that I navigate, and one that is inherently part of the impetus for the research I undertake. The materiality of industrial sites, loaded with meaning, comes from the ground upon which I walk. The sedimentary material that has been used to make the bricks of both my house and studio, for example, which were both built during the industrial revolution at the beginning of the 20th Century, has been extracted from the same hill upon which my house stands. Thus, the earth and rock that stabilises my dwelling makes up the very materiality of its form. Indeed, my daughter was born within its walls, her first cries absorbed into the clay that has continued to provide her with shelter, safety and warmth. It is this grounded existence, where I feel connected to the history and materiality of the landscape from which I am part, that offers ways in which I might test methods of slipping between the layers of matter to explore and test new formulations of

136. S. Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 2nd edn, Brooklyn, NY, Autonomedia, 2004. Pp. 61-131

137. O. Jones, *Chavs: The Demonisation of the Working Class*, 4th Edn, London, Verso Books, 2011. p.10

138. V. Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, London, U.K, Routledge 1994, pp. 22-23

what comprises my subjectivity. Each living and non-living fragment of these sites hold the potential for new material and conceptual entanglements to emerge, and the material thinking principles I employ seek to test this through immersive, experimental engagements and storytelling as Reclamation Grounds. Thus, I seek to bring my positionality, as a woman who has lived in amongst the post-industrial ruins of the North of England, assertively into the frame of the artistic research I undertake. I want to give voice to what I have until now been holding back in my practice, employing a feminist reclamation of gendered subjectivity on, with and in the sites I physically encounter.

3.1.2 Methodology Two: Autoethnographic Approaches

According to ethnographer Carolyn Ellis, autoethnography as a research methodology was developed in the 1970's as a solution to the "crisis of representation" prevalent in the human disciplines, such as anthropology, communication, gender and race studies, sociology and psychology.¹³⁹ Traditional scientific ethnographic practice was centred around the idea that the researcher "should separate the self from the research experience"¹⁴⁰ and become a neutral observer of the observed. In addition to concerns around the ethical implications and politics of this approach in representing others, specifically in the field of gender and race studies, there was also a recognition that these traditional ethnographic methods were limiting; leaving out "the particular, nuanced and complex elements of social life."¹⁴¹ Thus, autoethnographic methodologies challenge the essentialist goal of seeking "universal truths", through an acknowledgment of "the mess and chaos, uncertainty and emotion" that defines personal and cultural relations.¹⁴² Autoethnography is therefore "a self-narrative

139. T.E. Adams et al., *Autoethnography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.9

140. T.E. Adams et al., *Autoethnography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.9

141. T.E. Adams et al., *Autoethnography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.8

142. T.E. Adams et al., *Autoethnography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.9

that critiques the situatedness of self and others in social context”,¹⁴³ and includes “research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to cultural, social and political.”¹⁴⁴ It is a methodology that embraces personal experience, to further understand and make sense of social worlds,¹⁴⁵ through analysis that reaches beyond the individual subject.¹⁴⁶ Thus, the autoethnographic approach recognises and engages with the personal-cultural relations that, specifically from a feminist positionality, reveals the increased importance of social identities and identity politics.¹⁴⁷

This methodology builds on the wealth of historical feminist antecedents I cite in this enquiry. My located experiences on and with site will form a catalyst for materially thinking through the self-as-subject, so that a process of *becoming-with* manifests in relation to site and technology through situated knowledges. Drawing on autoethnographic principles, this research will make contributions to knowledge via the personal and experiential, while demonstrating the power and responsibilities of “storytelling” via engagements with the sites selected.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, within a social science context, autoethnographic stories are “stories of / about the self, told through the lens of culture.”¹⁴⁹ I seek to adopt this autoethnographic principle through exploratory and reflexive¹⁵⁰ practice-based methods, developing “artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and

143. T. Spry, ‘Performing autoethnography: an embodied methodological practice’ in *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(6), 2001, p. 701

144. C. Ellis, *The Autoethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*, Walnut Creek, CA, AltaMira Press, 2004, p. xix

145. G. Maréchal, ‘Autoethnography’ in A.J. Mills et al (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research: L-Z*; Vol.1. Sage, 2010

146. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1959, cited in K. Woodward, ‘Auto-Ethnography’ in J. Fulton and C. Costley, *Methodologies for Practice Research: Approaches for Professional Doctorates*, London, Sage Publications Ltd, 2018, p. 138

147. T.E. Adams et al., *Autoethnography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.8

148. T.E. Adams et al., *Autoethnography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.102

149. T.E. Adams et al., *Autoethnography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.1

150. T.E. Adams et al., *Autoethnography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.2

interpret personal and cultural experience.”¹⁵¹ In conjunction with the feminist, posthumanist and new materialist contexts outlined, I seek to develop intra-active autoethnographic engagements within specific located experiences as part of Reclamation Ground. Assessing the findings through this lens will reveal how agencies of matter – including my bodily matter – might emerge through relational and embodied entanglements in place.¹⁵² This contribution therefore also draws on the writings of Lisa Blackman, so that through materially thinking with site and technology, affective entanglements may manifest through an autoethnographic principle. Blackman states that the body is not “a ‘thing’ to retreat to, a material basis to explain how social processes take hold. The body has been extended to include *species bodies, psychic bodies, machinic bodies, vitalist bodies and other-worldly bodies*. These bodies do not conform to our expectations of clearly defined boundaries between the psychological, social, biological, ideological, economic, and technical, for example.”¹⁵³ In relation to the body and embodiment, what defines bodies is their capacity to affect and be affected. Thus, the autoethnographic is extended towards my situated, embodied, entangled subjectivity as an affected and affecting posthuman body.

I write from experience, as a body who has recently given birth, as a woman who has lived in and been shaped by abusive, sexist and oppressive contexts, and as an artist who is having to learn how to emancipate the self from the clutches of these historic experiences through artistic practice. This cultural position, constructed for me as a cisgendered woman against my will, has led to an internal battleground, fought under the skin of the day-to-day from childhood. This research seeks to bring that battle to the surface, through the pores of the cultural body and out into the open to be processed and deconstructed through materially led artistic methods. My gendered body is a landscape of trauma;

151. T.E. Adams et al., *Autoethnography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.1

152. K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Croydon, Duke University Press, 2007, p.33

153. L. Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation*, London, Sage, 2012, p.x

part of the ruins of the essentialist modes of power by which human beings are categorised and are *made* subjects¹⁵⁴ via a constructed patriarchal belief system.¹⁵⁵ Essentialism as a philosophy claims that there is a single, universal “essence” of womanhood, such as shared traits, experiences, or a fixed nature, that applies to all women. With this research I sift through the physical and psychological debris of this context, through and in the post-industrial and post-institutional, to find a conceptual reclamation of my positionality; using my located role as the researcher to reclaim female subjectivity from essentialist practices that divide, categorise and signify.¹⁵⁶ I hold the term ‘subjectivity’ in this enquiry with an awareness of its contentious positioning within contemporary feminist discourse, and this contribution investigates and reveals these contestations. Un-challenged, subjectivity is a singular construct that binds one’s gender to reductive dualisms as a “form of power that subjugates and makes subject to”.¹⁵⁷ Reclamation Ground opens a space to interrogate how female subjectivity is defined, and how it might be reclaimed and transformed through autoethnographic practice.

3.1.3 Methodology Three: Exhibitionary Practices

The core principles of exhibitionary practice revolve around the idea of the exhibition itself as a primary site for knowledge production and a form of critical inquiry, rather than merely a venue for displaying pre-existing knowledge or artworks.¹⁵⁸ The research value lies significantly in the process of active exhibition-making, including the selection, juxtaposition, framing, and presentation of objects,

154. M. Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, in J.D. Faubion (ed.), *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984*, 2nd edn, London, Penguin Books, 2002, p.326

155. S. Alaimo, ‘Nature’ in L. Disch and M. Hawksorth (Eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p.330

156. M. Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, in J.D. Faubion (ed.), *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984*, 2nd edn, London, Penguin Books, 2002, pp. 326 - 348

157. M. Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, in J.D. Faubion (ed.), *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984*, 2nd edn, London, Penguin Books, 2002, p.331.

158. J. Krysa, ‘Exhibition Practices at the Intersection of Academic Research and Public Display’ in J. Kaila et al. (eds), *Futures of Artistic Research: At the Intersection of Utopia, Academia and Power*, Finland, Academy of Fine Arts, Uniarts Helsinki, 2017, p.63

which contributes to the generation of new knowledge. Exhibitionary principles recognise that knowledge can be produced and communicated in non-traditional, non-linguistic and embodied ways, through the physical experience of objects in space, sensory engagement, and interaction. Yet there has been much debate around the role of the exhibition in the context of practice-based research, specifically in relation to where the essential contribution lies in artefacts that “putatively embody knowledge”, and within an academic context that demands “unambiguous communication”.¹⁵⁹ Kristina Niedderer suggests that in some cases, it is “not clear whether, and in which way, the research exhibition is different from an ordinary exhibition, what its essential contribution to research might be, and how that contribution is to be archived and disseminated”.¹⁶⁰ Michael Biggs states that, regarding exhibitionary principles, what is essential “is not a particular medium but a particular content, i.e. it must step outside the outcomes of the research and explicate the way in which the research embodies its ‘contribution... to the advancement of knowledge, understanding and insight.’”¹⁶¹

I approach exhibition-making as a part of the practice-based research enquiry, as part of the Reclamation Ground sequence I establish through the methods. Thus, the exhibition format is a material thinking process through the “expanded field of curation”,¹⁶² which as Joasia Krysa suggests holds the “potential for new epistemological and ontological insights into subject-object relations more broadly.”¹⁶³ Through this methodology, the exhibition is not just a display of

159. K. Niedderer et al. ‘The Research Exhibition: context, interpretation, and knowledge creation’ in *University of Hertfordshire Research Archive*, 2006, <https://uhra.herts.ac.uk/handle/2299/7475> (accessed 6th September 2024), p.9

160. K. Niedderer et al. ‘The Research Exhibition: context, interpretation, and knowledge creation’ in *University of Hertfordshire Research Archive*, 2006, <https://uhra.herts.ac.uk/handle/2299/7475> (accessed 3rd November 2025), p.1

161. M. Biggs, ‘The Role of ‘The Work’ in *Research*’, *Practice as Research in Performance*, University of Hertfordshire, 2003, pp.7-8, <https://uhra.herts.ac.uk/id/eprint/13396/> (accessed 4th November, 2025)

162. S. Sheikh, ‘Towards the Exhibition as Research in P. O’Neill and M. Wilson (eds.) *Curating Research*, London, Open Editions, 2014, p.34

163. J. Krysa, ‘Exhibition Practices at the Intersection of Academic Research and Public Display’ in J. Kaila et al. (eds), *Futures of Artistic Research: At the Intersection of Utopia, Academia and Power*, Finland, Academy of Fine Arts, Uniarts Helsinki, 2017, p.63

research artefacts / artworks but an active agent in making-meaning in and of itself. Curator Simon Sheikh writes that within research, the exhibition should “not only be thought of as a form of mediation of research but also as a site for carrying out this research, as a place for enacted research. Research here is not only that which comes before realisation but also that which is realised throughout actualisation.”¹⁶⁴ The gallery in this sense is where the research is made public, yet is it the material doing and the becoming-with of the exhibition-making process that also generates and contributes to the new ground - the new knowledge – of this research enquiry. The Reclamation Ground sequence developed through this enquiry forms parallels with Smithson’s site / nonsite series in this sense, whereby a curatorially-led *terraforming* takes place in the gallery that then activates the sites situated beyond the gallery space, generating a dialectical rhythm between the artworks as gallery installation and the entanglements of earthly matter to which it refers. Reclamation Ground is thus a research sequence that starts on geographical, material sites and ends in the gallery context as *new ground*. An entanglement of bodies, human and more-than-human, organic and inorganic, embody a contribution to knowledge through a synthesis between material thinking, the autoethnographic and the exhibitionary. The exhibitionary, as a research methodology, enables a physical translation of embodied, embedded female subjectivity to manifest in a public gallery context.

3.2 Core Methods

The four core methods below form the Reclamation Ground sequence, through which an active reclamation of female subjectivity will be initiated and tested. The methods have been developed using early artistic approaches, through which I developed a strategy for responding to site as practice-researcher. Being in, on and with the land physically is an important starting point for this practice-led research enquiry. Taking aspects of the site back to the studio, through digital means, enables the embodied connections I have established to continue. This

164. S. Sheikh, 'Towards the Exhibition as Research in P. O'Neill and M. Wilson (eds.) *Curating Research*, London, Open Editions, 2014, p.40

repositioning supports a process of material reckoning, which is then exhibited in a public context. I define this final method as terraforming, as new metaphorical and material ground is established through artworks. These four core methods, as a sequence, are detailed below.

3.2.1 Method One: Encountering Sites

At the beginning of each sequence there is an encounter on site. Autoethnographic principles are initiated through the methods here, as physical and psychological experiences are documented on and with the sites explored. It is important to note that the sites selected hold specific tensions and have been chosen because of their perceived seepage of 'culture' into 'nature', or 'nature' into 'culture'. The slippages between these essentialist categories, through the postnatural contexts explored, provide a rich landscape that is then deconstructed and reconstituted as part of the Reclamation Ground sequence. Materially thinking with these sites, through an autoethnographic methodology, reveals the cultural, social and political through the power of the personal encounter with the matter. In this stage of the process I research, select, travel to and occupy a site, initiating a period of engagement, consideration, stillness and repose in which opportunities for temporal entanglements unfurl, with, through and in, the sites explored. In this sense, we can see the posthuman encounter as an agential trigger, in which the more-than-human, postnatural site correlates, reacts and responds to the movements and presence of my body. The encounter has over the course of the research evolved to become a core part of Reclamation Ground. Initial encounters were fleeting; self-awareness and the gaze of onlookers led me to perform as the photographer rather than the embodied, embedded subject of the enquiry. Solitude, in a dilapidated hotel room and a disused quarry situated on private land, provided the conditions for intra-active processes to develop, shifting the significance of the encounter for the development of Reclamation Ground. I was able to think materially while residing on the surface of these sites,

with no external pressures and with a permission to ‘linger’ with the matter. It is important to also say that in responding artistically to a place – its history, its geography, its politics, its socio-cultural dynamics – one never experiences the same formulation of encounter. Landscapes change, as do the inner states of the artistic researcher and the geo-political, socio-cultural contexts that are entangled with sites and bodies. Within this context, the encounter as a method is made possible through the auto-ethnographic and material thinking approaches devised as methodologies.

3.2.2 Method Two: Material Extraction

The artistic processes that develop out of this core method, through the encounter, initiates and informs an extraction process, which moves the research into a different dimension to Smithson as technology is used to extract *data* rather than physical matter. Yet documenting site is metaphorically symbolic of material extraction through this enquiry, so that pixels hold the same relevance as grains of sand or shards of rock. Video, sound and photography equipment is worked with to capture the materiality of site. In this creative context, technology enables a process of collecting, documenting and extracting encounters on site as a woman, as an artist, as a human, as an animal, as a network, as matter. I explore the agential properties of technology and my bodily relationship with the machine in response to each encounter undertaken. The use of cameras, sound recorders, and scanners to ‘extract’ material holds ethical considerations. Digital extraction, of pixels rather than earth, enables me to employ an ethics of care¹⁶⁵ towards the sites I work with. This means that, after the practice-based research has taken place, the sites remain undisturbed in accordance with the Wildlife & Countryside Act, 1981, amended 1984 and the Countryside & Rights of Way Act, 2000. However, I am also aware that this decision works at the expense of other sites, mined for materials that power my machines. I am thus also complicit in the

165. The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence*, London, Verso Books, 2020

ecological breakdown we face through the works that I choose to make, and this conflict will be further navigated through the findings.

3.2.3 Method Three: Material Reckoning

Material Reckoning primarily takes place in the art studio. The findings from encountering and extracting sites are brought into the defined making space in order to be 'reckoned' with, through the development of methods such as digital distortion, layering, assemblage and storytelling. Material Reckoning is a phrase that describes deconstruction, agitation, reconstitution and aggregation methods that transform digitised geo-political material as a practice-based, posthumanist reclamation of female subjectivity. This research enquiry incorporates an intuitive and experimental approach to editing video footage, as Adobe Premiere Pro and After Effects software enables processes of contortion to manifest; of stretching, bending, looping, warping and glitching. I aim for the editing process to be a visceral experience here, one that enables a pulling and pushing of digitised material - a deconstruction of form that then reveals something about the social, personal, cultural and material. Material thinking as a methodology drives this core method, as the materials gathered are *thought-through* in order to challenge, transform and reclaim the binaries they reveal. This reckoning then is a metaphorical deconstruction and reconstitution of female subjectivity, through the making methods developed, resulting in different manifestation of female subjectivity through the agential qualities of the technology I work with and through.

3.2.4 Method Four: Terraforming New Ground

Terraforming is the stage in the sequence where the reconstituted material, developed through core methods one two and three, are made public in the context of a gallery exhibition. Different elements are brought together using exhibitionary principles to create an installation that manifests new 'aggregated'

ground. Sites have been digitally extracted, processed and reconstituted through the material reckoning process, and then layered, juxtaposed and terraformed to generate the reclaimed ground of this enquiry. Methods here are curatorially led, as artworks are installed, moved, placed, combined, built, hung, projected, sequenced, leaned, stuck, framed, draped, screened. The exhibition space often generates limitations on the form of the installation, as fire exits, walkways, plug sockets, furniture and general layout are taken into consideration. Thus, an installation in one gallery cannot be replicated in the same configuration in another; as such, the space forms an active agent in the process of terraforming. Establishing the aggregated material of Reclamation Ground in the gallery reveals the cultural, social, ecological and or material dynamics of the sites encountered to the public. This 'new ground' presents manifestations of female subjectivity through, for example, constructed soundscapes, the size and juxtaposition of still and moving imagery and the agential interactions resulting from combined materials, all in response to the architectural form of the gallery space. Terraforming is therefore the solidification of destabilised material for the duration of the exhibition; an aggregation that leads to a new formation of gendered subjectivity that is virtually and materially entangled as part of a process of becoming-with earthly matter.

Conclusion

The three relational, materially-led methodologies enabled thinking, storytelling and becoming-with through intra-active encounters. They deconstruct and reconstitute the nature-culture binary - through the personal and in a posthuman, postnatural context. They act as a framework for evaluating practice-based methods in relation to the artistic and theoretical contexts outlined. Through these principles, I have approached issues such as gendered representation and the behavioural patterns that manifest as a result through the autoethnographic. I use the personal to examine subjectivity in with and on the geopolitical sites selected,

entangling my own inner states with the materiality of the sites encountered to manifest new formulations as Reclamation Ground. Material thinking, as a form of becoming-with, is worked through on site, in the studio and in the gallery space, through the 'actualisation' of the exhibitions developed. These methodologies form the conditions that have enabled the methods to manifest, and through these principles I have generated different formulations of female subjectivity using digital technology. This engagement with technologies has been a dynamic relationship that has evolved over the course of this enquiry. Video editing, greenscreen and 3D modelling for example have manifested varying reclamations of gendered subjectivity, destabilising the nature / culture construct and enabling an interrogation of gendered subjectivity to unfold as part of this contribution.

Chapter Four: Findings Developed through the Core Methods

Introduction

This practice-based research enquiry is tested and developed in response to three very distinctive geographical sites, drawing on the methodologies and methods outlined in Chapter Three and in reference to the contexts outlined in Chapter Two. The histories of the sites selected feed in to and inform the shape of each core method, and include a landscape as film set, a British seaside hotel and a post-industrial quarry. These sites were selected for this enquiry through artist-in-residence opportunities because of their postnatural qualities; and encounters on and with these sites became an increasingly important initiator for the Reclamation Ground process.

In Reclamation Ground One, the encounter is formulated through the cinematic image and gendered modes of representation. In Reclamation Ground Two, an encounter is formed with the cultural and environmental setting of the hotel, which draws out the socio-political nature of female subjectivity through narration via the mythic figure. In Reclamation Ground Three, the encounter is formed through a material entanglement with a site that has already itself been reclaimed by ecological growth, contextualising my own transformations as a birthing body.

Digital technology was utilised in response to each of the sites visited. In response to the first site for example, video and photographic editing techniques lead the interrogation of female subjectivity through post-production. In the second, the body is technologically transformed alongside a deconstruction and reconstitution of site-based, gendered narratives. Responding to the third site, my female subjectivity is reclaimed by the site through a fictional narrative. In this final iteration, the agential potential of technology becomes apparent through my embodied interactions with the more-than-human.

These different formulations investigate what might be reclaimed and what types of gendered subjectivity can be manifested through different site-specific

encounters. Cinematic representations of female subjectivity are subverted; psychological inner states are addressed; and gendered subjectivity is reclaimed through posthuman, new materialist encounters with the more-than-human.

4.1 Reclamation Ground 1: The Cinematic Subject

In 2015 I was invited to exhibit a new artwork in a two-day festival at the site of a small ranch in the middle of the Mohave Desert. Because my artistic practice was often developed in response to a site, and I needed to have the work ready before I travelled, I had to think about other ways of connecting with this site from the UK. The deserts around Los Angeles have been co-opted by the Hollywood film industry as a film location since the early 1900s,¹⁶⁶ and so I started the project by watching as many films shot in this vast landscape that I could find. Aware that my physical body would be entering these 'scenes', I specifically became interested in the female leads as a stand-in for my own pre-emptive experiences in place.

I observed that these female leads were not only cast as secondary to the male protagonist, but were also controlled, dominated and manipulated by the male lead in different ways depending on the plot line; and this cultural motif stayed with me as I travelled to the Mohave Desert. Films such as *Wild at Heart*,¹⁶⁷ *Paris, Texas*¹⁶⁸ and *Twentynine Palms*¹⁶⁹ misrepresent psychological distress as a female trait rather than the consequence of an unhealthy, oppressive relationship with their male counterpart. Female characters are portrayed as vulnerable if left alone in the desert - susceptible to abuse if caught by the wrong man without a suitable chaperone. These manipulated women agents are positioned as exposed, sexualised objects through the mechanics of the film, and through the direction of

166. J. Burbank, 'The Technicolor Desert: Cinema and the Mojave', *PBSSoCal*, 2019, <https://www.pbssocal.org/shows/artbound/the-technicolor-desert-cinema-and-the-mojave> (accessed 17th August 2024)

167. *Wild at Heart*. (1990). [DVD off-air]. Directed by David Lynch. USA, Propaganda Films.

168. *Paris, Texas* (1984). [DVD off-air]. Directed by Wim Wenders. France, Argos Films.

169. *Twentynine Palms* (2003). [DVD off-air]. Directed Bruno Dumont. France, 3B Productions.

the respective male “auteurs”.¹⁷⁰

Hollywood cinema is a “popular mythology”, a “patriarchal fantasy” or signifier that does not reflect the reality of what a woman could be if presented in this landscape on her own terms.¹⁷¹ Yet these female stereotypes, perpetually trapped within problematic, coercive relationships, were familiar and known personally to me; these women were present in my life both on and off screen. Thus, there is a blurring of *Woman* and woman; the patriarchal projection of female subjectivity and the lived experiences of real women. I found the desert landscape triggering in this sense; the site brought me closer to the agents’ depictions of gendered trauma and to my own. I thought a lot about the desert as a site for playing out male fantasies of domination and control. I read Jean Baudrillard’s *America*: “You always have to bring something into the desert to sacrifice, and offer it to the desert as a victim. A woman. If something has to disappear, something matching the desert for beauty, why not a woman?”¹⁷² I began to ask what happens to the real woman if the image of the sacrificial Woman is disrupted, broken, recalibrated, remade?

170. S. Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Barbara Creed*, Oxon, Routledge, 2016. pp. 9-10

171. S. Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Barbara Creed*, Oxon, Routledge, 2016. pp. 24 - 29

172. J Baudrillard, *America*, London, Verso, 1988, p.70



Figure 12

Site Visit to Death Valley, 2015
Photo: Billy Kontouliis



Figure 13

Alabama Hills, Owens Valley, California, 2015
Photo: Victoria Lucas

4.1.1 Encountering the Desert

The Alabama Hills is a weathered granite rock formation that juts out of a valley just east of the Sierra Nevada, and West of the White Mountains, in Owens Valley, California, USA.¹⁷³ It has been framed and immortalised by the Hollywood film industry in countless films, spanning across the 20th and 21st Centuries, due to its desirable geographical phenomena. As Jeffrey Burbank notes, the “slate-blue granitic escarpment of Mt. Whitney’s minarets are accented upfront by the golden, rounded jumble of rocks that cry out for ambushes or hidden temples or wagon trains or cattle stampedes”.¹⁷⁴ Westerns, horrors, road-trip and science-fiction narratives have all played out at this location, and prior to my visit in September 2015 these filmic representations were the only references I had to the geographic site. The seepage between nature and culture is made manifest in the site’s paradoxical duality in this sense, as both a material, naturally occurring site and as a cinematic depiction of the imaginary. Real space is palpably jugged up against the “scene of cinema”¹⁷⁵ here, which led to an uncanny slippage in my experiences on site. Standing on the hot sedimentary rocks and looking out across the vast desert landscape that frames the site, I felt at times like I was encountering the gritty materiality of the cinematic.¹⁷⁶ The site’s image, which includes the cinematic stereotypes of female subjectivity, is thus a key part of the embodied experience of this site.

The material desert landscapes were familiar, like I’d travelled there before via the cinematic avatars I’d witnessed on my television screen back in the UK. What I had learned from the cinematic representations of this site was that it was dangerous for women; that when in the desert women became wild,

173. Refer to Figure 13

174. J. Burbank, ‘The Technicolor Desert: Cinema and the Mojave’, *PBSSoCal*, 2019, <https://www.pbssocal.org/shows/artbound/the-technicolor-desert-cinema-and-the-mojave> (accessed 17th August 2024)

175. L. Burchill, ‘Derrida and the (Spectral) Scene of Cinema’ in F. J. Colman, (ed.), *Film, Theory and Philosophy*, London: Acumen Press, 2009. pp.164-178

sometimes unhinged; coerced into whatever patriarchal fantasy the industry had designed for her. Standing there with my camera looking at 'Movie Road', a sandy track designed to transport film equipment to and from the natural site, I was simultaneously entering the position of the female stereotype, the viewer and the auteur. I had the unique chance to explore the cinematic representation of female subjectivity through this embodied experience, in which I held three additional perspectives. It was a unique but not wholly unfamiliar position, in which the performance of female subjectivity, the witness of female subjectivity and the patriarchal manipulation of female subjectivity were overlaying my own embodiment of female subjectivity. This layering was reminiscent of the identity struggles of adolescence, in which young girls are taught how to perform their gender via popular culture while being watched, monitored, critiqued and controlled. Being at the site of this paradox initiated creative approaches to visually puncturing the filmic tropes, and what they represented more broadly. I claimed my role as artist in this landscape to deal with my turbulent inner states at the site. I shifted through sandy dunes and scrambled up rocks to gain different viewpoints, which I then photographed and videoed using my Digital SLR camera. I wanted to somehow slip onto the screen as the disruptive sacrificial agent through the practice.

This encounter with the Alabama Hills resulted in an embodiment that was complicated by a multi-dimensional experience via the cinematic. I was physically experiencing the intense environment through my body on site while at the same time thinking through the performance of female subjectivity via the cinematic, the observer of that performance and the directional force that instils gendered behaviour. The writings of Judith Butler,¹⁷⁷ Michel Foucault,¹⁷⁸ and Rosi Braidotti¹⁷⁹ are useful here, in terms of thinking through this matrix of performance, power and

177. J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Oxon, Routledge, 1990, pp. 1-46

178. M. Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', 1982 in Faubion, *J.D. Michel Foucault: Power. Essential Works of Foucault 1954 - 1984*. London, Penguin Books, 2002 pp. 326-348

179. R. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2013, pp. 188-190

the posthuman. In summary, the cinematic site became a microcosm for exploring the dualistic experience of living *through the lens* of female subjectivity as *Woman* / woman, with all its contradictions and power dynamics, and created a desire to puncture through these socio-cultural veils that obscure the immediate, embodied, embedded, relational, material subject from view.

4.1.2 Extracting Representation

The scale of the desert landscapes encountered was incredibly awe-inspiring. Capturing the sublime in these vast American vistas became a theme, as I pursued the cinematic imagery I had encountered on screen. I sought to translate this overwhelming three-dimensional landscape as a cinematic composition with a foreground, midground and background. Drawing on the filmic through still and moving images, to capture the aesthetic qualities of the vistas witnessed, became a process of controlling nature through a visual organisation of its formal qualities. Shape and form, line, tone and colour, texture, space and depth of field foregrounded how I was reading the landscape. The landscape, as witnessed through and with the camera technology, is extracted as a surface here; one that is easier to define, control, recontextualise and mythologise. In comparison to Laura Aguilar and the visual register she deploys to perhaps playfully refer to the works of 1970s landscape photographers,¹⁸⁰ these images position the landscape as the subject, void of any visual reference to my body, which remains behind the camera. As a result, the imagery extracted from this site says nothing of my physical and emotional experience of being in the desert. I refer to Smithson and his Nonsites; of the desire to reach out from the gallery space to the real encounter through the work and feel the embodied sense of being, rather than living through constructed representations of it. In response to this site, I began with these flattened representations of my experience, as a series of two-dimensional images and videos of the landscape, so that I could experiment with breaking them open

180. Aguilar references the iconic black and white photography of Ansel Adams, for example, renowned for capturing the sublime beauty of the American West in the mid 20th Century.



Figure 14

Site Visit to the Alabama Hills, 2015
Photo: Billy Kontoulis

through the editing process back in the studio. Through this process of extraction with my camera, and through the complex experiences I had encountered on site, I wanted to puncture these visual surfaces, push my hand through the cinematic to hold on to the real, embodied encounter of the desert and its heat, light, scale, silence. I wanted to hold on to the sense of absolute solitude, in an environment that sinks through and becomes part of the body until the body becomes a part of it. The heat sinks through the flesh, the light burns the skin, the scale reduces the body to insignificance until it eventually becomes a part of its silence. The body can easily unravel in the uninhabitable desert landscape.

At this site, the extraction of imagery took place in conjunction with the embodied encounter, and the power dynamic of the auteur was adapted through this relational bodily infolding with technology. The video footage and still images I gathered of the site mirrored the representational images of the landscape I had witnessed on screen before visiting the site; forming a zeitgeist of the familiar, and an extracted 'film set' through which a material reckoning became manifest through postproduction techniques in the studio. I wanted to create something I could break open, via postproduction, that emulated the geo-political, socio-cultural paradigms that had agitated my inner states. This was Blackman's affective entanglement via the psychic body; like VALIE EXPORT I was using my training as a photographer to navigate a site that compelled an adaptation of my behaviour as a female subject through the power of the cinematic.



Figure 15

Victoria Lucas
Psychedelic Westerns 1-4 (2016)
Digital photographic series



Figure 15

Victoria Lucas
Psychedelic Westerns 1-4 (2016)
Digital photographic series

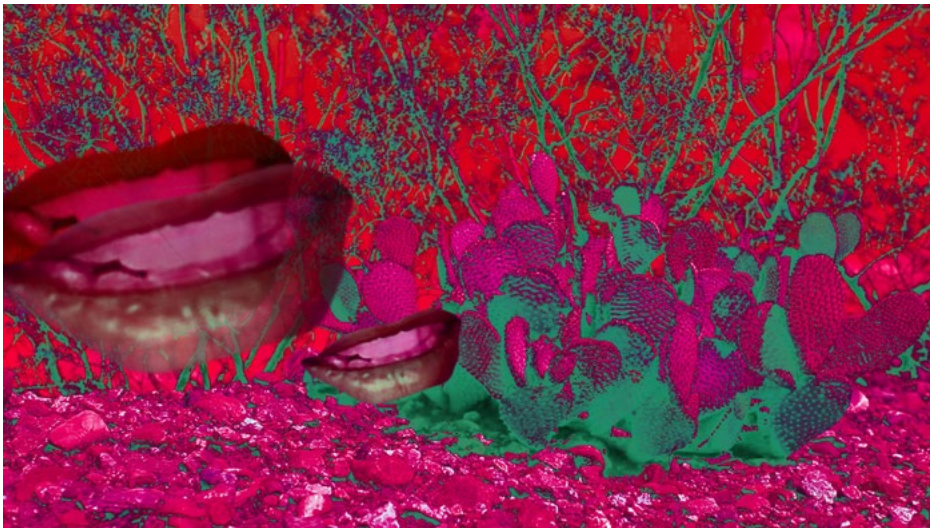
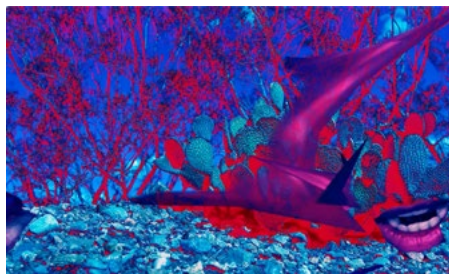
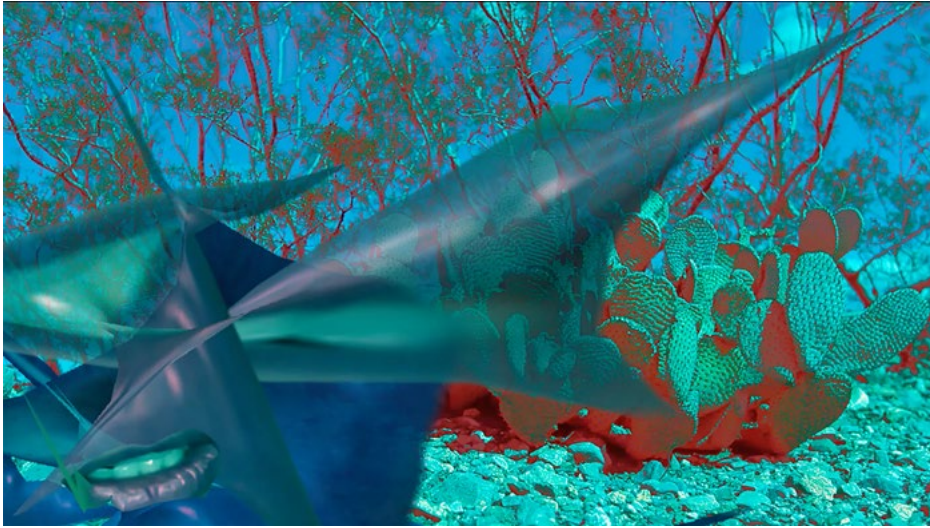


Figure 16

Victoria Lucas
Imaginary Voice, Real Voice #1 (2017)
Stills taken from looped digital video

[View Work Here](#)

4.1.3 Material Reckoning: Surface

Back in the studio, I explored a variety of making methods using post-production techniques that incorporated the footage and imagery I had extracted from the Californian desert. I initially played with processes of layering, saturation, scale and inversion to disrupt the reading of the cinematic landscape, as in the *Psychedelic Westerns* series.¹⁸¹ These methods became a visual translation of the multifaceted encounter with female subjectivity that took place on site, as various images are overlaid in this series to form a complexity of surfaces as one visual encounter. I also experimented with reformulating the mediated Woman, superimposing them back into these landscapes, treating these bodies as an illusion of subjectivity - a construction – and disrupting and destroying them using technological means. For example, I stretched and pulled footage of pouting, sexualised mouths like skin or fabric, until the pixels are revealed and the image is shattered.¹⁸² These bodily apparitions were then flattened, the resulting contortions inserted into the landscapes so that they slid around on the surface of the image and pooled on top of sand, sky, cactus and rock. There is no visual entanglement here; we see relations through assemblage without enmeshment between body and landscape – much like the experience of viewing the cinematic. Yet what happens through this process of image-based deconstruction is a reconfiguration. The female subject is no longer adhering to constructions of cinematic femininity - it is suddenly messy and dishevelled and complex. The female image is wild, but on its own terms, as the broken body-as-surface slid fluidly around the screen, uninhibited and unhinged with the aid of digital technology. I referred to the works of Aguilar, Woodman, Mendieta during this development; to their naked bodies positioned in front of the camera, in the landscapes, and what this activated. The female body, in this virtual state, had become liberated from the cinematic – from these popular mythologies – and was a visual formulation of the embodied, embedded, posthuman subject.

181. Refer to Figure 15

182. Refer to Figure 16

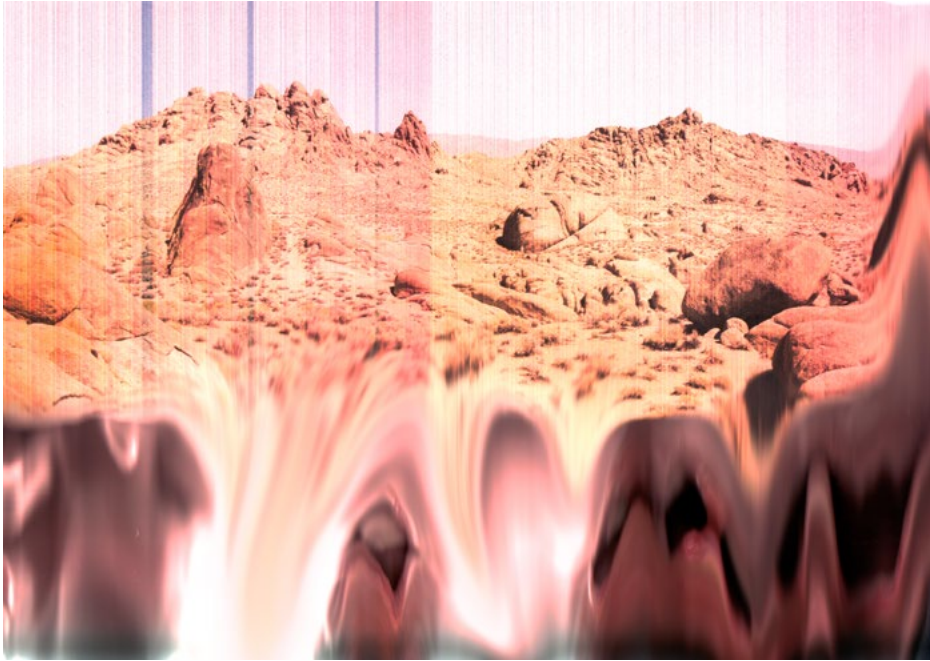


Figure 17

Experimenting: Deconstructing the Body using
Scanography
Image: Victoria Lucas

Subsequently, I scanned my own face and hands as parts of the body that were easy to access.¹⁸³ The scanographic process became another form of digital distortion, as fingers were elongated and facial impressions pressed against the glass of the copier. A representation of female subjectivity is reclaimed through this grotesque reconstitution, as organic innards are suggested through a variety of distorted morphed forms. Bodies and landscapes are not surfaces, and distorting the digital surface worked to shatter this screen-based illusion while opening these skin-like shapes to new interpretations. This point, in which I become the female subject in the work, was a key development. I literally began using my own body like Woodman, Aguilar, Mendieta and EXPORT, but I distorted my image further through these methods of material reckoning. In these works, the glitchy distorted image of my body becomes a reconstituted avatar of change through its agency, as a female subject that can be reimagined beyond the stereotypes it deconstructs. Legacy Russell suggests that the “body conceived of as a mechanic assemblage becomes a body that is multiple,” meaning that it “contains multitudes”... a body that is gooey, blurry, full of seams, or simply glitched is one that both absorbs and refracts, becoming every-body and no-body simultaneously”.¹⁸⁴ My reckoned image then is void of the dualisms that the cinematic encounter highlighted; it evades the performative, the external critique, and the authoritarian power that dictates the construction of female subjectivity, through its refusal to adhere to that visual pattern. This shift in representation frees the woman from Woman, and her new image slides across the filmic site as an embodied, relational, embedded, agential and psychically unencumbered digital subject.

183. Refer to Figure 17

184. L. Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*. London, Verso, 2020. P.137

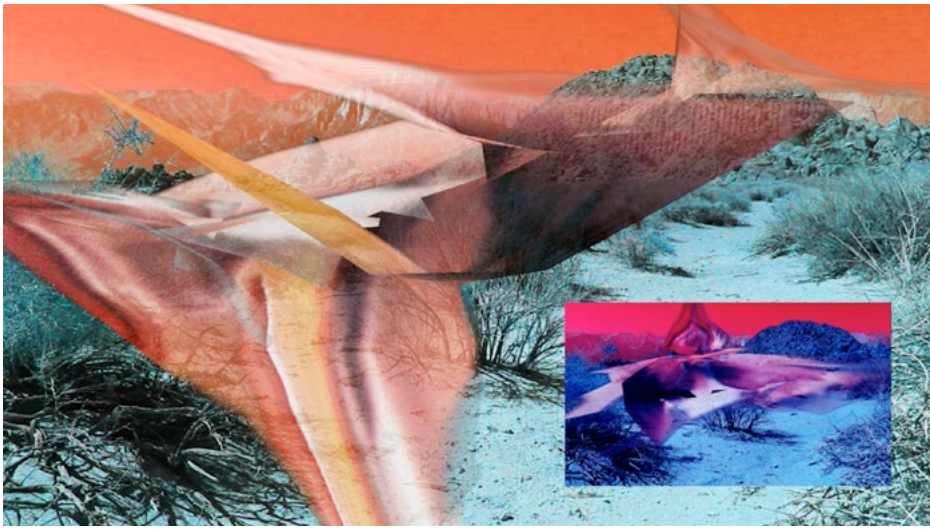


Figure 18

Examples of Bodily Deconstruction and Reconstitution Techniques

Victoria Lucas
Imaginary Voice, Real Voice #2, 2017
Stills from looped digital video

[View Work Here](#)

The main core of this testing utilised my body as a visual material to digitally layer, repeat and playfully deconstruct, as a visual exploration of deconstruction and reconstitution in and with the representations of landscape I had extracted from site. Using scanography, I worked to digitally fold, crumple, contort and de-naturalise my body. These grotesque forms were then animated using After Effects and Premiere Pro software, so that their glitchy agitation slid over the landscape like a greasy film on water.¹⁸⁵ The resulting forms were grotesque yet purposefully aesthetically seductive, to use the same language as the patriarchal tropes present across cinema and other media forms such as advertising, social media and pornography. Like these constructed representations of female subjectivity, I reduced the body to surface; yet this was a surface that I alone controlled, albeit through a form of digitised sensorial breakdown. Thus, the integrity of the images is challenged through visual disruption, as female bodies and subjectivities are pulled apart as a form of violent disfigurement until I felt like I had full control over their reading. These amorphous entities have fluid interiors, while maintaining their bodily boundary; each image a bag of pixelated skin. Static representations of my mouth appeared as an amorphous smudge of digitally rendered material. These images, developed through trial and error on a photocopier, and later isolated and animated through editing techniques, appeared as grimaces in the context of the aesthetically saturated, picturesque desert context upon which they are digitally superimposed and animated. Female subjectivity is materially reckoned with through the cinematic image and then returned to the cinematic landscapes, so that they occupy site as a reclaimed ground.

In later experiments, entitled *BODY/IMAGE #1*¹⁸⁶ and *BODY/IMAGE #2*, my grainy digital grimace is at points present alongside a stock photo of a female mouth, with the lips parted in what can be interpreted as a sexualised expression. Daubed with shiny pink lipstick and stylised through post-production, this cartoon-like mouth sits in stark contrast to my grainy glower. Both representations are disembodied, detached from the face upon which they belong, and are, importantly, silent. One

185. Refer to Figure 18

186. Refer to Figure 19

is a mouth made specifically to be seen and not heard - to titillate not articulate. The other is a mouth silenced through its materiality as an image, yet it makes its unease known through its refusal to perform the stereotype of its counterpart. A third mouth, this one moving as if communicating yet stripped of the accompanying audio, features in *Imaginary Voice, Real Voice #1*.¹⁸⁷ Also silenced, this mouth appears and disappears in conjunction with the two other static yet floating forms across the two interrelated video works. Through their juxtaposition, the three formulations of silenced mouths communicate a multitude of technical body-editing processes, undertaken to disrupt representations of the culturally constructed feminine. Each appears as a subversion in the landscape, a new manifestation of female subjectivity that is not controlled or rendered by auterual, or patriarchal, power. As the video sequence progresses, the mouths, at times attached to faces, are increasingly distorted, folded and glitched using experimental editing processes, until they embody what I describe as a *tech-grotesque* aesthetic. I define this term as an aesthetic that defies the ascribed naturalised, sexualised attributes of female subjectivity through its distaining, shapeshifting, subversive formulation.

The material reckoning in this Reclamation Ground sequence pushed through the gendered construction of female subjectivity, as bodies broke away from the sacrificial Woman of the desert and revelled in their own distortion. These disrupted, recalibrated and remade forms gained agency as a subject through the tech-grotesque. Images of mouths, faces and hands were deconstructed and reconstituted using a photocopier and postproduction techniques, before being returned to the manipulated scene of cinema. Released from their gendered traumas, their patriarchal narratives and gendered mythologies, these agents slid across the surface of each video work as freed, posthuman subjects. I have worked with technology to develop these methods, both on site and in the studio. Without the virtual, none of this work would have been possible, and thus technology forms a feminist ally that works with me towards a common cause.



Figure 19

Mouths: Grimace versus Stereotype

Victoria Lucas
BODY / IMAGE #1, 2017
Stills from looped digital video

[View Work Here](#)



Figure 20

Tech-grotesque Aesthetic

Victoria Lucas
Imaginary Voice, Real Voice #1, 2017
Stills from looped digital video

Nature, documented using the formal qualities of landscape photography, also reappears in the work as a construct through iridescent layering reminiscent of plasma screen technology. Both the messy, reconstituted bodies of woman and the layered, saturated scenes of the desert they occupy reveal the mythologies of female subjectivity, through the cinematic site and the stories it has told.

4.1.4 Terraforming tech-grotesque lands

The material experience of the desert informed the terraforming that took place in this sequence of Reclamation Ground. I developed a multi-media installation that brought representational elements into the gallery, providing new ground for my tech-grotesque agents to occupy. The installation, which I entitled *Lay of the Land (and other such myths)*, was first created for the London Art Fair in 2017.¹⁸⁸ The art fair booth, with its suspended ceiling and dark grey carpet tiles, was a challenging environment that created an interesting dynamism through its oppressive corporate aesthetic. In this installation, reductive replicas of boulders foregrounded large scale vistas reminiscent of film sets, referencing the formal qualities that I had adopted in the desert as a techno-collaborative coping mechanism for the dualistic encounter experienced. The gold boulders were made of fibre glass, and dominated the corporate space as non-compliant interlopers, spilling into the booth to construct a transformative scene that the audience entered. The booth became a portal-like space in this sense, as a familiar cinematic location opened out to unapologetically occupy the Business Design Centre. Fake representations of sedimentary rocks brought the virtual into the material realm of the actual, building on Smithson's Nonsite through their earthly visual language yet incorporating references to the simulated through their metallic, ungainly, synthetic characteristics. This became an inversion of my encounter with the Alabama Hills, a terraformed construction that referred to the physical, geographical environment. Prop-like, the gold boulders foregrounded the layered wall-sized images, which were the overall backdrop to the sculptural and agential moving-image works that



Figure 21

Victoria Lucas
Lay of the Land (and other such myths), 2016 – 17
Installation Views at London Art Fair 2017.
Photography: Jules Lister

manifested this new ground. These large-scale psychedelic prints fractured the spectrum of cinematic colour, reclaiming the literal setting of the art fair through the invitation to be enveloped into the spectral scene of cinema.

As part of the construction of this Reclamation Ground, an experimental vocal element is also coupled with the video works *BODY/IMAGE #1*, *BODY/IMAGE #2* and *Imaginary Voice, Real Voice #1* and *Imaginary Voice, Real Voice #2*. The intermittent soundscape installed explores a series of vocalised sighs through a series of hidden speakers. These recordings were created through my own body in the studio, to explore ways in which to 'give voice' to the mouths depicted across the related multi-channel video work. Although the sounds didn't form part of the video works through material reckoning methods tested, they later formed part of the terraforming process, finding relevance in a reconstitution of the desert landscape in a gallery context. The sigh is a noise that humans make in a moment of release. Often driven by emotion or state of mind - happiness, contentment, frustration, anger, boredom - the sound of a sigh can be interpreted by the listener through its tone, length, iteration, context. The sighs I incorporated can be read as a mark of contentment, so that the tech-grotesque agents are provided with a re-imagined state of being. The sigh can be considered a glitch in language, a pause in conversation and at the same time, a sound that communicates more than words in a single moment. Combined with the video works, the dislocated voice and images formed "rhetorical bodies",¹⁸⁹ avatars or agents that functioned as a politically charged subversions of female subjectivity. The potential that the tech-grotesque agent and its provocations in space unleashes has been further explored through subsequent testing.

Lay of the Land (and other such myths) has revealed tools in which to subvert and reclaim Woman in the context of the cinematic. Using technology, the material extracted from site has formed a new ground for these agential bodies to inhabit. For the first time, my own body has been considered as a surface through the works, in response to embodied experiences in and with the cinematic landscape

encountered. Thus, my body is used here as a material in the reworking of the scene of the cinematic, through the tech-grotesque aesthetic developed via the methods tested. Built into iterations of the *Lay of the Land (and other such myths)* installation, my reclaimed body slipped in-between multiple screens, in pixelated, fleshy pieces. This was the beginnings of thinking about the role of the avatar in relation to female subjectivity, which is picked up in response to the next site encountered through mythic re-presentation.

4.2 Reclamation Ground 2: The Mythic Subject

I was invited to undertake a two-week art residency in the Nayland Rock Hotel in Margate¹⁹⁰ to develop a new body of work, which would then be opened to the public as a two-week exhibition. This month-long event was developed in conjunction with Turner Contemporary's Journeys with 'The Waste Land' programme and was described as follows;

23 local, national and international artists riff off the 'inviolable' voices in T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land. With a focus on myth, gender and facets of the self, the artists' work will re-inhabit and re-animate the empty rooms, spaces and grounds of the Grade II listed Nayland Rock Hotel, Margate.¹⁹¹

T.S. Eliot wrote *The Waste Land* in an outdoor shelter situated adjacent to the site, and thus this context became entangled with my reading of the Nayland Rock Hotel through the curatorial themes of the exhibition.¹⁹² T.S. Eliot's works are often criticized from a feminist perspective for their misogynistic portrayal of women and support of patriarchal structures.¹⁹³ In her article *T.S. Eliot and Feminism*, Maria Teresa Gibert-Maceda quotes Joseph Bentley, stating that "throughout *The*

190. Refer to Figure 22

191. C. Williams, 'At The Violet Hour', *Chiara Williams*, [website], <http://www.chiarawilliams.com/at-the-violet-hour.html>, (accessed 23/10/24)

192. T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land' in *The Waste Land and Other Poems*, London, Faber and Faber. 1999, pp.23-46

193. M.T. Gibert-Maceda, 'T.S. Eliot and Feminism', *ES: Revista de filología inglesa*, Issue 19, 1995, pp. 61 - 72



Figure 22

Working in the Site of the Hotel Room
Photography: Victoria Lucas

Waste Land, women are passive victims, the objects who suffer, while male figures are active subjects”.¹⁹⁴ In advance of the residency, I read *The Waste Land* and was struck by Eliot’s rendering of an encounter in Chapter Three, entitled *The Fire Sermon*, in which a woman is seemingly sexually assaulted – raped - in her own apartment by a man she knows. Strikingly, the encounter is witnessed and narrated by Tiresias, a character that Eliot has borrowed from Greek mythology. In Greek myth, Tiresias is a prophetic clairvoyant who, following a violent encounter with two entwined (mating) snakes, is transformed into a woman. Sandra M. Gilbert asserts that “Eliot’s vision of Tiresias’ anomalous sexuality arises”... from an “anxiety about a blurring of those gender distinctions in which human beings ought properly to be clothed.”¹⁹⁵ In my site-based response, the gendered fluidity of this character became central to my material intra-actions with the hotel room, informing resulting manifestations of female subjectivity. Tiresias slips through time and gender in a way that opens new ways of thinking about how a space can be experienced; from the position of someone untethered from the gendered stereotypes that Eliot’s other characters uphold through their actions.

In Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, the character of Tiresias describes the encounter between a man and a woman from the outside looking in, as if entangled in the materiality of the room in which they occupy.¹⁹⁶ The feeling of being watched is familiar; women often experience life through a perceptive dualism in a bodily context that is always monitored and policed by the master model. Lines such as “I Tiresias, though blind [...] can see” and “I Tiresias [...] perceived the scene, and foretold the rest” positions Tiresias as a mythical or even mystical entity, separate from the actual and residing virtually as a witness to the past, present and future

194. M.T. Gibert-Maceda, ‘T.S. Eliot and Feminism’, *ES: Revista de filología inglesa*, Issue 19, 1995, p. 63

195. S.M.Gilbert, ‘Costumes of the Mind: Transvestism as Mataphore in Modern Literature’, *Critical Inquiry*, Winter, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1980, p. 402

196. T.S. Eliot, ‘The Fire Sermon’ in *The Waste Land and Other Poems*, London, Faber and Faber, 1999, pp.30-35

simultaneously.¹⁹⁷ This positionality felt pertinent to the tech-grotesque agents developed in the first iteration of Reclamation Ground, in that both formulations are liberated from external expectations. Thus, the character of Tiresias became significant in the context of the Reclamation Ground sequence, specifically in the context of the #MeToo movement that was gaining a lot of traction in the media at the time, amplified by the accounts from survivors of sexual predator Harvey Weinstein.¹⁹⁸ Many of these accounts described a sexual assault that took place in Weinstein's hotel room, and these accounts also seeped into the materiality of the walls through my encounter with the site in isolation; held within the imagined dynamics of Eliot's poem and the context of the room. Thus, Reclamation Ground Two synthesises an encounter with the site, the fictional or poetic framing of that encounter and the unfolding socio-political narrative around sexual assault. This dynamic agitates established, misogynistic power dynamics that have infected readings of female subjectivity.

4.2.1 Encountering the Hotel Room

The occupation of the Nayland Rock Hotel room, allocated to me upon my arrival, was an affecting experience. It formed a significant part of this enquiry, enabling a deconstruction of the implications of the site through the inhabited encounter. Out of the twenty-three artists who were invited to occupy the building I was the only artist who took up the offer, due to Margate being so far away from where I resided. I spent much of the residency alone on the top floor of the hotel as a result. This floor, like the floor below, was closed to hotel guests due to its uninhabitable state, yet the bottom two floors were still open for business, and I occasionally crossed paths with other occupants in the lower stairwell. In my attic room grime lined every surface, and the air was musty with the residual odour of those who had slept within its walls. The view out of the window was an

197. T.S. Eliot, 'The Fire Sermon' in *The Waste Land and Other Poems*, London, Faber and Faber, 1999, pp.30-35

198. BBC, 'Harvey Weinstein scandal: Who has accused him of what?' *BBC News* [website] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-41580010> (assessed 23/10/24)



Figure 23

Nayland Rock Hotel, Margate.
Photo: Victoria Lucas



Figure 24

Working in the Site of the Hotel Room
Photography: Victoria Lucas

undulating mass of irritable grey-black sea. My room was so rundown that I spent the two weeks sleeping inside a tent I had erected to protect my body from the musty filth of the interior. Nature encroached on the room's faded opulence, as entropic forces reclaimed the once grand and prominent feature of this seaside town. Communities of pigeons had moved into many of the rooms on this top floor, and at points the smell along the corridor was thick with their excrement and quiet deaths. The unravelling environment of this cultural site of Victorian leisure became a significant part of this situated, embodied, embedded encounter. In the hotel room, woodchip wallpaper was peeling off the walls; the boundary between inside and outside breached by nesting pigeons. The wind howled through the frames of the windows and battered the tiled frontage of the rickety structure of the attic room I inhabited. The floorboards were soft underfoot, creaky, as if they struggled with the weight of my body moving over them. The building felt as though it could easily slip into the sea when no one was looking, with me inside. Mould and mildew crept up the tiled bathroom, and the shower no longer worked. The décor was perhaps from the 1960s, and time pulled violently against it. This hotel was a long-standing cultural symbol – once opulent and frequented by the London elite – that was being slowly eroded by the salt and grime that clung to the building's porous membrane.

I ordered the contents of my room, taking control of the situation and my exposure to it. I scrubbed the en-suite bathroom with bleach so that I could use it, dismantled and removed the two steel-frame bunkbeds that had temporarily filled the space, and then erected the small aforementioned tent, in which I encased both myself and my belongings to keep them safe from the infecting atmosphere of the room.¹⁹⁹ With this act I was protecting the boundaries of my body from my surrounding environment, yet at night I still felt extremely vulnerable. I placed objects against the back of the hotel door that would act as a warning, should someone try to enter while I slept. It was largely an unpleasant experience, in which I was haunted by my fear of being sexually attacked. This state-of-being

for women is largely normalised in our society. Young girls and women are given rape alarms, told to cover their bodies to be safe from predatory men, told not to walk alone in the dark, warned to stay as invisible as they can so as not to draw attention. This was my adolescence, as missing girls punctuated our TV screens and my mother fretted about her three daughters, warning us of the dangers to keep us safe. In this dingy, dirty, isolated room, I was living out a woman's culturally-induced nightmare. This embodied experience, framed by a powerful, survivalist emotion, was further contextualised by the unfolding media storm surrounding the women assaulted in Harvey Weinstein's hotel room, in addition to the aforementioned residency source material, TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Like the films explored in relation to my encounter with the desert, these related references became entangled in the reading of this site through my fear for my safety as a woman alone.

This bodily encounter with the materiality of the hotel room, imbued with the literary and socio-political contexts outlined, led me to question what is written onto the body by social, cultural and political constructions, and how they might be extracted and reckoned with on site as part a physical occupation of site. Like Amy Cutler's *All Her Beautiful Green Remains in Tears* (2018), Reclamation Ground Two draws upon existing patriarchally constructed material, locating the gendered tensions and employing fictional narration methods to disrupt and reclaim female subjectivity. For Cutler, her site is archival and filmic; in this enquiry the site is material, literary and bodily. The avatar in Culter's formulation has agency through subversive AI learning. Through the extraction process of this enquiry, the deconstruction of this contextual framing is undertaken through a process of enmeshment, where depictions of the female experience infect, agitate and fragment patterns of misogyny present in text, bodies and behaviours. It is in these interrelated contexts and encounters that I wrote and enacted *Conversing with Tiresias*.

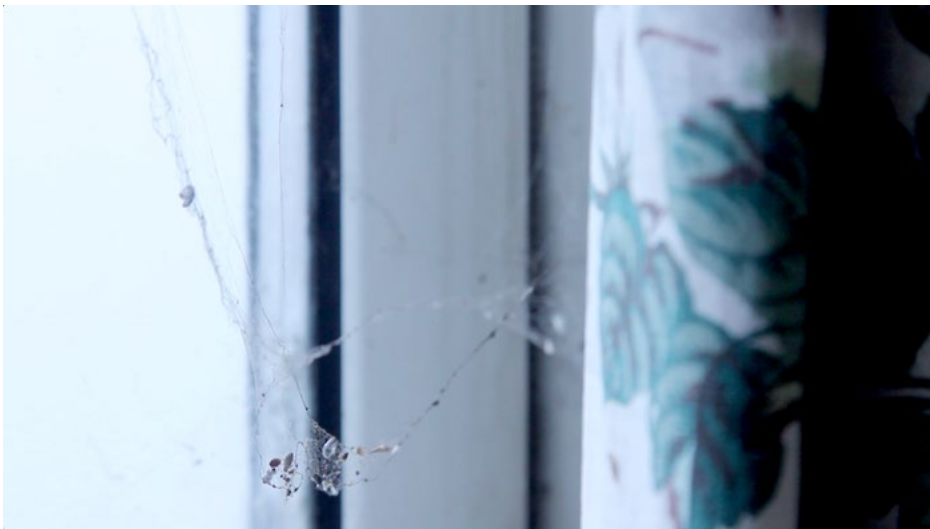


Figure 25

Video Stills from Footage of the Hotel Room
Stills: Victoria Lucas



Figure 25

Video Stills from Footage of the Hotel Room
Stills: Victoria Lucas

4.2.2 Extracting Histories

To work through my initial discomfort in this space I began to ‘think-as-the-stuff’, finding ways of becoming-with the site through this extended encounter. I initially extracted the minutiae of the space through closely cropped, detailed video recordings and photographs and with it, the crumbly cultural material that it represented.²⁰⁰ These historical site-based traces of other bodies, human and more-than-human, initiated narration-based imaginings, and I began to think through the agential surfaces of the room to think about other bodies that may have occupied this space as well as my own. I thought about eyes looking through these glass windowpanes toward the sea; of bodily interactions with the furniture that once occupied the room, evidenced by the indentations left in the faded pink carpet upon which I reluctantly stood. I imagined wardrobe doors opening and closing and the sound they might have made. I considered the interactions between people that had played out in this space and the residue of this, writing down any thoughts that appeared and learning through the matter presented.

The rape of the female typist in *The Waste Land* became entangled with the imagined histories that haunted the seedy hotel room I occupied. The accounts of sexual assault by Weinstein that were prevalent in the media at that time were also considered in relation to my embodied encounters in the room. Thus, the extraction in this Reclamation Ground developed textually, as sentences from survivors’ descriptive accounts of Weinstein’s behaviour towards them (that predominantly took place in his hotel room) intersected with material imaginings developed through a process of material thinking and quotes from Chapter Three of T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*.²⁰¹ Using the character of Tiresias as a witness to these repeated happenings became important. The hotel room over time became a reflective site for female subjectivity through the collective voice as witnessed by Tiresias and in the context of #MeToo. Unlike the extraction methods of Reclamation Ground One, in which the visual aspects of the surrounding

200. Refer to Figure 25

201. Specifically, Tiresias’ narration of the nonconsensual sexual encounter witnessed.

landscape were captured using technology, this iteration of the Reclamation Ground sequence was driven primarily by the discomfort I felt on site, framed by the exhibition's theme and the entropic materiality of the room. This then was less a technological extraction method and more of a psychological one, and Tiresias became an agential container for reframing these accounts of sexual assault.

In summary, the extractions in response to this site relate to written accounts, stories and imaginings that together haunt female subjectivity through the effects of behaviour, power and control within a constructed and dualistic gender binary upheld in these cultural contexts. This is revealed through my material encounter with site, my critical reading of TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and the gathering of voices of women who had encountered Weinstein's calculated, hotel-room based subterfuge that subsequently and importantly propelled the #MeToo movement. Through materially thinking with the site, I entangled myself with material, literary, social and political agencies as a form of collective testimony.

4.2.3 Material Reckoning: Behaviour

The narration of entangled female experiences, through Eliot's misogynistic depiction of rape, my situated, embedded, embodied, material encounters on site, and a social movement against sexual abuse, sexual harassment and rape culture became central to subsequent material reckoning methods. Through a process of textual assemblage that was anchored in the hotel room I encountered, I began playing with these interrelated encounters to establish a scripted narrative that I would then perform to camera. This was an experimental approach, where descriptive fragments and keywords were gathered and then moved around intuitively to find a vocally rhythmic text through a repeated and vocalised readthrough in the room.²⁰² The narrative developed includes quoted accounts from survivors of Harvey Weinstein, so that the work extracts cultural, patriarchal representations of female subjectivity and entangles it with situated knowledge to agitate their reading.

Artist: *Tiresias, are you here? I have written a script to read through with you.*

Tiresias: *Yes. I take the shape of this hotel suite. I embody the woodchip wallpaper and Artex surfaces that envelop your presence. I linger in the fibres of the stained carpet upon which you currently stand. I absorb the years of occupancy that mark this room as an odour. I am the air that you breath, and you will be the medium through which I speak. Please, document me in all my imperfect glory, for I await a transfiguration.*

Artist: *I want to know about the women to whom you have been a witness all of these years here. I imagine the existence of their hands – women’s hands. Rapping fingers on the windowsill, boredom, no purpose. Making up the bed, applying their make-up, getting undressed, dressed, brushing their hair, turning the taps in the bathroom on and off. Operating as best they can outside of the existing system of values. A man’s world.*

Tiresias: *A brush of the carpet with her toes. I felt the contact, the small touch. She rapped her fingers and I felt the sound ripple through me. The rest of her body is still. She looks out of the window to the cold sea below. Her thoughts sink into its blue-grey undulations.*

Artist: *Her breathing body, contained. He enters the room.*

Tiresias: *Clears, Lights, Lays, Bored, Tired, Unreproved, Undesired, No Defence, No Response, Indifference, Looks, Done, Over, Stoops, Paces, Alone, Smooths, Automatic.*

Artist: *She found herself alone with him in the hotel suite.*

Tiresias: *I foresuffered all, enacted on this same divan or bed.*

Artist: *He summoned her to his hotel room. The script had already been written.*

Tiresias: *Tights that are the same colour as the carpet, or the walls, or the sea, or violet. She paces, enraged and plotting her escape.*

Artist: *She was trapped by his body and was intimidated. He ejaculated quickly into a potted plant. The sad gloop is drawn towards the pointed tip of a newly unfurled leaf.*

Tiresias: *The potted plant. Enclosed in a man-made pot, cultured to grow in a certain way. Unnatural, superficial. Forced to be beautiful, constrained in a reach of life and there to be enjoyed, gazed at, looked after or neglected. The potted plant is at the mercy of its keeper. They decide whether the plant lives or dies, suffers or thrives. Cultivated and tamed, the potted plant is both ornament and creature.*

Artist: *Roots squeeze in-between the floorboards, through the cavities and crevices below until the earth is reached.*

Tiresias: *The future is foretold. She is still. She looks out of the window to the cold sea below. Her thoughts sink into its blue-grey undulations.*

Artist: *An alternative ending. She opens the window and throws out the script. It flutters towards the earth and is engulfed by the raging sea. The words are erased by the tide.*

Tiresias: *The expected guest arrives. He enters the room.*

Artist: *But she is no longer there.*

Tiresias: *Then the hotel room stands empty. The stale stench of the past lingers. Please, document me in all my imperfect glory, for I await a transfiguration. I am flawed and outdated, and I await a transfiguration.*

Figure 26

Written Transcript
Conversing with Tiresias (2018)



Figure 27

Work-in-progress at Nayland Rock Hotel, Margate
Photograph: Victoria Lucas

Through the methods, Tiresias is a gender-fluid clairvoyant agent that interacts with and frames my foregrounded, psychologically fuelled encounter of the space. It includes a list of words that T.S. Eliot uses in reference to the female character's movements, behaviour and emotions just before, during and after she is raped. And it highlights the same power dynamics between man and woman through Weinstein, via accounts from female survivors that describe his intimidating, coercive, abusive behaviour. The parallels between the fictioning of sexual abuse and the realities of sexual abuse form a pattern here, in relation to the entitled and misogynistic behaviour of the male abuser. Yet interestingly, the impact that this pattern of predatory behaviour has upon the survivors is depicted very differently through Eliot, who through his description suggests that the woman being raped is distinctly apathetic throughout the ordeal, despite clearly being in opposition to her visitor's advances. The narrative developed as a material reckoning here inserts a subversion in response to this male representation (or fantasy) of female experience, where a shift in the narrative towards the end disrupts Tiresias' 'foresuffering' (in response to the patterns of misogyny they have witnessed through time). A performative, scripted read-through draws on the extractive methods undertaken in, with and through the agential surfaces of the hotel room during my two-week residency, while also referring to the actresses abused by Weinstein, whose voices I had extracted and amplified through the development of the work.

The set up for filming this material reckoning included the positioning of a chair in front of the window to make use of the natural light. A tripod was set in-between the window and my body, supporting my DSLR so that the framing of my head was closely cropped on all sides.²⁰³ This composition was intimate, my face filling the frame, and I read out the draft of my script repeatedly to camera. As the script was read out and rewritten, a conversation developed between me as the resident artist and the all-seeing hotel room, Tiresias. It became apparent through this process that I had in effect become 'possessed' by Tiresias (as the

agential materiality of the site) as I read out both parts of the dialogue. I decided to visually represent this spectral embodiment, painting part of my face to represent two occupants of the same body. Thus, the bottom half of my face is painted with green paint, with reference to special effects technology, in a manner that suggests a state in-between woman (artist) and avatar (Tiresias). Leaving the 'green-screen' in its unedited, raw form opens a site of potential becoming, and a space that invites the subversive glitch to formulate. Indeed, chroma-keying as a postproduction effect enables the editor to replace the green hue in an image with any digital form desired, and therefore the power in this work lies with me as artist-editor. The green paint on my face can be read as an embodiment of Tiresias' power as a mythic agent; comically ghoulish and yet technologically functional as a mask that can be transformed at the press of a button. This is intended as an image of transfiguration, in which I begin to slip away from the binary notion of woman towards an agitation of my subjectivity, through the character of Tiresias as a Greek mythological body that transgresses cultural and bodily binaries, through the subversion of the patterns of sexual assault, material agencies and through a specific reference to special effects technology. Through the spoken narrative and the green face paint, the agency of the avatar in this work is therefore mine as the female artist. Through the methods, I 'work with' the Teresian agential qualities of the site to shift the narrative and reclaim the subject in a context in which natural forces also facilitate a process of cultural deconstruction. Thus, the dynamics between the patriarchal constructs that this site comes to represent and the external forces puncturing its boundary (pigeons, wind, rain, sea), also form a part of this process of material reckoning.

This work used the surface of the body to manipulate and expand our understanding of it without postproduction methods. In contrast to Ana Mendieta, who covers her body with mud, taken directly from the earth, I cover part of skin with a technologically activated substance. This draws on technology as an agential collaborator in the context of the posthuman, in a way that also reflects

the agential material dialogues I had with the postnatural site and its entropic dynamics as a hotel falling into cultural ruin by external natural environs. Thus, this video work uses technology differently to the fleshy apparitions constructed in Reclamation Ground One, instead contorting the textual narrative to deconstruct and reconstitute female subjectivity in a way that mirrors the material, political and social processes that have already been initiated. Through this narrative, the embodiment of Tiresias forms an avatar that builds upon the visual agents developed in *Lay of the Land (and other such myths)*. The characters in this work are fluid, vocal and multiple, in relation to the human and nonhuman entities that are incorporated to reconstitute notions of female subjectivity and in the context of #MeToo. The reclamation here sits with the survivors of sexual harassment and abuse in the context of the derelict hotel room, so that through their collective voicing, the work begins to reclaim their experience from the patriarchal systems that have enabled it to repeatedly occur. This is a retelling that deconstructs and reconstitutes the female typist in T.S. Eliot's misogynistic depiction of her rape in the context of MeToo and my embodied subjectivity as a woman alone in a dilapidated hotel room. The reclamation comes through this interplay and connectivity between the voices of the silenced, the oppressed and the afraid.

4.2.4 Terraforming the Encounter

In the postnatural context of the site, 'nature' (in the form of birds, sea, weather) worked to decay not only the building, but also the cultural constructions and the sexual oppressions it came to represent. This became a part of the reading of the works as I began terraforming methods in the same site I had encountered as part of the art residency, rather than in response to a separate gallery context. As an active agent in the work's making, it became important that the site was occupied by the viewer as part of the terraforming methods established, so that the public viewing of this Reclamation Ground incorporated the materiality and contextual affectivity of the site itself. It was also important that my bodily presence became



Figure 28

Victoria Lucas
Conversing with Tiresias, 2018
Video Installation with potted plants
Installation View, Nayland Rock Hotel

[View Video Here](#)



Figure 28

Victoria Lucas
Conversing with Tiresias, 2018
Video Installation with potted plants
Installation View, Nayland Rock Hotel

[View Video Here](#)

apparent in this context, making the performance to camera, filmed in situ a week before the space was opened to the public, vital to the exhibitionary principles that manifested through the methods. Using technology, my body and subjectivity become entangled in the materiality and cultural milieu of the site itself through a mounted screen. This spectre-like presence was important, forming a material conduit for the Tiresian haunting I had encountered as part of the Reclamation Ground sequence.

The television monitor was flanked by two plastic potted plants that I had found in the working hotel.²⁰⁴ The decision to include these cultural references to the natural sat alongside a mediated unravelling of the material (my embodied experience), cultural (through the spectral avatar) and societal (through the narratives of women's experiences of sexual assault) of female subjectivity. Thus, as with Reclamation Ground One, nature is held here as a constructed reference, juxtaposing the decaying state of the hotel room. The potted plant also features in the narrative, drawing on an account given by a female survivor of Weinstein in which he forces the victim to watch as he masturbates and ejaculates into a potted plant.²⁰⁵ In the context of this research enquiry, this misogynistic act becomes deeply metaphorical, as the potted plant becomes a stand-in for the abused and contained female body. The agential spectre of the work, bracketed by the postnatural (via the decaying building), thus becomes a part of the entropic force that unravels the sexual violence and oppression that the #MeToo movement reveals, through a vocalisation of shared gendered experience. This fusion of autobiographic encounters, framed by the material explorations of site, works to reclaim female subjectivity from the patterns of misogyny through an acknowledgement that trauma affects but does not erase the subject through processes of isolation and silencing. Female subjectivity in *Conversing with Tiresias* (2018) is therefore presented as fluid, resilient and always in a state of

204. Refer to Figure 28

205. P. Shanley, 'Harvey Weinstein Accused of Masturbating in Front of Female TV Reporter', *Hollywood Reporter* [website] <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/harvey-weinstein-accused-masturbating-front-female-tv-reporter-1046792/> (accessed 23/10/24)

transforming. It contains a collectivity of experience that rewrites and reframes the encounter as a vocalised becoming, through multiple co-opting mythic, material and technological agents. This entanglement reveals new ground, in which the female subject is liberated in a posthuman, postnatural, feminist context.

4.3 Reclamation Ground 3: The Entangled Subject

The third Reclamation Ground sequence was initiated by a series of encounters with a small disused quarry site situated on private land in Rowsley, flanked closely by Chatsworth Estate and the Peak District National Park. Due to its diverse mix of heather moorland and blanket bog, the quarry is protected as part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is long disused. According to a local retired quarry archaeologist I engaged, the gritstone that was extracted from the site was used to construct local infrastructure and farm buildings. This was quarrying on a small scale. My substantiated approach to working with postnatural sites in this enquiry draws on their unique contexts to test how they might intersect with my situated, embodied, embedded, material subjectivity in a posthuman context as part of the Reclamation Ground sequence. As a result, the research has developed to engage with landscapes, external cultural and social narratives, and my own situated physical and psychological experience, which is where autoethnographic principles come into play.

I was eight months pregnant when I was first introduced to the disused quarry site by the landowners Gaynor and Eric.²⁰⁶ I initiated the third Reclamation Ground sequence following a subsequent period of maternity leave, during which I experienced a deeply profound embodied and embedded transformation as both a birthing body and as a new mother reckoning with a shifting identity. Thus, my internal physical, psychological, and sensual experiences of pregnancy, birth and motherhood are brought into the site of Reclamation Ground three, in the way that externally situated cinematic representations of Women, T.S. Eliot and the #MeToo movement informed my encounters in previous iterations. In this sense, the power



Figure 29

First Visit to the Quarry with Landowners Gaynor and
Eric, 2018
Photography: Victoria Lucas

dynamics have shifted here, working from the inner states of the body rather than in response to external cultural constructs of female subjectivity.

The prenatal relation I had with my child - an identity-shifting liquid encounter with bodily enmeshment - initiated a deeply embodied understanding of entangled becoming, and this informed my encounter with this site as I brought my shifting subjectivity to it. During pregnancy, the foetus of my daughter was of my body yet separate from it in a beautiful significance of fluidity and flesh. In addition to this shifting dynamic, I was also at the same time viscerally and virtually connected to the body of my mother, completely captivated with the fact that the oocyte from which my daughter developed actually formed when I was a foetus growing inside my mother's uterus - a maternal presence that moved beyond this life 20 years ago. Thus, the materiality of my mother's deceased body was both present and absent in the event of my pregnancy, initiating a new and unfamiliar form of grief. Layers of ancestry and notions of the individual body became a fluid confusion, as a small living creature pushed a foot outward to test the boundaries of my womb. The connection, linear in terms of being, became rhizomatic in terms of the *being enmeshed*. I thought about the reproductive capacity of the more-than-human and felt entangled in a shared capacity to birth. Returning to the productive ecologies of this reclaimed site formed a dynamic connection with the transformative revelations that becoming a mother had brought to my experience of female subjectivity, which contrasted to my encounters as a prenatal body in Reclamation Ground One and Two.

As a result, this autoethnographic transformation forms a precursor to the posthuman encounter with the disused quarry site, drawing on Blackman's affective body in which multiple bodies are recast as embodied, entangled assemblages.²⁰⁷ Laura Green writes that "pregnancy is an example of where self and other overlap and become indistinct, and where inside and outside are no

207. L. Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation*, London, Sage, 2012, p.1

longer delineated; the self and the not-self coexist in the same bodily space.”²⁰⁸

She describes an intertwining of self and other that, in the context of this enquiry, is more of a deep material entanglement in which an intra-active bodily knowing is established between mother and child. Building on this, Reclamation Ground Three focuses on the affective capacities of human and more-than-human bodies in reclaiming female subjectivity in a posthuman context, using technology, narrative and the voice to explore these dynamics.

4.3.1 Encountering the Disused Quarry

There was a fluidity to this site, a fleshiness. The quarried topography of the site was uterine in form,²⁰⁹ the sunken absence enclosed by the remaining rock, which forms a shelter from the cold winds blowing through the thickets of bracken covering the surrounding moorland. There is one route in and out of the site, carved through the rock escarpment in the form of a narrow path. I found the way the space revealed itself upon entry along this path quite astonishing, and being inside the quarry felt intimate and secluded. The living tissue covering the rocky boundary of the quarry was wet, viscous and nurturing. There is a wide variety of wild plants growing across and out of the steep rock faces, benefitting from the elemental protection that the carved hollow provides. The carpet of moss that covers the flat bed of the quarry bottom is the most striking feature of the site – an undulating, thick, deep, luminous organism living symbiotically within this manmade structure.²¹⁰ Moss is known to thrive on sites of disturbance and regeneration due to its natural resilience to change, thus growing well in the fractures and fissures of industrial ruin.²¹¹ The surface run-off from the surrounding hillside produces ideal conditions for moss to thrive here, which I witnessed throughout the seasons. In early spring, the quarry bottom was

208. L. Green, 'A 'Fleshy Metaphysics' in Igaray and Battersby, 'On Female Subjectivity' in *Women: A Cultural Review*, 22:2-3, 2011, pp.143-154

209. Refer to Figure 30

210. Refer to Figure 31

211. R. Wall Kimmerer, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*, Corvallis, OSU Press, 2003, p.90



Figure 30

Disused Quarry, Rowsley
Photography: Victoria Lucas



Figure 31

Polytrichum Commune Moss at the Site of the Rowsley
Quarry
Photography: Victoria Lucas



Figure 32

Site-based Research for Reclamation Ground 3
Video Still: Victoria Lucas

completely waterlogged, the moss engorged and partly submerged in water. In late summer, the moss was bright green, dry to the touch, and stood 40cm high in places. The surface is springy, soft and incredibly tactile. I spent many of my visits encountering this surface, looking closely at the shape and colour of stems, leaves and capsules. I waded through the engorged, water-logged moss in spring, and lay out on the desiccated moss in summer.²¹² Spending time in this secluded site – at the mercy of the seasonal weather, surrounded by the coldness of stone yet supported by the softness of moss, was a distinctly different encounter to those in Reclamation Ground One and Two. I was the only human on site, and because this was private land I felt free to fully immerse myself in the encounter.

In her book *Gathering Moss*, Robin Wall-Kimmerer playfully writes about matriarchal systems, female tyranny, masculine surrender and hormonal domination in relation to moss species.²¹³ Weaving the scientific study of mosses with frameworks of indigenous ways of knowing, her poetic reflections aligned with the principles of material thinking, in that she was learning through and with these more-than-human organisms. Her observations on biological sex and moss reveals a fluid, creative and biologically adaptive species. Moss is an ancient species, dating back over 450 million years.²¹⁴ To overcome the challenges of sexual reproduction, some mosses have evolved to be bisexual,²¹⁵ while others are matriarchal, producing spores that have the capacity to become male or female depending on where they land.²¹⁶ This fluidity and the capacity to transform and adapt in response to a changing environment forms a rich contrasting dynamic to the rigidity of cultural stereotypes that I deconstructed and reconstituted in

212. Refer to Figure 32

213. R. Wall Kimmerer, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*, Corvallis, OSU Press, 2003, pp.29-34

214. E. Mchale, '7 Interesting Things About Moss', *Kew Royal Botanical Gardens*, London, 2020, <https://www.kew.org/read-and-watch/moss> (accessed 10th November 2025)

215. R. Wall Kimmerer, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*, Corvallis, OSU Press, 2003, p.32

216. R. Wall Kimmerer, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*, Corvallis, OSU Press, 2003, p.33

Reclamation Ground One and Two. Like the tech-grotesque bodies developed in Reclamation Ground One, the moss and its material affectivity holds rich potential as a political agent that evades categorisation. George Schenk writes about the conversation between moss and rock at the boundary layer being like “an interface of immensity and minuteness, of past and present, softness and hardness, stillness and vibrancy”.²¹⁷ Mosses have the power to transform monolithic stone back to their granular origins at the moment of their convergence, as sandy grains fragment and unravel the solidity of formations like fluid pixels shifting across a moving image. Recognising the comparison between the actual site and its virtual representation informed subsequent material reckoning methods.

When travel restrictions were imposed during the COVID19 Pandemic and I was unable to visit the quarry, I began visiting the site virtually using Google Earth,²¹⁸ circling around the site like a bird and filming / editing this virtual encounter. I was captivated with this technological experience, which enabled one to sink through the map and seemingly through the surface of the Earth weightlessly, described by Hito Steyerl as a “condition of groundlessness”.²¹⁹ This fluid loss of boundaries creates a space in which my virtual body collided and became enmeshed with the imagined skin of the earth. Thus, this virtually led *sensation-by-proxy* enabled me to meaningfully entangle a cognitive extension of my human body with the digital materiality of nature; albeit the quarry as it was on the 28th of September 2011 when the images were taken by a passing satellite. This experience revealed the power of the virtual in translating visceral embodied experiences and offered potential new methods of becoming-with using technologies. Through this virtual encounter, I also considered the language of the quarried geology of the land – extraction, aggregate, strata, reclamation – as a metaphorical method in which to excavate and redefine my female subjectivity, and this shaped subsequent material reckoning methods.

217. R. Wall Kimmerer, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*. Corvallis, OSU Press, 2003. p.5

218. Refer to Figure 33

219. H. Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2012, p.13



Figure 33

Google Earth Encounters during Lockdown
Maps Data: Google, © 2011 Landsat / Copernicus

My female subjectivity before I became pregnant was interrogated in conjunction with a variety of dualistic patriarchal tropes that sought to oppress and naturalise certain stereotypes, as explored in Reclamation Ground One and Two. At the site of the quarry, the autoethnographic experience of the postnatal body and material thinking methodologies with the moss and rock became entangled, resulting in a process of fictioning with the landscape that did not include a deconstruction and reconstruction of external power relations. Commonalities were found between both the transformation and recovery that was taking place in my postpartum body, and the vitalist resilience of the moss that I physically encountered in this post-industrial, postnatural site. Referring to Blackman, the liquidity of the moss extended to envelop the terrain of my body through this encounter, forming an agential aggregate of human and more-than-human through a specific set of circumstances and contexts in which boundaries were blurred and categories became fluid.²²⁰ My physical, neurological, hormonal and psychological body was in a state of transition having experienced enmeshment through the intra-active properties of pregnancy. The moss had grown out of a compromised site of industrial violence, reclaiming the rocky wound and attracting other plants to grow through a process of adaptive ecological succession.²²¹ Repeated visits to the disused quarry allowed for an intra-active bleeding between my body and site, so that I was able to become-with the landscape and learn from this process of reclamation.

The ecofeminist position, in which the domination of women and the exploitation of nature are both products of patriarchal systems, held relevance through this process of familiarity and entanglement on site, although it was material feminism that became the central reference during these encounters. For example, Jane Bennett describes matter as having inherent vitality and agency,²²² while Lisa

220. L. Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation*, London, Sage, 2012, p. xii

221. Ecological succession is the gradual process by which the species in an area change over time, leading to new ecosystems.

222. J. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, USA, Duke University Press, 2010. pp. 3-5

Blackman extends the terrain of the human and more-than-human body through an interrogation of embodied affectivity.²²³ Karen Barad's intra-action "signifies a mutual constitution of entangled agencies"²²⁴ and Elizabeth Grosz explores the body as neither pure culture or pure biology, proposing a definition of bodies as possessing an "open materiality"; one that holds a "set of (possible infinite) tendencies and potentialities" that are porous and dynamic.²²⁵ Stacy Alaimo uses the term trans-corporeality to describe a dynamic material world within which all embodied beings are intermeshed.²²⁶ Through these slow, site-responsive, embodied visits to the site, with my camera in tow, I encountered what becoming posthuman truly meant, as the site revealed my body as an intra-active, vitalist, porous, trans-corporeal, embodied and affective subject, fully immersed in a network of more-than-human relations and dynamics. I learned something truly valuable, spiritually and materially, from this bodily entanglement in site, enriched by the situated knowledge as a postnatal body.

4.3.2 Extracting Matter

My encounters with the site, both materially and virtually using Google Earth, led to a series of digital and material extractions that aimed to visualise and understand the intra-active entanglements revealed between the postnatural site of the quarry, its more-than-human inhabitants, and my shifting identity as a postnatal body. The female body was no longer pushing against an objectified superficial surface, as in the cinematic reckonings of Reclamation Ground One, nor was it beholden to the patriarchal tropes resisted and subverted through the narrative in Reclamation

223. L. Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation*, London, Sage, 2012. p. 15

224. K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Croydon, Duke University Press, 2007. p.33

225. E. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994, cited in S. Hekman, 'Constructing the Ballast' in S. Alaimo and S. Hekman (Eds.), *Material Feminisms*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2008, p.106

226. S. Alaimo, 'Trans-Corporeality' in R. Braidotti and M. Hlavajova (Eds.), *Posthuman Glossary*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, p.435



Figure 34

Extracting Data on Site
Photography: Victoria Lucas

Ground Two. This inquiry now felt different; I felt different. Bodily boundaries were blurred, absorbed and in constant flux with the materiality of the site. I was no longer an individual subject, as aggregations of human and more-than-human agents became perceptible through my encounters with the quarry. The extractions undertaken on site explore these material entanglements, using technology to grapple with the porosity of the special, psychic, machinic and vitalist body as a framework for reclaiming female subjectivity.

At the site over the course of many visits I took photographs and shot video using my DSLR, in addition to creating alginate moulds of the cracks in the rockface.²²⁷ Yet these methods of documentation felt limiting in terms of capturing the fluid materiality of the site, and I wanted to investigate other ways of creating a granular extraction of matter through which the body could become entangled. I was accepted on to the Freelands Artist Residency Programme in 2019, and I used the attached funding and time to explore other methods of 'extracting' the site. A photogrammetric process of digitally extracting rock from the site became a key tool in developing a form of material destabilisation as Reclamation Ground, through its process-based deconstruction and reconstitution of the site using technology. With the support and guidance of V21, a company that specialises in capturing art exhibitions and objects to produce 3D virtual tours, we used a high resolution DSLR camera to capture every angle of matter on site, so that 1000's of images document every surface, undulation and texture in detail.²²⁸ Taking photos in this context became a symbolic remapping of the extraction process, as a form of deconstruction and reconstitution, as the actual became virtual in the form of a digitised 3D model.

Rock faces were dismantled through a series of photographic frames, the digital eye working symbiotically with the human body to generate a deconstruction and extraction of landscape through this physical process. Like the tools used to break

227. Refer to Figure 35

228. Refer to Figure 36



Figure 35

Creating Moulds of the Rock Face on Site using Alginate
Photography: Victoria Lucas



Figure 35

Creating Moulds of the Rock Face on Site using Alginate
Photography: Victoria Lucas

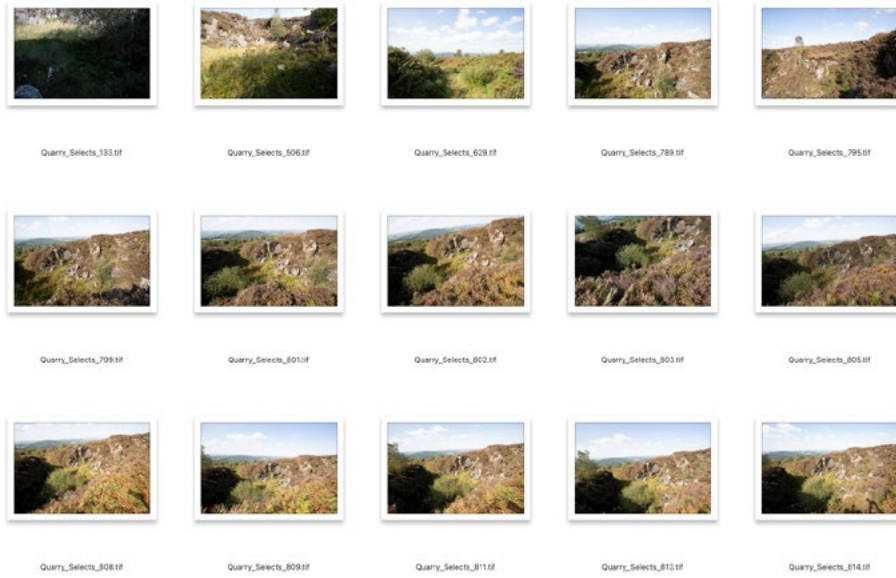


Figure 36
 Extracting Data on Site, 2020
 Images Courtesy of V21

up the land to make walls, roads and farm buildings, this photographic method carved up the surface of the landscape into pixels, so that the pixels became metaphorical stones that could be extracted and used to construct and reconstitute form. There are parallels here with Smithson's Nonsites, as digital matter is conceptualised as geological matter through this extraction process. Yet instead of a deconstruction of the actual, through a physical removal of fragments from the site to the gallery, the pixellated data of this Reclamation Ground sequence is used instead to create a virtual manifestation of site that can formulate further encounters with matter. This method of virtual deconstruction became central to the research through this core method, as the materiality of the rock and its inhabitants were digitally 'mined' and reconstituted using 3D modelling software to construct a liquid, skin-like form that can then be virtually traversed, permeated and manipulated as an artefact.

4.3.3 Material Reckoning: Substance

In Reclamation Ground One, the material reckoning methods tested ways of releasing female subjectivity from the cinematic dualisms through a tech-grotesque aesthetic. Individual 'bags of pixelated skin' floated across the surface of screens in fleshy pieces on their own terms. Reclamation Ground Two reckoned with the textual narration of female experience through the mythic body as site, so that an entangled multitude of voices manifested and reclaimed their subjectivity through collective agential testimony. Building on this work, Reclamation Ground Three tested ways of manifesting bodily material entanglements using technology, moving away from existing tropes to reclaim subjectivity as a vitalist, intra-active, trans-corporeal, embodied, agential, situated, embedded and materially porous subject. Experimental material reckonings were developed in response to multiple encounters and material extractions on site, undertaken over the course of a year. The resulting artworks employed different mediums in conjunction with the digital extractions undertaken on sites, including performance, sculpture, photography and video, and responded to the more-than-human matter encountered, including



Figure 37

Moss Capsules at Rowsley Quarry
Photographic Still: Victoria Lucas

the gritstone rock and plant matter.

Before I began developing the 3D model, I edited a photograph of the quarry face that I had taken on site, producing a large scale print on to fleece fabric. Inspired by an advert for personalised blankets that I had seen on social media, this process translated the site as a two-dimensional image, which I then draped over the top of my physical body in a performative sequence that I captured using my camera in the studio. Blankets are designed to keep the body warm; they protect the body from the elements. Through the action of covering and contorting my body in a way that mimics rock formations, I enacted what it might be like to be materially enveloped in and part-of the rock face of the quarry. Through this imaginative process, my body becomes enfolded as part of the solidity of stone. This specific material reckoning method was then developed into a series of photographic prints, showing different formations I made with my body in conjunction with the represented landscape.²²⁹

Both the body and the rock in this experimental series are an ecofeminist testament of the extractive and dominating forces of what has been constituted as 'nature', and yet together they generate new meaning through their visual amalgamation. What changes the most when thinking about the body in relation to stone is an understanding of time and material. Through the deep time of rock comes a connective tissue reaching back through the generations of evolutionary matter from the core of my fleshy materiality. Through this intra-active association, I become-with the rock and find that I am made up of generations of organisms, human and more-than-human. I also carry the cells of my daughter in my body, as is the chimeric reality of the postpartum body. So, I am made up of multiple beings, and I carry their epigenetic DNA that informs and shapes and influences further.

My body is also made of the same minerals found in the rocky matter that is represented in print on the blanket that shrouds my body. I also carry with me the postnatural, through the microplastics pollution that have been absorbed into my



Figure 38

Victoria Lucas
Formations 4, 2020
Digital Photograph
42 x 59.4 cm

body. Conceptually, I am not just a human in this sense; I am an Earthly being that is materially entangled with the more-than-human entities that share this planet. I am part mineral, part water, and I live in symbiosis with the internally situated bacteria that keeps me alive. Through this work, the conceptual understanding of existence as a subject grows backwards through time and outwards through space rhizomatically, so that I am no longer an individual but part of a network of life that stretches in all directions. This posthuman reading of subjectivity, through the transformation of the hard rock face to soft, pliable shroud, revealed a temporal dynamic that expands what might constitute female subjectivity when enmeshed with different earthly materials.

Subsequently, I began other experimental methods of image deconstruction in the studio using familiar postproduction techniques; stretching, distorting, scanning, mirroring and superimposing still images of the quarry and representations of the body, which resulted in amorphous forms that seemingly floated in digital space.²³⁰ These experiments sought to deconstruct and reconfigure both the site and the representation of my body into a liquid, pixelated form to be aggregated into one intra-active mass, drawing on the tech-grotesque methods explored in Reclamation Ground One. The resulting aesthetic qualities were exciting – animated and otherworldly quarried landscapes warped and morphed weightlessly, liquid fleshy forms drifted above abstracted mossy scenes, pixelated landscapes fell apart across photocopied paper. Yet the landscape was still a layered translation of flat surfaces and didn't reflect the depth of material entanglement I wanted to interrogate.

The next development of photogrammetric digital technology to process the extracted images of the quarry replicated the deconstruction and reconstitution of Reclamation Ground, so that images were fragmented (like quarried rock in an industrial plant) and then reassembled into a three-dimensional virtual model. The results are uncanny, life-like and yet strangely rendered, as if the rock face has been exploded and then painstakingly glued back together. To achieve

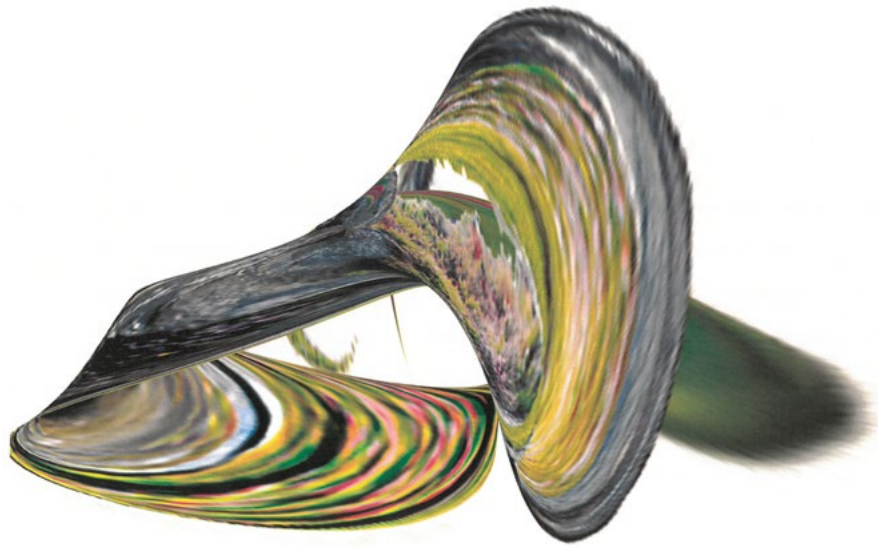


Figure 39

Digital Experiments
Still Images: Victoria Lucas

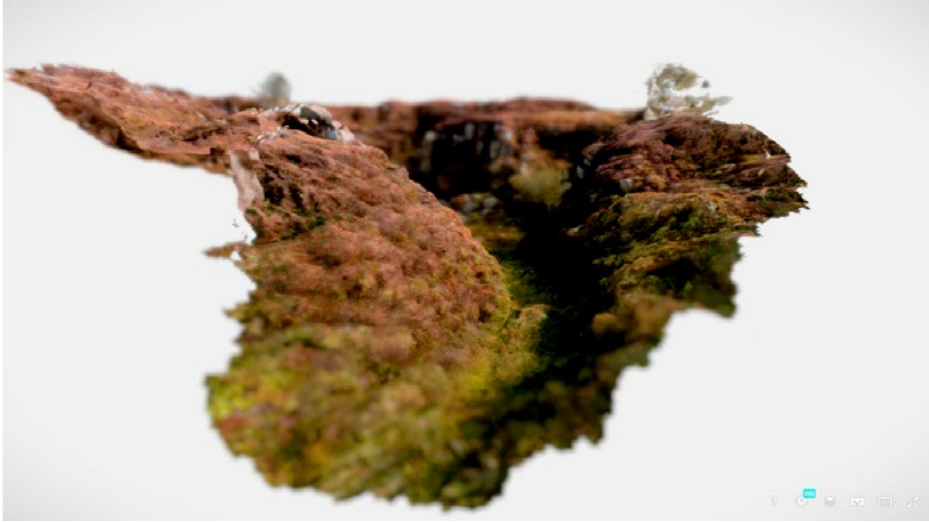


Figure 40

Virtual Model of the Quarry,
Screen Shot during interaction

this, the data that was gleaned from every surface of the site was uploaded to a computer back in the V21 office and run through Agisoft Metashape software, which systematically re-assembled the data as a material aggregation that, in turn, mirrored the whole site.²³¹ The resulting virtual model of the quarry is a digital imprint of my direct, sensually rendered experiences in place, so that both my embodied and virtual encounters are embedded in the pixellated forms that shift, tumble, reorder and assemble on screen as a material reckoning. This fragmentation method mirrored the extractive processes that have carved out the history of this site, deconstructing aspects of extractive capitalism through materially-thinking-through the process as a form of reclamation, through the core methods used. It also enabled methods of manipulation and ways of ‘falling through’ the landscape, as surfaces became pliable, liquid, granular through its pixellated rendering. Using this virtual model in different ways, I developed three prongs of experimental material reckonings, which all relate back to the physical and, crucially, virtual encounters on and with site. These artworks are *Aggregated Form*, *Entanglement* and *Coalesce*.

The first works developed deconstructed and reconstituted the postnatural quarried rock face that supported the ecosystem that was now thriving at the site, which became representative of the nature / culture binary and its relation to the constructions of female subjectivity in a patriarchal context. In the artwork *Aggregated Form*,²³² the mapped image of the rock face was reconstituted and flattened out using editing techniques in Photoshop and Blender, so that pixels became rock and rock became pixel.²³³ Through an intuitive process, the wire-mesh structure that constructs the shape of this digital form is also revealed.²³⁴ This exposure of the construction of the artwork, through a layering of the wiremesh, further reveals the image as a composite imitation of nature. Yet, through its specific material construction it does not conform to traditional representations of landscape, instead working to transform the site and its

231. Refer to Figure 40

232. Refer to Figure 41

233. Refer to Figure 42

234. Refer to Figure 43



Figure 41

Victoria Lucas
Aggregated Form, 2020.
Installation View, Site Gallery.
Photography: Victoria Lucas / Jules Lister

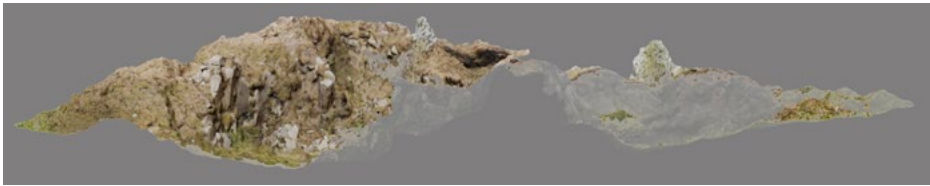


Figure 42

Image Development for Aggregate Form

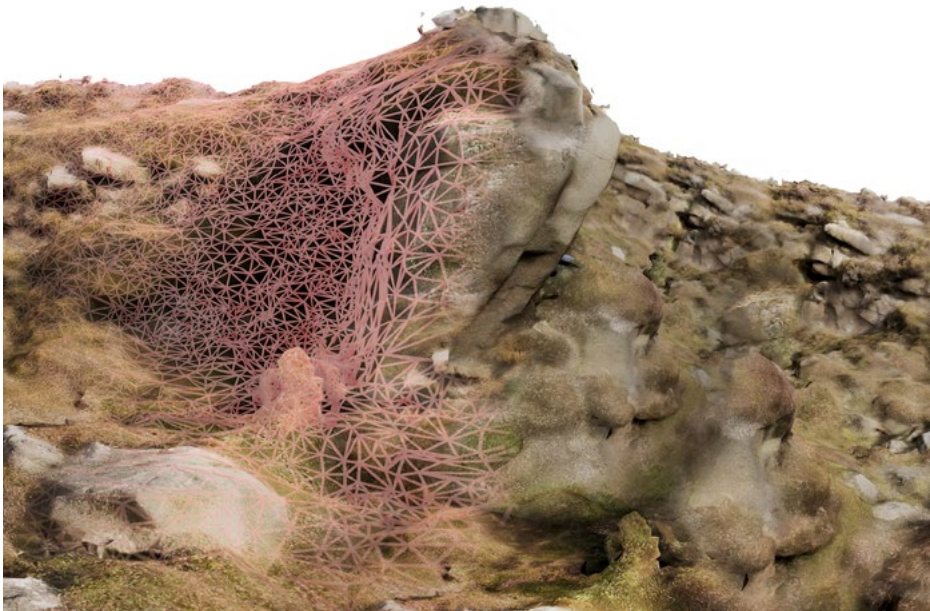
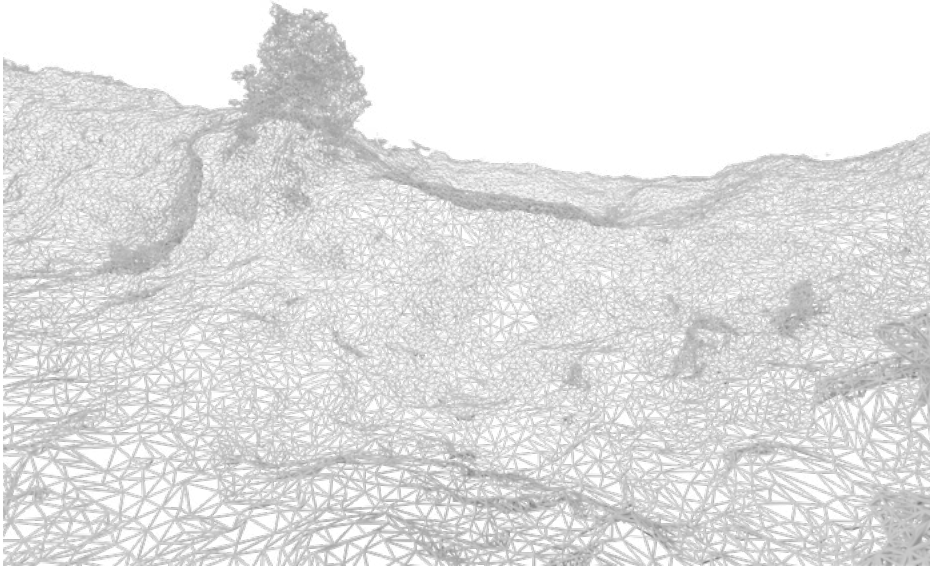


Figure 43

Wiremesh and Photogrammetric Overlays
(Screen Shots taken During Interaction)

inhabitants into an entanglement of related material and forming outside of essentialist categorisations and tropes via a soft form as a material skin. This contrasted with the hard, layered boards and wall coverings in Reclamation Ground One, providing new ways of terraforming the works in the gallery space using the two-dimensional image. Printed on to a 16-metre length of canvas, the surface acts as a membrane that catches the reformulated image, transforming the solid matter of stone into a digitally fluid, soft, draped representation that manifested as an object through the terraforming process. Thus, this is an exploration of materiality through a remapping of site using technology, so that its reconstituted form becomes fluid, bendable, rollable, pliable and portable. Photogrammetry maps out this terrain, deconstructs it, reconstitutes it into reformulations as a process of remapping the history of the site, through an aggregation of pixellated rocks. This process of remapping activates a secondary embodied experience for the viewer, where the postnatural remapping becomes intra-active, fluid and enveloping; building on the Formulations series that preceded it.

I also developed sculptural making methods as a part of this enquiry, revisiting the intra-active materiality of the geological strata on site. This site's geological 'body' was a result of millions of years' worth of small deaths and unimaginably seismic compressions, and through these practice-based material explorations I was thinking through the matter without removing or disturbing the site. Through different media, I explored processes of transformation to test out different variations of material entanglement. Video editing is akin to sculpture, in that it enables an interaction with its mattering. The mixing of plaster or Jesmonite is the same process in reverse, as powder and liquid are combined, my human hands pouring, lifting, measuring, mixing until a smooth viscous liquidity is achieved. This material state is reminiscent of the digital renderings I manipulate on screen... in both sculptural and virtual making processes there is a fluidity for a time in which I can interact and tacitly engage with material that is in a process of becoming; from



Figure 44

Studio-based Experiments
Photography: Victoria Lucas



Figure 44

Studio-based Experiments
Photography: Victoria Lucas

one state to another. Material deconstruction is a sensual manipulation of material.

I related to the rock as an ancestral being – a monument to the history of all living things. Using the alginate mould I had taken on site, I embedded the resulting plaster cast into a polystyrene block, which I then carved and built-up using papier-mâché.²³⁵ Carving polystyrene, pulping paper and building up texture and surface that mimicked the materiality of stone generated impressions of natural fissures, openings – the wounds of extraction. While making this sculpture, I thought a lot about the history the sedimentary rock, and the grit deposits laid down by the ancient delta that once flowed over the site. At the time, I reflected that each touch of the fingertip reimagines the pounding of raindrops, or the caress of snowfall. Through this method, a weathered face emerged that speaks of geological time; of solidifying liquid states compacting or consolidating a patient process of being. This tension between the materiality of both the real and the resulting artifice brings me closer to the material history of the quarry through the act of making. This material connection, between dead bodies, growing bodies and my own living body, became a central focus in all these later tests. Imagining this slow transfiguration, from living matter to solid stone over millennia, grounded my approach to thinking about subjectivity, and conceptually removed the cultural boundaries that I still held in place between human, non-human, more-than-human.

The materiality of the postnatural site is further explored using the virtual model in the video work *Coalesce* (2021),²³⁶ in which my body is visually absent, yet the rhythm of my breath remains as part of the geological material through the editing process. Through this work, my body is seemingly encased in the rock, becoming a heaving lump of stone. This brings my body and my subjectivity back into the work in a different form to Reclamation Ground One and Two. Through the virtual three-dimensional model, I experimented with techniques that were

235. Refer to Figure 44

236. Refer to Figure 45

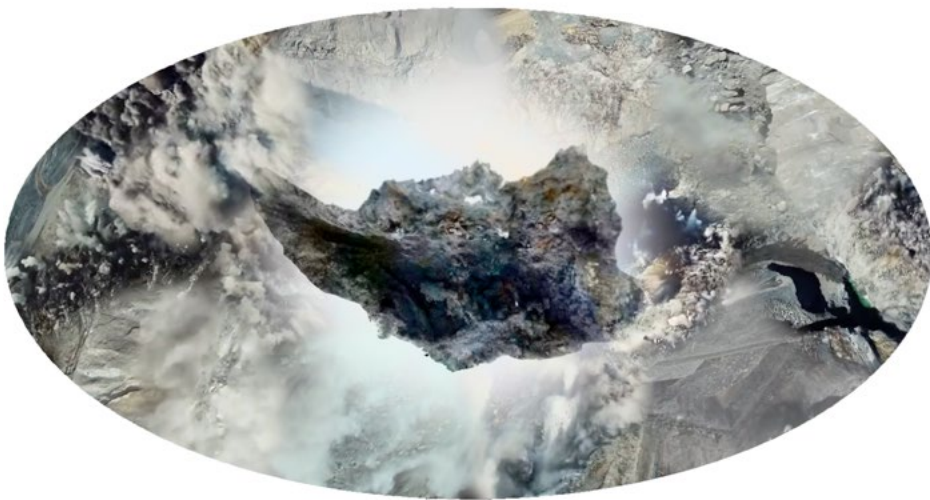
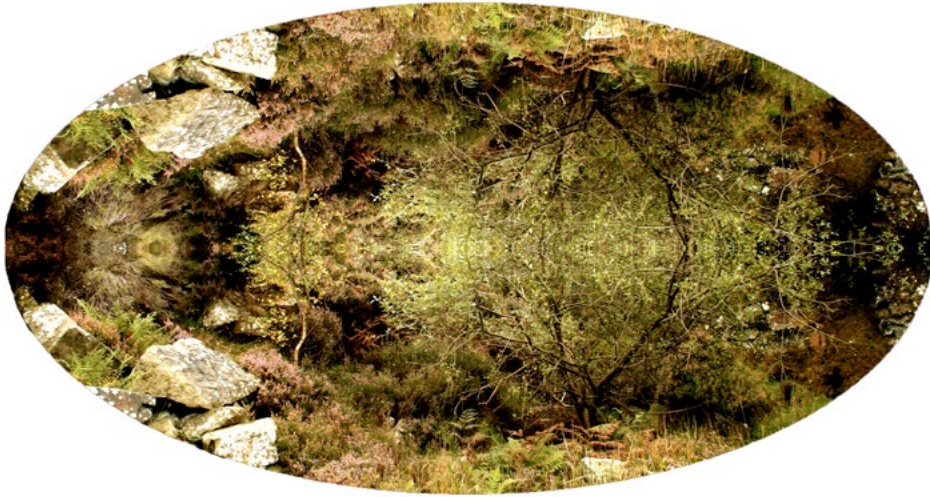


Figure 45

Victoria Lucas
Coalesce, 2021
Video Stills

[View Video Here](#)

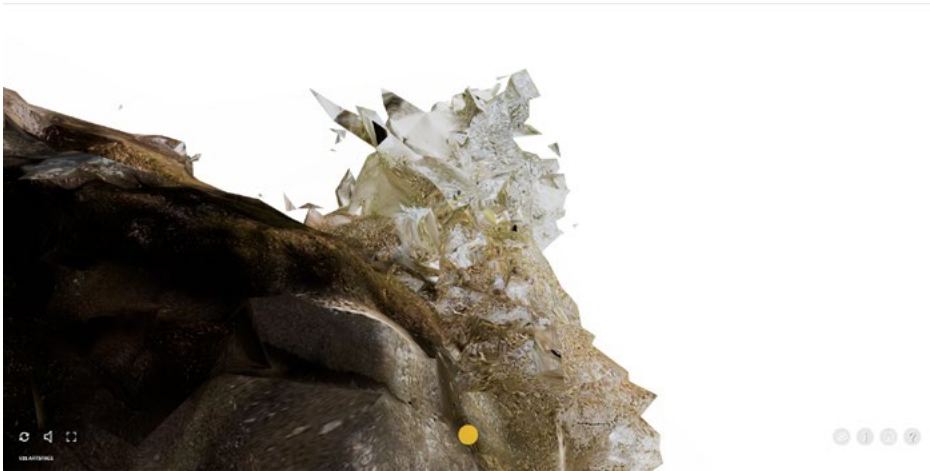


Figure 46
Digital Experiments (stills)

akin to 'reaching in' or 'falling through' the fissures in the rock, much like the virtual site visits I undertook using Google Earth.²³⁷ This process of 'moving through' and 'being-with' the pixelated matter drew upon material thinking principles to visualise becoming an embodied, entangled subject via the audio-visual editing process. Recorded movements through the virtual site of the quarry, combined with detailed video footage of the surfaces, were then mirrored through post-production. This effect is accompanied with the sound of breathing; the mirrored movement of the rock expanding and contracting to reference the natural rhythm of breath, as the oxygen is pulled into my body and to my lungs to replace the air that I have exhaled. Visualising the bodily cavity in this way evokes the embodied encounter via the enmeshed, entangled postnatal body. The lungs in stone become caves, the body an opening, a fossil. The edited sequence shifts again towards the vibrations of the earth, as a montage of quarry explosions expand and retract across the screen to further mimic the breath that has kept the pace of the video until now. The body, and female subjectivity, is decimated in this moment, remade as an aggregate through the postnatural forms that are reconstituted and transformed repeatedly.

This use of found footage, collaged into a writhing mass of pulsating explosions, also reveals the violence of industrial processes against the category of nature-as-resource, as geological matter is in a state of perpetual destruction. This edited sequence, coupled with the low rumbling vibrations of the events captured by construction workers and shared on YouTube, creates an endless state of turbulence in which the solidity of geological material and female subjectivity as a patriarchal construct is eviscerated and reformed. There are expansions and contractions with this digital process that speaks of the timeless violence of capitalism against nature-as-resource, as geological material forms a metaphorical illustration of the destructive forces of late-capitalism within the context of an environmental crisis. Yet the sequence is also anchored in the fleshy body, in the

turbulence of the birthing body. Here then is a material reckoning that entangles my female subjectivity with the landscapes encountered as Reclamation Ground, born out of an intra-active encounter on site. This is a posthuman transformation of subjectivity that eviscerates binaries and formulates a metaphysical return-to-matter, as bodies are brought together in a collective reckoning through embodied, entangled, affective, situated formulations of becoming-with the postnatural.

The soundscape for *Coalesce* is complex. The visual references to breathing through rock began to relate bodily cavities to the extracted cavity of the quarry, and I began experimenting with the generation of sounds using vocalisations that were not related to language. I thought back to the guttural sounds of the birthing process, of how my voice became a meditative material that held me through the power of uterine contractions. I explored a vocalised “shhhhhh” in relation to the footage, thinking about how the sound is formed, as air from my lungs is pushed into my mouth, over the tongue, around the teeth and through pursed lips. This sound is made by parents when comforting small children, and it is also used to silence; to disrupt chatter and to draw attention. With this sound I am asking the viewer to witness the transformation of my female subjectivity via the postnatural.

The other sounds explored in this work are meditative, as the cavity of my body and throat is used to generate its own vibrations, as the air is rhythmically hummed through the nostrils and mouth using the cycle of breath. This soundscape, made through an intuitive, experimental series of testing with the body and a microphone, makes becoming animal audible. Language is stripped away; the sound is layered and played backwards, so that the uncanny nature of the transformative voice is heightened further. Here, the human agent is no longer visualised directly, and the female human body is instead represented purely through the presence of my voice. So, as in Reclamation Ground one, there is a deconstruction of language that becomes destabilising, unanchored from articulation towards something that is materially and conceptually transformative.



Figure 47

Flipping the Virtual Landscape Upside-down



Figure 48

Drawings of Pathways to be Translated using Blender Software

In the related but different experimental video *Entanglement* (2021), the description of inter-species intra-actions renders the human(ist) body entirely obsolete, as a narrative, devised through the encounter on site, describes a reclamation of the female body by the postnatural site. This method of speculative material imagining gives the role of the voice in this work a degree of power and agency to perform on her own terms, through the embodied experience of site and the material nature of the moss and rock that it contains. Working with the virtual model for this video work was fascinating, as it meant that I could turn what was a skin-like virtual reflection of the landscape I knew quite literally upside down.²³⁸ This resulted in a visual experience of being underneath the surface of the quarry looking up at the boundary layer from inside the earth. Flipping the landscape in this way enabled me to 'see' the surface from a different material perspective, and I spent time exploring the form as if part of the ancient gritstone, or in the position of the watery moss interface, moving underneath and through the model using an online viewing interface that enabled me to control my position in relation to the virtual landscape.

I sought to create an experience in which the viewer was guided through the construction of aggregated matter, through the pixellated rocks and watery hues of vegetal material towards a posthuman entanglement with the non-human through this process of shifting through their virtually presented surfaces. This material testing sought to metaphorically destabilise humanist centred essentialism and associated nature / culture, women / nature binaries through a process of virtual entanglement and a shifting of perspectives. The interface used to navigate the virtual model was clunky to operate, so with the support of V21, we developed a more fluid way of documenting the movement through the skin of the quarry using Blender, so that a dislocation of material was visualised in the digital permeability and softness of the rock face. I created a series of rudimentary drawings,²³⁹

238. Refer to Figure 47

239. Refer to Figure 48

which V21 then used to construct a series of pathways using keyframes, before recording them as high-quality video files that I layered in Premiere Pro through an aesthetically-led, intuitive process. I combined these virtual manifestations with video footage I gathered at the site, to insert natural textures, colours, and movement on top of and underneath the pixelated forms. Combining the virtual model with the photographic and moving images resulted in a complex slippage of pixels and watery matter that pooled across the surface of the screen. This destabilisation of the site began to formulate a network of coalescent digital material that describes an embodied and materially embedded process of re-becoming part-of something-bigger-than the individual body.

As with Reclamation Ground Two, I began developing a spoken narrative to combine with the visual elements of *Entanglement*,²⁴⁰ introducing a language-based articulation of my embodied, embedded encounter with the site. The fictionalised narrative describes a deconstruction of my material body, as it is reclaimed by the 'matriarchal' moss colony that now thrives out of the quarried landscape before becoming part of the antecedent strata beneath. This metaphorical deconstruction and reconstitution of the body describes the transformation of female subjectivity through the postnatal body, as the site and its inhabitants become witness to the birth of my child. After labour, my body becomes liquid and is absorbed by the moss, until I am rendered earthly material. Here, I am beyond the individual subject, beyond gender, beyond human. I am entangled beyond recognition. This however is not an erasure of the subject, but a complete reconceptualization of what subjectivity is. Through this work and in relation to the other works created as a part of Reclamation Ground Three, subjectivity is a posthuman process of becoming-with through intra-active, embodied and situated

A delta once flowed across this site. The grit from pushing tides and flowing water builds. The dead sink and settle on the delta bed.

Moss, the first land based plants, form part of these gritty ingredients that now petrify in to cold hard matter.

Stone is made over millennia, recycling what once thrived into another form. Stone is silent. Machines chip away at time. Tools dig in, pulling apart the sacred shape of history. Cracked open, quarries are the wounds of the Earth's surface, revealing pains and internal workings. An extraction of bodies, the grit of the past is hewn from its resting place and displaced. The resulting absence is replaced with pooling air, which touches the new rock face for the very first time. The air is bittersweet. The rock is knowing. It sees what it touches.

The old quarry envelops my body as I enter its absence. There are many species of moss, growing across every surface. Trees have established themselves on the edges of the opening, both at the top of the wound and deep inside where sheltered saplings sprung out of the cracks left by the mark of hand tools.

A forest of polytrichum commune moss covers the central space of the quarry bottom. The colony stand tall, a small thriving forest of vibrant, illuminous green. She populates a wound inflicted on the land by the hands of men - protecting the raw cut of the rock with a film of living matter.

Photosynthesis is palpable, the whole space feels alive - electric - and the longer I stay the more I become part of it. My senses heighten, my pupils dilate. I become animal - I am an animal - and she holds me in her wisdom. This is her space, and she welcomes me in.

I dream of giving birth with her, on her. The moss is soft, a natural bed that supports my body and connects me to the inside of the earth like a membrane fusing me with the scared surface of ancient matter, deposited 350 million years ago. I think of my body, and how everything is made up of the same thing. I am the rock, I am the moss, I am the landscape.

The water in my body is drawn downwards towards the gametophytes. I imagine myself as the absent stone, compressed under the weight of time, bodily liquid oozing out of its encasement to quench the thirst of my bryophyte ancestors. Moss, the first land based plant. A unique environment that supports all other species to grow. She supports me now, as I bear down in what feels like the centre of the earth's embrace.

The moss is magnificently hormonal. Radiating the essence of their matriarchal powers, their daughters thrive out of the violence that ravaged the earth. Their skill and resilience is powerfully silent... their quiet knowing fills the quarry. I unwittingly lie upon a bed of radical feminists, and I can feel their power on my skin, in my lungs, in my blood. Here, I melt into her presence silently and all that I am is reclaimed by her.

Heightened senses, the allure of the moss washes over me, filling my body with euphoric electricity. I breath deeply, calmly. Something inside is ignited, my own source of feminine power that has been lying dormant all of these years. Called up from the depths of my bones, from the pit of my stomach, from the inside of my veins. I lay relaxed yet alert. I hear their collective whispers activated by the breeze, beckoning my body to evaporate and merge with theirs.

Our bodies are powerful. I let go. Sporophytes extend. Spores are released, floating across the turbulent breeze until caught by the earth's grasp. Females colonise... dwarf males are organised so that their seed rains down into extraordinary wombs. My blood is absorbed by the moss, enriching it with a metallic power that can be tasted on the damp air. My hands are red, spores stick to skin... using the viscous coagulate to establish themselves.

Oxytocin ignites the depth of my being as new life take root and grows strongly within. Bone and sinew are formed, as we are absorbed towards the earth. Soil and clay compact underneath my fingernails, separating tissue from keratinous plate. Finger tips throb as blood pools, forming crescent shapes of crimson. Fracturing, splintering, disintegrating, evaporating.

The cellular structures of my body dissipate, and I am drawn down towards the rhizoids that connect the colony to the earth. Gritstone vibrates as it meets my liquidity for the first time. I touch the surface of the rock and it senses my warmth. Barely audible whispers fill the air... gasps of ecstasy are released from in between the ancient grit. I absorb my ancestors' energy through a process of osmosis. Their embodiment enlivens innate powers.

The vibrations grow into tremors, and human matter fuses with rock. The rock engulfs eagerly, an interpenetration of human and nonhuman matter. The smell of ancient water is released into the air. I sink in deeper, sliding myself between substance.

The temperature of the stone is welcoming as the tremors of the earth are embodied and the surges begin. Powerful energy is liquid, and flows in through the skin cells towards a fleshy, gelatinous uterus. She works with her ancestors and her offspring in unison, each assuming their roles - the past, the present and the future. An omnipotent gynaecolatrous network.

So close to the edge of my being. Exquisitely beautiful pain. A power takes hold from within that is summoned from the very beginnings of existence, and it flows through every part of my body, consuming me with an essence of life that is raw and vigorous. My body works hard, drawing me deeper in to myself, pulling my inner self towards my daughter as we work together to birth her into the universe. The liquid from her emplacement is drawn towards thirsty mothers and daughters.

We lay together. The stillness of stone. I will my body's temperature to drop... my skin to harden. I become fossilised, a trace of my previous form remains. My presence melds with hers as our fibres meet under the weight of time. As we are compressed, our atomic structures transform, and we unite in our liquid splendour.... forever becoming, becoming, becoming.

I am encased, like a foetus unable to distinguish where I begin and end.... my parameters, the boundary marked by skin, is indistinguishable. All the air and water that once inhabited my body is squeezed, and it trickles away into the groundwater, to be later drunk by my offspring.

Figure 49

Written Transcript
Entanglement (2020)



Figure 50

Victoria Lucas
Entanglement, 2021
Video Still

[View Work Here](#)

4.3.4 Terraforming Subjectivity

The terraforming of Reclamation Ground Three took place at Site Gallery in Sheffield.²⁴¹ In this large open space, *Formations*, *Aggregated Form*, *Coalesce* and *Entanglement* were juxtaposed using exhibitionary principles to generate new ground in a public context. I worked with curators and technicians to enact the research, and we discussed how the works might manifest through mock-ups and sketches. Working in a team in this way was different to Reclamation Ground Two in this sense, which was an isolated experience. I was working with the Site Gallery team as both artist and researcher, and I had to be careful that the research developed initiated an active terraforming method rather than just becoming a presentation of existing objects. It was imperative that the exhibition, like the exhibitions in Reclamation Ground One and Two, was positioned as a primary site for knowledge production and a form of critical enquiry that activated the sites encountered beyond the gallery context.

The works were curated so that *Coalesce* was the first work that the audience encountered.²⁴² With the technicians, I devised and constructed an oval screen that supported a projection of *Coalesce*, and this structure was angled at 45 degrees to face the gallery entrance. It was important that the projection sat flush to the edge of the wooden ellipse, so that a floating image greeted the audience as they entered the space. This resulting portal-like video work was reminiscent of the experience of peering down into the quarry's extracted cavity from the top edge of the quarry face, becoming an active agent in making the work's meaning. Like Smithson's *Nonsite*, *Coalesce* became an abstract container that referred to the quarry site from the confines of the gallery through its positioning, and yet the depicted site was breathing; my body entangled in the earthly matter presented. The soundscape filled the gallery through a series of speakers mounted on the surrounding walls, filling the space with audible bodily and earthly material vibrations. These sounds were absorbed into the bodies of audience members as

241. Refer to Figure 51

242. Refer to Figure 52



Figure 51

Terraforming Reclamation Ground Three at Site Gallery



Figure 51

Terraforming Reclamation Ground Three at Site Gallery

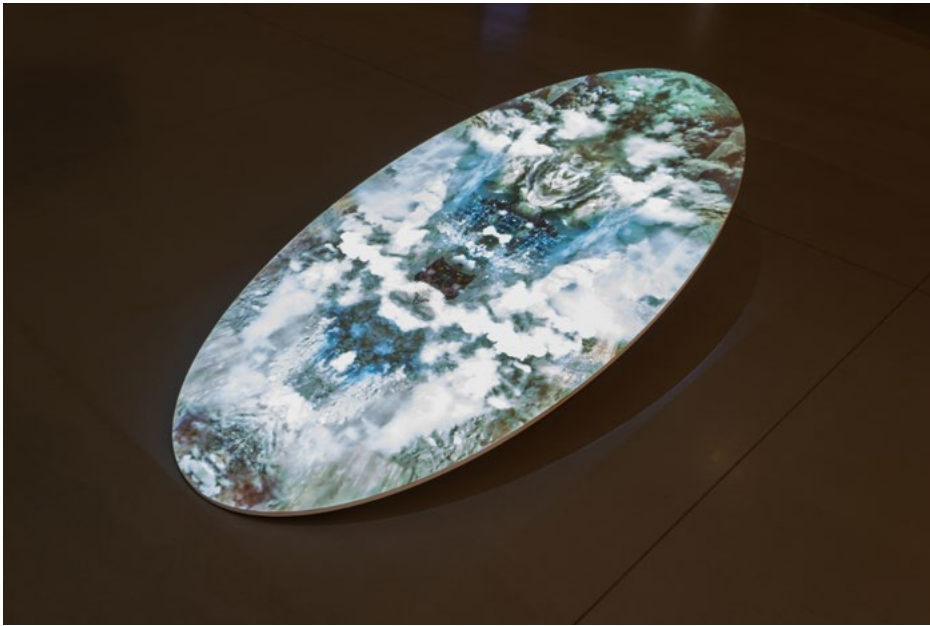


Figure 52

Victoria Lucas
Coalesce, 2021
Installation view, Site Gallery.
Photography: Jules Lister

[View Video Here](#)



Figure 53

Victoria Lucas
Aggregated Form, 2020.
Installation view, Site Gallery.
Photography: Jules Lister



Figure 53

Victoria Lucas
Aggregated Form, 2020.
Installation view, Site Gallery.
Photography: Jules Lister

they stood above the visual imagery looking down into the quarry. This reference to the topography of the site, in terms of the oval that mirrored the carved uterine hollow of the quarry, is reminiscent of Smithson's containers in *Nonsite "Line of Wreckage," Bayonne, New Jersey* (1968), with its cut strips of rust-coloured metal that create the illusion of looking across a landscape toward the horizon.

Behind and to the right of *Coalesce* hung *Aggregated Form*,²⁴³ suspended and hanging down from the high ceiling of the gallery. Here, the site of the quarry is digitally hewn and re-conceived in two dimensions, presenting the full exposed length of rock that encloses the quarry bed across the woven surface. Positioned so that it cascades from the ceiling and pools across the floor in folds, the hard surface of the rock becomes flexible in the context of the gallery. The interrelations between *Coalesce* and *Aggregated Form* are apparent through the subject matter. Rock and moss are represented through methods of material reckoning; the first bodily and fluid using a combination of voice and pixels; the second in sculptural form so that the scale of the site is referenced and felt in the body of the viewer. The voice, held in the rock in *Coalesce*, has seemingly fallen silent in *Aggregated Form*, as if it has escaped through the crack in the sculpted rock that has seemingly fallen from the quarry face above. In its final form, this sculptural work brings a three-dimensional replica of the site's materiality that the flattened image of the rock face cannot contain alone, despite being referenced through the folds of the fabric held across the concrete floor. So, the audience are presented first with a view into the perpetually transfiguring quarry from above, before the quarried rock is pulled up in front of them as if they have fallen through into the cavity itself and are dwarfed by the rock face. The weight of the sculpture grounds the viewer at this point, as a reference to gravity is introduced.



Figure 54

Victoria Lucas
Formations, 2020.
Installation View, Site Gallery
Photography: Jules Lister

Walking around the suspended fabric, the series of photographs, entitled *Formations*,²⁴⁴ are positioned to come in to view as the body turns. There is a performer wrestling more fabric here; another quarry face shrouding a body from view and taking on different forms. There is something interesting about the relationship between my body and the rock sculpture here; as if the body in the images has been revealed from under the fabric of *Aggregated Form* and has turned to stone. This series of photographs are generously lit in comparison to other works in the show and are hung formally in a row across the corner of the gallery – again close to *Coalesce*. The enveloped body, under the veil of the blanket-come-rock surface, becomes an interesting contrasting visualisation to the entanglement represented in *Coalesce*, and activates the suspended fabric of *Aggregated Form* through performative action. There is a pushing and pulling with this sequence, as the body of the performer and the body of the viewer traverse the space between the virtual-actual, enveloped in a material representation that also introduces the site of the quarry to the gallery space. What the virtual of the work enables here, through the printed aggregated rock face and the portal-like moving image is a space to generate a meaningful and materially grounded transformation of subjectivity.

Finally, at the end of the curatorial experience the viewer encounters *Entanglement*.²⁴⁵ Situated on a relatively small screen, with a directional speaker drawing the viewer close to the work, this is an intimate experience. The narrative reveals language, spoken word, for the first time in the sequence of related works. This narration details the bodily reclamation of the artist in the site of the quarry by the moss, until eventually she becomes part of the Earth. This work forms a conclusion, in which the viewer becomes aware of the agent's subjectivity through the encounters that she describes, while also witnessing her material disintegration in, with and through the site of the quarry. Bodily boundaries have disintegrated, and the audience are pulled through the surface of the earth, through the quarried rock and through the mossy boundary layer to below, inside

244. Refer to Figure 54

245. Refer to Figure 55



Figure 55

Victoria Lucas
Entanglement, 2021.
Installation View, Site Gallery
Photography: Peter Martin

[View Work Here](#)

and above the ground in a condition of weightlessness. This liberated position heightens the destabilisation of the reconstituted imagery, the layered textures and transformative processes described, so that distinctions begin to blur. This is the power of the postnatural site, where boundaries between agents become entangled with technology, nature, culture, actual, virtual, living and non-living, human and more-than-human. In summary, Reclamation Ground Three positions female subjectivity as material, psychological, entangled and embedded; subsumed into matter.

Conclusion

Three Reclamation Ground sequences have been described in this chapter, each iteration testing and reclaiming different aspects of female subjectivity. Reclamation Ground One, the cinematic desert, interrogates and visually deconstructs and reconstitutes existing socio-cultural constructs and cinematic stereotypes of Woman through processes of digital morphing using experimental editing techniques. The site is documented as a cinematic surface or a film set, in which the visual image of Woman is disrupted, broken, recalibrated and remade via a tech-grotesque aesthetic. Like Reclamation Ground One, Reclamation Ground Two also draws on existing cultural references that construct naturalised and biologically determined representations of female subjectivity. T.S. Eliot's depiction of sexual assault in *The Waste Land* forms a catalyst in response to the decrepit hotel room in Margate, through the mythic character of Tiresias. What is tested here is how narrative can articulate collective testimony developed in response to material histories of the postnatural. Tiresias as a mythic agent becomes a conduit for deconstructing and reconstituting literary and testimonial accounts until the narrative of female subjectivity is reclaimed by the collective voice. Thus, Reclamation Ground One focuses on rupturing the stymied representations of female subjectivity in Hollywood cinema, and Reclamation Ground Two focuses on psychological female subjectivities through a vocalisation of solidarity in response to sexual assault. In Reclamation Ground Three I

approached the postnatural site without any external cultural references to agitate. Leaning deeper into the posthuman, my own body becomes the agential subject as I encounter the site materially, bodily and affectively until material subjectivities are deconstructed, reconstituted and reclaimed by the postnatural site using experimental technologies. Each sequence has been deeply responsive to the site and my embodied reading of it, activated through the methodologies and core methods devised. In the next Chapter, I will discuss these findings, broadening the autoethnographic aspects of this study to further explore in what ways artistic site-based strategies, processes and methods, in combination with digital technologies, might constitute a *transformative* material reckoning, challenging cultural constructs of female subjectivity, while examining how Reclamation Ground might interrogate artistic practice and its significance for feminist debates on subjectivity in a postnatural world.

Chapter Five: Subject Matterings: Discussion and Further Analysis

Introduction

My interrogation of female subjectivity through this research enquiry has tested different manifestations of reclamation, through a material reckoning and transformation of female subjectivity, using site-responsive practice.

Reclamation Ground One took cinematic patriarchal tropes and destabilised their reading for example, through a tech-grotesque aesthetic that formed a refusal to enact these normative constructs. The tech-grotesque appeared as a messy, pixelated distortion of mouthing flesh that slid around the screen. These alluring yet deeply posthuman forms worked to shatter the patriarchal representations of female subjectivity found traversing the cinematic desert. This resulted in subjectivities that asserted agency and resisted male-dominated narratives, in a desert context that originally rendered them weak, subordinate and psychologically unhinged (through the cinematic). The digitised dissenting forms glitched and sighed in the terraformed space of Reclamation Ground One, forming a material reckoning with established, patriarchal tropes that persist, proliferate and contaminate the lives of women on and off screen.

Through the construction of a mythic witness whose collective reclamation is vocalised via the dilapidated aesthetic of the site encountered, the psychological reckonings in Reclamation Ground Two took back the agency of the female experience in relation to sexual assault via the mythic witness. Reclamation Ground Two formed connections between the depiction of a rape in TS. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the patterns of sexual abuse, sexual harassment and rape culture revealed by the #MeToo social movement, which I embodied through engendered fear and isolation in the site of the neglected hotel room. The manifesting subjectivities here arrived in the form of the collective voice, as the hotel room became a material witness through the mythical agent Tiresias, and as real and imagined accounts were pulled together, rewritten and recontextualised through the site-responsive narrative.

In Reclamation Ground Three the properties of virtual space, in translating visceral embodied experiences, were foregrounded using three-dimensional modelling technology. Female subjectivity was complicated further in response to this site, through a materialist entanglement with the verdant matter regenerating the disused quarry and the birthing body. Released from a position of resistance to patriarchal power, Reclamation Ground three revealed a revitalising feminist process of becoming-with the materiality of site, which destabilised notions of the individual hierarchic subject. In this chapter, I will interrogate these different manifestations of subjectivity and explore how Reclamation Grounds might begin to constitute a transformative subjectivity that challenges constraining patriarchal, essentialist power dynamics.

5.1 Site-Responses: Troubling Female Subjectivities

Reclamation Ground One and Two were sequences initiated by specific cultural constructs of female subjectivity through the landscapes and female characters of Hollywood cinema and the constructed sexual encounter in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The cinematic tropes of the female body situated in the deserts surrounding Hollywood led the first reclamation of subjectivity, as female bodies were digitally morphed and transformed away from the defined and maintained cinematic stereotypes encountered on screen and in relation to the Alabama Hills. This cinematic location was extracted using photographic methods, before female agents were made and 'recast' via scanners, screen recordings and postproduction technology. A tech-grotesque aesthetic was developed through these methods of making, which worked to undermine and nullify the cinematic stereotypes scrutinised in Hollywood cinema through their fluid domination of the landscapes re-presented. Their refusal to speak with language, as they revelled in their fluid movement across each film set and screen, reclaimed their agency as female subjects through a defiance to their characterisation and construction by the male auteur. Through this transformation, the agents developed inhabited the scene, unfolding and reforming through a provocative deconstruction and

aggregation of what it might mean to be a female subject. They take up space, rejecting the secondary roles assigned to them to become the protagonist of the reclaimed grounds situated in the *BODY/IMAGE* (2017) and *Imaginary Voice, Real Voice* (2017) video series. An intermittent 'sigh' sound was then introduced through terraforming methods, and this unscripted release of breath, combined with the transformational qualities of the tech-grotesque agents screened in situ, formed audible moments of autonomy as agents were released from the scripted narrative.

The tech-grotesque builds on antecedent cyberfeminist approaches that work to deconstruct gendered representations through glitching, warping, disrupting and agitating. For example, Amy Cutler destroys the gendered post-war constructs of domesticity prevalent in *Nature's Half Acre* (1951) using the agitating agent of AI technology. Linda Dement dismembers and recalibrates the disrupted female body in *Cyberflesh GirlMonster* (1995). In addition, feminist works by Mendieta, Woodman and Aguilar resist essentialist constructs that naturalise, sexualise and objectify the naked female body through different methods of positioning with and in the landscapes that they respectively encounter, and EXPORT utilises her clothed body to insert herself awkwardly into environmental constructions that have not been designed to include her. Pushing against normative paradigms is therefore a key feminist discourse that aims to trouble, agitate and subvert what is not wholly self-determined. Reclamation Ground One builds on this discourse, materialising new ground for alternative subjectivities to manifest.

This dynamic, in which female artists reveal, challenge and subvert attributed definitions of female subjectivity, is also tested further in Reclamation Ground Two. T.S. Eliot's literary depiction of sexual assault, which renders the female victim apathetic and deserving, contributes to an entitled sense of misogynistic predatory power over and against women. In Reclamation Ground Two, the hotel room formed a container in which to interrogate gendered power dynamics through the voices of the #MeToo movement; a container that I was enclosed

within for two weeks as part of the Nayland Rock Hotel art residency. The mystic, multidimensional character Tiresias, which T.S. Eliot borrows from Greek mythology, embodies this site as a witness to the patterns of sexual assault through a constructed narrative, which deconstructs and reconstitutes literary and lived testimonial accounts through a metaphorical changing of the script (a direct reference to film producer Harvey Weinstein, who was a central focus in the narrative). Thus, the site of the hotel room is reformulated as an active agent, breaking open cultural patterns of sexual assault and rape, reclaiming the narrative and neutralising the power dynamic through a collective vocalised account that subverts and emasculates the predatory behaviour scrutinised through an activation of solidarity. The reclamation here is psychological, driven by engendered fear in what felt like an unsafe environment and where isolation was central to the encounter with site. Reclamation Ground Two finds solace through a reconstitution of the collective narrative post #MeToo, reclaiming female subjectivity through a united voice that ruptures the patterns of misogyny witnessed by the mythic agent Tiresias.

Site-based encounters as part of Reclamation Ground Three were significant because they were not bound to a specific constructed patriarchal reference, in comparison to the cinematic, literary and world news references cited in Reclamation Ground One and Two. The disjuncture of Reclamation Ground Three shifted away from actively opposing constructions of female subjectivity towards an interrogation of what subjectivity is when one *becomes-with* site through the encounter. Through this final, intensive engagement with and in the site of the quarry, a different and unexpected set of relations or aggregations manifested, as I redefined what I understood about female subjectivity in relation to material embodiment, intra-action and affectivity. Importantly, this postnatural, post-industrial site was encountered through the postnatal body, which impacted on my approach to the site and the resulting extraction, material reckoning and terraforming methods that followed. The fecundity of matter is brought to the fore

in Reclamation Ground Three through the dynamics of vitalism and entropy, which were encountered and viscerally felt on and with the site of the quarry and through the birthing body. The act of birthing, or being birthed, cuts through humanist categorisations and reveals the spiritual and material power of the birthing body to engage in acts of renewal, regeneration and reclamation in this work.

As the human subject, I am revealed in the work as materially embodied, not wholly natural, but one that, as Braidotti clarifies, “is a culturally coded, socialised entity... the site of intersection of the biological, the social, and the linguistic.”²⁴⁶

Through the practice-based methods using technology, my female subjectivity is liquified and absorbed by the more-than-human agents on site through both the narrative developed and through the absence of the literal body. Through Reclamation Ground Three I am rendered fluid; a conglomerate of blood, tissue, cells, DNA, water, neurones and senses that are also entangled with all other living things at the site. Thus, the dynamic tensions between patriarchal constructs and feminist resistance foregrounded in Reclamation Ground One and Two was jettisoned in Reclamation Ground Three, and female subjectivity as a concept found new ground here. Fluid, intra-active, trans-corporeal entanglements at the quarry site manifested with technology, which in turn began to destabilise and interrogate what it might mean to be a situated, embodied, embedded material subject through the practice-based material reckonings established.

5.2 Technological Agents

Throughout this enquiry I have visualised what happens to female subjectivity in this process of cultural decoding through a technological translation of the material body, following a geographical, material encounter with site. In Reclamation Ground One for example, technology is used to animate disfigurements, manifest the grotesque and seemingly pool my body across the cinematic landscape to become a part of its surface. This intuitive and experimental approach to editing

246. R. Braidotti, 'The Subject in Feminism' in *Hypatia*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Summer, 1991), 1991. pp. 155-172

video footage using Adobe Premiere Pro and After Effects enabled a process of contortion, as stretching, bending, looping, warping and glitching tools developed a dissolution of bodily material boundaries as a process of reclaiming the visual surface of female subjectivity from cinematic patriarchal constructions. In Reclamation Ground Two, I tested a different process of reclamation using the potentiality of greenscreen technology, leaving 'space' through a technologically activated green hue that has the potential to hold the alternative subjectivities explored in the narrative developed. In Reclamation Ground Three, technology is used to explore a granular process of deconstruction and reconstitution through a translation of organic matter – rock, vegetation - into pixels, which can be pulled apart and reconfigured so that the disembodied agent can seep through, reach within, become a-part-of, through a transitional shift of more-than-human perspectives.

In relation to the inner and external boundaries of the body, fiction and technology become painless transmutations from flesh, as modes of transformation that deconstruct and reformulate the virtual body to interrogate what might constitute female subjectivity. The technological agent in Reclamation Ground thus becomes a potential virtual tool for reimagining, speculating and becoming in the actual, again going back to the *virtual-actual* potential of technology drawn from Deleuze. Interestingly, Simon O'Sullivan suggests that Smithson's Nonsites can be positioned on the edge between the "virtual" and the "actual";²⁴⁷ whereby the virtual affirms a "logic of becoming"²⁴⁸ and the actual manifests as an 'abstract container' that holds the virtual in the gallery context for the viewer to realise through their engagement with Nonsite. The logic of becoming in the context of this research draws parallels to Haraway's becoming-with, and is situated within the material thinking principles in which matter is engaged and manipulated to make change possible. My enquiry in a feminist, posthumanist, new-materialist context then is a materially embedded, psychological, social and political transformation, actualised

247. S. O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters: Deleuze and Guattari. Thought Beyond Representation*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2006, p.7

248. S. O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters: Deleuze and Guattari. Thought Beyond Representation*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2006, p.103

through a sequence of deconstruction, reconstitution and transformation through virtual manifestations of alternative subjectivities through Reclamation Ground.

Working with technology has enabled me, the intra-active agent, to embed myself visually, psychologically, sensorially and conceptually in the site-based works developed as part of a trans-corporeal experience of the world. Trans-corporeality means that all living things, as embodied beings, are “intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them”.²⁴⁹ Through the embodied, situated, embedded encounter, I explore technology as a conduit that complicates, entangles and reclaims the nature / culture and woman / nature dichotomies, thus moving the concept of subjectivity towards the material, biological body through virtual amalgamations of postnatural bodies combined with fictional storytelling.

Technology is therefore an integral agent that has enabled me to explore a transformative deconstruction and reconstitution of my subjectivity; specifically, through a decentering of the image of the female body into a virtual body transcribed as rock or as the liquidity of engorged moss gametophytes. It is my internal body that establishes a presence in the work here, as the lung cavities and vocal cords bring the viewer *inside* the image of woman and into the fleshy metaphorical interior of subjectivity, as visualised in video work *Coalesce* (2021). What is left in this work is my voice, which manifests as breath, as vocalised sound, as vibration, as a testimony of subjective transition where I become-with multi-agential matter. Thus, the voice is the manifestation of agency through a positioning of the female subject as a part of the landscape, using experimental digital editing techniques. This shift builds on the collective female voice in *Conversing with Tiresias* (2018), to include the material intra-active agency of, in and with the more-than-human, which includes the site, its living and non-living inhabitants, and the technologies with which I have conspired to reclaim female subjectivity.

249. S. Alaimo, 'Trans-corporeality' in Braidotti, R. and Hlavajova, M. (Eds) (2018). *Posthuman Glossary*. London, Bloomsbury, 2018, p. 435

Bodily entanglement is manifested in Reclamation Ground Three through virtual interactions, using machines made up of earthly components, in the form of site-responsive artworks. In this sense, the entanglement between my body and the technological media I collaborate with is bound to the very practices of material extraction I seek to deconstruct through the site of the quarry in Reclamation Ground Three. McKenzie Wark writes of Jussi Parikka's *Geology of Media*, "From the point of view of the rocks themselves, computers are a working-out of the potentials of a vast array of elements and compounds that took billions of years to make but only decades to mine and commodify - and discard."²⁵⁰ There is a rich complexity of layers to sift through here, as working with technology means working with extracted geology.

Technology is thus a material site, and the extracted materials that have been exploited to create my MacBook Pro for example are, as I type, assisting this research enquiry. Through a process of machinic activation, quartz, silver, copper, wolframite, and aluminium work symbiotically with me and additional more-than-human agents (demodex mites, bacteria, water, electricity) to test out methods and write up the results. I have navigated landscapes using Google Earth, and I have researched places using internet search engines. I have communicated with other humans – supervisors, curators, artists, technicians - via screens, and I have documented the landscape using a digital single lens reflex camera. I have edited footage of the landscape using Premiere Pro software; I have developed digital videos about landscapes and sites, which I have then uploaded to the Cloud and promoted using social media.

Technology as a material site has not only become a cyborgian²⁵¹ extension of my direct bodily engagement with my environment; it has become a significant aspect of how I function as a subject in the world. My intra-active relations with technologies have been tested in different ways through the three Reclamation Grounds, so that the technological agent has at times formed a tool (software),

250. M. Wark, *Sensoria: Thinkers for the Twenty-First Century*. London, Verso, 2020. p.234

251. D. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, London, Free Association Books, 1991, p.149-181

a mediation (3D model), a symbiotic partner (camera). Technology has brought agential properties to this research through site-based interactions that allow for a re-assemblage of extracted matter and subjectivity simultaneously. The body as sexualised and subjugated surface is ruptured and remade using postproduction techniques in *Lay of the Land (and other such myths)* (2017). The artist's face is activated as a potential vessel for collective occupancy through the use of green paint in *Conversing with Tiresias* (2018), and material bodies are deconstructed and reconstituted as entangled matter through the photogrammetric process in *Aggregated Form* (2020).

This contribution pulls together theoretical frameworks from material and cyberfeminist positionalities, so that a Xenofeminist position that seeks to “strategically deploy existing technologies to reengineer the world”²⁵² enmeshes with material feminisms in which “bodies are seen to always extend and connect to other bodies, human and non-human, to practices, techniques, technologies and objects which produce different kind of bodies and different ways, arguably, of enacting what it means to be human”.²⁵³ This brings us back to Blackman's assemblages, in which the body-as-organism is complicated through the post-biological threshold that “refers to a view of bodily matter which displaces the distinction between the organic and inorganic, material and immaterial, and living and non-living”.²⁵⁴ Perhaps the post-biological threshold is closely aligned with the postnatural here, as the materiality of culture breaches organic bodies (human and more-than-human) and with it any dualism between nature and culture as the human world leaves nothing untouched.

This builds on earlier contextual interrogations relating to nature/culture dualisms, as the postnatural, post-biological threshold ruptures the essentialist illusion of separability entirely. Technology manifests this conceptual reformulation of

252. H. Hester, *Xenofeminism*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2018, p.9

253. L. Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation*, London, Sage, 2012, pp.viii-x

254. L. Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation*, London, Sage, 2012, p.5

the postnatural in pixels in this practice-based enquiry, so that one can see the interconnections of human and more-than-human matter, specifically as part of Reclamation Ground Three. Terraformed in the gallery, these virtual amalgamations interrogate the chaotic postnatural, post-biological entanglements that exists as part of the actual, extending Smithson's Nonsite through material feminisms.

These practice-based findings reveal ruptures and gaps that have allowed the subject to become an entangled agent. Sites are gleaned for their visual data, so that surfaces can be skimmed, layered, opened, destroyed and remade through postproduction. These new grounds give space for alternative subjectivities to form. Through the Reclamation Ground sequence, female subjectivity becomes a multi-agential assemblage, transcending the fleshy mythologies and categories that underpin the cultural translation of Nature as oppositional, as layers of mediations, idealisations, mythologies and categorisations in this practice-led enquiry reveal the material world as a messy disordering of thought, steeped in crumbling essentialist structures of power and control. In the context of this enquiry, I ask if the Reclamation Ground sequence, as a process of deconstruction and reconstitution, can open up new sites of transformative potential.

5.3 Claiming 'Symjectivity'

What might it mean to reclaim female subjectivity? Is this possible? Is female subjectivity always in a bind with socio-cultural constructions or is there a way to move beyond this dualism? Reclamation Ground One and Reclamation Ground Two hold tensions with the patriarchal constructs that they materially reckon with to manifest potential transformations of female subjectivity. My embodied encounters on site were led by these dynamics. By Reclamation Ground Three, there is a clear disjuncture, a rupture, from this oppositional dynamic, following a deeply embodied transformation with site as a birthing body. The Reclamation Ground sequence and the resulting virtual, metaphorical reclamations of female

subjectivity demonstrate that, in their multiplicity and complexity, there is also the potential for a feminist critique of the word subjectivity to manifest. This critique will open potential ways of transforming the limitations of female subjectivity, as constituted through the patriarchal frame. The results of the material reckonings in Reclamation Ground Three have entered the enquiry into a different set of dynamics with the gendered subject, whereby the subject of Reclamation Ground has the potential to establish agency as a trans-corporeal, intra-active being, situated in a constant state of becoming-with more-than-human collaborators. Critiquing the word subjectivity to begin to reshape how we consider ourselves as earthly subjects feels like an appropriate articulation of what was explored, investigated and demonstrated in Reclamation Ground Three, which could also contribute to how we as a species might engage with our local environments differently and with an embedded feminist ethics of care.²⁵⁵ The prefix 'sym' is more appropriate than the prefix 'sub' as an active linguistic critique of subjectivity. The prefix 'sym' means 'with' or 'together', whereas the prefix 'sub' means 'under', 'beneath' or 'below'. The term 'subject' thus denotes an external power relation – a ruler, the patriarchy, a God – that positions the subject as a subordinate, an (insignificant) Other. A *symject* is more appropriate in describing linguistically the plurality of human and non-human intra-actions culturally reinstated through this research.

Symjectivity maintains the form of the word subjectivity (thus acknowledging the tensions that come with it), while revealing space for imagining what it means to become conceptually reabsorbed and integrated back into the world as an entangled earthly being. Manifesting from an embodied site-responsive sequence, symjectivity holds a multi-agential being through an absence of hierarchy, where all matter and genders are held equally and humans are decentred within other relations and entanglements. If we consider the root word 'ject', which means 'to throw', the pairing of 'sym' and 'ject' evokes notions of being thrown together as part of the chaos of existence. Thus, the symjective subject is caught in an

255. A. Chatzidakis et al., *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence*, London, Verso, 2020. pp. 19-20

affirmative, psychological process of breaking away from individualism towards the posthuman relational entanglements that were explored and made manifest in Reclamation Ground Three. Symjectivity in the context of this enquiry conceptually dissolves Woman, nature and culture binaries, holding their evolution as an entangled form in the works presented without getting caught up in dualisms that limit, segregate and damage everything that they touch. The fluid, feminist, posthuman body manifested in Reclamation Ground Three forms a conduit and mode of connection with earthly others in order to create *symjective* meetings in place. Symjectivity, as liquid becoming, connects one to many; so that one is repositioned as a cognitive construct and absorbed by the actuality of *becoming-with*.

Symjectivity as a term is a result of artistic practice, a mode of research that interrogates matter beyond the limitations of linguistics. Gendered language, itself a patriarchal construct that excludes, Others and categorises, is not currently proficient enough to articulate the shifting nuances and transformations of symjectivity; and it is here that interesting tensions arise. Yet, to make sense of the ecological crises and the huge challenges of our time, we need to understand our place in the world as entangled. Biologist Lynn Margulis²⁵⁶ substantiates that we are ancestrally related to all other living matter on the planet; more animal than fungi, but more fungi than plant; and Donna Haraway sums up the intensity and significance of this knowledge when she says “I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, us, no harm.”²⁵⁷ The symject of Reclamation Ground Three holds this materialist knowledge through the practice, enmeshing humans with nature, giving space to a myriad of gender identities, utilising a specific ethics of care through

256. L. Margulis, 'Serial Endosymbiotic Theory (SET) and Composite Individuality' in *Microbiology Today*, Vol.31, November, 2004. pp.172-174

257. D. Haraway, *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008. pp.3-4

and with technology. It is a term that enables a way forward towards a new form of belonging, not to a community as such, but to a slow time narrative and a material existence that supports a grounded trans-corporeality of being in-place. Site, as the environment in which I am situated, is a part of my body. Post-industrial dust - coal, textile fibres, chemicals - were entangled with my ancestor's flesh and thus mine, in a symbiotic encounter that unites species and matter in time and space. The North of England as a post-industrial landscape is part of my symjectivity, and yet I am continually becoming-with, through the encounters I have with the land and its inhabitants, pollutants, histories and technologies. The dynamic between a sense of becoming and a sense of belonging is thus forever in flux, so that when a terrigenous being moves away from their original geographical entanglement they can become enmeshed with another place, through the porosity of their symjective materiality. An orange from a grove in Spain, shipped to the UK to be sold at a local supermarket for example, will become entangled with the bodies it encounters. The human and their symbiotic bodily inhabitants digest the encased liquid segments; the bacteria, maggots and worms devour the discarded peel and turn it into compost. If trans-corporeality describes the earthly whole, then symjectivity describes the localised interconnection of beings in place and time, incorporating the specific ontological and cultural contexts *in place*. This is the specificity and nuance of site-responsive practice and what can be manifested through the Reclamation Ground sequence. Together, symjects can reconnect, renew, reclaim and reenergise in the context of climatic breakdown, growing out of the ruins of capitalism to make conceptual and metaphorical change possible.

5.4 Terrains of Reclamation Ground

Essentialising a subject, by portraying them in terms of one or more stereotypical or supposedly intrinsic traits, is reductive and ignores the intersections of for example gender, race, class and context. This is where the tensions of this research on subjectivity are held, as the term 'female' itself is tied to gendered tropes. Yet understanding the lived, affective and embodied experience of women

is important to notions of becoming-with, and thus this research foregrounds the embodied encounter as a way of grappling with the problematics of female subjectivity, in response to different sites, to test what should remain of the subject in a posthuman context. The research enquiry thus “stays with the trouble” of subjectivity,²⁵⁸ in a place of ambiguity, in order to test its boundaries through material methods. The following sections explore and summarise the contributions of the enquiry through three headings; reclamation, material reckoning and transformation, which act as a bridge to the concluding chapter.

5.4.1 Reclamation

What is reclaimed here, through a shattering of patriarchal representations via material reckoning, is the entangled earthly body over the neo-liberal individualist body. Agency is reclaimed through the refusal to participate (Reclamation Ground One), through a collective changing of the script (Reclamation Ground Two) and through a becoming-with (Reclamation Ground Three). The collective voice became central in all three Reclamation Grounds, as the female subject is reconstituted as a virtual agent through which these collective reclamations manifest. The female subject thus becomes a conduit for acts of refusal, acts of solidarity and acts of enmeshment through the material reckoning of subjectivity in response to site. The deconstruction of Woman, through the tech-grotesque, mystical and relational, positions agency as a counterpoint to the hegemonic aesthetic, psychological and individualist constructs that seek to dominate and control notions of female subjectivity.

Through the autoethnographic, material and technological encounters of this contribution, deep complexities and contradictions are revealed in relation to gendered subjectivities. I have a body – a boundary - and even though it can only be sustained as a living entity in conjunction with other organisms, my sensorial, cognitive, kinaesthetic experiences are unique to me. These are all valuable, meaningful parts of my existence, particularly in a resisting dynamic with

patriarchal constructs of female subjectivity. The entangled earthly subjectivities that manifested in Reclamation Ground Three revealed that, if ground is virtually established beyond this dynamic, other stratum of being can manifest that are beautifully complex, plural and continually shifting as part of a postnatural ecology. This practice-based research has activated the collective within the subjective in this sense; it holds qualities that can perhaps be applied to all genders, all species, all matter, in a way that initiates a metaphorical dissolution of hierarchical power through a reconceptualisation of the nature / culture dualism. This enquiry has thus explored the culture of nature, through the postnatural sites encountered, to breakdown and reclaim what it means to be a female subject through a different, nonhierarchical set of power dynamics.

5.4.2 Material Reckoning

Lodged firmly within posthuman and material feminisms, this enquiry has shifted from merely formulating the ground as a site in which to undertake the research toward an *earthly* materialism in which I, as the autoethnographic researcher, become the site's materially embedded counterpart. This approach has worked to deconstruct and reconstitute selected geo-political landscapes through site-responsive posthuman, embodied, embedded encounters using technology. Reclamation Ground One for example presents the desert landscape as a backdrop or location in which the female subject is glitched, recalibrated and extracted from cinematic tropes, via the tech-grotesque aesthetic developed, using post-production techniques. The repellent nature of the dilapidated hotel room manifests as a psychological space in Reclamation Two, yet the female subject is physically segregated from the materiality of site through the erection of a protective tent and through the transformative potential of green face paint. In contrast, without apparent hierarchies, the manifesting subjectivities of Reclamation Ground Three were multiple, less reliant on gendered dynamics and deeply entangled with the more-than-human entities that also occupied the site.

Thus, this transformative dynamic between the autoethnographic subject and geopolitical site across the three works has manifested through material reckonings that have worked to distort, resist, and transfigure normative power dynamics in a way that foregrounds nonhierarchic, relational, earthly materialisms.

The fluidity of matter and the disintegration of boundaries that manifested in this contribution, through the virtuality of technology, metaphorically transformed notions of subjectivity through the pixelated renderings of autoethnographic and materially situated encounters with site. Enacting these virtual manifestations as artworks in a gallery context solidified these transformative reckonings, so that metaphor became tangible through its material avatars. These glitching, fluid, pixelated bodies, virtually enmeshed with site and dislocated from patriarchal constructs, expanded the dimensions of female subjectivity outwards, demonstrating the possibilities that lie beyond proliferating categorisations, stereotypes and tropes that shape notions of gendered subjectivity.

5.4.3 Transformation

Working with technology has enabled me, the autoethnographic agent, to embed myself visually, aurally, psychologically, sensorially and conceptually in the site-based material reckonings of Reclamation Ground. Developed in response to Reclamation Ground Three, *Entanglement* (2021), *Coalesce* (2022), installation *Aggregated Form* (2020) and photographic series *Formations* (2020), foreground an entanglement of bodies through different material intergrations of the female body. Flesh, rock, vegetation, machine and pixel are virtually transformed as a conceptual and metaphorical process of becoming-with using processes of digital manipulation and the voice. A transformation of subjectivity manifested as entangled and earthly, as the plurality of human and more-than-human intra-actions encountered through the practice-based methods became apparent.

The term symjectivity evolved through these practice-based methods, suggesting

that the individual subject can be released from hierarchical categorisation through the collective body. Severing tensions with patriarchal, neo-liberalist notions of individualism and the solidification of identities as stereotypes, symjectivity is a formulation of being that is multi-agential, amorphous and situated. It suggests an autoethnographic, material existence that is entangled and rhizomatically connected to other human and more-than-human counterparts, as encountered through the birthing body and in the verdant ruins of the disused quarry. The term becoming-with, which Donna Haraway uses to emphasize the interconnectedness and co-creation in all relationships (not just between humans but between all living and non-living things), is the symject of this research *in action*. The symject continually becomes-with matter through the porosity of trans-corporeal encounters, a transformative formulation that has manifested through the Reclamation Ground sequence.

Symjectivity works to broaden an understanding of being in a way that reconnects and recalibrates the vibrant earthly living tissue of which humans are just a mere part. Entangling the multifaceted agent of Reclamation Ground Three, in a way that brings collectivity in a time of ecological and political crisis, is an affirmative²⁵⁹ geo-political stance, reasserting the significance of practice-led research as an active process of thinking-with-the-stuff.²⁶⁰ The symjectivity of Reclamation Ground is materially bound; a true situated knowledge shaped by an entanglement of social, cultural, historical, and personal contexts that shift away from the patriarchal frame through virtual and material bodies. It interrogates an engagement with the matter on, in and with site that reveals complex and rhizomatic stratum that has been reduced and erased by essentialist, patriarchal dualisms.

259. R. Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2019, pp.153-173

260. A. Neimanis, 'Material Feminisms' in R. Braidotti and M. Hlavajova, *Posthuman Glossary*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, p.242

Conclusion

The Reclamation Ground sequence has formulated artistic manifestations that contribute to the rich material and posthuman feminist frameworks cited in this study. Reclamation Ground acts as a practice-based method of re-contextualisation, a visual renegotiation of what it means to be of the earth in a time of planetary crisis. In the context of neoliberal individualism, subjectivity can be a significant and active process of defining and mattering who one really is through the autoethnographic methodologies of this enquiry. Yet the manifesting vocal and material collective entanglements of this research contribute other ways in which one can define the self, and in a way that perhaps contributes to a more hopeful future. Through the Reclamation Ground sequence, symjectivity has been recognised and internalised through the embodied, embedded, intra-active subject. What possibilities does this open up for culture and society, and what happens to the individual female subject through this process?

Chapter Six: Conclusion: Grounding the Findings

Before I began this research enquiry in 2016, any reference to female subjectivity in my practice had become increasingly jettisoned through the limitations I had adopted as an artist. Maintaining objective distance from my work, through a deadpan aesthetic, actively removed my practice from any representation or acknowledgment of how my specific, situated gendered experiences might interact and intersect with the sites and contexts I was documenting. Through this research enquiry, I have come to the realisation that the prevailing cultural context of 'post-feminism' at that time significantly contributed to this position; a mythology that suggested that gender equality had largely been achieved, thus rendering overtly feminist art unnecessary or outdated.²⁶¹ In the cultural context of post-feminism, I did not know how to artistically address the problematic power dynamics I was experiencing without being disregarded as a practitioner. A growing awareness of these culturally induced limitations subsequently initiated a need to critically examine my own subjectivity and what it might constitute, using a metaphorical and material reclamation process. Through technology, this research enquiry has formed an interrogation of the power dynamics that resulted in this form of censorship, through a site-responsive art practice that situated the female subject in and with the terrain of the sites encountered.

Since 2016, the world has experienced profound socio-cultural shifts driven by a global pandemic, technological advancements, political polarization, and major social movements. Key events that have unfolded during this enquiry include the rise of the #MeToo movement, the COVID-19 pandemic, widespread racial justice protests, Brexit, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, rapid environmental shifts driven by climate change and the explosive growth of AI technology. Throughout these seismic contextual changes, this enquiry has foregrounded a sequence of practice-based methods that have questioned what a critical reclamation of female subjectivity might mean, and how it might manifest, through a feminist site-responsive art practice that recognises the geo-political significance of an

261. E.J. Hall, M.S. Rodriguez, "The Myth of Postfeminism". *Gender and Society*, 2003. 17 (6) pp. 878–902

embodied encounter with site. Reclamation Ground establishes a process in which inequitable power dynamics can be critiqued, challenged, deconstructed, reimagined and transformed with technology, as working the ground becomes a metaphor for working the political space and contested ground of gendered subjectivity.

Material reckonings developed over the course of this enquiry have increasingly fragmented notions of female subjectivity. Cracks have appeared, boundaries have shifted and new ground has been established that has given space to an investigation of what might happen to female subjectivity when the dynamics with patriarchal constructions are challenged, subverted, broken down or transformed. Through the material reckonings of the Reclamation Ground sequence, the female body has mutated from a defined and linear surface towards a fleshy, porous assemblage. Silence has been replaced with vocalised becomings. Working through the virtual properties of artistic practice has supported an investigation of what being a human subject could be if the structural boundaries of gendered subjectivity are agitated. Becoming absorbed into the earth, through the virtual, conceptually entangles the neo-liberal body with the ecological systems that essentialism has severed from our experience of being human. Technology here enables a virtual engagement with materiality that contributes to a reconceptualization of the self, in turn evidencing potential possibilities for reconstituting the subject in a time of ecological planetary crisis.

What manifests here reveals further questions. For example, what is left of woman through this process, and where has female subjectivity gone in the plurality of entanglement? Symjectivity has grown in the verdant space of Reclamation Ground, where material thinking has the potential to lead to transformative ground in response to encounters with specific geo-political contexts. Reclamation Ground does not hold static boundaries in this sense; it is dynamic, fluid and responsive. Disconnected from the patriarchal categorisations of bodies, living and non-living,

human and more-than-human, Reclamation Ground has the potential to agitate different power dynamics that increasingly polarise, subjugate and persecute Othered bodies. Terraforming these material reckonings as artworks provides a temporary assemblage that materialises these alternative power dynamics in a gallery context. It is my intention to continue working with generative potential of Reclamation Ground beyond this enquiry, in, with and through the different geo-political landscapes I encounter as a site-responsive artist.

In summary, Reclamation Ground becomes an affirmative reminder of our earthly materialism and the intra-active, relational connectivity that proliferates deep below the inequitable surface of patriarchal essentialism. Through this site-responsive practice, the neoliberal female subject becomes-with a network of earthly matter that complicates, entangles and extends a critical understanding of the self. Reclamation Ground reveals positive, transformative methods of becoming-with, through artistic practice, as a grounding expansion of what it means to be a female subject.

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