

**Humans, Nature, and Technology: A Necessary Ecology**

by

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It's been said that everything is influenced by power. For all of history humans have debated over who has it, who deserves it, and who should yield it. Some think that to hold power is the highest honor, while others believe that this aspiration is dangerous. They believe that concentrated power is a corrupting and volatile force, and that power should instead be spread equally amongst the people of the earth.

Through the lens of power, any interaction can be boiled down into two forces: the powerful and the powerless. This dynamic informs the basis of ecofeminist ideology. The disproportionate distribution of power between two entities, for example human vs nature, is the principal issue of the ecofeminist ideology. The question that all of these generalities lead up to is how, in our modern era where equality is said to be universal, do we redistribute power?

To borrow phrasing from Robert Sessions' *Deep Ecology versus Ecofeminism: Healthy Differences or Incompatible Philosophies?* the idea of disproportionate power (and the resulting systems of oppression), can be seen as the "diagnosis" proposed by ecofeminists. Ecofeminism's core belief is that the oppression of women has developed on a parallel axis to the oppression of nature due to the unequal ownership of power by the (primarily described western) patriarchy. The dismantling of systems of oppression and the ultimate equal redistribution can be called the "prognosis" (Sessions 93). The exact nature of this prognosis is our big question.

A singular "cure-all" for the oppressive systems in western culture would be near impossible, but I believe that the internet and contemporary technologies (also referred to as information and communications technologies or ICT) can be used as the connective tissue between oppressed entities and therefore aid in the redistribution of power. Because the internet

(and adjacent digital technologies) are so all-encompassing, nuanced, and far-reaching, I believe that oppressed bodies in our society could use it to their benefit as a liberating device.

In this essay I will be examining two case studies in which ICT has created a mutually beneficial and empowering relationship between two oppressed bodies. These relationships, and the dynamics the involved entities create, can be seen through an ecofeminist framework as models for prognosis. In the cannon of ecofeminism, “oppressor” conventionally refers to “the patriarchy” or “patriarchal conceptual frameworks”. This framework includes (but is not limited to) systems of primarily western: misogyny, racism, ableism, xenophobia, capitalism, industrialism, and colonialism.

The “oppressed” in this essay refers to two separate but equally important players. The first is what is usually generalized as “nature” or the “environment”, this includes but is not limited to: plants, animals, insects, bacteria, fungi, earth, and space (moon/ planets/ sun). These organisms make up the majority of who is affected by the anthropocentric hegemony in the deep ecological school of thought.

By the standards of the ecofeminist ideology, the “oppressed” also refers to (primarily) women. An attempt should be made not to homogenize the player of the oppressed because this actively gives more attention and value to the plight of women (and conventionally white women) than those who are equally, if not more systematically oppressed. When referring to the “oppressed” we are referring to: women, people of color, lower income communities, indigenous peoples, disabled people, and the LGBTQ+ community.

Ecofeminism is not the only framework through which these issues can be viewed. A related set of ideas is known as deep ecology. While ecofeminism shares many ideas with deep ecology, the two hold distinctly different schools of thought. The two ideologies both agree that the destruction of the environment is caused by an overarching anthropocentric hegemony that has been woven into our society. Where the two meet a fork in their logic is that ecofeminism believes that women and other marginalized peoples have been oppressed in a manner parallel to the exploitation of nature. They also believe that to rebuild the environment requires us to acknowledge these oppressed bodies and include their interests when establishing new power structures (Sessions 97).

There is a rift between deep ecologists and ecofeminists. Sessions' aforementioned analysis of the difference between the two philosophies details these accusations: "some deep ecologists have accused ecofeminism of shallowness, anthropocentrism, short sightedness, and environmental naïveté, while various ecofeminists have called their accusers sexist, shallow, ahistorical, stoical, and even fascist" (Sessions 91). While these accusations between deep ecologists and ecofeminists are not important to the primary goal of this essay, the social context and impact of ecofeminism is.

In an effort to not generalize, the following case studies will employ specificity in regards to stories about individuals and small communities. That will then inform the larger concepts that constitute the overarching thesis. Andrew Flack wrote *'In Sight, Insane': Animal Agency, Captivity and the Frozen Wilderness in the Late-Twentieth Century*, an analysis of the behavior exhibited by Misha, a captive polar bear, in the Bristol Zoo. Within this essay, Flack explains the importance of specificity in terms of agency of a subject.

Illuminating the influence of individual animals and their interactions with humans in past environments allows us access to broader historical worlds. Simultaneously, it illuminates how it is possible for both individual animals and their species to wield powerful ‘agency’ through their relationships on both micro and macro scales. Doing so in the supposedly oppressive context of the zoo contrast to the ‘freedom’ of the ‘wild’ places allows for the consideration of characteristic of animal influence. (Flack 635)

Speaking about entities such as animals or insects, that are so commonly generalized requires us to look at them with a magnifying glass (so to speak). By considering them as individuals or conscious entities, we are able to give agency to the oppressed and possibly empathize with them, allowing an understanding of where they fit into the equation of oppressor/oppressed.

Generalization also comes into play in ecofeminist theory with regards to the “woman”. Most ecofeminists will use “the patriarchy” as the title for the oppressor, conjuring up the image that women are the only oppressed individuals. This is obviously untrue. In Stacy Alaimo’s *Cyborg and Ecofeminist Interventions: Challenges for an Environmental Feminism* she analyzes ecofeminist Susan Griffin’s 1978 book, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring inside Her*. In this book, Griffin aims to dissolve the boundaries between women and animals in support of her ecofeminist hypothesis. Alaimo’s criticism of these efforts describes why this erasure is counterproductive:

Nonetheless, Griffin erases class, race, and cultural differences when she speaks as and for a monolithic “woman”. Furthermore, this woman-animal solidarity casts animals and women as victims. That is, the blurring between animals and women supports the

historically ingrained position of women and animals as the Other to a male subject, roles that easily fit misogynist narratives of oppression (6)

To de-homogenize the oppressed allows for the breadth of our prognosis to not only reach more individuals who desperately need it (like those in the following case studies), but also allows for a larger amount of people to regain their agency in the new proposed power systems.

The first case study focuses on Claudio Aguayo and Chris Eames' *Promoting Community Socio-Ecological Sustainability through Technology: A Case Study from Chile*. Aguayo and Eames describe their hypothesis and application as the following:

This article presents a case study which evaluated the potential of ICT for promoting ecological literacy and action competence amongst community members in southern Chile. The case study addressed the ecological deterioration of a lake, which is having deep social, economic, recreational and cultural implications locally. (871)

The aforementioned community is located in the southwestern coast of Chile in the BioBío region. Lanalhue Lake is a part of the Nahuelbuta range which consists of two major towns, Contulmo (southeast shore) and Cañete (northern shore). These two towns are home to approximately 30,000 people, which jumps to about 40,000 during the holiday season (Aguayo and Eames 881). A large part of the community is comprised of the indigenous Mapuches peoples, as well as tourists during the summer months. The last 15 years has seen an increase in tourism due to the outcropping of new summer cottages and the local scenery (Aguayo and Eames 882).

Forestry and the tourism industry are two human initiated factors that are having a significant effect on the community's ecosystem, what an ecofeminist would call 'impeding anthropogenic forces' (Aguayo and Eames 882). These industries alter the community's economic and environmental standings, having caused water quality deterioration, and an increase of nutrients and sedimentation in the lake, resulting in accelerated eutrophication<sup>1</sup> (Aguayo and Eames 882).

The eutrophication has resulted in the flourishing of *Egeria densa* (known locally as lucheillo), an invasive species of Brazilian waterweed which, as reported by Aguayo and Eames, "has created problems within the tourism industry (an economic dimension), the recreational use of the lake by community members and visitors (a social dimension), and within the spiritual practices of the local indigenous communities (spiritual and cultural dimensions) among others." (883).

The researchers proposed that an attractive and functional website that made the information about these impeding anthropogenic forces clear to the locals would increase ecological literacy and would promote local environmental activism. Through meticulous research of the social, economic, and environmental impact of the deterioration of the lake, while also consulting with the key community members on how to design and implement the website at the benefit of the community, Aguayo and Eames successfully created a comprehensive database that was interactive, informative, and personal.

Upon viewing the website, Rafael, a local, reported the following:

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<sup>1</sup> Eutrophication being defined as "(a lake) characterized by an abundant accumulation of nutrients that support a dense growth of algae and other organisms, the decay of which depletes the shallow waters of oxygen"

I had never before heard of the “eutrophication” concept, and on the website it is very well explained. This led me to demystify people’s diverse opinions regarding the lake, and to have a more critical view in regard to actions undertaken so far, like in the case of the luchecillo harvester machine. To have a management plan based on local scientific research is definitely needed. (Aguayo and Eames 888)

Amongst the participants, many reported having a better understanding of local initiatives after viewing the website, as well as gaining ecological literacy and finding the motivation to engage in local environmentalist pursuits. Pamela, one of the participants, stated:

Before knowing the website, personally you do not know what is going on in regard to what other people are doing for the environment, so my perception has changed when we say “how come nobody does anything to help?” when you see the deterioration or death of something related to the environment; now I can say that there people doing something, which motivates me to participate and be positive part of it. (Aguayo and Eames 888)

This case study has triumphantly created a new power dynamic within this community; through an ecofeminist lens, a successful relationship between technology, humans, and nature.

Through the website, locals were able to gain environmental agency due to the spread of information by digital means. By exposing who and what was undermining the local ecosystem, the power was shifted from the oppressing forces (i.e. forestry and tourism industry) to the newly enlightened and motivated locals. The “design principles [of the website] promoted the emergence of non-formal and social learning, and distributed cognition, through interactivity,



diversity, and means for learners to affect each other and a decentralized control structure” (Aguayo and Eames 884).

This “decentralized control structure” is the epitome of what ecofeminists are aiming for. Indigenous locals and the surrounding ecosystem have regained power and agency through the availability of previously unknown information by means of digital intervention, from this point they have the potential to create a new power structure that mutually benefits them both, resulting in a multi-faceted ecology between human, nature, and technology.

The second case study focuses on *Sensing Locally in the Global Environment: Using Sensors in Teachers’ Education*, conducted by Maria João Silva, António Almeida, Bianor Valente, Margarida Rodrigues, and Vítor Manteigas through the Lisbon Education College and School of Health Technology at The Polytechnical Institute of Lisbon, Portugal. The case study revolves around the following reasoning:

New technologies together with transnational environmental problems are fundamental drivers of the definition of the skills and knowledge needed to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Furthermore, UNESCO stresses that the quality of education, including the content of the education provided, and the excellence of teachers, is crucial for achieving sustainable development, and all of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). In this context, the integration of sustainability into education will support natural and a consequent desire to protect and restore nature (Silva et al. 166)

Students engaged in a hands on collection of local qualitative and quantitative environmental data through easily accessible electronic sensors and smartphones. They collected this data from their campus in Lisbon as well as a local natural lagoon. The data they gathered

then pointed to what the impeding anthropogenic forces were and lead the students to sustainable solutions. The outcome of the workshop is as follows:

Based on the acquired data, students were able to: i) use the sensors without difficulties, in a engaged way; ii) recognize the low levels of CO<sub>2</sub> (below the planetary mean) of the Lagoon system, while relating these low levels to the photosynthesis and CO<sub>2</sub> peaks to the lack of quality of the air in the human crowded observatories of birds; iii) identify environmental problems of the Campus, such as thermal discomfort, sound pollution, and CO<sub>2</sub> pollution, while recognizing their causes; iv) envision a set of solutions to identified problems, namely to plant trees to create shadow (they used sensors to prove the lower temperatures at the shadowed places), and to place a barrier, “for instance of cork”, to protect the Campus from the traffic noise. (Silva et al. 169)

This case study exemplifies a more informal technique of decentralizing the power in a certain community. Although the technology usage was minimal, it resulted in the same outcome: members of a community becoming aware of their ecosystems and the forces that are affecting it. The spread of information by means of digital technology allowed these community members to become active in local environmentalism and consequently shift the power from the overall oppressing forces (climate change from general urban pollutants) to the oppressed.

These two case studies shared a crucial outcome: a strong sense of community and an understanding of how they relate to the surrounding ecosystem. Without understanding one's position amongst your community (and fundamentally your ecosystem) one cannot feel the empathy required to partake in local activism. The use of technology can act as an equalizer amongst those who make up a modern ecosystem by creating a consistent flow of information

about the oppressing forces to the oppressed bodies, creating a platform for those oppressed bodies to regain power and agency.

Although the use of information technologies can be used as a liberating force between the oppressor and oppressed, the socio-environmental effect that the machinery required to generate the energy for these technologies, and the technologies themselves, are active polluters to the environment that they are freeing.

There are instances where captive/oppressed bodies (i.e. zoo animals) are forced to live in an artificial environment that emulates their natural habitat, the local community will show outrage over the animal in captivity. But because of climate change resulting from environmentally exploitative power systems, the native environment of the animal has been disintegrated to the point where the animal could not survive if returned.

Conventionally, in a debate over blame, the party who caused the most harm would receive the most condemnation and would subsequently be accountable for reparation. But in the context of climate change, the onus has been put onto the individual versus the corporations (who have been accredited with 71% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions (“Just One Hundred Companies”)).

ICT could be used to give individuals access to a wealth of information about their local ecosystems and also those who are affecting said ecosystems. But paradoxically these technologies pose a huge environmental impact.

The Guardian article “‘Tsunami of data’ could consume one fifth of global electricity by 2025”, explains the multitude of environmental impact reports that explore the effect that the

communications industry has had on our global power usage. “In an update to a 2016 peer-reviewed study, [Anders] Andrae found that without dramatic increases in efficiency, the ICT industry could use 20% of all electricity and emit up to 5.5% of the world’s carbon emissions by 2025. This would be more than any country except the US, China and India” (“Tsunami of data”).

Increased calls for efficiency seems to be the proposed solution for the electrical power impact, as well as the spread of information (such as the aforementioned Guardian article, which has approximately 3,480 Facebook shares at the time of this essay). Which has the potential to enlighten readers to the effect their internet/power providers usage has on the earth. This could hopefully lead to an overall understanding for what is required to build more efficient energy structures (and more environmentally sound technologies) in our society.

Andrew Flack illustrates cause and effect of the increasingly common phenomenon of what I am calling the wild vs. unwild paradox. I will revisit Flack’s analysis of Misha, a captive polar bear who exhibited signs of “zoochotic” behavior from, *In Sight, Insane*:

Indeed, the conditions in which many animals are kept have become inherently problematic. Captive animal institutions cannot replicate the specific environmental conditions required by most species in the wild state. And yet, there is less and less ‘wild’ habitat for them, even in they were psychologically and physically prepared to be released into it. (632)

To reference Stacy Alaimo’s “Cyborg and Ecofeminist Interventions...” again in the section titled “EARTHMOTHER WARNS: ‘KEEP THOSE POTS TIGHTLY COVERED’” Alaimo investigates how the use of blame in the global climate change conversation has caused

the majority of guilt to lie with the individual instead of the corporate or governmental polluters. For example, in the case of plastic straws, the consumer is made to feel guilty if they use a single use straw instead of a reusable one. In reality, the guilt and blame should instead be put onto the manufacturer of the straws who produces the majority of the pollutants in creating, distributing, and marketing them. The weight of changing the masses habits in terms of plastic use should not be on the individual, but on the organizations who regulate and manufacture single use plastic.

Alaimo stresses that since women are expected to take care of the home (i.e. shopping for household cleaners and toiletries, cooking and disposing of food, etc...) then the blame for a house not being “green” is then inherently the woman’s fault:

Domestic imagery makes earth saving just another domestic chore...Furthermore, these pat solutions to systemic problems cast environmentalism as women’s work, thus tightening women’s domestic ties while letting corporate and governmental polluters off the hook. (Alaimo 4)

Even if all of the individuals equally contribute to supporting and providing for the household, and gender is out of the question, the weight of saving the world “one straw at a time” shouldn’t be the mentality. The cultural mentality should be saving the world “by holding the majority polluters accountable” for the waste that is created.

Recognizing the web of interconnectivity between individual (human or non-human) and the power systems that act upon that individual is the first step to dismantling said power systems. Whether it’s through internet based research, or readily available technology that can reveal the concrete environmental data that is actively being hidden by anti-climate change propaganda.

Stacy Alaimo's article points out solid reasoning as to why the burden of changing the environment shouldn't be on the individual. But this is where our paradox comes into play, without an individual we cannot have a community. Without a community we cannot have a movement, and without a movement the necessary information required to shift the power from the oppressing forces in an ecosystem cannot be disseminated to the farthest reaches necessary.

What could be put on the individual is the need for rewiring our perception of the environment. Changing it from "the" environment to "our" environment. Remembering that every person is actively affecting and living inside an ecosystem could change our actions and re-actions. To dismantle the cultural binaries between natural and artificial, human and animal, or powerful and powerless could enable the prognosis the ecofeminists and environmentalists have been searching for. Seeing those who are perceived as below yourself (power-wise) as equals, and communicating that to others through any means necessary allows for an ecology of mindfulness.



## Self-Reflection on *Digital Ecologies*



### *Digital Ecologies 2019*

*Hand woven tapestry, dried moss and lichen, video, plastic magnifying jars, tomato hornworms (Manduca quinquemaculata).*

*Digital Ecologies* utilizes conventionally opposing mediums to explore intersections between the accepted binary of ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’. Inspired by Donna Haraway’s ‘Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene’, the piece uses string as a connective tissue between the two energies (digital 360° video and live insects) to propose new pathways of thinking about the environment, technology, and the interactions humans have with the two.

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Ever since I could remember I have always loved bugs. Whether spiders, or insects, or any other common creepy crawly, they have always entertained and interested me. As I grew older, and began to settle into my artistic and academic practice, I always found myself coming back to this interest. I wanted to make work that incorporated the little creatures I had studied and admired for so long. Working in new media, the connection between insects and the mediums/ideas I was introduced to wasn't readily apparent. As I started to progress with my work, however, I found myself in a very comfortable arena for experimentation.

Leading up to my senior year I became heavily interested in media theory and concepts like transhumanism and the anthropocene. These topics lead me to wonder how our relationship with technology could be pushing us to a new and quite possibly dismal future.

I found myself thinking back to all of the little bugs and invertebrates that I was so in awe of when I was younger. The awe had not left me, and the interest in these creatures who live silently (for the most part) and stealthily around us came back in full force. When deciding what topic to write about for my thesis these bugs were on my mind, and when planning out the structure to my final piece I knew that the bugs had to be the main presence.

When I began planning the work that would become *Digital Ecologies*, I envisioned three main components: bugs, boxes, and string. I knew that I wanted to make a large installation or sculpture, but I had little to no experience with manufacturing what was taking shape in my mind. I initially planned on creating a chandelier of sorts out of metal and string, but while writing my essay I found that the form of a chandelier didn't have any connections to the content I was writing. I wanted my sculpture and my essay to have a cohesive relationship.



As I developed my research, the concept for my sculpture began to take form. When reading about the anthropocene and ecofeminism, I found that the primary argument is that animals and nature that have been suppressed similarly to how humans oppress each other. This relationship between human and non-human led me to the form that ended up with. I wanted to make a piece that utilized bugs and their position in the natural hierarchy to represent how humans interact with authority, oppression, and destruction of space. I wanted to make a piece that forced the viewer to become face to face with this very small and seemingly insignificant life...and feel it looking back at you.

In my research, I came upon Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, which introduced me to her concept tentacular thinking. Using creepy crawlies like spiders, jelly-fish, and other tentacled beings as vessels for this thinking, Haraway proposes a much more symbiotic approach to all interaction:

“The tentacular ones tangle me in sf<sup>2</sup>. Their many appendages make string figures; they entwine me in the poiesis—the making... I work with string figures as a theoretical trope, a way to think-with a host of companions in sympoietic threading, felting, tangling, tracking, and sorting. I work with and in sf as material-semiotic composting, as theory in the mud, as muddle.” (Haraway 31)

This way of thinking and the specific inspiration behind it, a sweet little spider Haraway came upon in a cave in California (*Pimosa chthulhu*), spoke to me. It was the perfect symbiosis between problem-solving, human, nature, and creature. The ecofeminist writings I had researched proposed big questions as to how one fixes the power structures of the western

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<sup>2</sup> In Haraway's own words SF refers to “a sign for science fiction, speculative feminism, science fantasy, speculative fabulation, science fact, and also, string figures” (10)

cultural patriarchal hegemony, and tentacular symbiotic thinking/acting/re-acting seemed like a possible solution.

I settled on the following form for my sculpture: I would weave a large tapestry (about 36" x 24") and leave two square holes within it. I would mount two small 7" monitors to the wall and mount the tapestry so that the monitors would fit inside of the holes. Spread out adjacent to the monitors would be 5-10 small clear plastic entomological survey jars with 1-3 live tomato hornworms inside. The survey jars would be affixed to the wall with clear tape so that the top (which is a magnifying lens) would be facing out so the viewer could easily see the worms. The weave of the tapestry would be fairly loose so that the faces of the jars could be pushed through the weave. The monitors would play a video on a continuous loop of the hornworms.

My objective with my sculpture was to have the viewer empathize with the captive insects, and to get a impression of 'tentacular' connection between the insects, technology, and the viewer. I was drawn to fibers and strings as the medium that would form the connective tissue between the three components in my sculpture.

I wove the tapestry in a way that emulated the swamps of southeastern North America. I was drawn to swamps due to their range of biological diversity, amount of ecological symbiosis between flora and fauna, and the 'stringyness' of the moss and lichens that hang from the cypress trees.

My primary inspiration for the design of the tapestry were cypress trees and the moss that hangs from their branches. *Tillandsia usneoides*, known colloquially as spanish moss, has a long history of being used as the filling for mattresses, pillows, and also for sewing. I find the fibrous nature of moss beautiful, especially how it hangs from the trees and blows in the wind. This is

the inspiration behind the tufting and hanging threads I used throughout the piece, as well as the dried spanish moss that I wove amongst the yarn.

Overall, the creation of the tapestry took a lot out of me, mentally and physically. It took me much longer than anticipated and the physical strain of sitting and weaving for hours on end was palpable after day one. I had always thought I was detail oriented, after spending days picking a part individual strands, or leading tiny threads meticulously through each other in just the right fashion to make a disappointingly simple design... I realized that in fact I was not as detailed as I thought. I found that the amount of work I put into the tapestry coupled with its size had culminated into now what was the strongest presence in the piece.

The second component in my piece was the video. I wanted an aspect of contemporary technology in the sculpture so that the viewer could create connections between nature, animals, and technology. The video was made using a 360° camera in an effort to make the viewer to feel as if they were inside the same space as the caterpillars and therefore could hopefully more easily empathize with them. I didn't want the viewer to see the caterpillars solely trapped inside the plastic boxes, so I needed another area in which the viewer could explore a space other than their own.

The third component in my piece were the caterpillars. Initially I had planned to have three different types of insects inside my sculpture. I wanted to use common types of feeder insects like crickets, tomato hornworms, and dubia roaches. After buying a batch of tomato hornworms, however, I realized the work did not need the other insects. The tomato hornworms were enough due to their color and the semiotic connection worms have to silk/thread. In the wild, they are considered pests since they will ravage tomato plants to get to their cocoon state as

fast as possible. This, and their apparent nutritional value, has caused them to become very popular with reptile and amphibian pet owners as additions to their pet's diet. They are very affordable and can be ordered through hobbyist websites or even on Amazon.

I chose the surveying jars because they enabled the viewer and the caterpillars to get face to face with the each other. The magnifying glass created a fisheye effect, similar to many surveillance cameras.

I found the accessibility of the jars and worms (both can be ordered on Amazon) interesting in that they could be seen as readymades. The concept of a readymade in our culture of over-saturation and over-production is one I found myself considering when using these premade objects (and creatures) in my sculpture. Contrary to the handmade component that the tapestry lends to the overall piece, the jars (and worms inside of them) are clearly not sourced locally or handmade. The viewer is forced to consider the object with all of the signifiers of its life outside of the sculpture. The fact that you can order live creatures through the mail to feed another captive live creature is a dynamic I find very reflective of our current era.

Once the work was installed and on view, I was asked many questions about the caterpillars, the two most common were if they were real or if I was feeding them. I had to face the seeming contradiction where I was using the caterpillars to advocate for animals and the environment, yet was creating a condition where they were most likely going to die. I had to use this death as part of the piece, since I couldn't deny this fact. I had to recognize my place as the artist and as the surrogate "authority figure", and the caterpillars as the "oppressed body" in the form of art and performers. I had to balance my guilt, the exploitation, and the questioning of the viewer all in the name of the work.

Working on this piece has taught me many things about myself not only as a student but also as an artist. I realized that for myself, the process of making my work is much more important than the reception. I found myself feeling more accomplished while weaving my tapestry or interacting with the worms than when presenting my work at the gallery.

I was also asked to consider my place as an artist advocating for the environment; the question of applied activism came up a lot when talking about the work. What does it mean for me to make work about troubles in our world, particularly if the work is abstract, and inherently harder to understand? Does it undermine my ability to promote change to the largest possible audience? Although I don't believe my work made any lasting impact I think that gaining new knowledge through my research has given me the tools to communicate my message through word of mouth to whoever happens to read my essay, or view my piece.



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