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VISUALISING POTENTIAL SPACE: ARTICULATING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SELF AND NATURE THROUGH TEXTILE AND DRAWING PRACTICE

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Declaration of Originality

I, Sally Blake (Sally Blake) hereby declare that the exegesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.
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Abstract

Visualising Potential Space: Articulating the Connections between Self and Nature through Textile and Drawing Practice.

This practice-led thesis explores the relationship between the inner world of the researcher and the outer world of nature, and developed from concern about human-led ecological crises such as climate change and flora and fauna extinctions. A methodology based on Donald Winnicott's theory of potential space is used to explore this relationship. Potential space is a state of mind that allows for inner and outer reality to be negotiated with an attitude of openness and playfulness. These connections have been explored using textile and drawing-based works that articulate and record the patterns and transformations that emerged between self and nature in potential space. Through experiences and collaborations with nature the visual research takes a number of forms including weaving, piecing, plant dyeing, drawings made with rain and burns, stitching and piercing paper. This research extends Winnicott's psychodynamic concept by exploring its relevance for understanding the relationship between self and nature. A number of art-making methodologies are presented as ways to understand and investigate the synergies, connections and tensions between humans and nature.
## Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................ iv

List of Illustrations ..................................................................................... vii

Introduction .................................................................................................. 1

Chapter One. Establishing the Project ...................................................... 13
Section One: Visualising Potential Space ................................................... 14
   Woven imagery ....................................................................................... 14
   Paper-based imagery ............................................................................ 26
Section Two: A Downpour and a Breakthrough: The Rain Drawings .......... 33
   Artists collaborating with nature ............................................................ 41
   Rain Drawing Series ............................................................................ 50
   Mysterious patterning ........................................................................ 55
Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 61

Chapter Two. Potential Space and Place .................................................. 63
Methodology ............................................................................................... 64
   Selecting plant materials ................................................................. 65
   Mordants and fabrics ....................................................................... 66
   Written record .................................................................................... 68
   Collecting data: the diary format ...................................................... 69
Outcomes ...................................................................................................... 70
   Recording the dyes: pieced works .................................................... 70
   Recording the dyes: tapestries ......................................................... 73
   Plant drawings .................................................................................... 76
Displaying the Dye Diary: making sense of what emerged ....................... 80
Place, Plants and Play ............................................................................... 87
   Containment and play ..................................................................... 88
Working in place ................................................................. 91

Plants as indicators of place ................................................. 95

Conclusion ........................................................................... 98

Chapter Three. Patterning and Connections in Potential Space ........................................ 100

Section One: Cyclic patterns, grief and renewal .......................................................... 100

My mother's shell collection .................................................. 102

The seedpod ........................................................................... 105

Sol Niger ................................................................................ 111

Renewal ................................................................................ 113

Summary of Section One ...................................................... 118

Section 2: Interconnections .................................................. 119

A shift in direction ................................................................ 121

The silver net: Interconnectedness ........................................ 122

Crochet: The Ecological Thought .......................................... 130

Failing patterns: Net drawings and Disruption ....................... 136

Conclusion ........................................................................... 145

Conclusion ........................................................................... 147

Appendix A: The Dye Diary Rules ......................................... 152

Appendix B: List of the Dye Diary Plants ................................ 159

Bibliography .......................................................................... 163

Additional Reading ................................................................ 171
List of Illustrations

All images not otherwise attributed are of the author’s own work.

Fig. 1. *Spotted Gum Forest, Ecotone and Heathland Murraramang National Park,* 2007. Digital photograph.

Fig. 2. Unknown, *Ikat Hanging with Red Circle Design on a White Background,* 1800-1900, Uzbekistan. Silk and cotton, dimensions not given. From the Rau Collection, http://www.vam.ac.uk/users/node/3227 (accessed 16 January 2015).

Fig. 3. *Spectral 2,* 2010. Woven *ikat,* wool, plant dyes, 51 x 47 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 4. *Spectral 3,* 2010. Woven *ikat,* wool, plant dyes, 51 x 47 cm. Photo: the author.


Fig. 7. *Shutters* (detail), 2011. Woven *ikat,* wool, plant dyes, 44.5 x 125 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 8. *Woven ikat samples 2,* 2011. Woven *ikat,* linen, plant dyes, 30 x 20 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 9. *Woven ikat samples 3,* 2011. Woven *ikat,* linen, plant dyes, 30 x 20 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 10. *Warp ikat on loom,* 2010. Woven *ikat,* wool, plant dyes. Photo: the author.

Fig. 11. *Woven ikat samples 4,* 2011. Woven *ikat,* linen, plant dyes, 30 x 20 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 12. *Ikat tube weave* samples 2010. Woven *ikat,* wool, silk, plant dyes, approx. 14 x 6.5 x 6.5 cm each. Photo: the author.
Fig. 13. *Felting sample 1*, 2010. Woven, felted *ikat*, wool, silk, plant dyes, 42 x 3.5 x 3.5 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 14. *Felting sample 2*, 2010. Woven, felted *ikat*, wool, silk, plant dyes, 28 x 11 cm. Photo: the author.


Fig. 16. *Tree Line* (detail), 2011. Woven, felted *ikat*, silk, wool, plant dyes, dimensions variable. Photo: the author.

Fig. 17. *Seedpod*, 2010. Digital photograph.

Fig. 18. *Wing* (detail), 2010. Burns through paper, 150 x 100 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 19. *Transition*, 2011. Plant dyes, mordants, pinpricks through paper, 46 x 46 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 20. *Potential Space 4* (detail), 2012. Plant dyes, mordants, pinpricks through paper, 46 x 23 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 21. *Potential Space 1 and 2*, 2012. Plant dyes, mordants, pinpricks through paper, 46 x 23 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 22. *Potential Space 7*, 2012. Plant dyes, mordants, pinpricks through paper, 46 x 23 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 23. *Rain Drawing 1*, 2010. Ink and rain on paper, 76 x 56 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 24. *Black and Brown Ink Rain Drawing*, 2010. Ink and rain on paper, 76 x 56 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 25. *Plant Dye Rain Drawing*, 2012. Plant dyes and rain on paper, 114 x 50 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 26. *Striped Rain Drawing*, 2010. Ink and rain on paper, 56 x 76 cm. Photo: the author.


Fig. 28. Heather Burness, *KurangK/ blue green/ pink white Shift #1*, 2010. Etching, dimensions not given. From http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-


Fig. 31. *Rain Drawing: 6 April 2015* (detail). Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 100 cm. Photo: the author.


Fig. 34. *Rain Drawing Series*, 2014-15. Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 100 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 35. *Rain Drawing: 2 November 2014*, 2014. Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 100 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 36. *Rain Drawing: 16 November 2014*, 2014. Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 100 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 37. *Rain Drawing: 16 November 2014* (detail), 2014. Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 100 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 38. *Rain Drawing: 24 November 2014, 1*, 2014. Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 100 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 39. *Rain Drawing: 24 November 2014, 2*, 2014. Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 100 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 40. *Rain Drawing: 30 November 2014, 1*, 2014. Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 100 cm. Photo: the author.
Fig. 41. *Rain Drawing*: 30 November 2014, 2, 2014. Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 100 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 42. *Rain Drawing*: 30 November 2014, 1 (detail), 2014. Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 100 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 43. *Rain Patterns* (detail), 2012. Ink and rain on paper, 114 x 50 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 44. Paul Bourke, *Google Earth Fractals (Egypt)*. KMZ file. From http://paulbourke.net/fractals/googleearth/#egypt (accessed 10 October 2014).

Fig. 45. *Deluge* (detail), 2012. Ink and rain on paper, 200 x 85 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 46. *Rain Drawing*: 23 February 2015, 2015. Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 100 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 47. *Rain Drawing*: 23 February 2015 (detail 1), 2015. Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 100 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 48. *Rain Drawing*: 23 February 2015 (detail 2), 2015. Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 100 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 49. *Rain Drawing*: 23 February 2015 (offcut), 2015. Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 15 cm. Photo: the author.


Fig. 51. *Rain Drawing*: 26 February 2015 (detail), 2015. Ink and rain on paper, 100 x 100 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 52. Kiara Creaser, *Canberra Sky*, 2015. Digital photograph.

Fig. 53. *Eucalyptus cinerea leaves*, 2013. Photo: the author.

Fig. 54. *Red onion skin sample*, 2011. Silk, plant dyes, mordants. Photo: the author.

Fig. 55. *Red onion skin sampler*, 2011. Silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, approx. 19 x 12 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 56. *Dye Diary (written)* (detail). Photo: the author.

Fig. 57. *Brown onion skin fabric strips*, 2011. Silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, 5 x 17.5 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 58. *Pieced Works* (detail), 2012. Silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, approx. 19 x 12 cm each. Photo: the author.
Fig. 59. *Structure Exhibition*, 2008. Silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, 120 x 36 cm each. Photo: Stuart Hays.

Fig. 60. *Red onion skin pieced works*, 2011. Silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, approx. 19 x 12 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 61. *Acacia baileyana and Eucalyptus mannifera samples*, 2012. Silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, approx. 19 x 12 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 62. *Prunus blireana samples*, 2011-12. Silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, approx. 19 x 12 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 63. *Acacia baileyana tapestry, front and back*, 2011. Woven tapestry, silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, 17 x 10.5 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 64. Sue Lawty, *No Man's Land* (detail), 2004. Linen, raphia, hemp, cotton, 136 x 37 cm. From http://www.vam.ac.uk/users/node/2087 (accessed 6 February 2015).

Fig. 65. *Acacia baileyana tapestries*, 2011-12. Woven tapestry, silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, 17 x 10.5 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 66. *Acacia baileyana flowers*, 2011. Acacia baileyana flowers on paper, 56 x 38 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 67. *Acacia boormanii seedpods*, 2011. Acacia boormanii seedpods on paper, 56 x 38 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 68. *Herbarium Sample*. Digital photograph.


Fig. 70. *Dye Diary*. Photo: the author, 2014.

Fig. 71. *Dye Diary (pieced works)*, 2012. Silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, approx. 3 x 6.8 metres. Photo: Brenton McGeachie.

Fig. 72. *Dye Diary (pieced works)*, 2012. Silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, approx. 3 x 6.8 metres. Photo: Brenton McGeachie.

Fig. 73. *Dye Diary (pieced works) (detail 1)*, 2012. Woven tapestry, silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, approx. 19 x 12 cm each. Photo: Brenton McGeachie.
Fig. 74. *Dye Diary (pieced works)* (detail 2), 2012. Woven tapestry, silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, approx. 19 x 12 cm each. Photo: Brenton McGeachie.

Fig. 75. *Dye Diary (pieced works)* (detail), 2012. Silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, approx. 3 x 6.8 metres. Photo: Brenton McGeachie.

Fig. 76. *Dye Diary (tapestries)*, 2012. Woven tapestry, silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, approx. 19 x 12 cm each. Photo: Brenton McGeachie.

Fig. 77. *Dye Diary (tapestries)* (detail), 2012. Woven tapestry, silk, wool, linen, plant dyes, approx. 19 x 12 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 78. *Dye Diary (plant drawings)*, 2012. Plant materials on paper, 56 x 38 cm each. Photo: Brenton McGeachie.

Fig. 79. *Dye Diary (written)*, 2012. Silk, wool, linen and plant dyes on paper, 42 x 30 cm each. Photo: Brenton McGeachie.


Fig. 84. *My Mother’s Shell Collection*, 2010. Digital photograph.

Fig. 85. *Contained*, 2010. Woven tapestry, cotton warp, linen, wool, recycled denim, plant dyes, matchboxes, 5.5 x 3.5 x 1.8 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 86. *Cracked Earth*, 2010. Woven tapestry, cotton warp, wool, linen and found box, 9.7 x 9.7 x 3.5 cm. Photo: the author.
Fig. 87. *Precious*, 2010. Woven tapestry, cotton warp, linen, silk, nickel wire and found box, 8 x 6.8 x 2.8 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 88. *Seedpod*, 2010. Digital photograph.

Fig. 89. *Copper baskets*, 2010. Copper wire, (large) 10.5 x 5.5 x 5.5 cm, (medium) 6.5 x 5.5 x 5.5 cm, (small) 4.5 x 4 x 4 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 90. *Fragile State* (detail), 2010. Burns through paper, 75 x 50 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 91. *Sol Niger*, 2012. Ink, burns through paper, 114 x 235 cm. Photo: the author.


Fig. 93. *Renewal*, 2012. Ink, burns through paper, polyester thread, 38 x 38 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 94. *Renewal* (detail), 2012. Ink, burns through paper, polyester thread, 38 x 38 cm. Photo: the author.


Fig. 97. *Colour Code*, 2012. Stitched silk and wool threads on paper, plant dyes, 76 x 56 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 98. *Study for Interconnectedness*, 2013. Stitched silk and wool threads on paper, plant dyes, 56 x 38 cm. Photo: the author.
Fig. 99. *Interconnectedness and detail*, 2013. Plant dyed silk and wool, silver wire, approx. 200 x 150 cm. Photo: Brenton McGeachie.

Fig. 100. *Jewels for Interconnectedness*, 2013. Plant dyed silk and wool, silver wire, approx. 2-3 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 101. *Interconnectedness in Process*, 2013. Plant dyed silk and wool, silver wire, approx. 200 x 150 cm. Photo: the author.


Fig. 104. *Interconnectedness*, 2013. Plant dyed silk and wool, silver wire, approx. 200 x 150 cm. Photo: Brenton McGeachie.


Fig. 106. Unknown, *Chain Stitch Crochet*. From http://learntocrochet.lionbrand.com/cgi-bin/faq-search.cgi?store=/stores/eyarn&faqKey=110&V2=$V2 (accessed 2 February 2015).


Fig. 108. *The Ecological Thought* (detail), 2015. Crocheted paper yarn, dimensions variable. Photo: the author.


Fig. 111. Marianne Midelburg, *Crochet Coral and Anemone Garden*. Materials and dimensions not given. From http://crochetcoralreef.org/about/ (accessed 15 September 2015).


Fig. 115. *The Ecological Thought* (detail), 2015. Crocheted paper yarn, dimensions variable. Photo: the author.

Fig. 116. *Stitch detail*, 2013. Plant dyed silk thread stitched into paper, pinpricks. Photo: the author.

Fig. 117. *Net Drawings 1-6*, 2013. Stitch, wool, silk, plant dyes and pinpricks on paper, 38 x 28 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 118. *Studies for Disruption*, 2013. Stitch, wool, silk, plant dyes and pinpricks on paper, 76 x 56 cm each. Photo: the author.

Fig. 119. *Repair* (detail), 2013. Stitch, wool, silk, plant dyes and pinpricks on paper, 76 x 56 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 120. *Scattered* (detail), 2013. Stitch, wool, silk, plant dyes and pinpricks on paper, 76 x 56 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 121. *Cracked* (detail), 2013. Stitch, wool, silk, plant dyes and pinpricks on paper, 76 x 56 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 122. *Rupture and Repair* (detail), 2014. Stitch, wool, silk, plant dyes and pinpricks on paper, 150 x 106 cm. Photo: the author.

Fig. 123. *Extinction* (detail), 2013. Pinpricks on paper, 150 x 106 cm. Photo: the author.
Fig. 124. Fragmentation (detail), 2013. Pinpricks on paper, 150 x 106 cm. Photo: the author.
Introduction

The focus of my practice-led PhD research is the relationship between my internal world—a world of images, feelings, thoughts, intuitions, dreams and memories—and the outer world of nature.¹ This research developed from my concern about human-led ecological crises such as climate change and flora and fauna extinctions, and I explore my concern about the contribution that disconnections between humans and nature make to these crises. Using textile and paper-based media I have examined the synergies, connections and tensions between my inner world and nature, to visualise the complex connections linking nature with humans.

Dualism is a key concept in my research as dualistic thinking affects how humans interact with nature. Environmental philosopher Val Plumwood (1939-2008) defined dualism as an “emphatic and distancing form of separation (hyper-separation or dissociation) ...”² She understood that for dualities such as human/nature, male/female and self/other to exist, the qualities of the dualised other are seen as inferior.³ If dualistic thinking is present, and humans see nature as inferior and beyond ethical consideration, then it follows that humans make decisions and take actions which, if they are not damaging for nature, are at least based on a logic which places nature in an inferior position. To question and challenge the perceived separations between humans and nature is particularly critical in the Anthropocene, an era defined by cultural sociologist Ben Dibley as “a geological interval since the industrial revolution, where, through its activities, through its numbers, the human

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species has emerged as a geological force now altering the planet's biosphere.\textsuperscript{4} Rather than addressing ecological issues such as climate change or extinctions directly, I have concentrated my research on the relationship between self (see below) and nature to examine the dualities that Plumwood suggests lay the foundations for human-led ecological issues.

The concept of self is complex and can be understood in many ways. Within this exegesis I use a definition of self based upon the work of psychiatrist and psychotherapist Russell Meares, and his understanding of philosopher and psychologist William James (1842-1910) ideas about self. Meares writes,

\begin{quote}
Thoughts connected as we feel them to be connected are what we mean by personal selves ... Thoughts in this statement, should be understood as a shorthand term referring to the drift of images, feelings, memories, ideas, imaginings, and so forth that are sensed during moments of contemplation or reverie. What is essential to this experience is a nonlinear 'shape' resembling that of play ... Self conceived in this way is not a structure but a process.\textsuperscript{5}
\end{quote}

Self as Meares describes is a dynamic process which arises out of the brain’s play and interplay with the sensory environment.\textsuperscript{6} As such, the concept of self includes the body as well as the mind and inner world, as it is through the body that we are able to experience the sensory environment.

Meares continues his discussion of self by writing, “that [the] state of consciousness we call self arises in the context of a particular form of relatedness.”\textsuperscript{7} In the context of psychotherapeutic practice Meares is concerned with how certain types of conversation and the intersubjective relationship between a therapist and client can help the client to restore a disrupted sense of self.\textsuperscript{8} In my research however my focus is upon the relationship of self – of both body and mind – with nature, and the

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 53.
changes that occur in self through a ‘conversation’ with nature. In my research this conversation is expressed and realised through visual arts practice.

To undertake my visual investigations I developed a methodology based on psychoanalyst and paediatrician Donald W. Winnicott’s (1896-1971) concept of potential space. Winnicott proposes that potential space is a “third part of human life ... an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute.” Winnicott’s seminal ideas, developed in his child and adult psychotherapy practices, have implications for creative and artistic practice. I recognise this space as a state of mind which allows for imagination and creative ways of understanding the connections between inner and outer worlds. In my research I develop and reconfigure Winnicott’s concept of potential space to examine the relationship between self and nature. Based upon this, the question which has framed my research is, how can Winnicott’s notion of potential space be used to investigate the relationships and patterns which connect humans and nature, through textile and paper-based visual investigations?

As my research progressed I found that this question presented three main challenges that I address in my studio and written work. The first was to find a way to explore potential space, using the natural transitional space of ‘ecotones’ as a reference point. Ecotones are areas of overlap or transition space between two plant or animal communities, such as an area where grassland meets forest. Secondly, I looked for collaborative, rather than dualistic ways of working with nature to explore questions of control and agency in art-making. The third challenge coming from the research was to examine patterns that connect humans and nature; grief and cycles

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10 Craig San Roque, e-mail message to author, 20 March, 2015. Dr Craig San Roque is a Jungian analyst working in Alice Springs. He cofounded the Squiggle Foundation in London which aims to study and disseminate the work of Winnicott, with a particular emphasis on the application of Winnicott’s theories to practice.
11 C. San Roque, e-mail message to author, 20 March, 2015.
of death and renewal, and systems of relationships and breakdown in an interconnected world.

By exploring these challenges in this project I have sought to extend existing research relating to the visualisation, patterning and understanding of the interrelations between humans and nature, and from this examine issues of agency in art-making. In this context patterning is thought about as the connections between all living creatures. Connections between the human and natural worlds, and the types of patterning which makes these connections, is a subject of enquiry for many scholars and artists. Anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1904-1980) asked, “what pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all four of them to me? And me to you?” And Plumwood writes, “the resolution of dualism requires, not just recognition of difference, but recognition of a complex, interacting pattern of both continuity and difference.” In my research I made collaborative works with nature—in particular plants and rain—to explore some of the complex patterning that Bateson and Plumwood describe. In two works, *Interconnectedness* and *The Ecological Thought*, I made use of the particular qualities of woven and crocheted textiles—interlacing threads to form cloths and patterns—to further explore these connections.

* Winnicott’s concept of potential space arose from his observations of thousands of babies and their caregivers, and his experiences in the consulting room as a psychoanalyst. He saw that within a “good enough” holding environment the baby moves from a state of being merged with the caregiver, to a state in which they are separating out the caregiver from the self. This shift towards independence is

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14 Ibid.
15 Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 67.
16 “The ‘good enough mother’ starts with an almost complete adaptation to her infant’s needs, and as time proceeds she adapts less and less completely, gradually according to the infant’s growing ability to deal with her failure.” Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 14.
mediated by what Winnicott called transitional objects, objects such as teddy bears and blankets. They are used by the child to stand in for the mother during her absences. Winnicott writes, "the object represents the infant's transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate."17 The transitional objects are symbolic of a third part of reality, a resting place between subject and object, between inner and outer, between what is merged with the mother and what is outside and separate.18 The object takes on a paradoxical "me and not-me" quality, meaning the infant does not perceive these objects as having a fully external reality.19 This paradox is the beginning of the infant's capacity to symbolise and play, in a third or potential space between his or her inner world and outer reality.

Potential space as a state of mind in which inner and outer reality are negotiated is retained into adult life. As clinical psychologist Anthony Bram and psychiatrist Glen Gabbard write, "potential space is viewed as a state of 'coming into being', a sense of 'aliveness' that is an experience significant in itself, thereby transcending its role in developmental impetus."20 A sense of aliveness, of creativity, of being in potential space, arises when people are engaged in activities they enjoy—be it gardening, running, playing with their children or making art.

I have used specific qualities of potential space—containment, play, empathy and transformation—in developing a methodology for my visual arts research. Containment, in this case, is understood as the conditions which allow something to happen. Winnicott observed that when a caregiver creates a contained environment by providing loving and timely care for the baby, the baby has the means to develop and explore and play. An analogous sense of containment is created by a therapist in their provision of a therapeutic framework pertaining to place and time,

17 Winnicott, Playing and Reality, 14.
19 Ibid.
confidentiality, empathy and a fee structure for their clients. Within this bounded space or framework, feelings can be contained and understanding within the therapeutic relationship can be developed.\textsuperscript{21} I set up frameworks that established the conditions for both playful and rigorous investigations to be undertaken in my research. For example, I conducted a year-long investigation into the dyes that could be obtained from one hundred plants in my local area. This project, \textit{Dye Diary}, involved developing the recipes and visual work to be made from each dye, as well as collating information about the biophysical conditions of each plant. Such a complex work required careful planning and the formulation of a strict framework (the \textit{Dye Diary} Rules), however I also made room for intuitive plant choices and moment-to-moment artistic decisions.

Using textiles in this research has a dual purpose—it provides a way of visualising the potential space between self and nature, and a means of generating the mind state of potential space. Another aspect of containment was my use of repetitive making practices such as basketry, weaving, crocheting and piecing to induce a state of potential space. Repetitive making is discussed by art historian Claire Pajaczkowska when she describes how textile games, skills and practices (such as cat’s cradle, skipping and knitting) are used throughout a person’s lifetime in the creation of self. Of knitting she writes, “the rhythmic repetition of the simple actions absorbs the free, floating anxiety and allows the knitter’s mind to roam freely across the landscape of thought. The knitting allows the hands to worry away productively.”\textsuperscript{22} Pajaczkowska’s work provides a link between the repetitive textile and drawing practices and the achievement of a mind state where thoughts can ‘roam freely’, creating a space where the boundaries between inner and outer, and self and nature, become more porous and the differences between them less sure. I understand this state of mind to be potential space, a space where thoughts and feelings move spontaneously, and are not impeded by regular, everyday concerns.

\textsuperscript{21} Anne Gray, \textit{An Introduction to the Therapeutic Frame} (New York: Routledge, 2014), 5-21.

Visual anthropologist Amanda Ravetz provides an analysis of a state of mind which she defines as "heightened awareness" or "reverie" that she achieved during intensive drawing classes. She describes this state as one which "comprised an absent-mindedness that paradoxically generated action."23 She goes on to write, "[m]y awareness seemed extended, dispersed or expanded into what I was observing. I felt an increased freedom to respond to what was outside me ... with this activity came a strong feeling of joy."24 Here Ravetz describes the experience of being in potential space where the defined borders of inner and outer reality dissolve. She wonders if Winnicott’s potential space is “one way of understanding experiences of porosity—as con-fusions of me-not-me ...”25 Both Ravetz and Pajaczkowska describe links between intensive, repetitive making and a state of increased awareness where thought and feeling are not bound by inner or outer reality, but are allowed to intermingle between the two. I have made use of this state of mind as part of my methodology, and brought it into being with repetitive making practices that include basketry, woven tapestry, piecing, stitching, weaving and piercing paper with burns and pinpricks.

Containment allows for play, and play allows for a time of not-knowing and for the teasing out of ideas.26 In this project ‘play’ has meant taking an exploratory approach to my material investigations, and allowing time to experiment. For example working with two and three dimensional woven ikat, and paper-based imagery with burns, plant dyes and pinpricks to visualise potential space. It has also been possible to incorporate the unforeseen, such as my mother’s death, or the devastating environmental effects of prolonged drought, into the research. As Winnicott writes, “play is in fact neither a matter of inner psychic reality nor a matter of external reality.”27 In other words, play takes place between the imaginal inner world and the

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 166.
26 Winnicott, Playing and Reality, 129.
27 Ibid.
reality of the outer, sensate world. Containment has therefore been essential to this project, allowing for this interplay between self and nature to occur.

In this research working in potential space is tested as a way to develop a greater understanding of and empathy for the other, in this case, the natural world. Empathy is a powerful tool that can be used to challenge dualities—hyper-separated or dissociated separations—as described by Plumwood. Philosopher Lori Gruen has considered empathic responses to nature and suggests that “empathy involves a transfer of affect, and eventually, a cognitive engagement with the perspective of the ‘object’ of empathy.”

From the idea of empathy, I came to examine the intentions and telos of the other as one way to challenge dualities. Telos is defined as, “end, purpose, ultimate object or aim,” and it is through telos that caterpillars become butterflies and trees grow from seeds. Plumwood writes, “by attending to a non-anthropocentric and non-anthropomorphic conception of telos, we can recognise the interests and needs of natural systems that are very different from animals, including humans.” In this research I collaborated directly with nature and spent time with nature; through this I developed a greater understanding of my grief for ecological losses and found ways to represent not only this, but also my delight and joy in watching other aspects of the natural world ‘going about its business’.

I have examined potential space as a space where thoughts, feelings and attitudes to the relationship between inner and outer reality—and self and nature—can be transformed. Working in potential space focuses attention on the experience and relationship between self and nature, and the synergies which can be found in-between. Philosopher David Abram writes of the human mind as being “distilled and provoked by the sensorial field itself, induced by the tensions and participations

30 Plumwood, Feminism and the Mastery of Nature, 135.
between the human body and the animate earth."³¹ Here Abram is describing the human mind as something that develops and changes in relationship with the world of nature. As potential space is a methodology which necessitates a focus on the relationship between nature and self, I suggest it can make an individual more open and receptive to the types of experiences with nature which are transformative. This raises the question of how textile and paper-based media might be used to visualise the patterns and transformations arising in the potential space between self and the world.

I have drawn on the work of environmental philosopher Freya Mathews and her concept of ontopoetics for a perspective on how humans and nature interact and collaborate. She writes explains that,

ontopoetics rests on the premise that there exists an inner aspect of reality which is expressed via a communicativity that coexists with but does not over-ride physical causality. If physics is the study of the causal order, then ontopoetics may be defined as the study of the poetic order, of the meanings that structure the inner aspect of being.³²

Mathew’s study of ontopoetics and her understanding of a non-dualistic way of relating to nature is based on a contemporary panpsychism, where mind is in matter, and matter is in mind, thereby attributing an inner psychic principle to all physicality.³³ Further, Matthews stresses the need for an openness to understanding the particularities of our engagement with nature if we are to find ways to communicate with, as well as understand, the communications from nature. She writes,

to initiate communication with it [the world at large] we must address it at the level of particulars. This requires awareness of intricate patterns of unfolding, attunement to the minutest details in the order and sequence of things; we must be prepared to pay attention to things in their infinite variability.³⁴

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Mathew's concept of ontopoetics became central to my research methodology; she recognises that in order to understand communications from the world we need to be tuned into and focused upon our experiences and relationship with nature. I understand that by allowing potential space to come into being between my inner world, natural processes and art materials, I have established the conditions for ontopoetic processes to begin.\textsuperscript{35} A specific example from my research is \textit{Dye Diary}, in which a set of rules, plant materials, fabrics, threads and my observations are brought together to produce a poetic expression of place.

In order to understand the relationship between humans and nature, Mathews suggests that we need to be aware that it is a dynamic relationship which is constantly unfolding. By using potential space as a methodology I envisioned that my attention would be on this unfolding, as it is a space for experiencing the constant state of flux in the relationship between my inner reality and the outer world.

Anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose also recognises the need for flexible methodologies when looking for answers to ecological problems arising from the relationship between humans and nature. She writes, "knowledge that looks for structure and permanence must be destabilised in favour of theories of knowledge that work with relationships and motion."\textsuperscript{36} She argues that we should be giving critical attention to the world as it is becoming.\textsuperscript{37} Using Rose's ideas as a point of departure, my research sought to explore my relationship with the natural world as an ongoing conversation: a conversation which remains in a constant state of unfolding where new aspects of the relationship are continually coming into being. Collaborative ways of working with nature allow such conversations to occur and thereby challenges dualisms. The visual arts context for my research is that of artists who work in collaboration with natural processes, examine the human and nature

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{35} C. San Roque, e-mail message to author, 20 March, 2015.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
relationship and/or broader environmental concerns. Australian painter John Wolseley, American textile artist Jeannie Mooney and Australian printmaker Heather Burness all engage with the non-human in individual ways to produce artworks, as I will describe in detail later in the Exegesis. Their methods include processes which stain cloth and paper through fermentation and burial, and the marking of etching plates with tidal changes. I will explore how each artist collaborates with nature to contextualise my own research, particularly in relation to the tension between level of control and loss of control each artist enacts in their working processes. How artists engage with place as they collaborate with nature was also examined. The work of Dutch artist Herman de Vries, Australian painter Gregory Pryor and the Tasmanian Aboriginal women reinvigorating their basketry practice through the Tayenebe project were important reference points for my own visual research when exploring place. Each artist opens up an understanding of place by undertaking daily practices such as walking, collecting and drawing to accumulate knowledge and experiences of the materials, patterns and processes of the places they are investigating. The felt and poetic qualities of their artworks, and how they have arisen from an engagement with place, are important points of departure for my own visual research. Pryor’s work and that of Australian artist Janet Laurence were important reference points for my investigations of grief for ecological losses.

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In Chapter One I describe two bodies of studio research. First, I introduce a series of woven and paper-based investigations that explore the visualisation of potential space. Second, I discuss a significant breakthrough in which I worked collaboratively with rain to make a series of drawings in which patterns emerged which are reminiscent of internal and external systems. Chapter Two covers my year-long investigation of place, Dye Diary, in which I made dyes from one hundred plants. This project continued and extended my methodologies for collaborative research with nature. I focus on the importance of place as the location of interactions between self and nature, and the value of plant dyes as indicators of place. The collaborations with rain and plants led to a greater understanding of the patterning and connections
between self and nature, and opened up emotional responses to these connections. In Chapter Three I explore the theme of grief for personal loss in which small objects from nature became the inspiration for a series of miniature woven tapestries and baskets. I examine grief for ecological losses in a series of drawings made with ink, burns and stitch. Natural cycles of death and renewal and the alchemical language of transformation were both departure points for these investigations. I then discuss my use of woven and crocheted forms to explore the idea of an interconnected world. I describe a paper-based series, Disruption, in which I used a restricted palette of materials to explore both complete and damaged interconnected systems.
Chapter One: Establishing the Project

In this Chapter I describe two strands of studio research in which I explored potential space and began to examine the relationship between self and nature. In the first, the development of woven and paper-based imagery provided a way to explore the connections and interdependencies between humans and nature. In the second, I elaborate on a collaborative way of working with nature in which I made two extended series of drawings with rain. The latter work allowed me to explore artistic agency and control in sharing the art-making with natural forces, and to give form to Rose's notion of an understanding of the natural world based on relationships and motion.38

I have divided the Chapter into two Sections. Section 1 describes two and three dimensional weavings which I made at the beginning of my research to explore the relationship of textile forms to aspects of potential space. I discuss my use of the naturally occurring transitional space of ecotones as a visual and conceptual departure point for these investigations, and describe the weavings of Jun Tomita and Liz Williamson. I examine how slow and repetitive textile practices can be used to induce an awareness of potential space, and reference the research of Amanda Ravetz and curator and writer Stephanie Britton. Next I describe and explain the change I made from woven to paper-based imagery to further examine the complexity of potential space.

Section 2 elaborates on a breakthrough in my research process when I started making drawings with rain in December 2010. Through this research I began to address the following question: how can the act of collaboration in art-making—where works are created by both artist and natural elements—be used to understand the relationship between humans and nature? The experimental and unpredictable quality of these drawings is examined alongside the decisions I made to minimise my control over the

38 Rose, “Writing Place.”
finished works. To contextualise this body of work, I examine the work of artists Heather Burness, John Wolseley and Jeannie Mooney who also work in collaboration with natural processes, for insights into their approaches to making. This Section concludes with a discussion of a second series of *Rain Drawings* that incorporates a more rigorous methodology developed after consideration of the first series of drawings and the work of other artists.

**Section 1: Visualising Potential Space**

*Woven imagery*

In the early studio research I worked with loom weaving techniques and paper-based imagery to visualise the naturally forming transitional spaces of ecotones, as a visual metaphor for the interplay between the inner and outer reality in potential space. An example of an ecotone is the transitional space created between a spotted gum forest and heathland on the New South Wales south coast. Within the ecotone the gums are no longer tall and straight, but are stunted, multi-trunked and twisted as they cope with conditions close to the shoreline and take on the low and entangled appearance of the heath (Fig 1).

The etymology of ‘ecotone’ is a combination of *eco* from ecology and the Greek *tonos* or tension, so an ecotone is a place where two or more ecologies are in tension.\(^\text{39}\) Out of this tension emerges a zone of rich biodiversity and biological density, which often has a “higher density of organisms and a greater number of species than are found in either flanking community.”\(^\text{40}\) I understand ecotones to be a physical transitional space analogous to Winnicott’s potential space, a space where the tensions and synergies between two or more entities can be negotiated to create a complex interaction in-between.

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To begin my investigations I used a method of weaving called woven *ikat* to create images with overlapping colour. Woven *ikat* is a fabric where either the warp and weft threads, or both, are tied and dyed before weaving, allowing the weaver to create images and patterns which are embedded within the cloth.41 *Ikat* is particularly suited to the creation of indistinct and nebulous edges, and it was this that I wanted to use to test what happens visually when two bands of colour meet and overlap. This is a contemporary use of *ikat*, as in traditional *ikat* the tying and dyeing is done with great precision to create fine patterns in which the ‘fuzziness’ of the edges where colours meet is minimised (Fig. 2).

At this stage I had a sense that I wanted to work in a way in which the natural world had a ‘voice’ in the work, although I was yet to establish this as a more definite method. To do this I created my own dyes from plants growing in my garden and local suburb, including eucalyptus, ivy, bamboo and prunus. I used the colour in bands and allowed areas of overlap to form between them (Figs 3 and 4). I used contrasting colours so that in the areas which overlapped a third colour was created, as an analogy for the ecological communities which meet in ecotones. In these ikats I tied and dyed the warp threads—the threads on the loom through which the other thread, the weft is passed to make the cloth—as a way to create the bands.
The weaving of contemporary Japanese artist Jun Tomita was a visual reference point as he uses *ikat* to make compositions of banded colour (Fig. 5). The tension, or shimmer, he creates between colours was particularly informative as a way to visualise a transitional space (Fig. 6), and I was able to create a similar shimmer between colours in my own work (Fig. 7). The colours generated in plant dyes are variable and they cannot be reproduced exactly (as I will explain in more detail in Chapter Two), which acts as a counterbalance to the planned and organised setup of loom weaving. The use of these dyes introduces an element of the accidental or unpredictable into these works, which lies outside of my control.
However, I found the overlap in colour and tension between colours I was able to obtain in these *ikats* was not visually detailed enough to describe the complexity and transformative aspects of potential space. I had aimed to create a zone where the colours merged, but also retained some distinctness, but what resulted was simply a third colour. I realised that if I wanted to increase the level of visual complexity then I would have to experiment with new ways of making the works. One way to do this was to make works with areas of overlapping patterns, not just overlapping colours.

I continued experimenting with woven *ikat* to explore aspects of potential space and to find new ways of visualising the relationship between inner and outer reality. In the following examples there is a tension between the separateness and merging of the figure and ground (Figs 8 and 9). On the vertical edges—where the internal figure meets the ground—there is a clean demarcation of colour, and on the horizontal edges the ground and figure visually merge. I used this tension to explore and visualise inner and outer as separate entities, which also intermingle in potential space. Discussing Winnicott’s concept of potential space, social worker Laura Praglin writes that he “insists that this ‘in-between’ world can never displace or supplant the
inner and outer worlds”. Hence the appropriateness of showing both the separateness and blending of inner and outer in one work.

Fig. 8. Sally Blake, Woven ikat samples 2

Fig. 9. Sally Blake, Woven ikat samples 3

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I used woven *ikat* to explore emergence, considering what might emerge when inner and outer are brought together in potential space. Economist Jeffery Goldstein describes emergence as,

the arising of novel and coherent structures, patterns, and properties during the process of self-organization in complex systems. Emergent phenomena are conceptualized as occurring on the macro level, in contrast to the micro-level components and processes out of which they arise.  

In my investigation I used the micro-level components of a plain weave structure and weft *ikat* in order to observe the patterning that emerges during the weaving process. When the *ikat* pattern is dyed into the weft threads the pattern only becomes visible through the weaving process, which is different to warp *ikat* where the pattern is visible before weaving (see Fig. 10 for an example of warp *ikat* on the loom). As the weft *ikat* patterning is hidden until it is woven, it was an appropriate way to experiment with emergence as I was unable to influence the pattern. To further conceal the pattern I wound the weft skein and then randomly selected an area to resist before dying—in this way I could not control the type of patterning that would be made.

When I wove the weft into an undyed warp a very structured pattern appeared in the cloth, which was a complete surprise (Fig. 11). This was thought-provoking as it showed a way to describe emergent order that had arisen through a process which is at once very structured (the set up on the weaving on the loom) and also random (the process of tying and dying). Creating emergent patterns with woven *ikat* showed the possibilities of working with basic elements to create complex patterning. I wanted to take this research further by working directly with natural phenomena to create emergent patterns.

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44 Plain weave is the most common and tightest of basic weave structures in which the filling threads pass over and under successive warp threads and repeat the same pattern with alternate threads in the following row, producing a chequered surface. From Textile School, “Plain Weaves,” http://www.textileschool.com/articles/119/plain-weaves#sthash.JPQ1r7a9.dpuf (accessed 2 February 2015).
I continued my experiments with woven *ikat* by shifting it from a two-dimensional surface to a three-dimensional form. Woven baskets were influential in directing this
shift as they enclose space to provide a visual description of both inner and outer. Unlike a vessel made from clay or glass, the woven vessel remains porous, which allows for the passage of light and air. I saw this as analogous to the intermingling of inner and outer in potential space. I began by making tube forms by weaving two warps on the loom simultaneously and linking them at their edges with a single weft thread (Fig. 12). In these investigations I also experimented with the surface of the weaving. I used wool that would felt for some of the warp and weft threads, and also silk and non-felting wool threads. During the felting process—where the wool that felts is shrunk with heat, soap and friction—the non-felting wool and silk do not shrink, but instead have to track their way through the felted wool causing undulations and texture on the surface of the weave (Figs 13 and 14).

Fig.12. Sally Blake, *ikat tube weave samples*
I saw that the technique of felted tube weaving held the possibility to express the transformations that can take place in potential space as the threads of the weave completely change during the making process. The threads start as single strands of white wool and silk yarns, which through the processes of *ikat* dyeing, weaving and felting are changed into textured, coloured three-dimensional forms. The combination of plant dyes and the undulating surface of the weave creates a tension between the ordered gridded structure inherent to loom woven cloth and the more spontaneous results of dyeing and felting. Using plant dyes is always somewhat unpredictable as the colours are never completely reproducible, as I will explain in detail in Chapter Two.

These samples have visual and conceptual resonances with Australian weaver Liz Williamson’s weavings where she has made use of the different shrinkage rates of various yarns to create rippling surfaces on her scarves. Fig. 15 shows how she creates surfaces that resemble landforms, but at a human scale, as these works are made be worn on the body as scarves. As artist Clare Bond writes, “Liz Williamson
knows that cloth and the body are deeply ingrained, interrelated to such an extent as to render recognizing the place at which one stops and the other commences difficult. Although Williamson’s focus is on skin as the transitional space between inner and outer, her scarves do mediate a potential space between self and nature as they bring forms resembling land into contact with the body.

The surfaces of my woven samples also had a natural appearance that reminded me of bark and I explored this mimetic quality further in the series, Tree Line (Fig. 16). When I started this series Canberra was at the end of a ten-year drought in which many trees had died, and by the time it ended there had been drought-breaking rains. These weavings explored the idea of trees as rain gauges and how they cope during times of high and low rainfall. I used a range of plant dyes—greens, blues,

Fig. 15. Liz Williamson, Land Folds 1

browns and greys—to visually indicate times of drought and times when rain was plentiful.

**Fig. 16.** Sally Blake, *Tree Line* (detail)

As a repetitive making process weaving is ideally suited to induce the state of mind that Winnicott calls potential space and Pajaczkowska and Ravetz describe as expanded awareness or reverie. Art writer and curator Stephanie Britton also identifies repetitive making as a way to allow the imagination to flow freely, and examines the seemingly obsessive compulsive making that some artists undertake. She recognises that artists can be rewarded while undertaking these repetitive
processes by a quieting of the mind, a quieting which allows the mind to fly freely into other realms of the imagination.\textsuperscript{46} In the quietened state of repetitive making I find that the usual boundaries between inner and outer are more permeable, similar to Ravetz's description of experiences of porosity when she is drawing.\textsuperscript{47} In potential space, there are places of overlap where dualities such as self and other, culture and nature, inner and outer can be negotiated, as differences and boundaries are no longer so certain. Potential space allows for the intermingling of inner and outer reality, where the connections between inner and outer phenomena and patterns may be understood, as related rather than separate. In this mental state there is the possibility that something new can emerge. This possibility is expressed in the three-dimensional \textit{ikats} as the organised, gridded woven structure combines with the more random elements of dyeing and felting to create natural looking surfaces.

\textit{Paper-based imagery}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{sally-blake-seedpod.png}
\caption{Sally Blake, \textit{Seedpod}}
\end{figure}

Early in my research I became interested in the structure of a skeletonised seedpod that I perceived as holding a duality between life and death, and a tension between vulnerability and resilience (as I will describe in more detail in Chapter Three). This

\textsuperscript{47} Ravetz, "Both Created and Discovered: The Case for Reverie and Play in a Redrawn Anthropology," 166.
tiny fragile form still held its seed, and the potential of new life (Fig. 17). It reminded me of woven basketry forms, with which it shares a porosity between inner and outer. I wanted to find a way to imitate the seedpod’s dry, skeletal fragility and experimented by burning small, repeated marks into paper. The burnt works revealed a new way to visualise potential space when I hung them away from the wall. Their transparency opened up the view beyond the surface of the work that reminded me of looking through lace (Fig. 18). This is an experience which Pajaczkowska describes by stating, “the lace offers a veil that both clothes and reveals rendering surfaces interesting, visible, desirable, by playing a game of revealing and hiding.”

Fig. 18. Sally Blake, Wing (detail)

The drawn form acts as a transitional space between the viewer and what is beyond, where the view beyond is altered and changed by the pattern burnt into the paper. These early experiments with burns in paper ultimately developed into an extended series of works in which I explored aspects of grief (Chapter Three). However, I also used what I had learned about the drawings’ transparency in further experiments to visualise potential space, as I describe next.

The challenge to explore potential space as a visual form and as a working methodology continued throughout the entire research project and I worked towards finding a way to represent the rich biodiversity and biological density of ecotones, as an analogy for the intermingling of self and nature in potential space. As I continued this investigation I used the elements from the woven ikats and burn drawings which I felt were successful in visualising potential space and combined them in new ways. These were the overlapping colour from the ikat weavings, transparency from the burn drawings, and the use of repetitive making processes for their capacity to induce a sense of potential space. To increase the complexity in the imagery I began to make fine, overlapping patterns, which were easier to achieve on paper than in weave. This is because the innate gridded format of loom weaving makes the development of organic and flowing imagery difficult. Therefore I continued with the paper experiments. I also decided to make the transparent imagery with pinpricks rather than burns, as this would allow for finer and more detailed patterning.

I made the drawings by creating two completely different patterns—one made by painting dissolved mordants onto paper and then dyeing the paper using plant dyes, and the other with pinpricks. A mordant is a substance which helps a dye to combine with textile fibres, enabling the dye to become firmly fixed in the fibre.49 However, mordants have the additional quality of changing the colour of the dye. By using three

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mordants, iron, copper and aluminum I was able to produce a range of colours in each drawing from the dyes. Using the mordants and dyes creates complex and unpredictable colour outcomes.

The drawing changes when it is hung in space. A spatial illusion is created when light shines in from behind (Fig.19). It is difficult to see which pattern is in front or behind, and the pinpricked pattern almost appears to float over the coloured grid. In the overlap of the two patterns an emergent third pattern is created, analogous to the third space of an ecotone. When the drawings are hung on the wall, the intermingling of the patterns is different again and the texture of the pinpricks is more evident (Fig. 20).

Fig. 19. Sally Blake, *Transition*
In the *Potential Space Drawings* I decided I wanted to show three zones—one for each of the patterns, and one where they overlap. This was in order to show the transformations and increased complexity of patterns as they overlap in contrast to the original two patterns. To achieve this I made drawings with two patterns—one using mordants and plant dyes on the front of the paper, and another pinpricked from the back of the paper. By working from both sides of the paper I allowed the two patterns to emerge spontaneously in the potential space—the middle of the drawing—where they overlapped, as I was unable to see both when I was working (Fig. 21). A final transformation happens when the drawings are hung in space and light shines through the pinpricks (Fig. 22).
Fig. 21. Sally Blake, *Potential Space 1 and 2*
Fig. 22. Sally Blake, *Potential Space 7*
Through my early research with woven *ikat* I was able to start visualising aspects of potential space, and a shift to paper-based imagery allowed me to make more detailed and complex imagery. Although I pursued this line of enquiry throughout the research project I realised it would only be one strand of my investigations. As Freya Mathews and David Abrams suggest, understanding the relationship between humans and nature comes from experience, and I knew I needed to find ways to explore my relationship with nature directly.\textsuperscript{50} I thought about how I might engage in an active dialogue with nature, and my explorations are elaborated in the following Section.

**Section 2. A Downpour and a Breakthrough: The *Rain Drawings***

It started to rain in December 2010. The heavy drops strummed the dry suburbs, raising the incredible smell that comes when rain hits long dry earth and concrete. The dry soils in my garden quickly repelled the water and rivulets were forming everywhere. The eucalypts were gleaming as dust was washed from their leaves and their bark shone, the colours exposed by the wet. This rain was significant, more than I knew at the time, as it began a period of higher rainfalls that broke a decade-long drought.

The rain came during an intense period of repetitive making as I created the pinpricked and plant dyed drawings described earlier. I used this time as a space for contemplating how I might work with nature in a more collaborative way. As I sat drawing, I heard the sound of rain, and spontaneously, I found a way to capture something of this experience by painting ink onto watercolour paper and then putting the paper into the rain to see what would happen. I discovered that the rain splattered the ink creating complex patterns, patterns which increased in intricacy as the ink dried (Fig. 23). By working in this way I had discovered something important for my research, which signalled a shift away from visualising potential space to

\textsuperscript{50} Mathews, *Reinhabiting Reality. Towards a Recovery of Culture* and Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*. 

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creating artworks within the potential space between myself and nature. I had instigated random possibilities through working with a natural phenomenon. The Rain Drawings are a record of this interaction and experience.

In this Section I will firstly describe the initial and more experimental Rain Drawings in which I was testing and playing with different methods and materials for making the works. Secondly I discuss how these investigations prompted contextual research into the methodologies of other artists working in collaboration with nature, and the ways in which they negotiated artistic control and lack of control in their collaborations. Finally I explain how I used my findings from the initial Rain Drawings and the work of other artists to develop a second series of drawings. I discuss how the development of a more scientific approach to these new works maximised the impact of the rain’s activity in the finished drawings.
In the *Rain Drawings* a number of elements interact to form the patterns—the type of paper, the kind of ink, the way the ink is applied to the paper, and the rain. The rain varies in amount, speed, heaviness, size of drops and the direction in which it falls. I set about experimenting with the first three elements as these could be controlled. I worked with a number of brands and colours of ink, finding that black *sumi* ink gave the finest and most complex markings (see Fig. 24 for an example of brown and black ink). With the black ink a large range of tonal values are possible, from the white of the paper to the intense black of the ink, and all the grey tones in-between. As I was using plant dyes in my other visual research, I also used a dark plant dye (black walnut...
husks plus iron) to see what emerged (Fig. 25). While the patterning in this drawing is interesting, it lacks the clarity and fine detail of fractal elements which are best shown in the sumi ink drawings. Other experiments with plant dyes yielded similar results. It was important to me to capture fine details as these are reminiscent of much larger scale patterns of water flowing across the earth, and other branching structures such as the internal circulatory and bronchial systems. The sumi ink, made from the soot of certain Japanese pine species and other plant oils, is known for its depth of tone, and revered in Japan for continuing to age and become a richer tone over many years. For these reasons, sumi ink retained connections to the burnt drawings as well as to natural colorants.

Fig. 24. Sally Blake, *Black and Brown Ink Rain Drawing*
I continued to experiment by working on strategies to minimise the impact of my interventions. Every drawing was made on the deck in my backyard, to provide consistency. When I decided to apply the ink in stripes across the paper (Fig. 26), rather than in circles, the patterning started to resemble the fractal patterns in nature, as I will discuss later. By painting black strips on either side of the paper, the pattern made by the rain develops in-between and this was the method that I used for all further rain drawings. After the drawings dry I cut off the strips where ink was applied, to retain the mystery of how they were made. As the drawing emerges between the two panels of ink there is a poetic link to potential space, as a space that allows for experiences to emerge between nature and myself.
The square and rectangular format of the drawings can be thought of as similar to a quadrat, which is "a square or rectangular plot used to mark off at random a physical area to isolate a sample and determine the percentage of vegetation and animals occurring within the marked area."51 In the case of the Rain Drawings the plot of paper defines the area in which rain will be captured to make the drawing and gives me a sample of information concerning the rain. This relates to Winnicott’s idea of containment in potential space as the paper acts as the container in which the conditions are in place that allow the drawings to emerge. A tension in the drawings develops between the straight edges of the paper and the wavering and fractured edges that develop in the drawings. By constraining the factors which I can influence in these drawings and developing a methodology for undertaking every drawing I made with the rain, the differences between individual drawings became attributable only to the nature of the rain itself.

Using the rain to create artworks allowed me to establish a methodology of creating work about and through potential space. It also opened up questions about what it means for an artist to be working collaboratively with natural processes, and harnessing these processes in the production of artworks. One effect of this collaborative approach is that the artist becomes an active participant in nature and its processes, not simply an observer. While the artist is actively engaged in experiences with nature, as I discovered while making the Rain Drawings, there is also a tension between how active or passive the artist should be in regards to controlling the art-making process. While I understood that it was my actions which initiated the drawings, I also consciously worked on minimising my role in the process. I recognised that my task in creating the Rain Drawings was to capture and record a natural process as it was unfolding, thereby allowing the rain to take its natural course.

Working through tensions of artistic control and lack of control in this practice-led research provided a way to question and interrogate broader dualities between humans and nature, as I understood these provided ways of collaborating with nature. Val Plumwood recognises that when hyper-separated into oppositional relationships, human culture dominates nature as the other, minimising non-human claims to the earth and reasonable ethical consideration. Her view is supported by Rose, who describes possible implications of dualistic thinking. As Rose writes, “if humans are rational, then nature is mindless; if humans are active, then nature is passive.” In this research, the idea that nature is passive and mindless is challenged by making artworks where natural processes are actively employed in their creation. Plumwood suggests that writers (and I add by extension other creative practitioners) are amongst those who can help humans to think differently about humans’ relationship with nature by being open to nature’s instrumental agency and creative,

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53 Mathews, Reinhabiting Reality. Towards a Recovery of Culture, 16.
54 Plumwood, Feminism and the Mastery of Nature, 9.
powerful experiences of nature.\textsuperscript{56} The \textit{Rain Drawings} are one way of collaborating with nature that shows and captures the creativity of natural processes.

Winnicott describes potential space as an "intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and outer life both contribute." As I developed my research methodology the importance of both experiencing natural phenomena and recording these experiences became more evident, and I became focused on the particularities and nuances of my relationship with nature. For example, making drawings with the rain made me more aware of local rainfall patterns, and the effects of the speed, density, drop size, direction and heaviness of rain. Experience is essential to the process of understanding and working within potential space, thus I spent a lot of time experiencing and being 'out' in nature.\textsuperscript{57} This approach correlates with Freya Mathews's concept of ontopoetics.\textsuperscript{58} Having experiences of working with nature was essential for examining the patterns and connections linking nature and myself, and more broadly humans and nature.

Making the \textit{Rain Drawings} was critical for the future development of my research. Through these drawings I found a way to collaborate with nature and natural processes. I had instigated a process with ink and paper that then allowed rain to affect the ink to mark the paper with intricate patterns. This activated a methodology of working in potential space, where the artwork was created between my actions and those of the rain, shifting the research from an abstract and theoretical investigation of potential space to an active engagement with nature. It was important at this stage of the research to consider and investigate the working processes of other artists who make artworks in collaboration with nature for insights into their working processes.


\textsuperscript{57} Winnicott, \textit{Playing and Reality}, 3.

\textsuperscript{58} Mathews, "An Invitation to Ontopoetics: the Poetic Structure of Being."
Artists collaborating with nature

We need to rethink concepts of meaning and accident in relation to the non-human world, and to question the reductive and human-centred frameworks that depict places in nature, often rich in narrative, as the product of meaningless coincidence.59

Collaborating with rain raised questions about artistic control and I worked to minimise my influence over the drawings. I was mindful that it was not possible, or even desirable, to completely remove my influence in these drawings as I had set up the conditions that allowed the rain to make them. Here I will look at the work of Heather Burness, John Wolseley and Jeannie Mooney and consider the various ways in which they have collaborated with nature and how they have negotiated artistic control and loss of control.

Heather Burness’s print works are focused on cultural and social aspects of the flow of water.60 She leaves etching plates in various waterways including the Coorong and the Wimmera to be marked and etched by tidal changes and flows (Fig.27). She later prints the plates back in her studio. In her prints Burness aims to capture some of the complexity of catchments, water flows and shorelines as social and cultural sites, as well as the interplay of forces which bind humans to these places.61 Art historian Sasha Grishin writes of her work,

much of her art is conceived as an ongoing collaboration with nature in which she attempts to break down the barrier between the artist and the environment. For her, nature is not the inanimate "other" the artist simply observes and records, but it consists of part of a broader reality which includes the artist herself and presents a contested territory.62

59 Plumwood, “Nature in the Active Voice.”
Grishin’s description of ‘a contested territory’ has synergies with the concept of potential space, the ecotone and my collaborations with nature. In the potential space between self and other there is a constant tension, just as there is a tension in ecotones where biological communities meet. This tension can be explored in collaborations between the artist and nature, as the artist is in the world of nature, where the artist’s decisions and plans for the artwork are in flux with the processes of nature.

![Image](image_url)

**Fig. 27.** Heather Burness, *Southern Lakes of the Coorong, Bearing Witness White.*

The way in which Burness employs art making as a means of working between self and nature is relevant to my own research, especially in terms of negotiating artistic control in the *Rain Drawings*. By allowing natural water flows to mark the etching plates, Burness’s prints have a complexity of mark unlikely to be made by the human hand alone. Control of the printing process does, however, become Burness’ when she is back in the studio. Although the marks have been made by water, she chooses the colours they will be printed in and how the images will overlap as they are printed. Here she exerts her artistic intervention to create prints, which have embedded in them the complexity of the water flows she has examined (Fig. 28).
Grishin recognises that the tension that is held between an artist's intent and the actions of natural processes is a very fine balancing act, recognising it is hard for an artist to completely surrender to chance.\textsuperscript{63} Working with nature to make collaborative works, balancing the tensions between the artist's aims and the unfolding of natural processes, means working with a constant state of flux. The artist needs to be responsive to natural processes as they are occurring and conscious of his/her own capacity to control the process. For example, my extended observation meant that I developed more and more knowledge about the factors that were interacting to make the \textit{Rain Drawings}. This knowledge increased my capacity to control the process on the one hand, and allowed me to make conscious choices to minimise my control on the other. By streamlining my methodology for creating these works I minimised my control, and maximised that of the rain. It was not necessary in my research to completely surrender to chance as it is the interaction between

\textsuperscript{63} Grishin, “Heather Burness, Looking Back: Down the River Review.”
nature and myself which was most relevant, but it was important to remain mindful of this tension.

John Wolseley collaborates with nature in aspects of his paintings that explore nature and particular places in Australia. As he explains, he uses "... methods of direct physical or kinetic contact ... to find ways of collaborating with the actual plants, birds, trees, rocks and earth of a particular place." Wolseley’s practice makes visual the experience of being in nature, and the dynamic character of his relationship to the places he investigates. He does this by encouraging nature to intervene. For example, stray charcoal marks are recorded on his painting surfaces as he rubs them up against recently burnt trees (Fig. 29). At times he makes paintings which he divides in half, so that half can be kept pristine in his folio and half can be buried at the site of making. He collects the paintings a year or two later. During this time he has no control over what happens to the work as natural processes are given time to mark and weather the paper which he later re-joins with the rest of the painting (Fig. 30). Wolseley makes use of a scientific approach in these works, where the pristine half acts as a control to provide a baseline for analysing the other half of the painting. Although this approach does not yield hard scientific data it does show the changes nature enacts on the paper, and the particular patterning and colouration that emerges as the paper interacts with the soil and microbes. In the same way the *Rain Drawings* do not produce hard facts, but they also visualise and reveal aspects of the rain’s processes.

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Fig. 29. John Wolseley, *Fauvette Melanocephale*

Fig. 30. John Wolseley, *Buried Painting—Mt Gunson*
Grishin writes of Wolseley’s work that, “in giving voice to ... [natural] elements in his art ... Wolseley is empowering the natural environment at the expense of the artist.” Grishin’s comment about ‘the expense of the artist’ opens up a discussion about the practice of collaborating with nature, and the sometimes chaotic character of this approach. While making the Rain Drawings there were many times where things did not happen as I planned. Sometimes the rain would stop just after I put the paper outside, and at other times it would become very heavy and almost wash the ink away entirely. The family cats occasionally walked through the wet ink leaving a trail of paw prints (Fig. 31) Making drawings with rain was a much more pleasant enterprise in summer compared to standing out in the rain on cold Canberra winter days, when the wind sometimes picked up the drawings and flung them around the backyard. Making art in this collaborative way is certainly dynamic, with many aspects of the process suddenly moving beyond the artist’s control. As Grishin suggests, “... our world comes through a mutually creative dialogue between mind and body (inner and outer, subject and object), between the individual and his personal and material context, and between human nature and the natural world.” Grishin recognises the continual movement back and forth between inner and outer, between self and nature, and the role artists can have in making explicit this dialectic through their art practice.

Fig. 31. Sally Blake, Rain Drawing: 6 April 2015 (detail)

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65 Grishin, John Wolseley. Land Marks 11, 115.
66 Ibid.
Wolseley allows chance occurrences to give nature agency, together with mindful strategies in his paintings. By working in this way the relationship between nature and self is foregrounded. Wolseley sees himself as a hybrid mix of artist and scientist who uses his powers of observation and artistic skills to paint aspects of nature, alongside chance occurrences to record his experiences of nature. This combination of artistic and scientific observations and skills is a way of working that I aimed to explore further in new bodies of visual research. This way of approaching an investigation of potential space underpinned my next body of research, *Dye Diary*, which I discuss in Chapter Two.

American textile artist Jeannie Mooney uses a process similar to Wolseley’s method of burying artworks, in her series *Earth Cloths*. In this body of work she has left silk cloths at particular sites in her home state of Maine, USA and in Tasmania to be marked and altered by organic processes such as staining and deterioration (Fig. 32). In Tasmania she wrapped silk organza around the trunks of Stringybark eucalypts and left them there for one month (Fig. 33). The interaction between chance and control is very evident in Mooney’s work. She creates a framework by selecting the site or place to be recorded, the type of fabric to be used and the length of time the cloth will be left. She then leaves the cloth alone so natural processes can mark it as the tree loses sap and insects spot the cloth for example. Unlike Wolseley’s paintings, there are no further elements added to these works; they are left as a record made by nature. This aspect of her work has much in common with my *Rain Drawings*, as I also do not alter or embellish what the rain has created, apart from cutting off the edges where the ink was initially applied.

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Fig. 32. Jeannie Mooney, *Earth Cloth Katadhn Stream*

Fig. 33. Jeannie Mooney, *Earth Cloth Tasmania*
I am curious about Mooney’s editing process when exhibiting the cloths. Does she display everything that is made or only those that she finds particularly interesting? I thought about this in relation to the *Rain Drawings* and realised that I had edited out those drawings that I considered did not ‘work’ well, for example when the rain stops before a drawing fully develops. I considered that a fuller picture of the relationship between self and nature might be told without this editing process, by including the ‘messy’ or ‘unfinished’ works alongside the more ‘successful’ ones. To test this idea, I undertook to make at least one *Rain Drawing* on every day it rained in November 2014, and again in February to early April 2015, and to exhibit all these drawings as a resolved body of work. To make any comparisons between the drawings meaningful, I chose a consistent scale, used the same kind of paper, and applied the ink to each using the same method. In this way I relinquished the desire to make the natural world as represented by the rain drawings conform to my ideas of beauty or artistic composition, and found a way to work in which the natural world had a greater agency within the work.

Wolseley, Mooney and Burness all use their visual research to explore specific aspects of place. I see a connection here with the investigations made by Mathews and Abram, as they also understand the importance of tuning in to the particularities of nature. This kind of attunement leads to a greater understanding of the relationships between humans and nature. Wolseley, in particular, has developed a methodology that actively creates a relationship between his paintings and nature as he works, allowing for random markings from a specific site to become part of the work. Burness and Mooney show that very focused investigations of place, such as water flows and markings from trees, map and reveal something about place, and their experience of being in place. Their work records a particular interaction with nature, in a particular place, on a particular day. Artists who keep returning to collaborate with nature are undertaking ongoing research into how we might understand the connections between self and nature. These ideas will be discussed further in relation to the *Dye Diary*, a work which evolved from the *Rain Drawings*, and which focussed on the place in which I live (see Chapter Two).
Fig. 34. Sally Blake, *Rain Drawing Series*
In presenting the *Rain Drawing Series* here, I have included diary entries written for works 1-6 as I made them. This allows me to express my experiences of working in the potential space that opened up between myself and the rain more directly.

2 November 2014. It had been threatening to rain for a while, and it finally arrived as a small shower. I put the paper outside hoping it would rain for long enough to make a drawing. It rained in fits and starts. It was also windy and the wind flung the paper around the back yard a couple of times, and the ink made heavy black marks across the paper. At this time I had made around fifty drawings with the rain, and the wind had never before picked up a drawing. There was just enough rain for the edges of the heavy marks to get softened by the rain. It is different to drawings I have made previously with fewer and more subtle marks.

*Fig. 35. Sally Blake, Rain Drawing: 2 November 2014*
16 November 2014. There was only a light sprinkle of rain so I left the drawing for about an hour (sometimes the drawings only take a minute or two when the rain is heavy). The paper was very sodden and as the drawing dried the patterning emerged revealing more detail, and finer, graduated marks which I had not seen in other drawings (Fig. 37).

Fig. 36. Sally Blake, Rain Drawing: 16 November 2014

Fig. 37. Sally Blake, Rain Drawing: 16 November 2014 (detail)
24 November 2014. I made two drawings today. The rain started very gently as I made the first one, but it got heavier as the drawing sat outside. The marks on these drawings are more familiar and similar to the fractal patterning seen in previous Rain Drawings. I brought the first work inside before the trails of black ink met in the middle of the drawing. In the second drawing the trails met before it was brought inside to dry. Making the decision about when a drawing is finished is sometimes determined by the rain as it stops, but more often this decision is made by me—it is one way I exert my artistic control.

Fig. 38. Sally Blake, *Rain Drawing: 24 November 2014*, 1

Fig. 39. Sally Blake, *Rain Drawing: 24 November 2014*, 2
30 November 2014. I made two drawings today. The first drawing was flung around the yard by the wind. The drawing was marked with harsh black lines in this process, lines which dried quickly and were therefore not softened by the rain. In the upper centre of Fig. 42 artefacts of this process can be seen as dark lines. This is the kind of drawing which I would have discarded if it were not for the parameters of this month-long project, as the drawing shows more than the patterning of rain. Undertaking this project helped to clarify that another way of minimising my control over this process was to not edit out drawings which I found less successful. By leaving these drawings in the finished series more of the challenges of working in this way are revealed, particularly in relation to the type of and variety of patterns which emerge.

Fig. 40. Sally Blake, Rain Drawing: 30 November 2014, 1

Fig. 41. Sally Blake, Rain Drawing: 30 November 2014, 2
Making this series of *Rain Drawings* further drew my attention to the range of intricate and detailed patterns which were created as the rain splattered the ink. These are discussed below.

**Mysterious patterning**

Fractals can subconsciously suggest that each of us is a microcosm, an image of the whole world, hence their strong appeal.\(^6^9\)

One noticeable pattern in the initial *Rain Drawings* was the fractal-like forms that emerged as the ink moved across the paper. Mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot was the first to describe fractals, and his theory suggests that systems which are typically considered ‘rough’ or ‘chaotic’ like clouds or shorelines actually have a degree of order, consisting of self-repeating patterns at different scales.\(^7^0\) Figure 43 shows an example of branching patterning in a detail from *Rain Patterns*. This is compared to a Google Earth image of another, similar branching pattern, a vast waterway in Egypt (Fig. 44), and both examples show patterns which are self-similar across different scales.


Similar fractal patterning can be found in the microcosm of the human body, as branching patterns of the respiratory system, in the branches of a tree, and in river systems. It was through the process of working collaboratively with rain that I discovered these unexpected fractal-like patterns in the *Rain Drawings*. Their emergence was mysterious and surprising, and they make visible the connections between inner and outer worlds, between the microcosm and macrocosm.

![Rain Patterns](image1.jpg)  
*Fig. 43. Sally Blake, Rain Patterns (detail)*

![Google Earth Fractals](image2.jpg)  
*Fig. 44. Paul Bourke, Google Earth Fractals (Egypt)*

Other patterns emerged. There is a dotting in each of the drawings that is created as the rain hits the paper (Fig. 45). This process remains mysterious to me, because it seems to happen as the rain hits the paper, before it interacts with the ink. The dotting is smaller or larger depending on the size of the raindrops. It is a very durable mark—even when the drawings are flooded with pools of ink and water, the dots re-
emerge as the works dry. There are generally patches of white paper showing in the
drawing, in the areas where the rain has not soaked the paper—these are also
evident in Figure 45.

Fig. 45. Sally Blake, *Deluge*: (detail)

*Rain Drawing: 23 February 2015* was a revelation to me (Fig. 46). I made the work on a
very stormy night, with lightning flashes in the sky and sounds of thunder. The rain
was torrential and the drawing developed very quickly. As the image dried patterns
emerged which I had not seen in any other drawing, patterns which captured the
experience of working out in a storm.
Details from the drawing show the marks that were captured—the swirling, reticulated patterning becoming apparent when the ink dried (Figs 47 and 48). These patterns encapsulate the energy of the storm and resemble eddies of water or wind. The edges of the cloud-like forms that arose in the images are complex and detailed, with gradations in tone I have not seen in other Rain Drawings.
Fig. 47. Sally Blake, Rain Drawing: 23 February 2015 (detail 1)

Fig. 48. Sally Blake, Rain Drawing: 23 February 2015 (detail 2)
Even in the offcut of this image—where the ink is applied and eventually removed—intriguing patterns emerged. Lightning-like imagery arose, evoking the weather that created the drawing (Figs. 49 and 50). In another Rain Drawing cloud-like phenomena are evident, when compared to a photo taken of the sky over Canberra.

Fig. 49. Sally Blake, *Rain Drawing offcut*

Fig. 50. The Weather Company, *Lightning*

Fig. 51. Sally Blake, *Rain Drawing: 26 February 2015*

Fig. 52. Kiara Creaser, *Canberra Sky*
The images and patterns that emerged in the *Rain Drawings*, in the interaction between the conditions I set up and the action of the rain, are therefore evocative of the weather conditions present when the drawings were made. Natural phenomena such as imagery of clouds and lightning, as well as fractal patterning, emerged in the works. This imagery shows a link between the microcosm of the drawings, and the macrocosm of nature's patterns and processes.

**Conclusion**

In my initial investigations of potential space I developed woven *ikats* and the *Potential Space* drawing series to visualise the complexity of overlapping patterns or systems, using ecotones as a point of departure for my investigations. As a single line of enquiry the visualisation of potential space had limitations. The research risked becoming too abstracted and theoretical as it was not undertaken in direct relationship with nature. By changing my methodology through the *Rain Drawings* I developed a new way of working in potential space that actively engaged me in a dialogue with nature. The *Rain Drawings* helped to clarify the kind of visual investigation most useful for responding to and pursuing my research questions. This meant not only collaborating with nature but also developing frameworks and strategies to moderate my control in the artworks, which I did by introducing rules-based approaches into the research. These 'rules' also linked to the concept of containment as a factor to establish parameters for engaging with potential space in the work. The work of other artists who collaborate with nature was informative for teasing out tensions between artistic control and the unfolding of natural processes to create artworks. I was able to learn from other artists' approaches, and used this information to refine my own research processes in the second *Rain Drawing* series.

The research with weaving and drawing techniques helped to clarify that repetitive making processes help to generate the state of mind of potential space. This repetitive methodology was not followed through into the *Rain Drawings*, which did however engage me in a direct and collaborative relationship with nature. To further investigate the potential space between self and nature through visual research I decided that the next step would be to bring these two aspects of the research
together—repetitive making and collaboration with nature. After my initial explorations working in potential space I also became increasingly attentive to ideas of place and sense of place. I realised that my daily interactions with nature were happening in the Canberra suburbs where I live and work, and that I wanted to incorporate aspects of place into the research, in order to explore the interplay between place and potential space. Out of these concerns I developed a new research project, *Dye Diary*, discussed in Chapter Two.
Chapter Two: Potential Space and Place

And I felt glad that I had made my paintbox journeys when I could still explore worlds of approximation and poetry, before the colours began to lose their words.71

In Chapter One I described how I worked in collaboration with rain to create a series of paper-based works, *Rain Drawings*, in which I began to incorporate a rules-based approach into my visual arts research. In this Chapter I explain how I used the knowledge gained from this body of work to develop a new project, *Dye Diary*, where I continued this collaborative way of working with nature while developing a stronger scientific methodology. *Dye Diary* is a year-long visual and written ‘journal’ in which I documented the dyes I prepared from one hundred plant materials grown or sourced in my local area, the Inner North of Canberra. By undertaking the Diary for one year, seasonal changes in plant availability and colour could be recorded and documented. The Diary consists of four separate but related bodies of visual and written work—pieced fabric samplers, woven tapestries, drawings made from pressed plant materials and a written record of empirical data, recipes and subjective observations.

After my initial explorations of working in potential space (Chapter One), I became increasingly attentive to ideas of place and sense of place. My aim in this project was to connect to and understand place—and therefore my interaction with the natural world—more deeply through the collection of plant materials and the creation of dyes.72 In *Dye Diary* I explored the relationship between place and potential space, and asked three questions. First, how is the state of mind of potential space influenced by place? Second, could a rules-based methodology allow for poetic, playful and emergent outcomes? And third, how could I work to enable local plants to

72 Plant dyes are used by some artists as sustainable sources of colour for cloth. The issue of sustainability and the use of plant dyes is inherently complex when metals such as copper and iron are used as mordants, and huge quantities of plant materials have to be harvested for large-scale dyeing projects. While I acknowledge this complexity, its analysis lies outside the scope of the current research project.
express their potential in new and surprising ways? I undertook Dye Diary as a place-based study to test working in potential space in a familiar environment.

Place is a complex concept which has been examined by many scholars and artists, however, I am particularly interested in research that investigates place as the location for exploring relationships between humans and nature. As environmental sociologist Frank Vanclay writes, “place’ is generally conceived as being ‘space’ imbued with meaning.”73 Investigating my local place provided me with a way of finding meaning in the potential space between self and nature. It allowed me to discover more about the place where I live by unlocking and discovering the otherwise unseen colours that plants produce as dyes. These colours reveal a layer of complexity, beauty and wonder in the natural world that is otherwise hidden from view.

Methodology

In making Dye Diary I employed a number of ways of inducing a state of potential space including repetitive making processes (stitching, piecing, woven tapestry) and walking to collect plant materials. I knew that this project would generate a large amount of information, presenting me with a number of organisational challenges. How would I select which plants to sample? How would I document the plant dyes I made and used, both visually and in written records? And how would I maintain the production of a large volume of work over the course of a year? I used a diary system to organise my workload into daily and weekly tasks, and established a framework, The Dye Diary Rules (Appendix A), that outlines the recipes used and the visual and written research to be undertaken for each plant sampled. These rules were set up to create a standard methodology so that meaningful comparisons could be made between the data collected from each plant. I begin by discussing how I selected plant materials.

Selecting plant materials

Fig. 53. Sally Blake, Eucalyptus cinerea leaves

To describe the myriad of plants grown and sold in the Inner North of Canberra I sampled a cross-section of one hundred indigenous, native, exotic and food plants grown in local gardens or available in local supermarkets, excluding only poisonous plants and those growing in nature reserves. In selecting these plants, I used an intuitive methodology that acted to counterbalance the strict and pre-planned Dye Diary Rules. This involved being receptive to what was happening around me, so that I could be responsive to the plants I was seeing on daily walks and in my garden, and to the suggestions of other people who were interested in the project. I used different parts of plants—leaves, bark, berries, flowers and seedpods—to test the variety of colours that could be made from a single plant. I reasoned that documenting the colours from one hundred dye plants for Dye Diary would be challenging but achievable within the timeframe of a year (see Appendix B: List of the Dye Diary Plants, for the names of the plants sampled).

I began the Diary on August 8, 2011, and I worked with flowers from the Acacia baileyana outside my studio to make the first dye. To complete an annual cycle of production and to note any changes, I returned to exactly the same plant to collect flowers to make the final dye. Working with the same plant material two or three times was a process I repeated with Prunus blireana leaves. I used dried leaves
collected in autumn, new leaves in spring and leaves which had developed their deep purple colour in summer, to see what effect this would have on the dyes (results on page 70). Seasonal changes were a strong factor in choosing plant materials; for example, I sampled more eucalyptus leaves when the deciduous trees had dropped their leaves in winter.

As the project progressed other people became interested in the colours and plants, and made suggestions that included using black rice, Dianella berries and red cabbage leaves. This project therefore connected me to the community as well as to nature. A really lovely part of the project was walking around friends’ gardens with them as they selected plant materials they thought would make good dyes. I have colours from the grape arbour under which many meals have been shared, from the leaves of a white cedar tree lovingly nurtured by a friend through its first two frosty winters, and the husks of the black walnuts dropped by cockatoos as part of their annual raid in a friend’s backyard. I also worked with plants from my own garden, gaining new knowledge and understanding of the plants I live with every day, and I spent a few weeks sampling trees lining the streets in the inner North of Canberra. I pressed the plant materials that I used for dyes and glued them onto paper, in order to highlight the plants that created the colours.

Mordants and fabrics

To generate a wider spectrum of colours from the plant materials, I selected a range of mordants to use with each of them. Mordants can be used at different times during the dyeing process—as a pre-mordant to help a fabric take up the dye, in the pot with the plant materials, or as a post-mordant to effect colour changes in already dyed fabrics. I used one pre-mordant, a 50/50 soya milk and water mixture, to help linen absorb the dyes. Protein fibres, such as wool and silk, generally take plant dyes well, whereas cellulose fibres such as linen and cotton take them poorly. The protein

in the soya milk pre-mordant helps the linen take up the dye. I used five post mordants for their capacity to change a dye’s colour as follows:

- Soda Ash as it softens and mutes the colours.
- Alum for its tendency to brighten the dye colour.
- Iron (ferrous sulphate) as it ‘saddens’ or greys the dyes.
- Copper (copper sulphate) as it brings out greens in the dyes.
- White vinegar, which brings out pinks and reds when they are present in the dye.

Using these mordants, I could influence the range of colours that would be produced. However, I had only partial control as I could not know in advance exactly how a dye would react with a particular mordant. For example, Figure 54 shows silk satin fabric dyed in red onion skins and demonstrates the wide range of colours that can be obtained using a single dye. It also shows the unpredictability of how plant dyes react to mordants. Given that alum usually brightens a dye colour, I was surprised to find that its addition to this dye bath changed the colour of the fabric from pinky-brown (far left) to green (third from left).

Fig. 54. Sally Blake, *Red onion skin samples*. (L-R) water only, soda ash, alum, iron, copper and white vinegar

In addition to using a range of mordants, I also used seven different fabrics—silk satin, silk organza, silk noil, silk/wool voile, wool, linen and linen pre-mordanted in soya milk—to record each dye. By piecing the seven different fabrics together in each sampler I could simultaneously record information about the reaction of each dye.

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with multiple fabrics (Fig. 55). These fabrics all take up the plant dyes in unique ways, giving seven different tones from each dye.

Fig. 55. Sally Blake, Red onion skin sampler

**Written record**

*Prunus blireana* leaves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Number</th>
<th>67-72</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>18 September 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant Material</td>
<td>New season, fresh <em>Prunus blireana</em> leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection site</td>
<td>Antill St, Dickson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
<td>5 to 26 degrees and sunny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipe</td>
<td>50 grams of leaves in 3 litres of water simmered for 45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapestry</td>
<td>Tapestry 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressed plant material drawing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The leaves are new and there are still remnants of the blossoms on the branches. The leaves haven't gone the deep purple colour that comes later in spring; they are redder in colour so I was interested to see what colours they would give. The leaves gave a much subtler dye than the dye I have previously obtained from prunus leaves later in the season. I noticed that the leaves went a green colour in the simmering water, which is different to the later season leaves which maintain their deep purple colour.

Fig. 56. Sally Blake, Dye Diary (written)
I took a structured and organised approach to documenting the production of each dye, and designed a template in which I recorded the information that will allow the making of particular dyes again in the future (for example, Fig. 56). Plant dyes are never entirely predictable, however there was valuable empirical information to record concerning the plants and biophysical conditions at collection, the collection site and the dye recipes. There is also an art to using these dyes and the knowledge of this deepens with time and experience as the dyer becomes more sensitive to and familiar with the materials used. In this written component I recorded the relevant empirical data for each dye and my own observations and subjective experiences of the plants and colours, thus demonstrating the different kinds of information required to make these dyes. To create a visual key for the written document I dyed strips of the fabrics used in the pieced works, to sit alongside the writing for each dye (Fig. 57).

Fig. 57. Sally Blake, Brown onion skin fabric strips

**Collecting data: the diary format**

To structure the collection of data and production of artworks for *Dye Diary* I used a methodology similar to journal writing, and broke the research down into daily and weekly tasks. By approaching the studio research in this way I accumulated the visual data recorded for each dye, and spent time in my local environment building an experience of place. In the written journal, empirical data and subjective experiences of working in collaboration with nature were recorded. This approach has much in
common with scientific field notes where empirical data, observational drawings and personal notes often coexist, as I will discuss later in the Chapter.

**Outcomes**

I recorded the dyes in the variety of visual and written forms described above, which provided me with a way to create many colours, tones and shades, as well as to document the plant materials, recipes and methods used.

*Recording the dyes: pieced works*

![Fig. 58. Sally Blake, Pieced works (detail)](image-url)
My initial research with a range of fabrics had indicated that each fabric takes up the dyes differently (Fig. 59). Using this knowledge I made smaller, sampler-sized versions (approximately 19 x 12 cm) of these early works for Dye Diary. For each of the one hundred dyes I made six samplers, one to test the dye in water alone and then five to test each dye with the five mordants (Fig. 60). Cutting and piecing fabrics is labour intensive and making works at this scale meant it would be possible to manage the production of the six hundred pieced works I would need for this project. As each fabric responds to the dyes differently I was able to produce 4200 colours over the course of the year as each of the six hundred pieced works is made up from seven different fabrics.

Fig. 59. Sally Blake, Structure Exhibition

Fig. 60. Sally Blake, Red onion skin pieced works
The plant materials produced a wide range of colours, some of which are predictable, such as the yellow dyes obtained from *Acacia baileyana* flowers. Some of the results were very surprising, such as the orange colours obtained from the green leaves of *Eucalyptus mannifera* (Fig. 61). The *Prunus blireana* leaves that I had collected and processed in different seasons showed significant seasonal colour variability (Fig. 62).
A rewarding outcome of this research was its use as a resource for fellow students. People hoping to make particular colours from plant dyes consult the pieced works to identify the colour they want. Through my recording and cataloguing methods we are then able to trace the colour back to the dye source and recipes.

**Recording the dyes: tapestries**

![Fig. 63. Sally Blake, Acacia baileyana tapestry, front and back](image)

I made a small tapestry, approximately 17 x 10 cm, each week of the *Dye Diary* after dyeing the yarns in one of the weekly dye baths with mordants. Tapestry is a dense and compact medium, quite different to the light and sometimes transparent fabrics of the pieced works. This means the colours from the dyes are made manifest in a different way. I continued the gridded format of the pieced works into the tapestries, in part to create a sense of visual coherence between the works. The grid in the pieced works, like that used in many traditional patchworks and quilts, results directly from how they are made—straight edged and rectangular shapes are the easiest to fit together and sew.
The gridded structure and *Dye Diary Rules* provided a template for the tapestries, meaning I did not have to design the tapestries from scratch each week. This helped to contain the workload, an important consideration in a project that was so labour intensive. Despite the containment and order imposed by the grid, my interest in each tapestry was maintained as I made intuitive aesthetic decisions about colour choice and placement as I wove. This paralleled my intuitive plant-collecting methodology, allowing for creative and spontaneous expression within the parameters that I had established.

Although the grid is a simple form to weave in tapestry, it is not as ubiquitous to this medium as it is to pieced works. I found a precedent for the use of the grid in woven tapestry in the work of Sue Lawty. As she writes, “I find myself ceaselessly attracted to the grid format - such a strong and basic design device. It is, of course, the fundamental structure of weave - the vertical warp, the horizontal weft. It is also a great system for exploring repetition.” Lawty’s weaving is inspired by landscape, although in an allusive rather than a descriptive way, her compositions evoking the rock faces and geological strata she examines. In *No Man’s Land* (Fig. 64) the repetition of a simple grid allows the viewer to notice subtle shifts in colour and texture in the weaving. Similarly, the grid in my tapestries allows the viewer to focus on the colours made from the dyes, rather than on figurative elements that would distract from my experiments with colour.

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77 Lesley Jackson, “Rock Opera,” *Crafts*, 197 (2005): 31
Fig. 64. Sue Lawty, *No Man’s Land* (detail)

Fig. 65. Sally Blake, *Acacia baileyana* tapestries
As with the pieced works, the tapestries revealed surprising colour outcomes. The first and last tapestries made for this project show distinct colour changes (Fig. 65). The yarns for these tapestries were made with flowers from the same tree, at the same time of year, but a year apart. The increased intensity of colour in the second tapestry is obvious, but the reasons for this can only be guessed at without specific and specialist scientific experimentation, experimentation that is beyond the scope of this research. When I collected the flowers for the first tapestry it was raining, and the increased water load in the flowers may account for the ‘diluted’ colours. These uncontrollable variations relate to the poetic possibilities and mysteries of nature, a wonderful reminder that much of what happens in nature is beyond human control.

*Plant drawings*

![Plant drawings](image)

**Fig. 66.** Sally Blake, *Acacia baileyana* flower  
**Fig. 67.** Sally Blake, *Acacia boormanii* seedpods

Where possible, I pressed the plant materials used to make the dyes and glued them onto paper to create works reminiscent of the botanical samples kept in herbariums.
(Fig. 68). I did this to give more information and detail about the physical conditions of the plants that had created the colours. For example, some leaves had been nibbled by insects, some were fresh and new, and others had changed to their autumn colours. I selected individual leaves, flowers, bark and seedpods as representative of the dye source and for their own unique qualities. In these drawings I wanted to maintain a friction between the empirical, structured cataloguing of plants and what I see as the innate poetics of nature, as analogies for the scientific and aesthetic methodologies used to create *Dye Diary*.

While my approach to collecting plant specimens was similar to the methods used by botanists, there were important differences. As an artist my approach could be freer. I did not look for perfect specimens but accepted the diverse and often imperfect condition of the actual plant materials that I used to make the dyes. I pressed and
presented only the part of the plant that I used for dyeing. Herbarium samples, on the other hand, are vigorous and typical specimens that include stems, leaves, flowers and fruits, and imperfections such as insect damage are avoided.78

Contemporary Dutch artist Herman de Vries’ pressed plant drawings were an important point of departure for my own works (Fig. 69). De Vries exhibits objects from nature as concrete realities, as realities in themselves rather than as symbols for something else—he does not use natural objects as metaphors which stand in for human experiences.79 De Vries trusts the objects to express their own meaning. As art critic Mel Gooding writes, “he does not represent the world in discursive descriptions, references and reflections; he presents not ideas but the things themselves.”80 I took a similar approach as I made drawings to show the actual materials I had used to

Fig. 69. Herman de Vries, Quercus macrolepis – lenos

80 Ibid., 8.
make the dyes. This also seemed to fit within my interest in allowing the natural world to have a 'voice' and agency in the final artworks.

After making the *Rain Drawings* and studying the work of other artists, I was particularly conscious of how difficult it is to avoid controlling the final appearance of works such as the *Plant Drawings*—the re-presenting of natural objects as artworks is an inherent process of artistic choice. I chose to continue with the gridded format that I was using in the pieced works and tapestries for the drawings. De Vries's work was once again useful as I analysed this decision, and the level of control involved in this process. Like de Vries, I let the grid for each drawing be determined by the size and shape of the largest natural object. De Vries uses the grid to eliminate aesthetic subjectivity, where the shape of the biggest leaf determines the size of the grid.\(^81\) By creating the works in this way I avoid the temptation to create patterns with the plant materials, which may have prevented the viewer being able to appreciate each individual object.

By eliminating the artist's subjective feelings I aim to minimise my input into the viewer's experience of the natural objects. De Vries is sure of the objects' capacity to move the spirit of anyone who encounters them.\(^82\) Gooding quotes de Vries as saying, "this (array of objects) does not exclude their beauty. I love their beauty. I feel the poetry of the things I work with, and I cannot explain it, but I do not have to add myself to this."\(^83\) Like de Vries, I find endless beauty and fascination in the small expressions of nature with which I have worked. For the *Dye Diary* drawings I realised that I did not need to find ways to express my feelings about the natural objects, that I could trust the objects to 'speak' for themselves.

Unlike de Vries, however, I acknowledge the reference to scientific methodology and ordering of the world in my use of the grid. The practice of using plant dyes is well served by employing scientific rigour alongside the more intuitive knowledge gained

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82 Ibid., 62-63.
83 Herman de Vries, quoted in Gooding, *Herman de Vries. Chance and Change*, 63.
from experience. The grid organises information in an egalitarian way, allowing the viewer to make comparisons between the natural objects as they are grouped together. In the grid no single element is given preference over another and the eye is able to roam, noticing subtle changes in colour, shape, texture and pattern between the natural objects.

**Displaying the Dye Diary: making sense of what emerged**

The most difficult part is imagining what the diary means to its author while he is keeping it and when he rereads it. Because a diary is like lacework, a net of tighter or looser links that contain more empty space than solid parts. Everything depends on what sea you throw it into. By the time it reaches us, it is nothing but a mass of strings lying on the beach at low tide.84

Fig. 70. Sally Blake, *Dye Diary*

When I finished the *Diary* I had a vast body of data comprising approximately 1400 individual parts generated by daily making and recording (Fig. 70). The daily making was similar to diary writing, and like a diary the meaning and shape of the whole work

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could only be understood with time, reflection and analysis. I considered that the sense and meaning of the work would only be fully revealed when it was installed for exhibition. It was important to me that the displayed *Dye Diary* should demonstrate the tension between the artistic and scientific approaches used to collect data, as each approach was vital for producing and understanding the information embedded within each colour.

Displaying the *Diary* as separate but related bodies of work is the method I have chosen for exhibition. Each body of work has been displayed in a different way, though each is organised chronologically and hung in the order in which the individual elements were made. By exhibiting the *Diary* in this way my methodology of collecting and recording the plant dyes as a series of daily and weekly tasks is made evident to the viewer. The works can be read as a code, the colours pointing to the underlying scientific and artistic knowledge, time and research that is embedded within each individual component.

![Fig. 71. Sally Blake, Dye Diary (pieced works)](image)

Displaying the pieced work samples as an artwork challenges the ways in which this type of information is usually seen and used. Colour sampling with plant dyes usually takes place to find colours for other purposes, such as dyeing threads and fabrics for clothing or weaving. In this project, the colour sampling and experimentation is the artwork. By displaying all the pieced works made over the year as one work, the
annual cycle is embedded within it (Fig. 71). This is a highly organised display, which raises questions about the artistic control and lack of control I grappled with to make *Dye Diary*.

For each dye I made six samplers, one to test the dye in water alone and then five to test each dye with the five mordants, as discussed above. By pinning the pieced works in the order in which they were made, my control over the final appearance of this work is minimised. The colours and patterns that emerge are on the whole beyond my control. I had no idea of the colours that the majority of the plants would produce, and I was therefore not able to pre-empt or plan the arrangement of colour for the final display. However, there was one factor in the *Diary* which I knew could become a strong visual element, and this was the use of iron as a mordant and its capacity to grey and darken the dyes. For each plant I hung the six pieced works in the same order: plants in water only, then with the mordants, soda ash, alum, iron, copper and white vinegar. The consistency of this hang meant the dark and grey pieces mordanted in the iron would appear regularly and would possibly produce a pattern.

![Image of Dye Diary](image_url)

*Fig. 72. Sally Blake, Dye Diary (pieced works)*
A pattern did emerge from the pieces dyed with iron mordant, and this is seen as the grey diagonals moving through the work from right to left in a downwards direction (Figs 71 and 72). It is a strong element, however it fades in and out, especially in the section just left of centre where all the colours seem to be paler. This paler, circular centre is mysterious and is echoed by other pale sections in the second and bottom rows. There are also areas that stand out, including the bright flash of yellow in the bottom right and the strong pink piece right in the centre (Figs 73 and 74). The eye dances between the flashes of deep orange and red dyed from certain eucalyptus leaves on wool. These are mainly to the left of the work, but a small square in the bottom centre and another in the top right keep the eye moving.

**Fig. 73.** Sally Blake, *Dye Diary* (detail 1)  
**Fig. 74.** Sally Blake, *Dye Diary* (detail 2)

I used the grid in *Dye Diary (pieced works)* to organise the large volume of data and to allude to the scientific approaches used to create the dyes. Each sampler is pinned to the wall separately—so the grid is an assemblage of individual grids. Art historian Rosalind Krauss argues that the grid is a structure that is emblematic of Modernity, and a structure that imposes a universalising system of order.85 The pieced work grid at first sight might seem complicit with the measured and controlled use of the

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modern grid described by Krauss, but this gives way to reveal traces of disruption, displacement and complex encounter. Closer inspection reveals the grid is far from rigid and precise, and each individual component is unique in construction, colour and size (Fig. 75). The grid collapses at points where the pieced works meet and is curved by the irregularity of the works it contains. The individual pieces are light and gently held by two pins. As a result, they move in response to air currents as people walk past or breezes catch them, further disrupting the certainty of the grid. I see this as analogous to the challenging of dualities in potential space, where the conviction of the x and y axes of a regular grid becomes disrupted and the relationship between them becomes more complex. The visual effect is meditative, and the eye roams over the work noticing subtle and dramatic shifts in colour, irregularities and patterns.

Fig. 75. Sally Blake, *Dye Diary (pieced works)* (detail)

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Krauss writes further that, “insofar as its order is that of pure relationship, the grid is a way of abrogating the claims of natural objects to have an order particular to themselves.” In the Dye Diary (plant drawings) it can be seen that the plant materials have been taken from the natural world and represented in gridded formats. As discussed earlier, this was done consciously to minimise artistic subjectivity and to present the natural objects so that their unique qualities can be seen.

I thought through a number of ways for displaying the tapestries. Initially I experimented with hanging them in a grid so the subtle details of colour and texture could be compared between the different weavings (Fig. 76). However this minimised the impact of the individual works, and it was hard to appreciate that there were actually fifty-two tapestries, representing a year of work. I decided instead to hang them as separate works, in a row, so each could be considered individually (Fig. 77). Displayed like this the viewer takes a journey to see each work, which parallels my task of making a tapestry every week for a year. Where the gridded display of the pieced works visualises aspects of cyclical time and the annual cycle, this display

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highlights linear time and the accruing of data and experience, creating a literal time line.

Fig. 77. Sally Blake, *Dye Diary* (tapestries) (detail)

Likewise, the plant drawings were initially displayed in a grid (Fig. 78). After further consideration I decided to show the drawings in a pile to allow the viewer to look at each work individually. This maintains the connection to herbarium samples that are generally viewed on a horizontal surface such as a table, rather than on a wall. In this way the viewer can see and appreciate the subtleties of each drawing without other

Fig. 78. Sally Blake, *Dye Diary* (plant drawings)
distractions. The viewer activates the work, and is activated by the work, shuffling through the pile and discovering new drawings.

Fig. 79. Sally Blake, *Dye Diary (written)*

The written component of the diary is included in the visual display as a loose leaf book as described earlier in this Chapter (Fig. 79). As with the plant drawings, the viewer becomes engaged in the work as they turn the pages, revealing visual and written information. This display method therefore allows for playful and unexpected interactions between the viewer and the work.

**Place, Plants and Play**

In the following discussion I will contextualise the *Dye Diary* in a broader theoretical and visual arts framework. First I will describe how containment and play have been used and expressed in this project. Second I analyse my research in relation to artists and researchers who examine the relationship between people and nature in place. I discuss my work in the context of the Tasmanian Aboriginal women’s basketry practice, and the art works of Gregory Pryor and Kristy Johnstone. Next I explore why plants and their dyes are useful indicators of the place where they grow. And finally, I discuss my felt and emotional experiences of working in place, from which I developed the research described in Chapter Three.
Containment and play

Alongside the Dye Diary Rules my use of a diary methodology provided containment for this project by structuring how data was collected and recorded. The diary methodology I used has much in common with scientific field notes where empirical data, observational drawings and personal notes often coexist. Ecologist Erick Greene identifies the many different types of information recorded in field notes, ranging from the purely empirical to the observations of amateur naturalists recording their experiences in the natural world. He concludes, “the most useful and interesting notebooks of field biologists are hybrids: as well as recording details and data of field research, they record the observations, thoughts, musings and peregrinations of the author.”

This is the approach I have employed in order to elaborate the different types of knowledge that are required to make plant dyes. It is an inexact science and the dyes are difficult to replicate exactly due to the plants’ growing conditions and other variables, as discussed earlier. The colours achieved result from a combination of understanding the plant materials and how to process them, as well as from the accumulation of knowledge that comes from the experience of making the dyes.

Embracing this research in a way that allows for empirical and subjective accounts and observations gives the work a greater completeness and complexity. Anthropologist Karen Kramer says of field notes that, “narrative by nature is relational, and recording events, thoughts, speculation, and anecdotes as well as quantified data brings our curiosity back from the field.” The concept of curiosity is important in this project as it relates to Winnicott’s notion of play which is discussed below. The diary methodology helped to maintain a sense of curiosity as it allowed my attention to be focused on the present moment and experiences as they occurred—in a personal diary events are generally not foreshadowed. This links to Mathew’s concept of ontopoetics and her urging us to focus on the particulars of our relationship with nature, and the dynamic quality of its unfolding. Paying attention

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90 Mathews, Reinhabiting Reality. Towards a Recovery of Culture, 16.
to the present moment and to interactions with nature as they occur is therefore facilitated by the diary methodology. Making plant dyes is a practice of curiosity as new colours are always being revealed, and as some of the wonder of the natural world is brought back from the field and embedded in cloth.

Through the *Dye Diary* project I learned more about the cultural significance of containment and the conditions that help people to think about and reconsider their relationship with the place in which they live. Even though I established the *Diary* as an independent project, other people also came to understand local plants in new ways, as they collected plants with me from their gardens.

Containment allows for play. Play in terms of my project meant collecting plant materials as I spent time in nature, talking with others about the plants and dyes and experiencing the excitement of new colours as they were revealed in the dye pot. It meant uncertainty and discovery, disappointment and joy, and acceptance of all of these states. It meant standing in the middle of a carpark completely absorbed in the comings and goings from a tree, and noticing all the small details of individual leaves and bark patterns, as the rest of the world fell away for a while. Outside the studio one day, in a large *Eucalyptus blakelyi*, galahs and wood ducks fought over a coveted hollow for their nest. I saw a drake fly off with an egg in his mouth, which I presume had belonged to the galahs. I kept my eye out but no baby birds emerged from the hollow that year. I was becoming more aware of the particularities and minute details in nature, as I worked in place to undertake this project.\(^{91}\)

In *Dye Diary* my use of repetitive making was extended as I made work every day for a year to complete the project. *Dye Diary* was structured so that experiences in nature, the collection of plant materials and recording the visual and written information were performed as regular tasks. Each week I was engaged in many repetitive activities,

walking to gather plant materials...cutting fabrics into squares and rectangles...stitching seams...repeat, repeat, repeat...ironing seams...winding skeins of yarn...preparing the dye material...filling a pot with water...simmering the plant materials...scooping out one and a half litres of dye liquor to fill five metal pots...adding the five different mordants...putting skeins of yarn and a pieced work in each pot...waiting for an hour...rinsing the samples in water...ironing the samples dry...cutting silk noil labels...writing the labels...stitching the labels onto the samples...writing about the dye...selecting plant materials to press...opening up the plant press and putting them in...taking out the dry plant materials...dividing a piece of paper in two...working out the grid size for this drawing...arranging the plant materials on the paper...carefully gluing each small item onto the paper...putting the drawing into a press with the other drawings...warping the tapestry loom...weaving in the base of the tapestry...tying knots at the bottom of the tapestry...winding the skeins of yarns onto bobbins...selecting a colour...winding the yarn back and forth on itself until it is thick enough...winding the yarn onto a tapestry bobbin...picking up one, two, three, four, five, six warp yarns...passing the weft yarns through the warps...tapping down the warps...repeat, repeat, repeat...sewing the long slits...tying knots at the top of the tapestry...cutting the tapestry off the loom...plaiting the warps ends...trimming the weft threads at the back of the tapestry...stitching down the loose weft threads on the back of the tapestry...ironing the tapestry...cutting silk noil labels...writing the labels...stitching the labels onto the tapestries.

This repetition meant I had many opportunities to enter into states of reverie or expanded awareness, which allowed me to contemplate and negotiate the potential space between my inner world and that of nature.
Working in place

I thought through aspects of my own project via an examination of the artworks and the stories written for the *Tayenebe* (meaning exchange) exhibition shown at the National Museum of Australia in 2010. This was an exhibition of contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal women’s basketry and kelp vessels, and represented the women’s reinvigoration of cultural practices that were almost lost in the aftermath of colonisation. As curator of the *Tayenebe* exhibition Julie Gough writes “the baskets represent the restorative experience of weaving through which reconnection with extended family, ancestors, skills and knowledge, plants and country is occurring.”92 Through an examination of the *Tayenebe* project I learnt about the capacity of craft to connect people to place, plant materials and their cultural histories.

Every basket in the *Tayenebe* exhibition was unique, with the materials and maker’s hand influencing each basket’s particular qualities. In Figures 80 and 81 are examples of baskets made with kelp and white flag iris, respectively, demonstrating the unique nuances of colour, texture and form that derive from the choice of materials. Artist Vicki Matson-Green writes, “the reconnection with native plant materials, thanks to the generosity of other Aboriginal women ... facilitates an inextricable connection to native bush and sea fibre use.”

In each location the women learned to collect and work with the natural materials and to attune to seasonal variances in the materials. Seasonal variation was significant in *Dye Diary* as I too was working with plant materials, and I became more aware of the effects of season and weather patterns upon the plants and their dyes. Making with materials from place embeds aspects of the place into the artworks—the eucalyptus samples still smell of the leaves when I iron them.

Working in place and with the materials of place allowed me to engage directly with nature in my local suburb. Freya Mathews highlights the importance of engaging with place, as it is in place that the actual rather than the abstractly imagined relationship between humans and nature can be experienced. As she writes, “engagement with world ... can proceed only via its local modality, place.” It is in the context of a specific place, that I can investigate my relationship with nature in a grounded and real way. Making dyes from plants not only examines an aspect of place, but also brings attention to an otherwise hidden poetic expression of nature. It is a way of “bringing forth new poetic forms.” The dyes constantly surprised me with unexpected results as the fabric, plants and mordants interacted, bringing into being an otherwise unseen aspect of nature.

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95 Ibid.
96 Ibid., 33.
The colours in the *Dye Diary* hold memories for me of the places and plants from which I collected the dyes, the birds, insects and animals buzzing around the plants, and the people who showed me around their gardens. Through his investigation of place, philosopher Jeff Malpas suggests that "the binding of memory to place, and so to particular places, can itself be seen as a function of the way in which subjectivity is necessarily embedded in place, and in spatialized, embodied activity." By walking and collecting materials for the dyes I am embedded in place, all my senses engaged in observing the world around me. Each colour from the *Diary* holds specific memories of the activities I was undertaking as I collected plants and processed the dyes.

I also found that in making *Dye Diary*, other people became involved in the project and discovered more about the plants around them. People also told me stories from their cultural backgrounds about the use of plants for dyes. For example, I carried a box of onion skins into a local bakery and the woman serving was curious. When I explained I was using them for dyeing she shared stories from her childhood in Eastern Europe, where onion skins were used to dye patterns onto Easter eggs.

Australian artist Gregory Pryor undertook an investigation of plants to understand the place in which he was living. In his work *Black Solander*, Pryor drew 10,500 Western Australian plants specimens from the Western Australian Herbarium (Fig. 82). The drawings were made with black ink on black sugar paper and executed over a six month period. He concluded that the best way to come to terms with a place is by carefully studying its plants. Pryor’s work creates a context for my own investigations that examined place through the study of plants. His work brings attention to the flora of the rich and enormous biodiversity of this region, while also alluding to the threatened status of many of the plants. I explore this reference to grief for ecological loss further in Chapter Three.

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Place-based studies such as Pryor’s can create understanding and empathy for nature. Plumwood acknowledges that local nature study and observation can foster understanding of the needs of nature, which counters anthropocentric ways of thinking. Through *Dye Diary* I became more attentive to the activities of the plants, insects and animals living in my garden and neighbourhood, and more interested and concerned about their lives. This was particularly true of the plants that I was visiting and collecting specimens from, as it became apparent how many lives they support and how they themselves are affected by weather conditions and human interventions.

All the plants were collected in suburbia. Plumwood raises important issues concerning the relationship between place and ecological awareness that are

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particularly relevant to suburban dwellers, particularly the notion of “shadow places.” These are the places that support a suburban life, such as rural areas in which food is grown. They are the places that are affected by the commodities we consume and the waste we dispose of, places whose degradation we are indirectly responsible for. While I have not directly explored this issue, embedded within my choice of plant materials is the complexity of suburban life about which Plumwood writes. Food stuffs such as onions, cabbage and black rice, which I have bought from local supermarkets, have been used as dye materials. Similarly the materials and threads that I have used to sample the dyes have come from different parts of the world, revealing the complex connections between one place and another.

Geographer Aidan Davison writes that “nature is being theorised as distinct from culture yet [is] inseparably entangled with it in the many and shifting political collectives - the naturecultures - that arise in human encounters with their other-than-human world.” The suburban setting is a site of natureculture where the lives of humans and nature are interwoven. Social theorist Trevor Hogan suggests that “Australian suburbia is the ‘third space’ that mediates urbanism to ‘nature.’” His articulation of suburbia as a third space has synergies with Winnicott’s writing about potential space as a third space mediating inner and outer experience. Within suburbia the tensions between nature and humans are constantly at play, making suburbia an appropriate location for an investigation of place in this project.

**Plants as indicators of place**

As explained earlier, and as demonstrated in my dye results, plant dyes are hard to replicate. Colours are influenced by plant type, season, biophysical factors, nutrient loads and the water used for simmering the plants to extract the dyes. Plant dyes are

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102 Ibid.
indicators of the conditions in which a plant lives, and in each place, the plants will produce a distinctive range of colours.

Other artists have investigated plants to reveal information about specific place/s including Australian artists India Flint, Holly Story and Ilka White, who all work with plant dyes. New Zealand artist Kristy Johnstone studied the colour palettes available from plants growing on four sheep stations in New Zealand’s high country, where she was seeking a sense of place through colour. She used merino wool to test the dyes and found distinct colour ranges from each station (Fig. 83). As she wrote, “my role has been to extract and interpret the colours in such a way to allow the vegetation to reveal the truth of that place through colour.” Similarly, in Dye Diary, the colours produced reveal something particular about a specific place at a specific time; they act as a witness to place. As I also discovered in my research, Johnstone found that the climate, soil and region that the plants came from, all have an effect on the colour palette created from each specific site.

Fig. 83. Kristy Johnstone, Colours of the High Country

The variability in dye results observed in *Dye Diary* can be understood through the research of plant physiologists, biologists and botanists into plant intelligence and how plants negotiate their living conditions. Writer Michael Pollan explains that a plant’s rootedness “calls for an extensive and nuanced understanding of one’s immediate environment, since the plant has to find everything it needs, and has to defend itself, while remaining fixed in place.”\textsuperscript{108} In addition, plant physiologist Anthony Trewavas writes, “their sessile lifestyle is clearly successful and individuals must therefore possess a fine ability to adjust and optimally exploit the local environment.”\textsuperscript{109} Supporting these statements are years of observations and experiments which defend the idea that plants have a capacity for adaptive behaviour and have an ability to adjust to and make use of the conditions in which they grow.

Anecdotally my research shows that the dyes produced from the same species of plant at different times of the year, or from different locations, can be quite variable. Research into plant intelligence reveals that plants have intentionality and respond to nutrient loads, water and pests in their environment.\textsuperscript{110} A plant’s rootedness means it must respond to the given conditions in its environment, making plants excellent indicators of the place in which they live. It is beyond the scope of my research to conduct scientific experiments to explain the reasons for each colour result, but working on the scale I have makes the variability in dye results evident. This variability suggests that the colours produced by plants may be one way that changes in environmental conditions are signalled by plants.

The implications of plant intelligence—signalling, learning, movement and communication—are assessed by Matthew Hall in his examination of human relationships with nature, specifically plant life. In *Plants as Persons*, he argues for a moral consideration of the plant world, and for the development of less destructive,
more respectful and harmonious relationships between humans and nature. Hall’s research, as well as that of literary scholar John Charles Ryan, is underpinned by Val Plumwood’s understanding of the dualities that affect relationships between humans and nature. As Ryan explains, Plumwood’s research is particularly relevant to the study of plants as they have been conceived as passive, and are assumed to be lacking in intelligence and consciousness. In Dye Diary I brought an aspect of plant life to the fore—the colours that are produced by the plant materials. It is a project in which plants are considered as collaborators, as the colours are determined by the plants and indicate how the plant has negotiated the environment in which it lives. The variable dye results support the notion that plants are active and instrumental in their negotiation of their living conditions. By collaborating with plants to produce colours, a normally otherwise unseen wonder of a plant’s capacity is brought into focus.

**Conclusion**

[Attention to the particular ... typically leads to an awareness of ecosystems, interconnectedness, and deep respect, usually through a sense in which the perceived otherness of the natural world is overcome.](#)

Through the research for Dye Diary I recorded the dyes from one hundred plants in the Inner North of Canberra. By setting up controlled experimental conditions I was able to make an extensive and detailed visual document of this aspect of place. Dye Diary recorded both the artistic and scientific aspects of colour creation with plant dyes, and as with the Rain Drawings the process of collaborating with nature was complex and rewarding. Although Dye Diary was contained by the rules and decisions I made, the plant materials determined the colour outcomes, and this aspect of the project remained unpredictable and mysterious. Working in collaboration with nature made me more aware of the constant state of flux in both nature and my inner world as, for example, the seasons and weather changed. Entangled within the ordered

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111 Hall, Plants as Persons. A Philosophical Botany, 1.


appearance of the finished *Dye Diary* are the complex conditions that come together to make each individual dye. These include the weather, soil, nutrients, season and other biophysical aspects of place.

The act of collecting plant materials and producing dyes over a year allowed me to map an aspect of place. The consistent documentation formed a record of changes in the environment of the Inner North of Canberra over time, and these changes are embedded within the colours of the pieced works and tapestries and the pressed plant drawings. The time-frame which I dedicated to the *Dye Diary* is critical as changes in the environment could be recorded and noted. The recording of plant dyes over time, in a specific place, expands what is known about that place.

Also embedded within each colour is my experience of the place where I collected the plant materials. The *Diary* is a personal narrative of place that incorporates my memories of interacting with nature and people, memories that are included in the written component of the *Diary*. However, the information I have collated in this textile work also has practical applications, as it can be used by others to make plant dyes. It incorporates recipes, as well as the scientific and artistic knowledge involved in making the dyes, extending the field of textile and plant dye research in Australia.

My focused and intensive year-long examination of place heightened my awareness of the cyclical patterns of death and renewal as well as the interconnections between humans and nature. My increasing awareness of these patterns and interconnections formed the starting point for new paper-based and textile explorations that I describe in Chapter Three.
Chapter Three: Patterning and Connections in Potential Space

Knowing is a direct material engagement, a practice of intra-acting with the world as part of the world in its dynamic material configuring, its ongoing articulation. . . Ethics is about mattering, about taking account of the entangled materializations of which we are a part, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities—even the smallest cuts matter.114

In Chapters One and Two I outlined methodologies that allowed me to investigate my direct experiences with nature and place and that gave rise to the Rain Drawings and Dye Diary. I came to understand the patterns and connections between humans and nature in new ways, and I now discuss how I built on my research to investigate these further. This Chapter is divided into two Sections. In the first I discuss my exploration of patterns of decay and renewal, and grief for personal and ecological losses. In the second I describe the development of textile and paper-based imagery that visualise the interconnections between humans and nature, and the consequences of these connections failing.

Section One: Cyclic patterns, grief and renewal

Eight days after I started the research project my mother died unexpectedly. In a project where my inner world responds to the external world in potential space, this loss, and the impact it had upon my thinking, feeling and dreams, was significant for the research. It was inevitable that I would explore grief throughout this project, initially in relation to my personal loss and the solace I found in nature for understanding my bereavement, and later as a response to ecological losses such as flora and fauna extinctions.

Working with grief, and through grief, also meant working with the promise and actuality of renewal. Through the Dye Diary research, undertaken as it was for a year, I became more attuned to seasonal changes in the plants around me, and to the cycles of decay and renewal. I made work as a response to grief, and explored the connection between natural cycles and the process of grief during and after the Dye Diary project. I wanted to investigate what would emerge in the potential space between these natural cycles and my emotions. One response to my trauma and confusion was that I found myself drawn to making objects using the repetitive processes of basketry, stitching, burning and weaving, processes that induce the state of mind of potential space.

I turned to the natural world to find ways to understand my grief after my mother died. My interested centred on the potential space between my inner emotions and two small objects from nature—a collection of shells and the seedpod described in Chapter One and below. Later, after making a series of small works responding to the shells and seedpod, I was able to broaden my approach and move from exploring personal grief to contemplating the impacts of climate change and ecological loss. This contemplation raised a series of questions—what is the impact of another plant or animal species disappearing? How do I feel when people and animals are suffering the impacts of natural disasters? And how can such grief be expressed? This wider grief is examined in relation to alchemical processes of transformation in a series of drawings made with ink and burns, and in the context of the work of Australian artists Gregory Pryor and Janet Laurence.
After my mother died her loss was overwhelming, and it absorbed all my thinking and feeling as the grief pressed in upon me. It seemed that there was no space left to imagine anything new or different. This feeling began to shift a little, and a tiny space opened, after I found a matchbox full of shells tucked away in one of my mother’s cupboards (Fig. 84). It was precious to me. It held memories of walking along the sand and pottering in rock pools, as my mother shared her love of nature. As cultural sociologist Margaret Gibson writes, “in the most simple, fleeting and poignant moments, people grieve with and through objects.”

Objects belonging to the deceased help the person grieving to deal with the tension of holding on to memories of those who have died, while also trying to find a way to let go and move on without their loved one. Gibson draws on Winnicott’s research to suggest that these objects are used by those grieving in a similar manner to children using teddy bears as transitional objects. With the shells I found a way to grieve. A space emerged in which I was able to ‘play’ with the meaning of my mother’s death, as I remembered moments with her and discovered ways to incorporate her loss into my life.

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116 Ibid., 287.
research began as I explored the shell collection as a transitional object that would help me to grieve.

Inspired by the collection, I began to weave miniature tapestries that were small enough to fit into matchboxes (Fig. 85). I wondered about the capacity of the matchbox full of shells to hold my grief, alongside my mother's memories of a place once visited. These feelings and memories seemed too big to be confined in such a tiny space. I worked with this idea and wove miniature representations of immense natural structures such as mountains and geological formations. In the tapestries, immensity is contained at a scale that can be held in the hand. The macrocosm becomes microcosmic, allowing the immense to be examined up-close, which parallels my minute examinations of the vast and overwhelming emotions arising from grief. I did however struggle to find a solution for resolving the disconnection between the images on the matchbox covers and the tapestries. The images did not relate to one another and I could not find meaning in the 'conversation' between
them. I therefore started weaving tapestries that would fit into other small containers, including jewellery boxes.

In these new tapestries I wove patterns from nature such as mud cracks and layers of sediment in rocks (Figs 86 and 87). The preciousness of these small weavings was enhanced by placing them in containers made for jewellery, changing their meaning. They no longer simply referenced grief, but also allowed me to consider how even the small, overlooked and seemingly insignificant aspects of nature have value.

Making these works in the slow and repetitive medium of tapestry focused my attention on the small details of individual stitches and marks, which together created the images. Weaving the tapestries helped the process of grieving, the repetition making a space for reverie and contemplation, a potential space in which I could think about the significance of my mother’s death.
This seedpod (Fig. 88) gave rise to a series of works, including the initial experiments with burns in paper described in Chapter One. This seedpod was a gift from someone who understood my grief and it represented much of what I was feeling about the loss of my mother. It was vulnerable and yet resilient, and gently held its seed—the source of potential new life and inspiration. In response to the pod I wove small, wire baskets as I tried to capture both its sense of fragility and of resilience. By working with fine silver, copper and nickel wire, the baskets appear delicate but the wire is strong enough to hold the structure (Fig. 89). This tension between vulnerability and resilience is beautifully expressed by philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who writes,

> if we go deeper into daydreams of nests, we soon encounter a sort of paradox of sensibility. A nest—and this we understand right away—is a precarious thing, and yet it sets us to daydreaming of security.\(^{117}\)

Seedpods are the plant world’s equivalent of the nests of birds and insects. Like nests, seedpods protect and nurture new life in a form that can seem fragile and precarious. In making these works, I discovered that within my grief, from inside this vulnerable state, there exists a tiny seed-like hope in which the promise of renewal lies.

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The baskets, like the tapestries, are miniatures that can be held in the hand. They are shiny and intricate, precious and jewel-like. I left the warp ends long, the strands alluding to new growth and the possibility of renewal, paralleling the latent potential of the seed in the pod. In the smallest basket the wire is not much thicker than coarse hair, and took many hours to weave. The works embody the hours and hours spent contemplating both the small work in my hands and my inner emotions, in the space that opened up through the repetitive making.

I was often surprised to find that the baskets emerged in forms I had not anticipated, as it seemed impossible that such a slow and intricate process could produce unexpected results. For example the larger, darker basket in Figure 89 ended up less rounded and squat than I expected. This happened when my mind was wandering,
while my hands were occupied with the process of weaving. As Claire Pajaczkowska suggests, repetitive textile practices allow the mind to roam freely, while the hands worry away productively (see Introduction). Similarly I found that the tiny, repetitive manipulations I made in the tapestries and baskets allowed me freedom to 'play' with ideas and feelings of grief. In the state of mind of potential space I had a 'conversation' with the shells and the seedpod, which helped me to understand loss in new ways. The shell collection brought back memories, as well as inspiring ideas about the immense—feelings of grief and large geological formations—being contained in a way that allows for close inspection and consideration. The seedpod connected me to the wider world where cycles of death and renewal are constantly at play.

I was fascinated, too, by the transparency of the seedpod. The baskets demonstrate strength and fragility, however I wanted also to reference the transparency and openness of the seedpod. The inside of the pod is visible from the outside, revealing the world of the seed. I considered the transparency created by the holes to be an important element, both conceptually and materially, as it allows the inner and outer worlds to interact and interconnect in ways that are not so evident in the baskets. I responded by working with burns in paper, using the glowing ember at the point of a lit wooden skewer to create the transparency (Fig. 90). Using burns for mark-making was a return to, and rethinking of, earlier experimental work made in relation to the seedpod (see Chapter One). As holes are burned into the paper over and over again, it becomes progressively more fragile. The paper still has strength, however, and is held together by the fine, lace-like web of fibres that remains. These works embody a tension between fragility and resilience, and between creation and destruction, because the patterns are created as the paper is burnt and destroyed.

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118 Pajaczkowska, "Thread of Attachment," 143.
These were ideas that I examined further, while considering grief’s capacity to re-pattern and change people irrevocably. This change is explored by social scientist Ashlee Cunsolo Willox in relation to losses resulting from the effects of climate change. She writes,

in mourning, we not only lose something that was loved, but we also lose our former selves, the way we used to be before the loss. We are changed internally and externally by the loss in ways that we cannot predict or
control, and in ways that may be disorienting, surprising, or completely unexpected. In this context I understood that I was using the burns to create a sense of this re-patterning, as my old patterns and ways of understanding the world were changed by loss. The new patterns suggest the process of renewal that may follow grief.

Working through personal loss helped me to find a visual language for exploring grief in relation to ecological loss. Tackling the scale of loss and suffering that the world faces through the effects of climate change seems impossible for an individual. Psychologically this can lead to denial and a sense of hopelessness, not just in terms of accepting climate change science, but also in terms of believing that individuals have any agency or capacity to affect ecological futures. As psychotherapist Rosemary Randall writes,

> The idea of denial has certainly gained currency in discussions of climate change, though often without deep understanding of what it means psychologically... it can be an important protection, allowing the most painful truths to be assimilated piece by piece.

Assimilating painful truths is difficult psychological work, and as I contemplated the enormity of actual and potential ecological loss and change, I began to have terrifying nightmares of engulfing black holes. I responded by painting circles of black ink onto paper, and then creating patterns with burns to surround the black (Fig. 91).

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This use of black ink creates a link between the *Rain Drawings* and the drawings made with burns. My decision to work with ink was made spontaneously in each case, firstly as a means to record natural patterns made by rain, and secondly as a way to capture my experiences of grief. However, a significant difference between the two drawing series was the level of control I used to create the images. In Chapter One I discussed how I constrained my agency in the *Rain Drawings* in order to maximise the effect of the rain. However, in the drawings made with burns I controlled the process by choosing the placement of holes, and by preventing the holes from burning too far. I maintained more control of the burn drawings as they were made to express my inner world of emotions, and my feelings of grief. Nevertheless, the burning process was not completely predictable, and unexpected marks emerged when, for example, the burns smouldered on the underside of the drawing. As I observed this smouldering it reminded me of the volatility of grief, and the strong emotions which can suddenly emerge.
If we hypothesise that the alchemists unconsciously projected their internal experience of transformation into their work with matter, their images are more relevant to the work of psychological growth and healing... that they were using a symbolic language to talk about the phenomenology of inner experience.121

The drawings that evolved from my investigations of grief I understood as images of sol niger or the black sun. This alchemical image is associated with the nigredo or blackening stage in the magnum opus or great work as alchemists engaged in the process of making the philosopher’s stone.122 Carl Jung (the founder of analytical psychology) understood that the alchemists spoke in symbols, and that their work concerned transformations in the human soul as well as transformations in the literal materials of their art.123 The nigredo can be understood to approximate a descent into the unconscious. Jungian psychoanalyst Stanton Marlan writes that “to consider the image [of the black sun] in the context of the unconscious is both to recognize its vastness and unknown quality... and the psyche’s attempt to represent the unrepresentable.”124 Sol Niger is my attempt to represent the unrepresentable, to find a way to express grief concerning the huge ecological losses of the Anthropocene. This work is a diptych, with each half of the work reflecting the other. This double image was created as way to convey the idea that grief comes from inside and outside, and that the work of grief takes place somewhere between one’s inner and outer worlds.

As well as the reference to black holes and the black sun in the imagery of Sol Niger, the use of burns in the drawing refers not only to the re-patterning of grief, but also to alchemical processes of transformation. Fire was used by the alchemists to bring about purification by burning away the inessential.125 This brings about the second

124 Ibid., 11.
125 Ibid., 97.
process in the *magnum opus*, which is the *albedo* or whitening. During the *albedo* the alchemist’s materials, or the psyche, moves out of the dark and depressive state of *nigredo* towards a greater sense of purification, or in the case of the psyche, consciousness.¹²⁶ In *Sol Niger* the white areas which have also been burnt refer to the process of *albedo* and the illumination and insight which comes after the work of grief. As Marlan writes, “the whiteness of the albedo is simultaneously a developmental step in a series of alchemical processes and the illuminating quality intrinsic in the blackness of the nigredo process.”¹²⁷ Similarly, the deep pain of grief, when confronted and worked through, can be understood as illuminating a possible way forward towards renewal and transformation.

![Fig. 92. Gregory Pryor, Black Solander (detail)](image)

Gregory Pryor explores concepts of grief for flora extinctions and loss of botanical biodiversity in his work *Black Solander* (see also Chapter Two). His explicit environmental message is realised by drawing dead plant specimens in a sombre

¹²⁷ Ibid., 99.
black monochrome (Fig. 92). In doing so, he subverts conventional botanical illustration that represents versions of plants in full colour and health. He lined an entire gallery with the drawings to give the impression of a solander box—a box designed by Daniel Solander to preserve the botanical specimens he gathered on the Endeavour voyage with Joseph Banks—yet apart from the images on the walls, Pryor's solander box is empty. I have thought about the glimpses of white showing between the drawings, and wondered if these might be a small sign of hope from Pryor for the future, in this otherwise bleak work.

Renewal

Fig. 93. Sally Blake, Renewal

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My ideas for investigating patterns of renewal came spontaneously, drawing on previous works such as *Sol Niger* and the pin prick works. I cut nine squares of paper and painted each with either a circle of black ink, or a background of black ink leaving a central white circle. I imposed the black ink to represent grief, then used marks made with burns as well as stitched red thread to signify repatterning and renewal (Fig. 93). I thought of the circles as seed-like, holding a latent potential. I stitched patterns of concentric circles and stylised plant tendrils to represent growth and new life (Fig. 94). These patterns are sewn with a red thread to represent the next stage in alchemy, the *rubedo* or reddening. The *rubedo* is the final stage of the *magnum opus* and the colour of highest perfection.\textsuperscript{129} Renewal is made as a series of nine drawings, where each visualises the relationship between *nigredo*, *albedo* and *rubedo* in different ways, to speak of the multiple ways transformations may occur through the process of grief and renewal.

\textsuperscript{129} Dupré et al., *Art and Alchemy: The Mystery of Transformation*, 251.
At this stage of my research I referred to Janet Laurence’s practice, which provided a useful context for my work as I explored themes of grief and ecological loss. In her art practice Laurence explores issues of environmental sustainability and fragility, cycles of life and death and states of transformation. Her installation, *Waiting: a Medicinal Garden for Ailing Plants* (Figs 95 and 96), evokes a state of environmental crisis by
acting as an intensive care unit for plants. Laurence’s use of scientific glass vessels—beakers, vials, flasks, test tubes—filled with plants conjures laboratories, glasshouses and alchemical transformations. In the glass vessels the state of the plants is paradoxical; the vessels may represent the final resting place for the many specimens that have been collected for classification, experimentation and display. However, the vessels are womb-like potential sites of germination, perhaps a transitional space of growth before release into the environment. The works bear testament to what has been lost, but also hold an impulse towards the possibility of restoration. Tensions between life and death, and between fragility and resilience, are evident in Laurence’s work.

Fig. 95. Janet Laurence, Waiting: a Medicinal Garden for Ailing Plants (detail)

132 Ibid.
The concept of the black sun itself also embodies a tension between death and renewal. In discussing the paradox of the black sun Marian writes, “it is blacker than black, but it also shines with a dark luminescence that opens the way to some of the most numinous aspects of psychic life.” In relation to nature’s cyclic patterns of decay and renewal I thought about the light that comes after the darkest night, and the warmth after the coldest winter as new life and growth begin. I held these ideas in my mind, playing with them in the potential space between the seedpod and my emotions and thoughts, allowing time for these ideas to generate as I went about the slow, repetitive work of burning paper for *Sol Niger*.

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My approach to the *Renewal* works was playful and I worked intuitively and spontaneously, creating patterns as they emerged in my mind. This playfulness was held in tension with the slow and repetitive processes of burning and stitching. I made each drawing as an individual work, but when they were all completed I displayed them in a grid to show their similarities and differences in relation to one another. The central drawing is the only one not to have any stitching, its latent potential hidden. In some drawings, the stitching is inside the circle. This represents the inner work of the seed or self as the processes of renewal begins. In the remaining drawings the stitching moves to the outside where growth and change become evident. The practice of stitching involves a movement with thread, which connects the front and back—the inner and outer aspects—of the image. It is indicative of the movement between my inner and outer worlds, a visual record of the slow process of working with grief, where my emotions and the fragility and resilience of the seedpod are brought together.

**Summary of Section One**

Using the slow and repetitive processes of burning and stitching patterns into paper helped to induce the state of mind of potential space. The slow and deliberate processes involved in the baskets and tapestries and the paper-based works *Renewal* and *Sol Niger* fostered a detailed consideration and deep contemplation of grief for both personal and wider losses.

Grief became an area of exploration in this project after my mother died, and continued as a line of enquiry as I responded to ecological losses. My initial visual research allowed me to explore and play with themes of resilience, vulnerability, memory and renewal embodied in the shells and seedpod, revealing synergies between inner and outer reality. It gave me confidence that working in potential space provided an effective and flexible methodology. I realised that I would need to be responsive to changes in my inner and outer reality, and allow unpredictable events and outcomes to influence the development of my research. Thinking about and analysing the imagery in *Sol Niger* and *Renewal* in relation to alchemy helped me
to clarify and find visual expression for the processes of transformation that occurred in response to grief.

**Section Two: Interconnections**

Connectivity: (1) In ecological science, connectivity refers to exchange pathways (for energy, information, living things); the greater the number and complexity of pathways, the greater the biodiversity; (2) more widely, exchange pathways may include stories, songs, forms of address; (3) at the foundation—the bonds that sustain the life systems of earth.\(^{134}\)

In this Section I discuss my use of woven structures and drawings to test and visualise interconnectedness. Grappling with the concept of interconnectedness, and the different ways in which humans and nature interrelate, is essential for challenging concepts of duality. As noted previously, dualism was defined by Plumwood as an "emphatic and distancing form of separation (hyper-separation or dissociation)."\(^{135}\) Human geographer Jessica Weir concludes that by challenging dualities, people may develop a more connected way of being in the world—one that allows them to understand the world as part of living in it, not as an external and separate entity.\(^{136}\)

In my research I aim to understand humans as part of nature, as part of an interconnected whole. The idea of an interrelated whole is essential in the work of philosopher Timothy Morton who writes, "the ecological thought is the thinking of interconnectedness."\(^{137}\) He goes on to suggest that all living and non-living things are connected in a vast, entangling mesh which penetrates all aspects of life.\(^{138}\)

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\(^{138}\) Ibid., 30-32.
The woven language of textiles, in which nets, meshes and webs are created, provides both a visual and physical means for exploring ideas of interconnection. In particular I have used the Buddhist metaphor for the interconnection between all things—Indra’s Net—as a visual reference point for my own investigations. \footnote{Indra is an Indian God, and Indra’s net is an image used in Buddhism for, ‘‘teaching of totality’ according to which all phenomena in the universe are interrelated...comparing the universe to a cosmic net strung with jewels such that in each jewel can be seen the reflection of all the others.’ In Damien Keown, A Dictionary of Buddhism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 119.}

Indra’s Net is an infinite net in which a multi-faceted jewel is hung at each node, each jewel reflecting all the others in the net. Tibetan Buddhism teacher and master Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche writes, “since the net itself, the number of jewels, and the facets of every jewel are infinite, the number of reflections is infinite as well.” \footnote{Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, The Joy of Living. Unlocking the Secret of Science and Happiness (New York: Harmony Books, 2007), 174-175, quoted in Morton, The Ecological Thought, 39-40.}

The image of Indra’s Net conjured many possibilities of how to make a net structure, and brought to mind similar metaphors such as spider’s webs, the entangling mesh that Morton describes, and neuronal connections. I explored these ideas with woven structures made with silver wire and plant-dyed threads, as well as crochet to make an entangling mesh.
A shift in direction

To begin this discussion I will first describe two drawings made after I completed *Dye Diary*, as they demonstrate a significant shift in the direction of the research (Figs 97 and 98). *Colour Code* is a gridded, stitched chart of 126 dyed threads created for *Dye Diary*, showing the range of colours through the spectrum. *Study for Interconnectedness* is a visualisation of Indra's Net, the individual circles of colour stitched through the paper, and connected in an irregular, pinpricked grid. The circles of colour represent individual jewels strung in the net.

In considering how I might represent individual entities as part of an interconnected whole, I visualised the links between these entities in new ways. As I described in Chapter Two, the multiple individual components of *Dye Diary* were related by displaying them grouped in grids, lines and books, to make sense of the journal-like and rules-based methodologies I employed to make the work. As a study of place, *Dye Diary* also facilitated my observation and comprehension of the many ways in
which different aspects of place are connected to one another, the repetitive processes of walking, collecting and making allowed me time and space for contemplation. *Study for Interconnectedness* was my initial exploration of the multiplicity of these connections. It provided the departure point for two lines of enquiry—a net made with silver wire and plant dyed yarns in which I explored the concept of interconnectedness, and a series of drawings made with pinpricks and stitching (*Net drawings and Disruption*) that allowed me to investigate the possible consequences of these connections failing.

**The Silver Net: Interconnectedness**

![Image of the Silver Net: Interconnectedness](Fig. 99. Sally Blake, *Interconnectedness and detail*)

The work described here arose directly from *Study for Interconnectedness*, and is a net made with silver wire and plant-dyed silks and wools (Fig. 99). I wanted to create a work in which the individual components were physically linked together, so that I...
could understand any particular challenges that might arise when working with a whole structure, rather than with individual parts. I wove small discs with silver wire and plant dyed yarn employing the basketry technique I had previously used to weave the miniature metal baskets described earlier in this chapter (Fig. 100). The small woven discs were then joined together in a network of silver wire. Each disc was connected by multiple strands to others in the net (Fig. 101). I thought of these discs as analogous to the jewels in Indra’s Net, and secured one at each node in the net to represent individual life forms. In total I made three hundred jewels ranging in size from approximately two to three centimetres in diameter, each taking about one hour to weave.

Fig. 100 Sally Blake, Jewels for Interconnectedness
I used wire to construct the net as I wanted it to have some integrity and be able to hold its own form, while the use of silver refers to the precious connections between all living and non-living things. The wire was fine (just 0.3 mm in diameter), so while it had strength and flexibility, it was also fragile, indicating the tenuous nature of some of these connections. This thin wire also has a 'memory', meaning if it is bent too far and the wire dented, these dents are hard to remove. So I needed to work carefully with the wire, which also reflects the preciousness of these connections.

I worked with approximately 60 plant dyes—including some from the *Dye Diary* and an indigo dye bath—to create the net, making five 'jewels' from each colour. I finished the jewels from each colour in two ways—in some the ends were tucked under and hidden, and in others the silver warps radiate from the jewel. The radiating threads maintain a possibility of new connections being made in the net, providing a material and conceptual relationship with the long warp threads of the small wire baskets. As the wire is so fine and fragile, I left long ends in only one-third of the jewels, as they are easier to manipulate and I was less likely to damage them if the ends were tucked under.

*Fig. 101. Sally Blake, Interconnectedness in Process*
Making the net challenged me to extend my understanding of interconnectedness. Every adjustment I made in the net would create a ripple-on effect in other sections. The most dramatic example happened when I removed a nail that had secured fourteen wires. The net ‘exploded’, leaving a large hole and extensive rupturing. The damage to the net was widespread and the rupture snaked its way through many of the nodes, destroying the wire connections. I was able to repair this damage, but it was instructive in terms of understanding the type of destruction that is possible when things start to go wrong in an interdependent whole. The damage does not just happen locally, and consequences occur in unexpected areas far from the initial problem. While it was not my intention to investigate disintegration and repair in *Interconnectedness*, the experience of damaging and repairing the work informed the development of further paper-based works exploring these ideas (see *Failing Patterns* below).

I considered this work in the context of Dutch artist Marian Bijlenga’s installations in which she makes interconnected wholes from multiple small parts—both from objects she creates and those she collects, such as fish scales and rose petals (Figs 102 and 103). She uses materials such as horsehair, thread and fabric as drawing materials in the same way others might use pencils and brushes. Nature inspires her works and, as the artist Anna Berk writes, they are made in a “continual process of becoming that can be compared to processes of growth in nature.” Bijlenga constructs each individual element meticulously before she arranges the parts, using monofilament—fishing line—to attach the small pieces together to make a whole. By using fine monofilament the connections between elements are barely visible.

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Fig. 102. Marian Bijlenga, untitled

Fig. 103. Marian Bijlenga, untitled
Bijlenga thinks of her works as spatial drawings and concludes that "the wall ... is what a sheet of paper is to someone else." By suspending her drawings a small distance from the wall, the shadow they cast becomes an additional dimension. As Berk writes, the patterns in Bijlenga’s drawings “become paraphrased in quivering lines of shadow.” Bijlenga’s works are abstracted and rearticulated in the shadow, the shadow lines contingent upon the lighting and conditions of the space in which the works are hung. The monofilament connections that Bijlenga uses are more visible in the shadows than they are in the physical work, and the eye can explore these shadow lines looking for the multiple ways in which the individual elements are connected to one another. Considering how shadow operates in Bijlenga’s work was useful to me as I thought about how I might display **Interconnectedness**.

Suspending **Interconnectedness** away from the wall, under gallery lights, creates a strong shadow that becomes an important element in the overall work. When viewed from the front the shadow interacts with the net and has the effect of visually increasing the complexity of connections and interactions between the individual ‘jewels’. The relationship of the work to its shadows under gallery lighting is crucial as I aim to express a sense of the multiple and complex ways in which separate entities are connected.

I also found that the shadow and net interrelate in a way that conveys a sense of their enclosing space to create a vessel. This alludes back to the small baskets I made in response to the seedpod. The emergent visual effect was surprising, but also desirable, as the basket provides a visual metaphor for describing potential space. Between the work and the shadow the viewer is able to visualise a potential space, paralleling Winnicott’s statement “that [potential space] shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated.”

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143 Berk, “Spatial Drawings: Marian Bijlenga’s Textile Structures.”
words and the way that *Interconnectedness* and its shadow interrelate—viewed from the side, the separateness of the work and shadow is evident (Fig. 104). But from the front the work and shadow appear to be completely connected and related.

Fig. 104. Sally Blake, *Interconnectedness*
Australian textile artist Nancy Tingey has also worked extensively with net structures made through various textile techniques such as knotting and looping. Her work *Acaena Screen* (Fig. 105) is particularly thought-provoking as it is made from the individual seeds of *Acaena Novae Zelandiae*, where the seeds are connected to build up a cohesive surface.\textsuperscript{145} The prickly seeds connect to each other without additional support or securing, creating a surface which is both cohesive and fragile in appearance. As in *Interconnectedness* the connections between individual components are tenuous, a reminder of the preciousness of the connections through which all living beings are interrelated. Similarly to Bijlenga’s and my own work, *Acaena Screen* is transformed by light. When viewed from above it appears as a bristly mat, and when it is hung in space against light it looks like an ethereal net curtain, emphasising its fragility.\textsuperscript{146} This ephemeral work has been made by Tingey as an environmental piece and as it falls apart she will return the seeds to the land to allow them to regenerate.\textsuperscript{147}


\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
Crochet: The Ecological Thought

I experimented further with the concept of interconnectedness through the medium of crochet. Crochet is different to woven structures as only one or two stitches are held on the crochet hook at any one time, and a surface can be made from a continuous thread. Working with one single thread provided another means of thinking about and exploring an interconnected world. I started with a fine and fairly stiff paper yarn, which created a delicate surface that retained some integrity when manipulated into three-dimensional forms. I used two simple crochet stitches, chain stitch (Fig. 106) and single crochet (Fig. 107), from which complex structures can be made. The crochet hook can be inserted into any existing stitch in the crochet surface to form the next stitch, making rumples and textures in the crochet surface possible (Fig. 108). I started with a cone of paper yarn 4400 metres long which I crocheted into a complex, entangled structure, The Ecological Thought, a reference to the title of Morton's book (Fig. 109).

Fig. 106. Chain stitch crochet

Fig. 107. Single stitch crochet
Fig. 108. Sally Blake, *The Ecological Thought* (detail)

Fig. 109. Sally Blake, *The Ecological Thought*
Before describing *The Ecological Thought* further, I will introduce the *Crochet Coral Reef* project created by the Wertheim sisters, Margaret and Christine. Their project lies at the intersection between mathematics, marine biology, handicraft and community art practice, while responding to environmental challenges including global warming and the growing problem of oceanic plastic trash. The sisters instigated a project to crochet a woollen reef, to bring attention to their concerns for the effects of global warming upon the Great Barrier Reef. The project has expanded into other cities and countries, becoming a worldwide project that engages communities across the globe with both craft and ecological issues.

The realistic looking crocheted reefs are inspired by Cornell University mathematician Daina Taimina’s discovery of ‘hyperbolic crochet’ in 1997. Using the art of crochet Taimina was able to model hyperbolic space, which many mathematicians had previously thought was impossible. The life-like appearance of the crocheted reefs stems from the fact that many marine organisms embody hyperbolic geometry in their anatomies— the crochet pattern is a map of the growth patterns found in corals, kelp, sponges and so on. The Wertheims elaborated Taimina’s technique to develop a taxonomy of reef-like forms, all based on adaptations of the simple algorithm which produced the pure shape made by Taimina (Fig. 110). These endless variations are adopted and adapted by crafters around the world to create complex and realistic ‘woolly’ reefs (Fig. 111). In addition to the wool reefs others have been made to address specific issues affecting corals and sea life. One example is *Toxic Reef* made from the plastic trash that is clogging oceans and choking marine life, and another is the *Bleached Reef* which visualises reefs under stress from warming seas (Figs 112 and 113).

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150 Ibid.
Fig. 110. Daina Taimina, *A Mathematically Precise Model of a Hyperbolic Plane*

Fig. 111. Marianne Midelburg, *Crochet Coral and Anemone Garden*
Fig. 112. Christine Wertheim, Evelyn Hardin and Pate Conaway, *Toxic Reef*

Fig. 113. Helle Jorgensen, Sarah Simons, Heather McCarren, Margaret and Christine Wertheim, Nancy Lewis, *The Bleached Reef*
The curving structures of hyperbolic crochet are created by increasing stitches, and the forms become more ‘crinkly’ by growing the number of stitches increased in each stitch. This is shown in Figure 114 where the rate of stitch increase changes from one in every third stitch, to one in every second stitch, to one in every stitch.

![Fig. 114. Jenny Hoople, Hyperbolic Crochet Models](image)

I used this information as I crocheted *The Ecological Thought* to create an intricate structure. I followed no set pattern, moving intuitively from stitch to stitch, and increasing the number of stitches to create an undulating surface. I used three different crochet hooks to make different sized marks in the work, thereby increasing the visual complexity and suggesting infinite and entangled connections. Using a free form stitch, with elements of hyperbolic crochet, *The Ecological Thought* has an organic structure that relates to patterns and forms in nature, such as sea foam. As with *Interconnectedness*, *The Ecological Thought* casts a complex shadow when suspended a short distance from the wall, which further increases the visual intricacy of the work (see Fig. 115). *The Ecological Thought* is made from one continuous thread, in which every stitch is linked within the net, providing an analogy for the interdependence of all life.
Failing patterns: Net drawings and Disruption

As I worked with grief in this project I thought about how I might visualise the enormity of ecological losses. The *Sol Niger* drawings described in Section One speak of deep and painful grief in which there still remains the hope of renewal. When making *Interconnectedness* I wondered about what happens when connectivity fails. What happens when ruptures are repaired over and over again, or when a point is reached where no further repair is possible? What would this look like? Would the hope for renewal remain?

To examine these questions I began a new series of drawings in which I drew upon Deborah Bird Rose’s research into ecological crises and extinctions. *Study for Interconnectedness* was my starting point, and I decided that I would work with the three elements in this drawings—the paper, the pinpricked grid, and stitched marks that signify individual life forms. I simplified the stitched mark to a cross of colour where the warp and weft of the pinpricked grid meet (Fig. 116).
Using these three elements I began a series of small drawings which investigated the idea of Indra’s Net in a drawn form, finding the simple gridded structure flexible and easy to collapse and manipulate (Fig. 117). These drawings are experiments in visualising an infinite net structure, as I worked through ways to allude to an endless structure within the confinement of the paper. The possibility of the infinite is retained as the pinpricked grids extend beyond the coloured nodes, reaching to the edges of the paper. The idea that gridded images can convey the infinite has been explored by Rosalind Krauss, who wrote that, “logically speaking, the grid extends, in all directions, to infinity. Any boundaries imposed upon it by a given painting or sculpture can only be seen—according to this logic—as arbitrary.”151 In my works, extending the pinpricked grid to the edges of the paper gives a sense of the drawing being a fragment of a greater whole. In the drawings where the grid does not extend to the edges the net is isolated and appears to ‘float’, giving a sense of disconnection and disruption from the whole.

151 Krauss, “Grids,” 60.
As I considered the future direction of this series I was influenced by the research of literary and cultural studies scholar Kate Rigby, who poses the following challenge to creative practitioners:

I want to make a case for the value of writing in the anthropocene in the mode of prophetic witness. Such writing would seek to disclose the catastrophic consequences of continuing on our current ecocidal path and awaken us to the possibility of another way of thinking and being: one that holds the promise of reconciling urban industrial society with the Earth.\(^{152}\)

Rigby contrasts the capacity for prophetic witness with the risk of a writer’s or poet’s words becoming idle chatter, and in so doing she presents a question or challenge to all creative practitioners engaging with environmental concerns. I believe it is a

challenge to understand the structures and patterns connecting humans and nature, so the consequences of their undoing might be made known.

Finding the right language, the language of prophetic witness, is a challenge. However visual artists through their training in observation, visualisation and technical skills possess an ability to understand the deep processes and complex patterns of the natural world, which is often combined with an intuition for communication.¹⁵³ Just as scientists can have confidence in their capacity for objective reason, nurses in their ability to notice subtle changes in the patient’s condition and understand their significance, so too can artists trust their training and capacity to observe and communicate patterns and ideas. Through the Net drawings, I found a way to convey a sense of an interconnected whole, and of exploring breakdowns and ruptures in this whole.

Fig. 118. Sally Blake, *Studies for Disruption*
I began to explore the consequences of such disruptions by making drawings that combined the elements of paper, stitch and pinprick in different ways (Fig. 118). In the top left hand drawing I have stitched coloured thread into only some of the nodes to indicate a loss, or absence in the others. In the top right the net has been ruptured, as connections fall apart. The middle left shows repairs in the net, which after repeated stitching and mending eventually starts to break down (Fig. 119). On the right, the pieces of a ‘shattered’ pattern are stitched onto a new surface (detail in Fig. 120). This is similar to the drawing in Figure 121 where the shattered pattern has also been recreated in a new drawing. In the two lower works I experimented with the addition of colour. The black background makes the white pinpricks stand out, emphasising the expanding and collapsing net. In the second drawing the graded pencil marks make the net harder to see, and the verticals in the drawing are dominant. Using colour added another element to the drawings which increased, but also complicated, the visual effects that were possible in the drawings. I decided that this extra element was not necessary, as the stitch, pinpricks and coloured yarns were allowing me to make images that explored my concerns, and the extra element was a confusing addition. These experiments showed I had the conditions in place to explore ruptures, repairs and damage in the net.

Fig. 119. Sally Blake, Repair (detail)
My initial resolution of this series was three large scale drawings—Extinction, Fragmentation and Rupture and Repair, each 150 x 106 cm. Rupture and Repair brings together elements of my initial investigations and refers to these concepts in one drawing (Fig. 122). The disintegration of the paper in places where I have repeatedly stitched repairs parallels the breakdown of ecological systems. Rose writes of the extinction crisis as,

an Earth-shattering disaster, one that cannot be unmade, and in that sense cannot be mended, but yet one toward which we owe an ethical response that includes turning towards others in the hopes of mending at least some of the damage.154

By modelling the strength and limitations of the systems which connect all living and non-living entities, Rupture and Repair demonstrates the collapse of a system in which repeated repairs are made, some of which allow the connected whole to hold together. Eventually, however, repair is no longer possible, as the underlying structures have become too damaged—in the case of the drawings the paper can only sustain so many stitches before it breaks down.

Finding a way to show absence was challenging. In *Extinction* (Fig. 123) I have portrayed the absence of life forms by excluding the stitched thread used in other drawings, and only the underlying grid structure remains. After making *Extinction* I envisaged what an interconnected net might look like if different life forms continued to disappear. I imagined the net would break down and start to fragment, the underlying structures no longer strong enough to hold together. This kind of disintegration is described by Rose when she writes, “the current cascade of extinctions is drawing life out of Earth, unmaking the fabric of life, severing the bonds of connectivity.”\(^{155}\) *Fragmentation* (Fig. 124) portrays a disintegration in the net which is beyond the point of repair. It is no longer possible to find a way to fix what is

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destroyed, a thought which fills me with despair. Scientist and conservationist Tim Flannery writes of this despair,

it is our misfortune to be only now, perhaps, tentatively emerging from a world in which human genius was so without wisdom that it fractured and disfigured nature’s evolutionary bonds to the point of our own self-destructiveness.\textsuperscript{156}

In \textit{Fragmentation} I portrayed what may happen when the natural world changes so dramatically, that sense and meaning can no longer be found. I thought about this work in relation to the \textit{Sol Niger} burn drawings as they also visualise concern and grief for ongoing ecological damage. However, the grief portrayed in \textit{Sol Niger} contains the potential for new life and renewal, while \textit{Fragmentation} shows the extreme and dire consequences of continuing on an ecocidal path.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig_123_Sally_Blake_Extinction_detail.png}
\caption{Sally Blake, \textit{Extinction} (detail)}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig_124_Sally_Blake_Fragmentation_detail.png}
\caption{Sally Blake, \textit{Fragmentation} (detail)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{156} Tim Flannery, \textit{Here on Earth. An Argument for Hope} (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2010), 72.
I made these works to model systems of interconnection, and the consequences of these systems being disrupted. I questioned my initial decision to make three large-scale works to conclude this aspect of the research, and am still actively exploring these ideas in a series of smaller scale drawings. At a smaller scale it is possible to produce a larger series of drawings, in order to experiment with the interacting elements of paper, stitch and pinprick more broadly. In this way the viewer will see examples of the intact system, as well as examples where the system is breaking down—including smaller versions of Rupture and Repair, Extinction and Fragmentation.

**Conclusion**

Early in the research project, my personal experience of grief became the starting point for investigations that continued throughout my research. My initial responses, made between my grief and thoughts about ecological crises, provided confidence about working in potential space as a methodology, as a creative space opened where complex emotions could be understood and ‘played’ with.

As a methodology, working in potential space was flexible and emergent, allowing for changes in my inner world and the outer world of nature to be incorporated into the research. Personal experiences of grief opened a way for thinking about and responding to the almost unthinkable grief of ecological losses. Through my earlier research which incorporated a direct material engagement with nature, I became more aware of emotional and ethical responses to nature, and collaborative ways of engaging with nature. Thinking through the work of Gregory Pryor and Janet Laurence was helpful in representing grief for ecological loss. It revealed that the common inheritance of ecological crises inspires artistic responses that examine and grieve the losses, while also looking for transformative possibilities. The research of scholars from the ecological humanities—Deborah Bird Rose, Jessica Weir and Kate Rigby—provided valuable insights into the thinking about interconnectedness, as well as the consequences of disruptions to the connections between humans and nature.
Employing the textile techniques of weaving and crochet provided different ways of understanding and giving form to an interconnected whole. Working with the drawn, woven structures was a way to investigate glitches, ruptures and repairs in the interconnected whole. Using a constrained system of stitch, pinprick and paper allowed for multiple outcomes.

Working in potential space allowed for my personal and inner felt experiences to be incorporated into the research. This was essential in a project examining the relationship between self and nature and more broadly humans and nature. Emotional responses to ecological losses and the suffering of others creates empathy and a greater understanding of the interconnected whole, where humans are seen as part of nature.
Conclusion

In this Exegesis I have described how my practice-led research investigated the potential space between my inner world and the outer world of nature. My aim in this research was to use visual practice as a means to extend Winnicott’s psychodynamic concept by exploring its relevance for examining ecological issues that occur when humans see themselves as separate from nature. I undertook this project to examine the connections, tensions and patterns that link self and nature, and more broadly, humans and nature. Finding these connections challenges the dualistic thinking which Val Plumwood argues contributes to human-led ecological crises, such as climate change and flora and fauna extinctions. My key research question was, how can Winnicott’s concept of potential space be used to investigate the relationships and patterns which connect humans and nature, through textile and paper-based visual investigations?

My methodology was based on Winnicott’s concept of potential space. I used particular qualities of potential space—containment, play, empathy and transformation—in my approach to visual arts research and was able to establish a way of working about and through potential space. Potential space emerges when the conditions are in place that allow for a creative and playful negotiation of inner and outer reality. Therefore, part of my methodological approach involved finding ways to create the conditions that allow for the state of mind of potential space to arise, a set of conditions known as containment in Winnicott’s theory. These included developing ‘rules’—strategies and frameworks—to contain the research and to inform my making methodologies. Examples of this approach are the framework set up for the second series of Rain Drawings (Chapter One) and the scientific methods and rules established for Dye Diary (Chapter Two). Once containment is established, potential space allows for an immediate and playful approach to understanding the relationship between inner and outer reality, which leads to an explorative approach in my research. Examples are the many drawings I made with rain for which I tested different inks, papers and ways of applying the ink, and the experiences I had in
nature, observing the comings and goings in my garden and neighbourhood, as I collected plant materials for *Dye Diary*.

A second strategy that I used to induce potential space was repetitive making. The repetition inherent to practices such as basketry, woven tapestry, loom weaving, piecing and stitching meant textiles was an appropriate field in which to base my research. The labour intensive and repetitive processes I used throughout my visual research created an altered sense of time and space in which the boundaries between inner and outer reality dissolved, allowing for new understanding to arise.

Understanding the potential space between self and nature is necessarily complex and multi-faceted. The visual outcomes that resulted from using these strategies centred around three main themes—visualising potential space, collaborating with nature, and visualising the patterns connecting humans and nature, in particular cycles of death and renewal and systems of connection and breakdown in an interconnected world. The *Potential Space* series of pierced and dyed drawings and the early *ikat* experiments described in Chapter One were made to visualise this space, informed by the natural transitional space of ecotones. They convey the complexity of overlapping patterns, expressing the intricate relationship between inner and outer reality in potential space.

Winnicott described potential space as “an intermediate area of experiencing,” and experience constantly evolves and changes.\(^{157}\) As such, my methodology related to the research of Deborah Bird Rose and Freya Mathews, who explore relationships between humans and nature as a collaboration and an ongoing and unfolding conversation. My methodology was responsive to experiences that affected my inner world and the outer world of nature, which I came to know through my visual research and the types of experience to which I was responding. My experience of personal grief early in the research highlighted the importance of using a methodology that could accommodate the unexpected and chaotic in nature and

human experience into the research. Another example is the initial *Rain Drawings* that were made during the rains which broke a decade-long drought. Although I did not know this as the rains started, they were significant and noticeable and an experience that I wanted to capture. Realising the need for a flexible methodology raised the question of my control and agency in the visual research. I came to understand that by accommodating rather than resisting change, I could develop methodologies that were both flexible and robust.

Grappling with artistic control/lack of control through my collaborative work with nature in *Dye Diary* and *Rain Drawings*, and researching the practices of Wolseley, Burness and Mooney, was instructive as I considered the relationship between nature and humans more broadly. While it was impossible to remove human agency in these works it was possible to minimise my control, and allow nature to take its course. Perhaps this provides an analogy for thinking about wider nature/human interactions, such as the role humans have in facilitating the space for nature to regenerate on previously cleared land. This process also highlighted the sometimes messy and more difficult aspects of working with nature, as artworks were flung around in the wind, bugs flew into the ink or cats trailed their paw prints through the drawing. In these collaborations patterns emerged which showed visual links between internal and external systems. This was particularly evident in the *Rain Drawings Series*, in which patterns emerged which were reminiscent of the human bronchial system and vast waterways. The meteorological conditions which produced the drawings were mysteriously captured in the works as cloud-like or lightning-like forms.

Mysterious patterning such as the spotting in the *Rain Drawings*, and unexpected colours in the *Dye Diary* research, were some of the most surprising and revealing results from this project. They showed that even though these patterns could be recorded and mapped, they would remain inexplicable, beyond the control and understanding of humans. Surprising and emergent properties arose in other works; the ordered patterns in the small weft *ikat* weavings, the light that shines through the *Potential Space* works that makes the pinpricked drawing appear to float, and the patterning of the *Dye Diary* (*pieced works*) when hung together in a grid. Other
patterns, like the burnt patterns in *Sol Niger* and *Renewal*, and the stitches and pinpricks in *Disruption* were made under greater artistic control. The point of difference between the levels of control in the works reflected my intentions. In the *Rain Drawings* and *Dye Diary* I used a working methodology which revealed patterns made by natural processes, whereas in *Sol Niger* and *Disruption* it was my personal and felt experiences which were explored.

Working in collaboration with nature for *Dye Diary* opened up unexpected opportunities for engaging with friends and colleagues. Friends became involved in the project as they wondered about plants in their own gardens, discovering that the dyes revealed another layer of complexity in the plants they see every day. Fellow students at the ANU School of Art consult the *Dye Diary* when planning to make particular colours with which to dye cloth. Being able to identify the colour they want in the pieced works, and trace it back to the written material that reveals the plant source and dye recipes, establishes the *Diary* as a useful ongoing resource. I recognised that the state of mind of potential space could be understood as private and pertaining to an individual. It was rewarding, therefore, to understand that the framework which I established for *Dye Diary* set up the conditions for broader community involvement in the project.

Through direct interactions with the natural world I became more aware of my emotional and ethical responses to nature and the impact that humans have upon other living beings and natural systems. Working through personal grief between the collection of shells and seedpod and my emotions helped me to find a visual language for investigating wider grief for ecological losses. The transformative imagery of alchemy and my year-long study of dye plants provided reference points for exploring cycles of death and renewal in *Sol Niger* and *Renewal*.

To investigate interconnectedness, textile processes were ideal for visualising intermeshed and interrelated forms, and evidence for this is provided in the woven form of *Interconnectedness* and the crocheted work, *The Ecological Thought*. Making *Interconnectedness* was informative for examining the particular challenges that
arose from working with an interdependent whole, rather than individual parts. For example, the complications and unforeseen rupturing that occurred when I removed one of the connecting nails, showed that the failure in one part of an interconnected system has ramifications beyond what might be predicted. When I examined ruptures, glitches and disruptions in the connected whole I restricted my materials to paper, a pin-pricked grid and stitches of plant-dyed yarns. Through this limited material palette I could visualise both complete and damaged interconnected systems, which demonstrated the usefulness of containment for my material investigations.

To explore each line of enquiry that has emerged in this research has involved extensive material investigations via textile and paper-based materials and techniques. The material and visual research allowed me to explore my thoughts and feelings about these experiences as they arose. In the final exhibition the viewer will experience a wide range of visual outcomes, from the plant-dyed tapestries and pieced works to drawings made with black ink and burns. Each body of work embodies, maps and records aspects of the complex and infinite relationship between humans and nature.

Undertaking practice-led research from the perspective of potential space contributes an original way of perceiving the connections between humans and nature. I approached this research with the aim of examining and visualising the relationship between my inner world and nature. The realisation of this methodology engaged me in a fluid and associative five year conversation with nature. Through the visual research the project brings attention to ways in which inner and outer worlds are connected, as a challenge to dualistic thinking.
Appendix A: The Dye Diary Rules

General guidelines for dye recipes

- All processing of plant materials will be done by simmering the material in 3 litres of water for each dye. The water will be sourced from mains water in Dickson, Canberra.
- The plant materials will be simmered in a stainless steel pot.
- The amount of plant material in each dye pot will be consistent according to plant species. The first time a species such as eucalyptus is used, the weight of plant material required for the dye pot will be determined. The weight will be decided according to the amount of plant material needed to fill the pot.
- The simmering time for each dye will be consistent according to plant species. For example 50 minutes will be the time used to process eucalyptus leaves. Other times will be determined according to how quickly the plants release their dyes into the pot.
- After the simmering is complete, 1.25 litres of dye liquor will be removed from the dye pot. 250mls of the liquor will be poured into each one of 5 stainless steel bowls. A single mordant, either soda ash, alum, iron, copper or white vinegar will be added to each bowl.
- The quantity of mordants used will be consistent for each dye. 10mls of vinegar will be used. Minute, less than 0.1 gram of the other mordants will be added to the liquor.
- The pieced works, fabric strips and yarns added to the bowls with mordants, will be steeped for one hour.
- The fabrics and yarns will then be removed from the pots and rinsed thoroughly in water.
- At least 1 new plant will be sampled each week.
- All plant material will be used in the dye pot on the day it is collected.
Specific rules: The pieced works

- Each pieced work sampler will be made with 7 fabrics; silk organza, silk satin, silk noil, silk/wool voile, wool, linen and linen pre-mordanted in soy milk. Each fabric must be used at least once in each sample.
- Four different sized pieces will be used in the samplers—5x5cm, 5x9cm, 9x9cm and 5x13cm. If just the 5x5cm squares are used the dimensions of each sample will be 3 squares in width and 5 squares in length. Each sample will have these proportions regardless of what size pieces are used.
- The pieces will be sewn together using a 0.6mm seam with silk thread. Each seam should be pressed to one side, and towards a transparent fabric where possible.
- For each dye bath six pieced samplers will be made.
- After being dyed each sampler will be ironed dry and trimmed straight.
- An identifying number, written on silk noil, will be stitched onto the back of each sampler.
- The numbering of samples will be consistent for each dye: in water only, then with the mordants in the following order—soda ash, alum, iron, copper, and white vinegar.

The fabric strips

- Cut a 5 x 20cm strip from each of the following fabrics—silk organza, silk satin, silk noil, silk/wool voile, wool, linen and linen pre-mordanted in soy milk. These will be added to each dye pot as the plant materials are simmering in water.
- Cut 5, 5x20cm strips of silk satin. One of these will be added to each of the pots with mordants. This is done for every dye.
- Iron each sample dry and trim to 5x17.5cm.
- The 6 silk satin strips will be numbered on a sticker attached to the back. They will be numbered in the same order as the pieced works.
- The 6 remaining fabrics will be adhered to A3 paper with double sided tape.
The tapestries

- One tapestry will be woven each week, using yarns dyed with one dye plant sampled. The yarns will be dyed at the same time as the pieced works and strips.
- Each tapestry will be woven on 36, size 9 cotton warp yarns (with 16 warps over 4cms).
- A range of yarns will be used in each tapestry; 20/2 wool, 20/2 mulberry silk, silk noil, gima (linen look silk), viscose coated silk, linen paper yarn (replaced with silk boucle after week 23).
- 1 wool, 1 silk mulberry and two of the remaining four yarns will be dyed with the plant material in water only. 1 wool, 1 silk mulberry and the other two yarns will be dyed with the dye plant and a different mordant for each yarn.
- Each dyed yarn will be used in the tapestry.
- The tapestries will be woven as grids of colour. 4 different sized rectangles and squares should be used as illustrated and following,

1. Weave across 4 warp yarns and then weave up until a square is formed.
2. Weave across 8 warp yarns and then weave up until a square is formed.
3. Weave across 4 warp yarns and then weave up until a rectangle is formed, which is twice as high as it is long. Alternatively weave across 8 warp yarns and weave up until a rectangle is formed, which is half as high as it is long.

4. Weave across 4 warp yarns and then weave up until a rectangle is formed which is three times as high as it is long, or weave across 12 warp yarns and weave up until a rectangle is formed which is one third as high as it is long.

- Each tapestry will be woven until it is 17.5cm high, or the equivalent of 16 small squares high.
- Each section of the grid will be woven with a single colour.
- Any slits in the tapestries will be only partially sewn in order to provide some structural support.
- No cartoon will be used to weave the tapestries. Decisions about the composition are to be made as the tapestry is woven.
- A number (according to the week of the diary), the plant dye used and the date will be written on silk noil and then stitched to the back of each tapestry.
- A label listing tapestry number, dye source and date will be made from silk noil and stitched on the back of each tapestry.

For four weeks at a time there will be additional rules for the tapestries made in that four week period. These are outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-4. The colours will be used randomly throughout the tapestry. One colour is selected to use in 9 small squares only, one in each vertical.</td>
<td>![Pattern Image]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5-8. The first four rows of squares will be woven with non-mordanted yarns, with the occasional square of a mordanted colour. The next eight rows of squares will be woven with all the yarns. The final four rows of squares will be woven with mordanted yarns, with the occasional square of non-mordanted yarn.

9-12. The first four rows of squares will be woven with mordanted yarns only. The next eight rows of squares will be woven with all yarns. The final four rows of squares will be woven with non-mordanted yarns only.

13-16. The tapestry will be divided vertically. The first 4 vertical columns will be woven with non-mordanted yarns only. The other five columns will be woven with mordanted yarns only. For structural support at every fourth row of squares a rectangle over 8 warp yarns will be woven across vertical columns 4 and 5.

17-20. The outer 2 side rows and the outer 3 rows at the top and bottom of the weaving will be woven in non-mordanted colours. The inner 5x12 rectangle will be woven in mordanted yarns.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>21-24.</th>
<th>The first 2 rows of squares will be woven with non-mordanted yarns, and then the next two rows will be woven with mordanted yarns. This pattern will be repeated 3 more times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>25-28.</th>
<th>The tapestry will be divided vertically into 3. The first and last vertical column will be woven with non-mordanted yarns only. The middle columns will be woven with mordanted yarns only. For structural support at rows 1, 4, 7, 10, 13 and 16 the middle column will be woven over 5 squares</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Diagram" /></td>
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<tr>
<th>29-32.</th>
<th>The tapestry will be divided into 12, 3 x 4 rectangles which will be woven in alternating mordanted and non-mordanted yarns. For structural support large squares will be woven over columns 3 and 4, and columns 6 and 7, at rows 4-5, 8-9 and 12-13.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>33-36.</th>
<th>Four squares (4 x 4 each) will be evenly distributed in the tapestry and woven in non-mordanted yarns. The rest of the tapestry will be woven in mordanted yarns.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeks 37-40. These tapestries will be woven in a stepped diagonal pattern with alternating non-mordanted yarn and mordanted yarn sections.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>41-44.</strong> The tapestry will be divided in half horizontally. The bottom half will be woven with non-mordanted yarns and the top half with mordanted yarns. In each half a centred 5 x 4 rectangle will be woven with the opposite group of yarns.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>45-48.</strong> In each corner of the tapestry a 3 x 6 square rectangle will be woven in non-mordanted yarns. The remaining cross shape will be woven with mordanted yarns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>49-52.</strong> The colour in the tapestry will be distributed randomly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The plant material drawings*

- Where possible the plant materials used for the dyes will be pressed in a flower press until dry.
- The dried plant materials will be used to make a drawing.
• The plant materials will then be arranged into a grid and glued onto a piece of BFK Reeves paper, 56 x 38cm. The grid size for each work will be unique according to the size and shape of the materials used.

• When the plant materials do not have their own distinct boundary, as in the case of bark and onion skin samples, the pressed and dry materials will be cut into 2.5cm squares and then arranged in a grid.

Written record

• For each dye plant sampled the following will be recorded; sample number, plant name, collection site, and the collection day’s temperature and weather conditions.

• The weight of plant material used, the volume of water used to process the dye plant and the length of simmering will be recorded for each dye.

• It will be logged if the dye has been used to colour yarns for a tapestry, or if the plant materials have been pressed for a drawing.

• The notes section is where subjective observations about the dye or dye plant will be documented.
Appendix B: List of the Dye Diary Plants

1. *Acacia baileyana* flowers
2. *Acacia baileyana* leaves
3. *Acacia boormanii* flowers
4. Brown *Allium cepa* skins
5. Red *Allium cepa* skins
6. *Eucalyptus cinerea* bark
7. *Eucalyptus cinerea* leaves
8. *Brassica oleracea*
9. *Prunus blireana* leaves
10. *Eucalyptus mannifera* leaves
11. *Hedera colchica* leaves
12. *Prunus blireana* leaves
13. *Eucalyptus sideroxylon* leaves
14. *Eucalyptus sideroxylon* bark
15. Black Sallee bark
16. Black Sallee leaves
17. Bamboo leaves
18. *Eucalyptus nicholii* leaves
19. *Eucalyptus nicholii* bark
20. *Acacia baileyana* seedpods
21. *Prunus blireana* leaves
22. *Prunus nigra* leaves
23. Black rice grains
24. *Indigofera australis* leaves
25. Peppermint tea leaves
26. Rosehip tea leaves
27. Black tea leaves
28. *Eucalyptus melliodora* leaves
29. *Eucalyptus melliodora* bark
30. Hakea dactyloides leaves
31. Eucalyptus mannifera bark
32. Eucalyptus scoparia leaves
33. Hypericum perforatum flowers
34. Juglans nigra husks
35. Eucalyptus pulchella leaves
36. Eucalyptus pulchella bark
37. Cape weed flowers
38. Eucalyptus nicholii leaves
39. Lichen
40. Eucalyptus globulus leaves
41. Eucalyptus globulus bark
42. Angophora costata bark
43. Mistletoe leaves
44. Dianella berries
45. Lomandra longifolia leaves
46. Beta vulgaris subsp. vulgaris peel, leaves and stalks
47. Prunus cerasifera leaves
48. Persea americana seeds
49. Acacia iteaphylla seedpods
50. Acacia iteaphylla leaves
51. Eucalyptus mannifera leaves
52. Eucalyptus mannifera bark
53. Prunus serrulata leaves
54. Corn leaves
55. Rosehips
56. Nandina domestica leaves
57. Nandina domestica stems
58. Blackberries and blackberry leaves
59. Vitis vinifera leaves
60. Robinia pseudoacacia leaves
61. Eucalyptus macrorhynchla leaves
62. *Melia azedarach* L. leaves
63. *Prostanthera ovalifolia* leaves
64. *Eucalyptus pauciflora* leaves
65. *Eucalyptus pauciflora* bark
66. *Lavender stoechas* flowers
67. Photinia leaves
68. Geranium leaves
69. *Punica granatum* rinds
70. *Fraxinus oxycarpa* leaves
71. *Robinia pseudoacacia* seedpods
72. Pistacia chinensis leaves
73. Pistacia chinensis leaves
74. *Acer rubrum* leaves
75. *Pyrus ussuriensis* leaves
76. *Fraxinus velutina* leaves
77. *Eucalyptus polyanthemos* leaves
78. *Eucalyptus bicostata* leaves
79. *Eucalyptus macarthurii* leaves
80. *Eucalyptus mannifera* ssp. *maculosa* leaves
81. *Eucalyptus blakelyi* leaves
82. *Angophora floribunda* leaves
83. *Eucalyptus rubida* leaves
84. *Eucalyptus rubida* bark
85. *Eucalyptus melliodora* leaves
86. *Eucalyptus melliodora* bark
87. Buddleia leaves
88. *Cedrus atlantica* cones
89. *Cedrus atlantica* leaves
90. Turmeric
91. *Quercus cerris* bark
92. Poa grass
93. Sweet Paprika
94. Cayenne Pepper
95. *Aspidistra elatior* leaves
96. Coffee
97. Nandina Bamboo berries
98. Jarrah sawdust
99. *Brachychiton populneus* leaves
100. *Acacia baileyana* flowers
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Additional Reading


