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Choreocraftivism:

small gestures, gentle action and caring for things

I must let my sense wander as my thought, my eyes see without looking… Go not to the object; let it come to you.
— Henry David Thoreau, *Journal* (1852)

Of all the turns in recent intellectual times, we approach arguably the most important one of all: the 'thing turn.' To pivot full throttle with abandon to the world of things, we might as a species manage to sever the self-centric importance of the I and begin to address the systemic problems of waste, pollution, extractivism, deforestation, over-production, exploitative labour and, an inevitable planetary crisis. But how do we remain optimistic, energetic and free from thoughts of our impending doom?

Small Gestures . . .

In this article, I share my fascination with and care for *things.* I propose that in cultivating particular forms of attention and aesthetic awareness through a practice of choreocraftivism, we might begin to re-evaluate our relationship to the 'more-than-human.'[1] By shifting our attention away from the use-value of things toward their intrinsic value through small gestures, gentle actions and a caring awareness, we might enter into a more meaningful and playful relationship with things; especially with those that we make. Valuing things on their own terms, avowing their intrinsic 'uselessness' (when there is no labour), and by seeing ourselves as a mere thing among things, we can creatively reflect upon our relationship with the earth that is no longer reduced to a dialectics of benign data strangled between tipping points and blanket denials of anthropocentric change.[2]

First, I will consider the concept of "thingism" introduced by political ecologist Jane Bennett in her 2010 text *Vibrant Matter*. Here, Bennett's concept will be deepened through a phenomenological approach to the materiality of things, ultimately supporting the actions of choreocraftivism as a kinetically informed creative approach for a circular economy. While phenomenology seems an unlikely bed fellow of Bennett's 'new materialist' generated concept, I highlight how the early work of Edmund Husserl on the *material a priori*, can be seen to overcome the dismissive charge of 'correlationism' (objects always tied to subjects) by new materialisms of the phenomenological project.[3] I explore some overlap between the intentions of speculative realist Quentin Meillassoux and what Husserl claims about the essentiality of matter. I suggest that in acknowledging the limits and exploring the potentialities of both phenomenology and new materialism, we are drawn to the strengths of each approach in their encounters with *things.*

I argue that the relationship between us and things is deeply corporeal: what we *do* to things they do to us, including how they are *with* us in their use and uselessness. Therefore, it is more methodologically potent to pay phenomenological attention to human intentional structures and bodily schemata when turned to and turned by 'things' in their creation, use or demise, and to not excise from the problem the agential capacity for describing, reflecting and activating change.

Second, I will introduce the practice of choreocraftivism and the traditions that have inspired this gentle form of activism and its emergence from a place of choreographic thought and practice. Choreocraftivism is inspired by the actions and sensibilities of the craftivist, D.I.Y and slow fashion movements which "encourage positive dialogue [on] difficult issues" and entice one person to make a difference in a shared collective (Press 2018, 22; Rippin & Vachhani 2019, 217-233).

Finally, my *Chairfriend* series and *Street Finders* projects will be introduced as everyday ethical incursions [*all movers welcome*] within a blooming ecology of dance artists and scholars in Australasia who are 'choreographing the problems' of our planet in the best way they know how. Arguably, it is up to those who inhabit their bodies creatively with attentive listening, intentional focus and "knowledge formations" (Lepecki 2016, 14) to entice others to not only move, but critically address the logic of their everyday movements and stasis that are crippling the planet.[4] It is in doing nothing — in-the-not-moving — that we collectively contribute to our existential demise.

Part I: Matter Matters

New materialisms hold that things are unreachable in their relations prior to any human encounter, and is evocatively described in Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* as dead rats and bottle caps forming a "contingent tableau" (Bennett 2010, 5). Bennett's recognition of "thing power" angles our glance to the non-human relation between things in their independence from total sublimation through human constructivism. Hers is a promising yield toward the material and a "vital" materiality. Bennett makes an important

distinction between objects and things. Objects are the way that things appear to us in perception. We semantically and sensuously impose conceptual identities to close the gap between the thing in itself and our imperative to know. While *things* "signal the moment when the object becomes other, 'when the sardine can looks back'" (Bennett 2010, 2).

The traditional philosophical problem that 'new materialisms' seek to overcome is the epistemological trap of the gap imposed by the *correlation* developed between 'thought—being' and 'subject—object'. This relation took on a more problematic form in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant through his metaphysical carving up of reality between the *phenomenal* world (the one we can sensuously know) and the *noumenal* world (the one that we have no access to). The realm of the latter establishes the idea of a 'thing in itself' unable to be plumbed by the human mind — not even a Platonic 'philosopher king' — due to our impaired capacity to reason. Here, we are to accept the verisimilitude of the world as far as we can apprehend it, through categorial representations inherent to a complex structure of the human mind.

Quentin Meillassoux's speculative realism claims a strong anti-correlationism, denying this independent 'in-itself' of Kantian metaphysics: the realm we can't access but would if we could. Meillassoux confronts the overt covering over of the in itself of objects by subjects on every encounter through sensuous knowing, thought, language and concept with existential and empirical simplicity through his 'ancestral' argument. In *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, Meillassoux releases matter, objects and things from the contemporary philosophical problems of the correlation through his posing of the 'arche-fossil problem': the factual coming into being and existence of living organisms prior to terrestrial life (Meillassoux 2008, 1-27). He asks: what about objects which existed, or 'were given' prior to human existence? There is scientific evidence of a "reality anterior to the emergence of the human species" (Meillassoux 2008, 10). Thus, we have a period of time where the 'correlation' insisted upon could not have existed since there were no humans to bring sense, thought and conceptualisation (via scientific statements) to explain matter. Meillassoux presents several rejoinders to his contention by so-called correlationists, primarily arguing that "what is un-witnessed is unthinkable" (Meillassoux 2008, 19). They extend the idea of matter having always been 'in relation' with the way we perceive and think matter, to considerations of the origins of a fossilised organism in its empirical form and ontological significance. Meillassoux sees this, however, as falling into a grave metaphysical trap where some eternal, supra-being like God would need to bear witness to pre-human, "ancestral matter" (Meillassoux 2008, 11). Most correlationists reject this logic on secular grounds. For instance, a Husserlian phenomenologist would argue that we can never perceptually experience objects in their totality, only in their one-sidedness: "a cube is never perceived according to all its faces at once; it always retains something non-given at the heart of its givenness" (Meillassoux 2008, 19). Objects do not need to be perceived all the time to exist. Their hiddenness, like their time prior to human existence, is an essential dimension of an object's givenness (how it will appear to us even before we perceive it) that constitutes the *possibility* for the relation of a subject-object dyad. Matter's independent existence as a world given to us to perceive, even its past, does not escape human thought just because

we were not perceiving it at the time. This is the tricky, somewhat irresolvable aspect of the debate, which Meillassoux also struggles with despite his rigorous attempt to annihilate the correlation. He admits that:

> scientific truth is no longer what conforms to an in-itself supposedly indifferent to the way in which it is given to the subject, but rather what is susceptible of being given as shared by a scientific community. (Meillassoux 2008, 4-5)

In proposing empirical arguments against correlationism, Meillassoux is still stuck behind the metaphorical 'pane of glass' that separates us from the truth of the world. All this even despite him looking through with renewed materialist and realist vigour at the 'outside' — the very in itself that Kant and others have conceptualised as inaccessible. Meillassoux concurs that science's representation of matter through statements is always subjective; we are never able to "represent the thing 'in itself' without it becoming for us" (Meillassoux 2008, 3). He invokes Hegel's witticism that "we cannot 'creep up on' the 'object from behind'" (Meillassoux 2008, 4). All our encounters are either representations or subjective experiences; however, we must entertain the possibility of more. And it is an account of the 'more' that Meillassoux attempts to provide. He asks: if there is a time before humans, then how do we interpret scientific statements now? Where is that continuity? It needs to be outside of us in matter, independent, not-given, but communicable and meaningful. This is the crux of the issue and purportedly resolved through his Alain Badiou and Georg Cantor-inspired speculative realism which promotes a mathematics with the "ability to discourse about the great outdoors; to discourse about a past where both humanity and life are absent" (Meillassoux 2008, 26).

Steps towards a phenomenological theory of thingism

Meillassoux's thesis becomes important to my work in two ways: firstly, via his solution of turning toward "mathematisable properties of the object that are exempt from the constraint" of the correlation (Meillassoux 2008, 3); and secondly, in that his solution opens up the possibility of developing a Husserlian-inspired phenomenological approach compatible with 'new materialism's' hope for a more meaningful, less instrumentalising way to be with matter.[5] I do this in order to not only theoretically argue for but to develop in a gentle activism the human capacity "to treat nonhumans — animals, plants, earth, even artefacts and commodities — more carefully, more strategically, more ecologically" (Bennett 2010, 17).

Using a phenomenological approach to bring attention to Bennett's "material vitality," it is possible to pick up on Meillassoux's call for mathematisable properties by engaging with Husserl's concept of the material a priori: exposing the kinetic logic of things that we come to understand and acknowledge in our interaction with the world—dead rats and bottle caps included. I do this to bring phenomenology back to the materialist/realist table, avowing its strengths in paying attention to the kinetic structures of matter and providing rigorous grounds for dance theorists and practitioners to draw on this approach if phenomenologically inclined. My purpose is to draw together new materialism and phenomenology, enlist their strengths which emerge from their limits,

and to understand them in a more complimentary way, rather than in a perpetual polemic over the problem of the correlation.[6]

Edmund Husserl, an old materialist?

In the *Logical Investigations* (LUA) of 1900/1901, Husserl outlines how there is a non-dependent separation between subject and object at the *a priori* level. This is contrary to the correlation his phenomenology is accused of.[7] The typical meaning of *a priori* is a "kind of knowledge or justification that does not depend on evidence, or warrant, from sensory experience" (Moser 1998). But in Husserl, *a priori* means the essence (*eidos*) of something, rather than being 'prior to' (Romano 2015, 23). In LUA, III, "On the Theory of Wholes and Parts," Husserl distinguishes between two kinds of *a priori* for all objects, the *formal* and *material* which are not always contained in a hylomorphic (two-sides-of-the-one-coin) type of co-relation. What this means is that

> [a] part often can exist without a whole whose part it is. Obviously, this involves no contradiction. What we mean is that, if the part is treated in respect of its *internal content*, its own essence, then a thing having this same content can exist without a whole in which it exists; it can exist by itself, not associated with anything else, and will not then be a part. Change in, or complete elimination of associations, does not here affect the part's own, peculiarly qualified content, and does not eliminate its existence: only its relations fall away [the *formal a priori*], the fact that it is a part. (Husserl 2001, 20)

Husserl is suggesting that there is a separation between the material laws (*material a priori*) pertaining to matter on the one hand and the "purely formal concepts and propositions, which lack all matter" on the other. The formal a priori are imposed to reify *things* categorially into objects for measure, so we can make sense of them (Husserl 2001, 19). Data is a case in point. We use mathematics in the sciences to explain phenomena in empirical ways.

Unlike Kant, Husserl believes that our experience of phenomena and the laws which govern and structure our perceptions (say, space, sound and colour) do not rely purely on categories of the mind. Categories which help us to perceive space, colour and hear sound in these ways because the mind articulates them in this way. Husserl's *material a priori* "is grounded *in the very nature of the contents of experience* which exemplify it, in the very nature of space, sound and colour" (Romano 2015, 20). These material laws, essential and necessary to experienceable phenomena, are objective and independent of the subject who may or may not apprehend them in perception and/or judgement (define, explain, conceptualise etc).

The *material a priori* laws are independent of any one single experience; they are available "for *any possible experience* (in all possible worlds)" (Romano 2015, 23). But this availability for any possible experience does not mean a thing only *is* because we can 'take up' these laws: capturing, discerning and delimiting them on the basis of our knowing. Nor do we exhaust them through the appropriation of objects through the senses: the world "presents itself as existing in itself over and above its existence for

me [with] no need to be perceived in order to exist" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 178). These laws offered for any possible experience are general and unrestricted, inexhaustible by the possibility of all experiences. But even more importantly, the essence of sounds, colour, dead rats and bottle caps are never innate to our experience.

> The *a priori* is first a characteristic of objects (their essence) and only through this a feature of our knowledge. We must perceive colours to capture the essence of colour, but that essence **does not depend on our grasping of it**, and it is not all limited to our factual past or present experience. (Romano 2015, 24 my emphasis)

At the *a priori* level, the correlation between subject and object is ontologically overcome, ameliorating the so-called metaphysical problems that the dyad brings. However, for there to be any meaning or sense communicated by the materiality of matter, experience itself cannot be overcome. Phenomenologically speaking, we can understand 'Experience' as necessarily conditioned by the very possibility of itself through *things* that avail both real and imagined experiences. There is an overlap of understanding here with Bennett's materialism that finds its apogee in a stumbled upon tableau of trash, and Meillassoux's divining of a mathematisable plane of matter beyond with which we (or only *he*) might commune with in some non-hierarchical interaction.

Husserl's distinctive *material a priori* absolves phenomenology from the ultimate charge of always promoting a co-dependent correlation between subject and object, where the latter cannot do without the former, and where the former dominates the latter. In fact, things can just *be* without us, despite possessing material laws that make it possible for us to 'take them up' in all our human intentional ways: sensuously, cognitively, linguistically, imaginatively and kinetically. It is to the kinetic that my choreocraftivism now turns its attention. How can we move with and corporeally take up the kinetic *a priori* or logics of things to promote a deeper, ontologically informed ethical relationship with them?

Choreocraftivism is a practice that attempts to efface both the epistemological and representational reification of things in its caring attitude and movements *with* their deeper kinetics. By somatically acknowledging the kinetic in things, we can ignite a plurality of motivations within us as we move *with* them and *for* them. Bennett's work in *Vibrant Matter* acknowledges this ethical need for humans to de-instrumentalise the linguistic and symbolic hierarchies that reify things. Yet she still finds her approach to a care ecology through narrative and creative forms of linguistic description. The kind of phenomenological description that choreocraftivism proposes is prelinguistic and non-narrative. If we acknowledge that there is indeed a deeper set of *a priori* logics to things that are independent of us, then our interactions with the kinetic kind involves an intimate engagement with our own moving bodies to potentially disrupt destructive tendencies.

Part II: Moving with Care

Choreocraftivism, in its widest scope, is a response to the climate crisis as we live it now—on fire, underwater, choking on toxins with a belly full of plastic under mountains with their summits sliced off. The project's current focus is upon the issues of waste and extraction, which concern practices within the *circular economy*. Like most terms, the circular economy has been described in many ways, as a: "regenerative system in which resource input and waste, emission and energy leakage are minimised" (Tuovinen & Mäkikoskela 2019, 2) and as a "living system" it is

> dynamic but adaptive … effective, neither courting disaster by over-emphasising efficiency (brittleness) or resistant to change (stagnation). It celebrates diversity — of scale, culture, place, connection and time because a dynamic system is full of change, by definition, and thriving in such an environment requires diversity — a fount of creative adaptation, a means of resilience, a source of redundancy or back up. It is led by business for a profit within the 'rules of the game' decided by an active citizenship in a flourishing democracy. (Webster 2013, 542)

There is a common thread running through these descriptions that the circular economy involves a culture of constant change that will transcend the ostensible use of terms like 'sustainability' by encouraging participation in creative practices. As Tuovinen & Mäkikoskela advocate, it involves "the radical intertwinement of aesthetical, ecological, and ethical processes and the way we are experiencing them. This way the original idea of materiality extends towards ideas of experiential, cultural and social materials" (Tuovinen & Mäkikoskela 2019, 2-3).

My first incarnation of the circular in the choreocraftivism project was the (ongoing) Instagram page *Chairfriendseries* that originated in the back streets of the Inner West in Sydney.[8] My daily walks were filled with the anticipation of encountering a chair friend. My journey, or *drift*, was a spree minus the shopping for finding abandoned chairs. Often


alone, or in pairs, cavorting, sleeping, unwanted. There is something about the chair on the side of the street that evokes emptiness, loneliness and waiting. Chair rescue. Chair awareness. The love started spreading with an alternative movement and disrupted logic of consumption in a public choreography that motivated a creative kinaesthetics of care.[9]

Figure 1. *Davis St, Bondi Junction,* by Carey https://www.instagram.com/p/B25ufqGg188/

The chairfriendseries Instagram page [https://www.instagram.com/chairfriendseries/] has been going since 2019 with 174 sightings of chair friends posted from around the world. I am sometimes active and other times not for many months — embracing a philosophy of 'slow' in all my creative projects. The majority of these photos are from friends and keen followers. I cannot claim social media virality, but this has a lot to do with my poor management of hash tagging which limits the chairs' following. The appeal of using Instagram to only post and celebrate chairs with no humans appearing in the frame (only in signature) is a subtle transgression or critique of using social media platforms to share the most intimate and mundane aspects of our lives to facilitate the best version of ourselves and constitute what Tanner, Maher and Fraser call a 21st Century vanity of the self (2013). Of all the social media platforms, Instagram seems to me the most harmless.

Traditionally the circular economy encourages design and production logics which disrupt the linear process of an object's movement from 'cradle to grave.' In upcycle, recycle, slow fashion and the right to repair we confront a used object's telos as waste and stymy the excesses of capitalist production worsened by the free-trade agreement and off-shore manufacturing and mineral extraction. This circle is both direction and symbol, troubling for the linear human in both space and time. The symbol of the circle was prominent in my earliest movement investigations, which led to later incarnations of the choreocraftivism project.
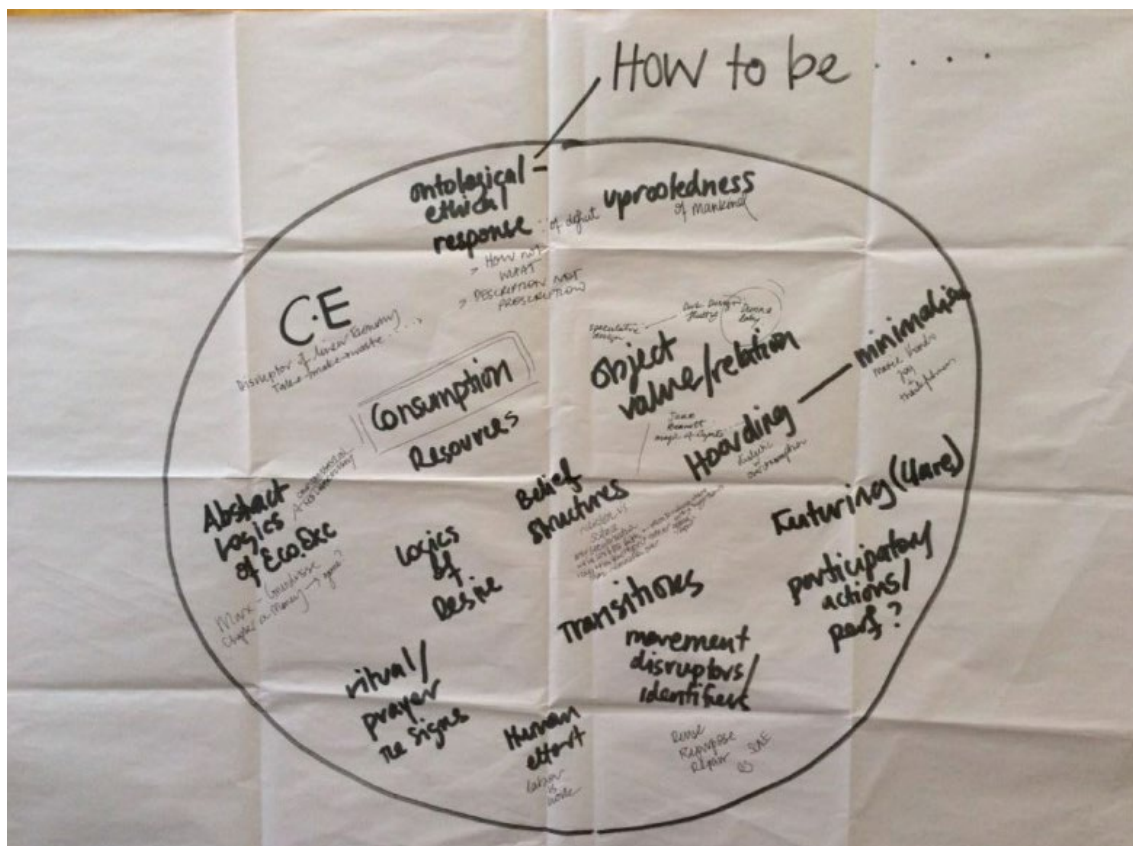

Figure 2. McNeilly, Jodie. 2019. *Circular Economy*. Hacking the Anthropocene Choreographic Lab, Critical Path. Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.

Like the Sufi Dervish, we whirl the self, fling the ego, paradoxically reduced to the smallest point through an "unmoving centre" — but all the while moving. Rūmi implores: "*in order to understand the dance one must be still. And in order to truly understand stillness one must dance*" (Rūmi 1974). Sufis open their hearts to unite with the Divine, annihilating their everyday subjectivity in the presence of God. The choreocraftivist diminishes the 'I' in a moving encounter with the more-than-human. Unpacking the term choreocraftivism requires time to acknowledge the roots and influences for its choreographic approach, first as 'expanded choreography' and second in the origin and practices of 'craftivism'.

Choreocraftivism as expanded choreography

In *Choreographing Problems*, Bojana Cvejić characterises several European choreographers' practice as a creative method of posing problems (Cvejić 2015, 2).[10] Bodily movements, like ideas, are given the status of problems in their expression of a choreographic decision. These problems, both bodily and conceptual, take place in creation and in performance where they might "provoke" an audience, often resisting identification and recognition "within the horizon of expectations of contemporary dance" (Cvejić 2015, 2). In choreographing problems, we face one of the greatest problems of all with climate change and waste. Our vulnerability is palpable and it seems that what we 'do' requires all the more reflection. Not only a cognitive appreciation of the scientific picture, but responses with a somatic saving capacity.
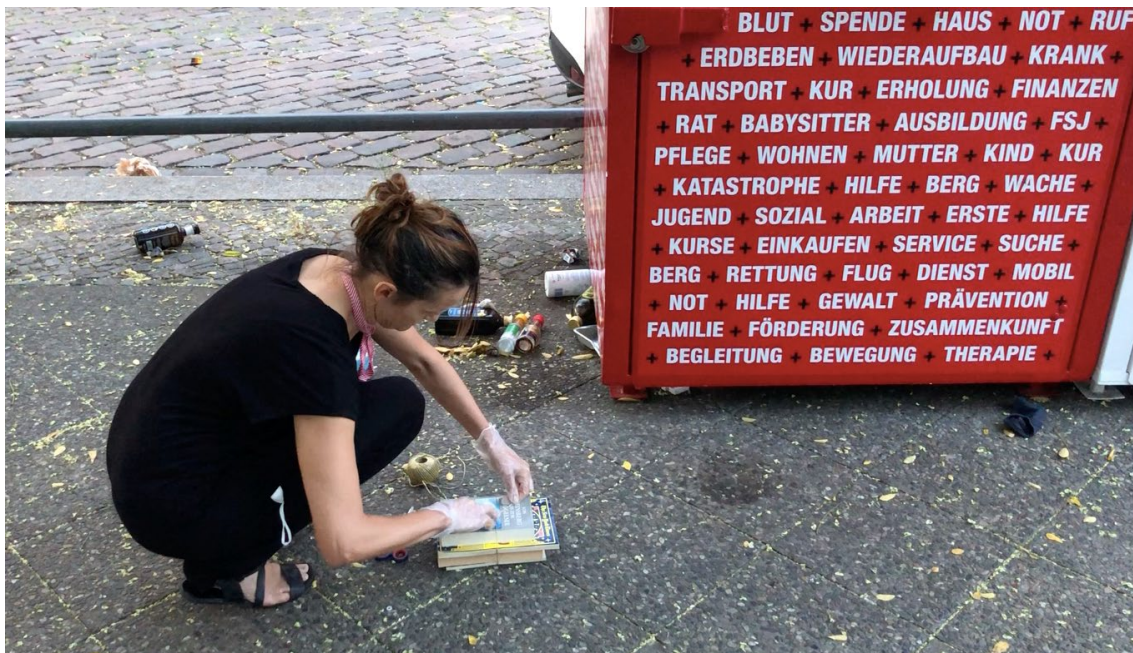
Figure 3. Still from Documentation of *Street Finders* (Berlin July 2022). Videographer: Joseph Appleton

A second practice called *Street Finders* developed following a 3-week residency in Berlin.[11] Wandering the streets with the mobility of a *flaneur*, I noticed a relative dearth of chairs on the kerbside. There were other *things*, dumped in a particular way in this place that invited me to pull on some gloves, grab a ball of string and start arranging,

folding and binding them into little piles with the purpose of encouraging adoption and as an expression of my care.

My movements in *Street Finders* are without affectation or exaggeration but involve a devoted presence in my contact with things and the context within which I find them. These actions possess a meditative, deliberate quality and are not presentational, representational or marked as performance. When picking up *things*, I try to connect with their kinetics. Being human made, there is already a certain 'style' to the way they move when moved that constitutes my movements of arranging, folding and binding as a care practice. The idea is to save things from breaking, rotting on the street or ending up in landfill. It involves an anthropocentric corrective to this linear pathway of cradle to grave—even if only a temporal hiatus. Showing care, encourages care. My little arranged piles have disappeared on return after having sat on the kerb untouched for days.

Street Finder 'events' are spontaneous. I blend into my surroundings and just *be* with. The videos I've taken are for documentation purposes only and support the eventual development of 'gestural pattern' making for wider participation and plans to create mini choreocraftivist task forces who are disaster ready after natural events like floods or earthquakes.[12]

The actions of a choreocraftivist responds to choreographic problems, as Cvejić describes, but serve a very different purpose to the theatre dance she writes about. Her analyses (with the aid of Spinoza, Bergson and Deleuze) broker some intriguing "expressive concepts" (Cvejić 2015, 14-17), and my own nomenclature and framing of *street finders* actions share this impulse in naming emerging kinetic patterns of *binding, folding, arranging*.

The choreocraftivist certainly breaks with traditional forms and techniques of classical and modern dance, and stretches beyond contemporary dance presented on stages. Choreocraftivism shares characteristics with Postmodern Dance, in particular the 'pedestrian approach', but stretches closer toward the everyday than performing pedestrian. I walk the streets, I loiter. *Things* on the street and the context in which they are found inform what I do, when I do it and how I do it. And yet, there is an irreducibility to the street finder events that prevent them from being just everyday actions and so characterised as expanded choreography. A performer performing pedestrian will 'reference' the everyday, the choreocraftivist will not; they are just doing, effecting the full force of Yvonne Rainer's "NO." But within the event itself there is an attentive style of listening to the thing itself that produces certain gestural styles of action

Postmodernism was a term first used by choreographer/dancer Rainer to describe what she and other artists were doing at the Judson Church in New York and other parts of North America in the early 1960s. As Sally Banes writes, they were the generation coming "after modern dance" departing from "stylized movements" that "conveyed feeling tones and social messages". Choreography was approached in a radical way to "reconceive the medium of dance" (Banes 2004, xiii-xiv). Choreocraftivism does not explicitly interrogate "choreography's own ontology'" since its purpose is not self-

referential (Lepecki 2006). It does not explicitly critique or question the form in the way that avant-garde dance invested in its identity strives to do.

Ultimately, if it is necessary to locate choreocraftivism within a choreographic tradition, I prefer to use the term "contemporary choreography", where, as Brannigan highlights, thinking, movement, experimentation and, in my case activism, is 'preoccupied' with the same concerns of the "broader contemporary arts" (Brannigan 2022, 13). In *Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental Composition 1950s—1970s*, Brannigan releases artists and the diversity of their aesthetics from the all-encompassing but reductive term postmodernism, exposing the significant influence of choreographers on the Visual Arts between the 1950s and 1970s. Her revisioning of history demonstrates that dance was not at the service of other mediums, but equally valuable and impactful in its "intermedial exchange" with other art forms (Brannigan 2022, 21). Defining these historical periods in aesthetic waves provides a sense of 'contiguity', where dance, choreography, movement, text, music, sound, visual arts, media arts etc are in a continuous connection with each other. Equally influential partners in their creative engagement with pressing issues of the time. The climate crisis is affecting artists of all mediums to respond and dance is an efficacious player in practices that are *affective* for political awareness and change.

> [A]rtists can seize the hint of new possibility, one that may already be experienced in people's ordinary life, but has not yet migrated into the domain of institutional politics. If change is to occur, it is not just as a result of the guidance of experts from above, for more importantly, it must be seeded from below and spread horizontally. It will creep up and then suddenly appear as if it was always there. (Papastergiadis 2021)

There is no single 'ownership' or 'authorship' by artist or performer in choreocraftivist events. This idea resonates with the critical reevaluation of the artist subject in Bojana Kunst's *Artist at Work: Proximity of Art and Capitalism*. Kunst tellingly brings to light the pointless work involved in overproducing our artistic subjectivities for the benefit of capitalism. She argues

> that the work that drives us to 'go into ourselves fully and completely,' both socially and artistically, actually produces nothing of value … the more we are invited to be creative, political, revolutionary and dynamic in our ways of working, the more standardised and controlled our subjectivity becomes; our only freedom becomes that of utter individuality, which can be selected in the market of homogenously individualised offers. (Kunst 2015, 32)

Kunst goes even further with the idea that in "performing the crisis of subjectivity" we effectively cover over the "basic commodification of the artistic event" (Kunst 2015, 24). I am very cautious to not overproduce my subjectivity by making a spectacle of the things themselves for my own artistic benefit. This would be contradictory to the choreocraftivist imperative to efface the overbearing presence of the human. Moreover, as Bennett warns, my practice attempts to avoid reducing objects "to the contexts in

which (human) subjects set them" (Bennett 2010, 5). Clearly, I am not so successful. As soon as I frame these actions as choreography, contemporary art, activism and craft I impose a formidable subjectivity. As soon as I talk, apply for opportunities or publish, I exhaust things with human meaning. However, going silent, pausing any action because of the irreducibility of the 'I', nothing will change. It is incumbent on humans to do the work; we broke it, we fix it.

In order to mitigate the problems posed by Kunst and overcome the instrumentalisation of *things* for artistic or academic ego, the project must become highly participatory, publicly distributed and even more pedestrian than a performance of the everyday: choreocraftivism *as* a practice for everyday life. Moving with care for *things* based upon a keen attentiveness for their kinetic logics (affecting ours) must become a basic bodily dimension. This will, however slight, contribute to cultivating care toward the more-than-human; and in the case of matter or things, the more-than-sentient.

The origin and inspiring practices of craftivism
The term craftivism was coined by cross-stitcher and guerrilla-knitter Betsy Greer in the early 2000s. She and other craftivists all believe that communities developed around their craft "encourages positive dialogue [on] difficult issues" (Press 2018, 22). Most report suffering "burn out" from traditional forms of activism. "Shouting", "marching" and dragging oneself through the city streets and "demonising" people have made many activists turn to their craft hobbies of cross-stitch, knitting and embroidery.

In Clare Press's interview of Betsy Greer in her 2018 book *Rise and Resist*: *How to Change the World*, Greer advocates for small group and community based creative activities to deal with political and social issues without the furore and/or stalemates brought about by opposing sides in a confrontation. She insists

> it's a way people can open up. When you're talking with someone face to face, it can be confrontational, even if you're not arguing; it can be scary because you're looking into someone's eyes, you're watching to see if they approve or disapprove. [When] you're stitching, you can look down at your hands and no-one thinks you're being rude. Sometimes we need that little psychic break [when faced with complex political issues]. (Press 2018, 25)

Craftivist methodologies emerge from a culture of making and everyday crafting with strong links to the Punk, DIY cultures and "happenings" of the Fluxus movement from the sixties and seventies.[13] Events organised by craftivists can be seen as "sites of resistance" to challenge all types of oppression and exploitation. They are fundamentally social events permitting the craftivist to connect to their physical environment (Rippin & Vachhani 2019, 217-233).

Craftivists' actions are subtle and gentle, yet can be effective and subversive in their activism. Greer argues that there is "no metric" of change in craftivist events having an efficacious impact. It could be just a handful of people, for example, "yarn bombing" their urban environment. Craftivist Sayeg declares that all she wants to see is "something

warm and fuzzy and human-like on the cold, steel grey façade that I looked at every day" (Press 2018, 28).

Craftivist projects have influenced the development of a *Street Finders* kit, bomb messaging during kerbside events, and gestural pattern training videos. My *Street Finders* kit constitutes a very small brown suitcase from my childhood that includes all the items I need in order to interact with *things* during a kerbside event: string, scissors, yarn, cotton for sewing messages, and gloves. The idea for this was inspired by Sarah Corbett's "pop-up suitcase" at festivals. She hosts "impromptu 'footprint workshops' to talk about the benefits of craftivism" but never approaches or solicits people's attention (Corbett 2013, 32). She waits until they engage with her. My *Street Finders* events are similar. People sometimes ask what I am doing, since it must look strange tidying up, binding piles of folded clothes and bomb messaging in the company of my little suitcase. My hope is that the affection and care displayed is contagious.

A more sophisticated version of an 'activation kit' has been created by researchers involved in the RMIT PlaceLab's 'Wear and Care' project:

> Wear & Care was an exploration into methods of fashion "rewilding" in Brunswick, Melbourne. It gathered locals, retailers, makers, creators, and researchers to learn about and encourage practices that mend, repair and share clothing to build a local response towards a new fashion system. (PlaceLab RMIT)

The kit aims to "activate clothing repair in your community" not as the ultimate Bible, but more as a "collection of [their] insights" (PlaceLab RMIT). In this kit, there are cards which behave like scores. They say things like: "ACTION | PROMPT… Close your eyes, reach into your thread box and repair whatever colour you select" or "SET A GOAL … Can you wear repaired garments from your wardrobe at least twice a week for a month?". These kits help communicate both a discipline and practice toward being active in the circular economy. My aim for choreocraftivism involvement in community clothing repair is to activate everyday movers in the early stages of the clothing repair supply circle. What we do when we find piles of clothes on the street, clothing that could be stained, in various stages of deterioration, with holes, or just out of fashion?

My version of 'bomb messaging' during *Street Finders* events was seeded by a very sweet, but efficacious, campaign called *Shop Drop*, a form of subtle protest against modern forms of slavery in the fashion industry. In a shop drop, rather than shop lift, craftivists are provided instructions to inscribe on tiny paper scrolls political messages like "forced to work exhausting hours" and "degrading sweat shop conditions" (Press 2018, 41). They then drop them into the pockets of fashion labels and clothing chains that produce from a questionable supply chain. To entice those walking by a kerbside dump of clothing (often in front of charity bins), I engage a folding kinetics on the clothing (however soiled) and create little packages bound with biodegradable string and messages for passers-by, in the hope that their attention will be piqued and more inclined to take the clothing home. I have even moved underwear on the street this way.

Figure 4. Street Finders, March Dance Workshop 2023. Frontyard Projects, Marrickville.

The gestural pattern *Street Finders Training Videos* are the most constructed works I have made, and it has taken me some time to agree to their inclusion in the choreocraftivism project since they conflict with its intention. Yet, they are important on two fronts. First, they facilitate the street finder with a strong awareness and attentiveness to the materiality of the thing. When it comes to clothing, the kinetic *a priori* is communicated through the fabric, wood (buttons), metal and plastic (zippers) etc. The street finder's movements give over to the garment's own way of moving. The folding logics are specific to them, but can develop into felt patterns that become strong visible gestures or motifs that are repeatable – very much like a set piece of choreography. I often feel that I'm dancing, or being danced by, the garment. Second, the videos are a way to demonstrate the folding-with of garments as gestural patterns and entice others to become a street finder in a choreocraftivist task force that cares for clothing dumped kerbside. Each street finder would be encouraged to document the folding style induced by the materiality (kinetic *a priori)* of the clothing they find, then upload to a shared platform that is constantly added to as a growing, permanent loop of actions. The point of this public distribution is to 'influence' action.[14] Seeing and following what others do, belonging to a community, and publicly sharing one's efforts and potential impact are reliable human traits that the craftivist and/or any political group use to provoke change.

The idea for creating a gestural pattern training video is drawn from several influences. The first is the famous *Pussyhat*: *Design Interventions for Social Change,* a highly participatory craftivist project designed for the Women's March on Washington DC in 2017. The march was a reclamation after Trump's election following the release of his grabbing women's pussies voice recording. Krista Suh, Jayna Zweiman and Kat Coyle of The Little Knittery in Los Angeles set up a website where crafters could download the

pattern and/or watch a video on how to make a pink pussy hat complete with ears. Their goal was to make 1 million hats. Hat numbers exceeded 7 million worldwide.[15]

A second influence is Japanese T-Shirt folding. In these 'how to' YouTube videos, a person instructs the viewer on how to fold a t-shirt to save both time and space.[16] The frame locks in on the shirt and hands as they fold. Described as a form of "wardrobe origami" (Smith 2005), the t-shirt folding belongs to a long tradition in Japanese culture, which includes strict and purposeful techniques of fan, paper, and kimono folding and unfolding. The ornate wrapping techniques particular to Japan rely upon folding the garment or thing in a particular way first. All these techniques involve rules and patterns imposed on the thing itself. Folding, binding and arranging actions by choreocraftivists on the street involves a more intuitive engagement with the thing's material kinetics. The *Street Finder Instructional Videos* invite, inspire and encourage others to develop gestural patterns intuited from the garments they come into contact with.

Figure 5. Gestural Pattern Training Video. 2022. Filmed by Lindsay Webb

Corbett believes that we must overcome the defeatism that "one person cannot make a difference in the face of the enormity of the world's needs" (Corbett 2020, 60). Greer argues that even one person taking action to "change the world via engaged creativity" is efficacious, and "some acts of craftivism are very subtle, affecting a handful of people, or even just one" (Press 2018, 29). There is a well-known argument within ethics called 'causal impotence'. It is often invoked by those who challenge vegans and vegetarians concerned for animal suffering. Causal impotence grips us in the face of recycling or when we purchase toxic items or commodities produced within a non-transparent supply chain. When it comes to recycling and dealing with our waste more sustainably, the claim often is that even if *I* recycle properly, it will have very little impact on waste, pollution, or use of single-use plastics, because the vast majority of us do not recycle correctly, or at all. I stand with Greer and Corbett against causal impotence, committed to the idea that one person can help make a difference, however large or small their impact.

Choreocraftivism is a subtle practice that is not 'in yer face'; it does not shame nor expect anything from others. It invites participation with its whimsical actions and expressive concepts to help choreograph the biggest problem we are facing on this planet. *Chairfriendseries* hangs about on Instagram in an exhausting, repetitive manner — I'm sure people are thinking: why is she still doing those chairs? But there is a point to their durability and exhausted presence. They linger to corrupt both the way we receive information (i.e., social media posts) and as an aesthetic that confronts the new and disposable. How is an artist responding to the problems recognised by the circular (or anti-linear) economy meant to create change if ideas are equally fleeting or disposable?

For the Sake of Things . . .

In the first part of this article, I provided a phenomenological basis to the concept of *thingism* to theoretically support my choreocraftivism practice. New materialisms have been responsible for revitalising a very old concept as new in their critical objections to correlationism: the epistemological heart of how human beings approach matter. I argue that early Husserlian phenomenology, the so-called ogre to new materialisms, does in fact provide a similar, if not stronger account of materiality through the material *a priori*. With this, the kinetic can be encountered and described in terms of a deeper logic belonging to the object and not just our moving relation imposed upon it. Communication of the material *from* matter itself is stressed by both Meillassoux and Bennett; it is articulated through some mathematisable plane by the former, and poetic narration *from* things for the latter. Insofar as we give phenomenology its ontological rather than epistemological emphasis, it communicates through rigorous description while still affording independence of the thing.[17]

In the second part of the article, I introduced a practice of choreocraftivism through the *Chairfriend* series and *Street Finders* projects. This was not to promote them as art or choreographic works, but to demonstrate how choreographing problems as large as extraction processes, waste and pollution might be enacted through aesthetic and kinetic means in the everyday. I wish to contribute further to the traditions inspiring these actions, as efficaciously ethical and gentle political movements.

Moreover, my hope is that a continued discussion on the philosophical concept of *things* might contribute in some small part to the bodies of work blooming within Southern Oceania by dance artists and scholars in their 'whirling turns' toward ecological problems.[18] Choreocraftivism is a thinking that propels participatory actions through expanded choreographic strategies which emerge from an encounter with the kinetic *a priori* of *things*. It aims to create resources in us for an ethically tuned-in way of moving.

Choreocraftivism contributes to the greater desire for dance, choreography and movement to *be* ecological. It is not *about* ecological issues, but proposes an art practice that eschews resourcing that might contradict its very intention, like: burning fossil fuels to travel; using materials that create waste or are made from non-renewable resources; financial or in-kind support from questionable sources; and/or any practice that

compromises the more-than-human. As Tamara Ashley recognises: "[t]he works of the [ecological] artists ask if **meaning can be found in what is immediate and present and be resourced and enriched by what is already there**" (Taylor 2012, 28, my emphasis).

Choreocraftivism ultimately shares with other ecological artists a choreographic thinking turned toward the environment, *things* and methodologies of the more-than-human with impacts beyond just making art. Thus, with creative and attentive listening we may be able to entice others in some small way to transform their 'not-moving' on the problems which contributes to a system of even greater 'stuckness'. We can help others to "make a body" (Buckwalter 2019, 615), as Olive Bierenga suggests, and let the things we make and use move us in a non-linear economy that's not only circular.

Notes

1. The concept 'more-than-human' has been in academic circulation for well over a decade, most prominently within Human and Cultural Geography and the Environmental and Geo-Humanities (see Whatmore 2006). Blanche Verlie explains that 'more-than-human' methodologies emerge from the "complex sets of more-than-human relations, dispositions, practices, structures, perceptions and identities" (Verlie 2021, 12). These 'relations' are taken beyond sentient life in Donna Haraway's "Chthulucene" as stories that tell stories, concepts that think concepts, "figures figure[ing] figures", and when "systems systematise systems" (Haraway 2016, 101). This begins to be closer to my usage of the term, without absolute reticence toward the value of human experience.

2. To encounter an object's thing power is to be with it, move with it, well before any notion of it as "use-value". Use value is where "an object outside of us" is propertied in terms of it satisfying "human wants of some sort or another". Marx always tied labour to objects, even at their most basic value. He never thought beyond the means of production when exploitation of the human exists. He did, however, speak of 'useless things': those things with no labour in it. While he understood those things to possess 'no' value, I ask: what if this is a thing's only value? (Marx 2013, 17-21). In uselessness, we find a redemptive power for things, like trash on the street, or a pile of things filling a house beyond the limits of human inhabitation. In an earlier presentation of this article, I explored the phenomenon of hoarding as an extreme activity of care, rather than a pathology. I suggest that hoarders are the "true mystic of things" (McNeilly 2022).

3. I am unable to provide a definition for all the theories which claim to be part of the new materialism movement since they differ in root and emphasis. However, they do share genealogical traits in their "commitment to a Deleuzoguattarian, affirmationist monism (Spinozism) in which matter is conceived of as vibrant, in process, and interacting, other contemporary materialists, by contrast, are inclined to promote any combination of the following: inert and indifferent matter, subject-object duality, (techno-)rationality, mathematical idealism, the withdrawn reality of matter/objects, and negativity" (van der Tuin and Nocek 2019, 12). For the purposes of this paper, I remain narrow in my selection of Jane Bennett's vitality of matter that champions and extends Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) of relationality. ANT insists that non-human actors play a crucial role in any event. The second figure of interest is Quentin Meillassoux. I find that his brand of Speculative Realism shares a strong overlap with phenomenology while offering strong philosophical objections against it. It is important to acknowledge the critical work in Indigenous ontologies that are taking new materialisms to task on failing to include First Nation perspectives in their "agent ontologies" (Rosiek, Snyder and Pratt 2020, 331).

4. In *Singularities*, André Lepecki speaks of the kinetics responsible for colonisation and the enslavement of bodies in early capitalism: "In this sense, dance and choreography, as knowledge formations on the conditions of mobility, self-mobility, and generalised mobilization, become critical to address and counter the kinetic impetus in neoliberalism" (Lepecki 2016, 14). Choreocraftivism concurs that the dancer/mover/choreographer is central to an informed counter-logics of movement for creating awareness and a potential new relationship with waste.

5. I cannot cover all of the criticisms of phenomenology, especially the ones targeting Husserl by Meillassoux and others. While this is important to the underpinnings of a phenomenologically augmented 'theory of things', it will detract from the need to discuss choreocraftivism.

6. I am not the only phenomenologist who is attempting to do this work (see Ferro 2019, Coole 2005, and McGregor 2020).

7. Husserl, unlike Kant, is not interested in the grounds of the relationship between our mental representations and the object existing in itself. This leads him to unapologetically focus upon the 'side of the subject' rather than the object, and mostly as a reaction to empirical psychology of the late 19th Century. We find volumes of his writing dedicated to phenomenological method and its primary application to the intentional nature of consciousness. The structure of consciousness is taken as the first "object" to describe since our experiences *are* directly given to us. Experiences are not the things that exist outside of us (Husserl 1907 [1997], 117). We can construe this isolated inquiry as a pragmatic and efficient manoeuvre on Husserl's behalf since we undeniably have an intimate access to our experiences. While Husserl would not deny the epistemological primacy of the 'I know', 'I can', 'I move' (see Sheets-Johnstone 1999) there are more than enough *leitmotifs* in his non-exhaustive analyses that bring us closer to appreciating a thing's independent existence beyond us.

8. In 2019, I participated in 'Hacking the Anthropocene', a choreographic lab initiated by Critical Path (Sydney) and facilitated by Bec Conroy in collaboration with Adelina Larsson and partners Strange Attractor, Sydney Festival and the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. I had just emerged from a raft of cancer treatments which instigated a critical rupture in my creative and research interests. Reflections on my mortality turned me outward rather than inward. I began to think about the health of the planet more seriously and the death of *things* and our relationship to their demise. Next were the catastrophic bushfires of early 2020, followed closely by the pandemic and how restricting global mobility made a difference on the natural world. (For more detail, see McNeilly 2019).

9. Kinaesthesia is a "sensory modality" innate to most humans like vision, hearing, taste, smell and tactility. It is the ability to sense movements of the body and limbs. There are qualities of self-movement that "anyone can discover for him/herself in the very experience of moving". I am interested in this discovery through attention and awareness in designed action, close to what Jeroen Fabius calls a 'kinaesthetically-based choreography', but for the everyday not staged performance (Fabius 2009). See also Maxine Sheets-Johnstone for a rigorous phenomenological clarification of the term in (Grant, McNeilly and Wagner 2019, 50).

10. Cvejić analyses the work of Xavier Le Roy, Jonathan Burrows, Jan Ritsema, Boris Charmaatz, Eszter Salamon and Mette Ingvartson. Brannigan would characterise these six choreographers as "third-wave dance avant-garde (beginning in Europe in the early 1990s)" (Brannigan 2022).

11. FilmEXplorer, founded by Artist Ruth Baettig and Philosopher Giuseppe Di Salvatore, is an idiosyncratic documenter, critical discussant and provocateur of experimental and expanded screen culture based in Basel Switzerland with a residency program in Berlin. See https://www.filmexplorer.ch/berlin-hub/jodie-mcneilly/.

12. My first attempt at a task force was for *March Dance* in Sydney in 2023.

13. As Anna Dezeuze describes, "Do-it-yourself artworks are formally similar to types of language-based conceptual art, but use texts to give instructions rather than utter statements; do-it-yourself artworks are performative, but, unlike body art and other audience-oriented performances, they

require the presences of the spectator's body rather than the artists" (Dezeuze 2012, 188). The work of Australian dance artist and academic Julie-Ann Long creates performances where the audience is integral to its execution. Long's *Invisiblists* project poignantly explores with humour how women of a certain age who become invisible to society can either see this as a curse or use it as a power. *Queenie Gives an Address*, was performed for the Liveworks Festival of Experimental Art at Performance Space, Carriageworks, Sydney in 2021. Audience members were invited to have tea and pastries at a long table and be entertained by Queenie's larger than life persona.

14. I follow UK clothing sustainability Influencer and Fashion Futurist Gemma Metheringham's posts on her Instagram handle *The Elephant in My Wardrobe*. She often posts kerbside dumps of clothing with a commentary to remind us of the impacts of fast fashion waste. "In the UK today", she writes in her annotation to a photograph of clothes haphazardly dumped under a tree on the street in Hackney "we send 11 million textile items to incineration or landfill each and every week… In this week of Cop27 I find myself wondering whether our throwaway attitudes are a bigger problem than carbon emissions… ?" https://www.instagram.com/p/Ck1eyMNKDGe/.

15. In the U.S between 3,267,134 and 5,246, 670 pussyhats were knitted; worldwide it was 7 million. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Women%27s_March#Pussyhat_Project.

16. Marie Kondo T-shirt folding is about space management and organisation. The art of tidying, or throwing away is culturally influenced by the Japanese religion of Shintôism, (shen – 'divine being' and tao – 'way') that animates things with a spirit. In Shinto, the faithful must pay their respects to the "myriad kami [deity]" that resides in the natural world. There are kami of the mountains, sea and in "everything and every person". Kondo addresses the kami of things and believes that our possessions came to us like people in our lives. She then justifies the discarding process, the throwing away, the burning of things as the choice of the thing itself. She asks: "then what do the things in our homes that don't spark joy actually feel? I think they simply want to leave" (Kondo 2014, 223).

17. I accept that the bulk of Husserl's interests were focused upon phenomenologically describing the structures of consciousness, thus objects were not taken independently from an intending subject. However, correlationism was not the only focus of phenomenology; it had much broader aims. Therefore, speculative realism is wrong in its dismissive critique of Husserlian phenomenology as only correlationist (Whitehead 2015). There is a richness in Husserl's writings from his "genetic" period (manuscripts on time as temporal experience) that I have worked on for different purposes, including: audience experience during improvisational performances; audience experience of bodies in relationship with digital technologies in dance performance; methods for a digital dramaturgy and the structure of religious belief. My work follows a tradition of 'new directions' in Husserlian phenomenology, where his analyses of phenomena permit a range of studies beyond the very scope and limit of his own.

18. I cannot do justice to all the artists who currently or have previously worked on these issues through performance and scholarship in this one article, but will mention a few independent, Southern Oceanic based artists whose work (while performance based) share similar concerns to choreocraftivism: Tongan artist Latai Taumoepeau's *Last Resort* 2022 and *Repatriate* 2015, a "distressed dance" responding to rising sea levels in the Pacific; Rhiannon Newton's choreographies: *Explicit Contents* 2021 and *The Gift of a Warning* 2021 and her MA Thesis *Embodying an Ecological Condition: Dance Practices and the Development of Embodied Ecological Awareness;* Dean Walsh and his company *Integrated Science, Environment and Arts Access*; and Kay Armstrong's collaboration on the *Waste Not* festival in 2016. Dance research and scholarship includes Jo Pollitt, whose improvisational methodology helps us discover "more nuanced and deeply felt relations with the natural world" (Mosk 2021). See other publications by Pollitt in collaboration with other researchers addressing ways of sensing and learning about weather and climate change by combining early education research, technology, ecology and creative art

methodologies (see Blaise, Pollitt, Merewether & Pacini-Ketchabaw 2022; Pollitt, Blaise & Rooney 2021).

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