Meeting Trees Halfway:

Environmental Encounters in Theatre and Performance

by

Megan Laura De Roover

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Graduate Supervisory Committee

Tamara Underiner, Chair
Erika Hughes
Peter Goggin

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ABSTRACT

How do trees (live and representational) participate in our theatrical and performed encounters with them? If trees are not inherently scenic, as their treatment in language and on stage might reinforce, how can they be retheorized as agents and participants in dramatic encounters? Using Diana Taylor's theory of scenario to understand embodied encounters, I propose an alternative approach to understanding environmental beings (like trees) called "synercentrism," which takes as its central tenet the active, if not 100 percent "willed," participation of both human and non-human beings. I begin by mapping a continuum from objecthood to agenthood to trace the different ways that plants and trees are used, represented, and included in our encounters. The continuum provides a framework that more comprehensively unpacks human-plant relationships.

My dissertation addresses the rich variety of representations and embodiments by focusing on three central chapter topics: the history of tree representation and inclusion in dramatic literature and performance; interactions with living trees in gardens, parks, and other dramatic arenas; and individual plays and plants that have a particularly strong grasp on cultural imaginaries. Each chapter is followed by one or more corresponding case studies (the first chapter is followed by case studies on plants in musical theatre; the second on performing plants and collaborative performance events; and the last on the dance drama *Memory Rings* and the Methuselah tree). I conclude with a discussion of how the framework of synercentrism can aid in the disruption of terministic screens and facilitate reciprocal relationships with trees and other environmental agents.

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INTRODUCTION

I have a very clear memory from my childhood of driving to visit my grandparents. As we drove the Mazda from our farm in Stanley to their bungalow in the village of Kakabeka Falls, I watched a long line of spruce trees through the car window. I'm not sure if my impression of them was a result of confusion or fantasy, but I remember truly believing the trees were not stationary but rushing in the opposite direction of us. Over the fifteen-minute drive, I decided that the trees were having a party at the farm while we were gone. Later, when we drove home, I saw the trees rushing back to my grandparent's house for a party there. I don't think I ever mentioned these fantasies to my parents or siblings, but it stuck with me long enough that I can still recall the trees passing us by. What did they do at these mysterious parties? Did Nanny and Papa know that they were all rushing over to them? Had my grandparents planned the tree party? And why couldn't I go too?

Fast forward about twenty-five years and here I am pondering the same questions, albeit now in a more scholarly form. This dissertation comes in part from a childhood wish to be where the trees are, to finally understand what it is they are up to.

***

I began my PhD in Theatre at ASU deeply believing that my cumulative work would be on border discourse in North America, and how performance and liveness, and putting multiple borders in conversation with one another, can change or contribute to the idea of borders and borderlands. I had laid the groundwork for such a study in my master's thesis at the University of Guelph and I saw a clear trajectory before me. It

wasn't until I began writing my prospectus that I realized that my interests all seemed to hinge on the environmental. I am not alone in bridging my interests between border studies and environmentalism. Charles Bowden, for example, makes such connections overt in his writing. In *Blue Desert*, he looks at how the Sonoran Pronghorn survives in southwestern Arizona thanks to the US Air Force's use of the space for military training (22-24). The geopolitical border has very real consequences for the antelope—especially since they are endangered.

As I continued to build my prospectus I noticed more and more that non-human inhabitants of places like the border were largely overlooked or problematically reduced on stage and in studies of performance. And since many borders restrict access for live encounters, I found the lack of ecological specificity in representation disturbing. If I couldn't physically go there, and if I couldn't find it on stage, it was as though the non-human inhabitants of these kinds of places were non-existent aside from those moments where they are used as extensions of human imaginaries. I concluded that non-human members of the borderlands, who are physically present and affected by our encounters, are in fact participants or (in Bowden's terms) players, if only we'd notice them. To use literary theorist and rhetorician Kenneth Burke's terms, the "terministic screen" through which most people view border studies does not stretch wide enough to accommodate such a noticing. My experiences had sparked such a widening of the frame and I was determined to draw attention to these participatory beings. To challenge myself, my own presumptions, and the terministic limitations I recognized in the literature I was studying,

I agreed with my committee to focus my interest in environmental encounters on the ubiquitous and often overlooked tree.

Language from Kenneth Burke' *A Grammar of Motives*, mentioned above, has aided in the understanding the roles trees play in this dissertation, applying his five key terms of dramatism (Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose) and the ratios or relationships between them. Burke's pentad was designed to facilitate the understanding of human communication (rhetoric) as a form of action, and that when attributing motives to others, we use rations between the five key terms. He explains, "…we take it that men's linguistic behavior here reflects real paradoxes in the nature of the world itself" (Burke 56). By studying the treatment of trees in language (linguistic and performative means of communication in theatre) his terms offer space for me to unpack the curious position trees occupy on the stage as simultaneously scenery (the background or situation), plot device (enabling the act or what takes place), and agent (the person, or in this case, the arboreal being). Agency is then exhibited in the playing out of such a role. For the last key term, purpose, on the part of living trees I attribute to Burke's description of Spinoza's *conatus* or endurance as "the endeavor of each being to continue being" (144) while in more representational contexts a tree's purpose might be exhibited in a similar manner to a human. Using these relationships helps to uncover the dynamics at play in each case study and avoids simplistic assumptions that trees are primarily or naturally scenic.

In this dissertation, I grapple with several major theoretical questions, the central being: how do trees (live and representational) participate in our theatrical and performed

encounters with them? If trees are not inherently scenic, as the treatment of language of trees on and off stage might reinforce, how can they be re-theorized as agents and participants in dramatic encounters? Instead of focusing on human-centered terminology and the power dynamics it embeds, I propose an alternative approach I call "synercentrism," which takes as its central tenet the active, if not 100 percent "willed," participation of both human and non-human beings. To address this question, I look at the history of tree representation and inclusion in dramatic literature and performance; interactions with living trees in gardens, parks, and other dramatic arenas; and individual plays and plants that have a particularly strong grasp on our cultural imaginaries.

Foundations

To evaluate and analyse the arboreal and vegetal examples in this dissertation, I use Diana Taylor's book *The Archive and the Repertoire* as the conceptual foundation on which this dissertation is built. Her arguments on embodied encounters and scenario as related to performance makes room for my emergent analysis of plant performance and participation. She argues that

> Performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard Schechner has called "twice-behaved behavior." (Taylor 2-3)

Given this understanding of performance as an act of transfer, as well as an epistemology that treats performance as both the object/process of analysis and the methodological lens for analysis, Taylor develops an understanding of how these transfers occur in performance through what she calls *scenario*. I agree with Taylor that compared to narrative, scenario is a more effective model for constructing the social imaginary for

encounter because it depends on "embodied practice, along with and bound up with other cultural practices, [to offer] … a way of knowing" (3). As my research focuses on representational and living trees, embodiment is key to understanding vegetal and arboreal participation in encounters. By acknowledging embodied enactments as having power on par with narratives and archives, Taylor opens a space by which performance produces knowledge and ways of knowing and it is this space in which my research lives.

What Taylor calls a "scenario of discovery" (28) is typified by colonial encounter, but reverberates and takes on new forms in each iteration. The quintessential example Taylor puts forward is that of the claiming of the Americas by Columbus in which "the self-proclaimed discoverers perform the claim in public by enacting specific movements (planting the flag) and reciting official declarations in a spectacle backed by visible signs of authority" (56). The scenario is dependent on the embodied act as well as the written account which legitimizes it: Columbus planting the flag and declaring Spain's ownership through the writing and reading of a declaration. The recognisability of the discovery scenario generates from its historical contexts, yet there is no identifiable "original" to the pattern. The declaration of ownership is both for and not for the indigenous spectators (Taylor 57) since by fact of language they are not necessarily knowingly a part of the act but are witness to it.

The scenario here is a "basic framework [that] includes particular elements that viewers recognize despite the variations" (54). Taylor argues that "the scenario simultaneously constructs a wild object and the viewing subject—producing a "we" and an "our" as it produces a "them"" (54) and that "[a]lthough much has been written about

narratives as structures of communication, there is also an advantage to looking at scenarios that are not reducible to narrative because they demand embodiment" (55). By demanding embodiment, the "body in the scenario…has space to maneuver because it is not scripted" (55) thus offering a dynamic unlike narrative—a structure that privileges the knowledges produced by live performance and embodied encounter. I have come to understand that our primary mode of contact with environmental beings, such as trees, is deeply rooted in embodied encounters and most often exposes power dynamics akin to colonial encounter as Taylor describes it. While Taylor does not use scenario to identify environmental participation, I find her work opens the door for meaningful scholarship in this arena.

Taylor's integral theory of scenario is outlined as follows[1]:

1. A physical location is conjured to "recall, recount, or reactivate a scenario" (29). This is both the "scene" as a physical environment as well as the "highly codified environment that gives viewers pertinent information" (29). Place and action, within the scenario, define one another.
2. Within the scenario, viewers must deal with the embodiment of the social actors and "wrestle with the social construction of bodies in particular contexts" (29). The viewer must keep the social actor and the character "in view simultaneously, and thus recognize the areas of resistance and tension" (30) which are apt for parody. This is most clearly seen in scenarios as acts of transfer, "a paradigm that

[1] It is important to note that while these components are numbered in a particular order, they are not hierarchical.

is formulaic, portable, repeatable, and often banal because it leaves out complexity, reduces conflict to its stock elements, and encourages fantasies of participation" (54).

3. Scenarios are "formulaic structures that predispose certain outcomes and yet allow for reversal, parody, and change" (31). They are specific repertoires that have fixed frames which are still flexible enough to be repeated and transformed.
4. "The transmission of a scenario reflects the multifaceted systems at work in the scenario itself: in passing it on, we can draw from various modes that come from the archive and/or repertoire" (31).
5. Scenarios force us to "situate ourselves in relationship to it; as participants, spectators, or witnesses, we need to "be there," part of the act of transfer" (32). Much like Althusser's theory of ideology, we are within the parameters of the scenario if we are witness to it.
6. Scenarios do not have to be mimetic: "rather than a copy, the scenario constitutes a once-againness" (32).

Understanding scenario as a framework involving multilayered rules of engagement, embodiment and presence in order to function, creating "formulaic structures that predispose certain outcomes" which repeat over and over, and also "allow for reversal, parody, and change" (31), I argue that this model can be used not only within the intercultural context from which she writes, but within ecocriticism to better understand how trees and plants participate in performed encounters. Scenarios are specific repertoires with fixed frames which are still flexible enough to be transformed even as

they are repeated in recognizable ways. I argue that because moments of reversal, parody and resistance are found within scenarios (as Taylor asserts), similar moments may be identified in environmental encounters where both humans and non-humans participate in in the exchange, even when they are held within repeating human-centric scenarios. In each chapter of this dissertation, I identify the ways in which scenario facilitates and frames our encounters with trees and plants, and offers the possibility for these otherwise silenced beings to participate. Much like the colonial basis Taylor builds her theory on, I too am interested in those figures who are too often made to look like an inert backdrop.

As theatre scholar and dramaturg Ric Knowles suggests in the editorial comment on the issue of *Theatre Journal* on Interspecies Performance (65.3 Fall 2013), "if we are serious about the reciprocity of the interspecies, we must be willing to address, as actors and as audiences, the potential absence or inconsequence of human participation" (Knowles np). Not only should we be willing to address our potential inconsequence, but, by that token, entertain the idea of those other participants which make up the reciprocal exchange. This means acknowledging the participation of the non-human in scenarios and the historical existence of these actors which extends beyond our lived experience or encounters. Theatre scholar Theresa May in "Beyond Bambi" proposes an emphasis on environmental history since "environmental history can set a play or a performance more solidly in its earthen sphere—that is, in the eco-materiality of the world of the play and/or the world of production" (May 102) so that we as scholars may "…critique the underlying master narratives in terms of their ecological implications, even as we have critiqued these sites for racist, sexist, jingoist, or other hegemonic values" (May 101).

The sites and archives that I have proposed for this dissertation tackle these problems by both privileging the materiality of the world and its production, as well as intersecting with interdisciplinary methods of critique.

Taylor's intervention with *The Archive and the Repertoire* is two-fold: bringing theatre to Latin American studies, and Latin America to theatre studies. I present a similarly reciprocal approach, bringing trees to theatre, and theatre and performance studies into ecocriticism. In many ways, this exchange has been developing in recent years, with theatre and performance studies being brought into ecocriticism (notably, *Performance on Behalf of the Environment* which recognizes in its introduction that "very little was published that put the two fields of study into conversation with one another" (2)) and vice versa in terms of environmentally inclined or inspired performance and dramaturgy (Phantom Limb Company's dance drama, *Memory Rings*, is a prime example discussed in this dissertation). There is much to be learned from such a rich and yet untapped interchange, that even with all its recent theoretical advances, still lists towards the representational and the human-centric. My intervention, then, is not just to introduce these fields to one another, but to also use performance studies as a means for recognizing and acknowledging the players *within* those fields as intermingling. It is not sufficient that themes of environmentalism come to the theatre: we must recognize those environmental beings who participate in our theatre making. Similarly, we must recognize the same operatives at work when we bring theatre and performance studies out of the black box and into different environmental contexts.

Trees are the perfect focal point for an analysis bridging these two disciplinary fields. They demand negotiation as material bodies as well as lend themselves to a wide array of conceptual and theoretical frameworks in both ecocriticism and theatre and performance studies. Investigations into the interchange between these fields occur elsewhere in a case by case basis, exploring different environmental or theatrical phenomena, but delving into the relationship between trees and theatre studies in a sustained manner reveals a substantial history of engagement on which to build new relationships and new modes of encounter. To use the metaphor "you can't see the forest for the trees" as a launchpad, this dissertation works not to reveal the forest or big picture by looking past the trees, but rather reacquaint us with the trees themselves *as* the forest.

Dissertation Breakdown

This dissertation has three central chapters each followed by one or two case studies, and a proposed continuum of tree participation in environmental and theatrical encounters with humans. The continuum, which is found directly after the introduction, is not meant to be a taxonomy, but a way of seeing. I have created it to shed light on plants in theatre and performance in as many ways as possible and facilitate a deeper understanding of their usage, representation, and participation in our encounters. I want to resist the urge to categorize each plant or tree I later discuss—which is tempting but impractical—and instead look at how the continuum's spectrum opens discussions and analysis of said plants and trees. The point of its inclusion is to nuance the interpretations of these texts and beings so that their complexities in representation and involvement is not dismissed by limited existing frameworks. Throughout the dissertation, my

continuum is evoked and applied in conjunction with Taylor's scenario, to tease out the encounter relationship between humans and trees.

The first chapter, From Nō to Godot, addresses the question: How are trees represented and analyzed in dramatic literature throughout history? I review a range of tree examples important to the development of western theatre, breaking the chapter into four sections: trees as scenic devices, trees as integral to the plot, trees as people, trees as themselves. In each, I use scenario to understand the dynamics of staged relationships between trees and characters/audiences. For trees as scenic devices I unpack the Japanese nō drama *Matsukaze* for a better understanding of traditional nō stage designs (always featuring pine trees), as well as the additional trees that make an appearance in that specific play. To address trees as integral to the plot, I look to the Dutch medieval play *The Apple-Tree*, including probable staging techniques and the character's interactions with the tree. I look at both Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the 2017 National Ballet of Canada's *Pinocchio* trees as people, first studying the bard's play for animated trees (Birnam Wood being one), and then the Italian classic's boy who begins life as a talking log. Finally, I begin to address the possibility of trees performing as themselves (and the inherent absurdity in such a performance) by looking at Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* where the tree is often described as the only character who exhibits change. The arc demonstrated in this chapter imitates that of the continuum, beginning with trees as objects (scenery) to things (enchanted, uncanny) to agents (people, trees as themselves).

Following the first chapter are two case studies both on 1980's Broadway musicals: *Into the Woods* and *Little Shop of Horrors*. In these case studies, I apply the

continuum to the vegetal characters and representations in the plays, paying particular attention to how their performance offers moments of reversal and parody (Taylor's third tenet of scenario). *Into the Woods* demonstrates a wide range of plant representations, each example falling on different sections of the continuum. In the case study on *Little Shop of Horrors*, I look closely at the carnivorous plant character Audrey II who, over the course of the play, transforms from object to thing to agent, thereby spanning every section on the continuum.

Chapter 1 sets the stage for how trees are represented and analyzed in dramatic literature, opening the door for Chapter 2, Living Trees, to apply the same approaches for understanding plant participation in dramatic representations to actual living trees. It begins with a discussion on the objectification of living plants and trees connecting staging practices with garden and landscape theory, and then moves to a close study of the arboretum, using Diana Taylor's terminology and museum studies theory, and reading the arboretum as a historical space that is functionally both an archive of tree and plant species and a living repertoire. The subsection "*Things* in the Garden" looks at how plants resist and subvert human dominance and what means are used to repress such acts of misbehaviour. I end the chapter with a close study of two megaflora sites: Sequoia National Park and Giants Grove, first looking at how sequoia agents General Sherman and General Grant participate in American rituals and psyche, and then how such imaginaries are currently being transplanted in Ireland by planting Redwoods in Giants Grove. The case study following Chapter 2 looks at encounters with two cacti in Arizona, the first as part of a garden experience and the second in a performance event. Together,

the institutional and performative framing bring the cacti into the scenario as an unequivocal participant.

In Chapter 3, Ancient Agents, I identify trees as historical agents by their role as witness and their relationship to discovery scenarios. I first set out to unpack how plants are treated as witnesses in historical mediums, ranging in date from Marco Polo to Chernobyl. Specifically, I look at Thomas Cole's series of paintings depicting the rise and fall of humankind, where plant life bookends human existence. After establishing trees in the role of witness in human history, I look to dendrochronology for trees that have participated meaningfully in our understanding of human history. I then connect the scientific discovery of ancient trees to the discovery scenarios played out by park visitors at Inyo National Forest where the ancient bristlecone pine Methuselah grows, resulting in vandalism and new regulations to safely shelter the tree from the public. Given the unique circumstances surrounding Methuselah, I propose a way by which the scenario being played out can be changed by altering the finite goal of discovery (that comes hand in hand with conquest) to one of mutual exploration and play. I build this proposal by comparing evidence from my fieldwork conducted at Inyo National Park with a promotional video leveraging themes of discovery by Phantom Limb Company for their production of *Memory Rings*.

The final case study is a close reading of Phantom Limb Company's 2016 production of *Memory Rings* as a performance event that facilitates synercentrism in a production that by necessity cannot be site specific. I apply my continuum with Taylor's

scenario framework to show how the play negotiates themes of discovery and ends with an transformation which unmistakably grants agency to trees.

***

Reflecting on my memory of trees rushing past a car window, I can see now that perhaps my experience exposes a fundamental trigger for this project: that I felt left out where so often we feel in charge of the encounter. While it never occurred to my parents to entertain the fantastic idea of trees with their own agendas—their adult perspectives likely would not have accommodated such conjecture—a moment of imagination opened a door for me. In a moment, it undid a human-centric model for understanding nature and left me needing a new framework for understanding the encounter, as well as a language for recognizing the beings in front of me. Taylor's pivotal scenario model recognizes the power dynamics of the colonial encounters, and certainly, growing up in a town where the most prominent source of employment was a paper mill, my desire to understand trees as having lives of their own was at odds with the resource-based narratives I was raised on. Taylor's intervention offers moments of change in the scenario, and as I saw the same power relationship between human and tree play out over and over I noticed the moments of rupture, of possibility. To imagine trees having gatherings that didn't involve me, or any other human, was both a childish fantasy and a radical reframing of human-nature relationships: one that doesn't place power solely on the human overseer.

A dissertation on trees has a fraught relationship with the production of knowledge, regardless of intent. Nearly every scholarly resource used in the creation of

this work has come in some manner from a tree. I am reminded of a quote from Carl Sagan, that:

> “A book is made from a tree. It is an assemblage of flat, flexible parts (still called “leaves”) imprinted with dark pigmented squiggles. One glance at it and you hear the voice of another person, perhaps someone dead for thousands of years. Across the millennia, the author is speaking, clearly and silently, inside your head, directly to you. Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people, citizens of distant epochs, who never knew one another. Books break the shackles of time — proof that humans can work magic. (Sagan 295)

While Sagan poetically identifies the magic of books as proof of human ingenuity, the literal *body* of knowledge is unmistakably arboreal. It is worth blatantly stating that my proposal that trees are participants in embodied encounters is more than relevant here, that the “treeness” of books and knowledge should not be lost in the human squiggles found upon the page. Tree rings, after all, transmit information across millennia to anyone who is willing to learn to read their stories too.

Driving the same route as an adult—which passes a tree farm—I am certain the same trees I watched as a child have since been harvested. I now see young trees, maybe five or six years old, maybe even planted when I entered graduate school and embarked on this project. In all likelihood, the tree farm supplies raw materials for the paper mill, and the trees I imagined festively rushing to a party have been transformed into paper. In a colonial encounter, this is the ultimate conquering of the arboreal being. But as Taylor suggests, there are moments in such scenarios which offer the possibility of reversal or change, and I like to think that maybe—just maybe—the paper on which this dissertation is written is from a tree that rushed past a child’s window. From a tree that was treated its entire life as an object and a resource, but has since transformed into a substance that

contains and transmits human knowledge. That in some way, that that same tree is participating in the discussion ahead, and that my words, squiggles on a page, are worthy of such paper.

TOWARDS A TREE CONTINUUM

In order to understand the work that representations of trees do in art, literature, drama, film, etc., as well as the work that trees (and the idea of trees) do in parks, gardens, forests and other everyday encounters, it might be helpful to array their many interpretive possibilities along a kind of continuum that looks at synercentrism – nature as participant in these encounters – according to a sliding scale of visibility and agency (from low to high). In this chapter, I offer such a continuum, including basic definitions of each point along its march accompanied by a singular example to demonstrate it, which I will subsequently apply and elaborate upon them in the rest of the dissertation. And I should note although the continuum encompasses a diversity of global examples, it may never be comprehensive or complete, as new work on and with trees continues to emerge. Using a continuum, it is possible to identify participation in environmental encounters in which trees frequently are not considered to participate at all. By demonstrating that participation in environmental encounters is not a binary construction between plants as objects and humans as agents, but a spectrum with different layers, histories, and possibilities embedded, the continuum serves to provide the groundwork for future meaningful investigation into plant and tree participation and performance. It is my aim in this construction to create a new model by which participation can be understood to occur by gradient rather than absence or presence.

The continuum has multiple practical applications. It is an archival resource bringing together different tree/plant representations across multiple fields. It is also a process for understanding said representations, per specific qualifications. Those working in theatre and performance, whether in the making or analysing of it, can benefit from this continuum as it offers specificity and context for the inclusions of plants/trees on stage based on extant historical and contemporary examples. It also offers concrete examples of plant/tree participation for theatre makers/thinkers to build upon, so that going forward, the ways in which we build performative environmental encounters can grow in meaningful ways.

Besides the archival range of examples, which undoubtedly is a useful repository to be added to and shaped over time by future contributors, the continuum also provides a language and a context for discussing plants and trees as participants. Currently, much of the discourse on plant participation is couched in spiritual, religious, or generic terms. Performance scholar Courtney Ryan may see plants as more than objects in her performance practice, but certainly her conception of plant participation is radically distinct from Elyse Pomeranz, a visual artist who claims to speak directly with trees, and both are different from sacred plant-human interactions found in multiple mythologies and cultural traditions. While there is a vast interest in plant or tree participation in human encounters, there are few functional examples of cross-cultural understandings. Without a language or framework for bridging these examples, scholars have been challenged to organize our knowledge about these encounters, grouping them together based on genre, media, or other external qualifiers. This continuum seeks to provide a

language and a framework so that new connections and understandings may be forged between these isolated nodes.

Just as there is a growing interest in the diversity of nature writing, theatre practitioners and scholars must be aware of the work our representations and inclusions perform. Alison Deming and Lauret Savoy's edited collection *Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World* opens with the author's interrogation of how the existing parameters of nature writing "… raises questions in our minds as to why other perspectives are missing from our nature literature, as it has been historically defined" (6). For the authors, environmental racism connects social and environmental problems by the similar mentalities by which they arise; and by addressing the lacunas in nature writing, they identify the systemic issues in need of mending. To rethink nature writing to accommodate a greater inclusivity, we must connect the social to the environmental and disrupt the established silos of literatures. In the development of the following continuum I have taken this interdisciplinary task to heart, working to provide a large repository of tree and plant representation so that we may better understand our perceived relationships to these natures and create space for these overlooked, unseen, and ignored participants. Demming and Savoy argue: "What is defined by some as an edge of separation between nature and culture, people and place, is a zone of exchange where finding common ground is more than possible; it is necessary" (7). The continuum seeks to provide this zone of exchange.

Continuum

The following is a continuum illustrating the range of representation of trees and plants in performance and unpacking the possibility for, visibility of, and depth of each representation's participation in an encounter. It consists of three parts: a range from Objecthood to Agenthood (bold); Low to High visibility (italics); and nine general sections of representation (divided in three, colourized). To explain the construction of the continuum, each of the three components will be discussed in turn, with the breakdown of the nine sections.

Objecthood *(Low visibility)*			**Thinghood**			**Agenthood** *(High visibility)*		
Scenery	Objectified Trees	Dedicated Trees	Econs	Charismatic or Misbehaving Flora	Enchanted or Empowered Tree	Animated Tree 1 (Low)	Animated Tree 2 (Medium)	Animated Tree 3 (High)

Figure 2. Continuum

Objecthood – Thinghood – Agenthood

The first section of the continuum offers a range of representation with Objecthood and Agenthood bookending an ambiguous Thinghood. The terms "object," "thing," and "agent" build from the three dominant models applied and unpacked in this dissertation: Herndl and Brown's rhetorical model for environmental discourse, Bill Brown's "Thing Theory," and Kenneth Burke's Dramatistic Pentad.

Objecthood

My use of "objecthood" draws on Herndl and Brown's rhetorical model for environmental discourse in their book, *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in*

Contemporary America as well as the more common-sense understandings of object as inanimate and discardable. Herndl and Brown's model identifies the terms Object, Resource and Spirit as the three central approaches to nature in writing, as illustrated below:

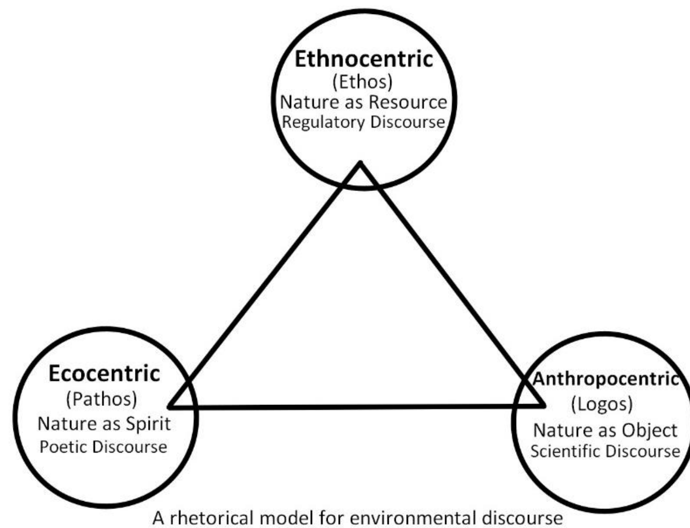

Figure 3. "A rhetorical model for environmental discourse" from Introduction to *Green Culture*, page 11

On my continuum, both Scientific and Regulatory discourse would occupy space in the Objecthood section of the spectrum while Poetic Discourse might be placed somewhere between Thinghood and Agenthood, depending on its manifestation. What the Herndl and Brown's rhetorical model for environmental discourse lacks, however, is reciprocity. Given the field of theatre and performance studies as a space for the coming together of human and non-human performers, reciprocity becomes a primary concern for my research. I find therefore that the model needs a fourth point—one that understands the role embodiment plays in our understanding of Nature. I offer a diamond approach:

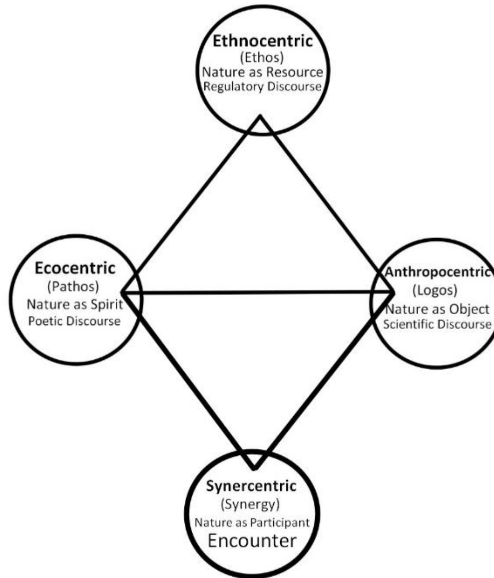

Figure 4. Diamond Model for Environmental Encounter

The introduction of a fourth point on Herndl and Brown's model is perhaps the most striking interjection in this dissertation as it informs nearly every other part--certainly every other part of the continuum. If the discourse, at its very center, now includes the possibility of reciprocity and vegetal or arboreal participation, already every generalized pre-existing understanding of plants as objects is transformed. Therefore, even as the term "objecthood" heads this section, it must be understood that within the synercentric frame, even objects may participate.

Thinghood

"Thinghood" borrows language from Bill Brown's article "Thing Theory" in *Critical Inquiry* 28.1 where he argues when *objects* cease to function in predictable manners, they become *things*, asserting a peculiar kind of power into our interactions with them. Referring to Theodor Adorno, Brown says "Most simply put, his point is that accepting the otherness of things is the condition for accepting otherness as such" (Brown

12). Including Thinghood as a central part of the continuum offers the possibility of understanding plants as having the capacity to behave in surprising ways that challenge our fundamental assumptions about their roles and behaviour. Including a range of "in-between" is crucial to understanding the range of tree and plant representation on stage, and helps to avoid undue dismissals of examples (fictitious or real) that do not easily fit into a category of object or agent.

Agenthood

The term Agenthood borrows from Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad in *A Grammar of Motives* as that which "does" the action and therefore carries motive. General scholarship identifies plants and trees as Agents based on their visual and cognitive similarity to human beings, which then diminishes those that do not resemble people. However, as Burke argues, "…what we want is *not terms that avoid ambiguity,* but *terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise*" (Burke xviii, original emphasis). Identifying plants and trees with different degrees of power to enact as agents, and locating them next to Thinghood on the continuum, allows me to understand agency as a range. In this case the term agency I describe better coinsides with what Margaret Archer defines as Primary Agency, which offers "individual 'resistance,'" rather than Corporate Agency which involves a "shared…imagining of other futures" (Carter and Charles 333). Moreover, it avoids conflating vegetal agency with humanness. Burke's dramatistic pentad:

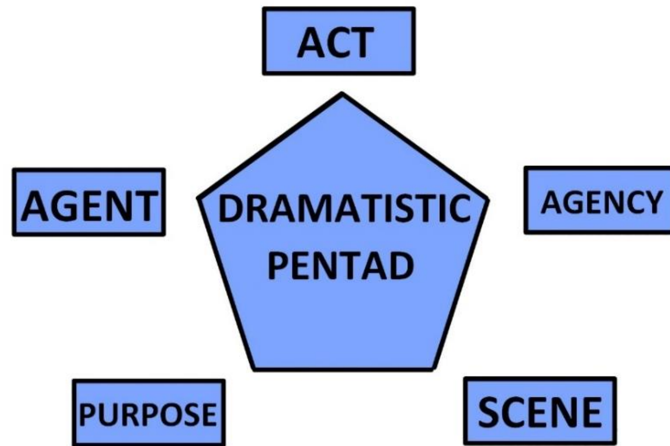

Figure 5. Dramatistic Pentad

The five components of the dramatistic pentad function to distinguish acting plants and trees from those objects which are inert. If a tree is to be reconfigured as an Agent, then it has a peculiar relationship to Scene where trees usually reside. The pentad aids in distinguishing the roles of the agent and the relationships (or as Burke calls them, ratios,) between each of the five components. Whether the tree-Agent in question has high or low animism will affect the relationship between Agent and Scene, for example, as well as the range of action possible. If within a performed encounter participation is the ultimate motive or purpose (regardless of intent) then the other components of the pentad also aid in the analysis of how plant agents can be understood in a variety of arenas.

Low visibility – High visibility

I argue that trees have different levels of visibility arranged from low to high on the continuum[2]. On the side of "low visibility," the tree is almost indistinguishable from those other elements that create the scene—colour, form, other objects, etc. while on the side of "high visibility," the tree is a character capable of calling attention to itself in literal terms. Between these points are more ambiguous levels of increasing or decreasing visibility, sometimes only created by external indicators or events which draw attention to the tree. For example, a physical anomaly may create visibility for an objectified tree if the person encountering it has the capacity to notice the anomaly, while a more direct plaque or sign achieves a slightly higher level of visibility using archival methods. Tied into the problem of visibility is the processes of enablement by which humans make the non-human visible (to humans). As one follows along the continuum the visibility of trees as performing beings increases. Simultaneously, there is an increase in human interference or enablement. This can be seen within the objecthood section where otherwise gestalt scenery becomes framed by signage or dedications, or more largely across the whole continuum where the incorporation of human features (face, voice, etc.) produces highly visible acting tree agents. Human enablement can also be seen to make visible plant agency through technological means, such as time lapse photography. In real time, plant movement and change might be invisible to the human eye, but with the enablement of time lapse, such a performance is highly visible and very much reveals the otherwise stationary plant as a moving agent. Other human machinations might include

[2] This does not mean that the tree is physically more difficult to see, but that the framing of the tree's representation either facilitates or restricts its visibility as an entity rather than as a conglomerate of shape, colour, form, etc.

puppets, costumes, etc. which make visible and understandable the animated lives of trees and plants. Further examples of this problem of visibility and enablement can be found throughout this dissertation, but particularly in the final Case Study on Phantom Limb Company's *Memory Rings*.

Breakdown of Continuum Sections

In addition to written explanations, I found the best way to illustrate the distinctions between sections was to literally draw examples of tree and plant representation. Each section therefore includes a drawing featuring a deciduous tree, a bush, and a coniferous tree, with slight alterations in each illustration indicating the key elements of representation from that section.

Scenery

Figure 6. Scenery

Scenery is the furthest most point on the continuum toward Objecthood or Low Visibility. Scenery refers to that which is background, additive, and gestalt whether on stage or in a property landscape design. Theatrically, scenery can inform the action, the character, and the plot, but is essentially superficial, designed in a manner to only contextualize the more important action occurring between characters or agents. Plants and trees in scenery are colourful backdrops (as Courtney Ryan would say) or objects for aesthetic purpose, and that scenery is comprised of real and artificial trees/plants. In

terms of visibility, scenery is quite low on the continuum because of the gestalt effect of its representation, curation, or engagement which obfuscates the possibility of participation and emphasizes complete human control over landscaping and design. As such, it is easy to confuse scenery with all plants/trees because of object-oriented discourse. As I show in the illustration, the individual plants/trees make up a generalized nature scene with no particular indication of species or anomalies.

Objectified

Figure 7. Objectified

Important or named for physical anomalies, objectified trees are singled out as objects—not by being personified. Their objectification grants them slightly higher visibility than generic scenery, as their physical anomalies cause them to stand out against the scenic backdrop. Their material presence is attention grabbing for variety of reasons, including peculiarity, rarity, shape, size, or even their context. Sometimes the naming or identifying of an objectified tree is an attempt to distinguish one tree from the rest, while still maintaining scientific objectivity toward the subjects. Referring to a fallen tree, a large tree, a crooked tree, etc. calls attention towards a specific material body without anthropomorphizing or personifying that body. Some trees enter this section when dead or dying. For example, the Wawona Tree in Yosemite National Park, California, is now “The Fallen Tunnel Tree” since toppling over. I identify “The Fallen

Tunnel Tree" as an objectified tree, but the Wawona as an Econ in the Thinghood section of the continuum. Its material transformation changes our relationship to the tree.

In the illustration, the coniferous tree has two tops—a physical anomaly not uncommon, but unusual enough to be noticed. The eye is drawn to the anomaly, causing it to stand out because of its unusual form, distinguishing it both from the other trees/plants in the scene as well as the imaginary of the conifer.

Dedicated

Figure 8. Dedicated

We dedicate trees in honor of a person, organization, event or idea. I suggest two dominant approaches to Dedicated trees, including archive and repertoire (to use Taylor's terms) which may potentially change the level of visibility over time. While Objectified trees have physical differences, which cause them to be visible, Dedicated trees are usually visible because of either a) intense curation and framing (archive), or, b) repetitious engagement by a group of people (repertoire). Signs, plaques, maps, etc. single trees out with an archival approach, as indicated in the illustration, whereas stories and usage indicate a repertoire approach. Repertoire is not lower on the continuum for visibility than archival as for that lived community, the Dedicated tree is as highly visible as one that is demarcated for a similar purpose. Archive-dedicated trees are also not higher on the continuum as their demarcation depends on audiences being willing and

able to engage with the supplemental materials (plaques might be in another language or inconveniently placed).

Recently making headlines in both Canada and France is the case of the Vimy Oaks. At the battle of Vimy Ridge in 1917, Canadian "Lieutenant Leslie Miller picked up a few acorns from a shell-blasted oak tree at his feet" (Vowles) and sent them home to family in Ontario. The acorns were planted and the land re-named Vimy Oaks Farm. The oaks are currently being used by the Canadian and French government to re-establish a population in France (no oaks survived the war) as an initiative to celebrate the century anniversary of the battle of Vimy Ridge. Repatriating the saplings to France and planting more in Canada are performative gestures that result in living memorials.[3] These trees are indicated to the public by plaques, news articles, extensive written framing, etc. signaling not only the trees themselves but also the events of the battle of Vimy Ridge. The archive of the events and their significance will endure, possibly longer than the arboreal subjects themselves, although their interpretive potential relies on audiences who can comprehend their framing.

What I call intangible dedication trees are dedicated by lived repertoire relying on memory and ritual to sustain its dedication. Their importance is relevant to smaller or localized audiences. For example, a tree planted in memory of a loved one without a sign is a dedicated tree, but exists as such only within the repertoire of those aware of its dedication.

Econ

[3] Two of these saplings will be planted at the University of Guelph's arboretum.

Figure 9. Econ

The term “Econ” or ecotype comes from Sean Morey’s essay “A Rhetorical Look at Ecosee” from *Ecosee: Image, Rhetoric, Nature* where he explains that:

> Despite the cultural relevancy of certain images, mass media have exported different environmental images around the globe, so that an animal in China, such as the panda, has become an important eco-political image for the whole world. Such images become either ecotypes or “econs.” Ecotypes resemble archetypes, categories of animals that may look different from image to image, and may even be different animals within paintings, but serve the same function within those paintings. For example, images of humpback whales or elephants could be used to portray the concept of an endangered species. Ecotypes may represent stock definitions from ecology, and science often uses them as examples, which as predator, prey, consumer, producer, parasite, host, terrestrial, and aquatic. Thus any animal can fulfill one of these roles and serve as an ecotype in doing so. Econs, such as the panda, provide instant associations with organizational groups (such as the World Wildlife Fund), ideas, or movements. Icons from other contexts may even be appropriated by environmental (or anti-environmental) agents and become an econ. (Morey 33)

For the purposes of this continuum, a tree as an econ is widely recognizable with national, cultural, spiritual, or political connotations or importance. It can be an individual tree, a species, or even a collection of trees. I illustrate the econicity of the tree by using the symbolism of the Canadian flag. Similarly, an image of rainforest trees may elucidate ideas about preservation if contextualized with the slogan “Save Our Rainforests!” The maple, however, has a ubiquity in the social and physical landscape of Canada, based on the flag (adopted in 1965, unofficially referred to as “The Maple Leaf”)

as well as in Canadian Poetry from as early as Bliss Carmen's 1898 "The Grave Tree" which begins:

> Let me have a scarlet maple
> For the grave-tree at my head,
> With the quiet sun behind it,
> In the years when I am dead (209)

A multitude of authors and poets identify the significance of the tree to Canadian writing, with D.M.R. Bentley explaining in *Mnemographia Canadensis* that to all poets interested in the links "between Canada's social and physical landscapes past and present, a scarlet maple will always be more than merely a scarlet maple" (Bentley n.p.).

On the continuum Econs are part of the Thinghood umbrella, as they claim a life of their own in the cultural and political imaginary while still being trees. The term "Charges" from Kenneth Burke relates to econicity, as "symbolic intensity," Buke says, "arises when the artist uses subject-matter 'charged' by the reader's experience outside the word of art" (163)" (Killingsworth and Palmer 27). Their contextualization creates agency, but it is their form and prevalence (or in some cases, absence) which participates in the making of and the sustaining of the econ in the imaginary. For example, the maple tree's shape and prevalence in Canada participates in the maintenance of a cultural identity through colouration, production of syrup and other by-products, etc.

Charismatic or Misbehaving Flora

Figure 10. Charismatic or Misbehaving Flora

In the animal world, charismatic megafauna are species that through cultural production are highly recognisable, representative of their ecosystems, and often hold regional or national importance (such as pandas, polar bears, penguins or lions). There is significant overlap between this section and that of Econ; however, a charismatic megafauna (or megaflora) does not *need* to be appropriated by an external context to be charismatic. While the scarlet maple may be an Econ for Canada, coniferous trees of the boreal forest might be a charismatic species indicative of the same geographic region, offering northern imaginaries of cold and wintery habitats. There is something about its individuality, distinctiveness, and recognisability which draws attention to it specifically. In the illustration, the coniferous tree is singled out as being charismatic or "misbehaving" as an individual tree because of its size. The charisma of the largest tree in the forest might be interpreted as plant growth misbehaviour depending on if gigantism is a desirable trait.

Enchanted or Empowered[4]

[4] There are issues of language found in this dissertation that gesture towards the complicated nature of the subject. I have sought to address these issues by digging deeper into the qualities of the subjects. For example, the category of "Enchanted or Empowered Tree" was originally titled "Magical Tree," introducing problems with the religious inclusions of that section. While trees with extraordinary abilities may in fact be "magical," it would be an error to refer to the burning bush from the Book of Exodus as such. Rather than forcing only partially accurate definitions onto the cases, it was necessary to explore the

Figure 11. Enchanted or Empowered

Enchanted or Empowered Trees are something of an in-between. Liminal, they are both trees and supernatural vessels, meaning that their treeness is an important material reality but the supernatural abilities transforming them are what makes them significant and provides them with visibility as agents. The subjects have no anthropomorphic characteristics, but magical, supernatural, unnatural, or divine abilities either internally generated or granted by an outside source.

Of course, I cannot restrict this to only magical or supernatural ability, but also those other seemingly impossible abilities with other origins. In this manner, plants that grow overnight like *Jack in the Beanstalk* would fall into this category; in rare and peculiar circumstances, real trees can enter this category. In the Book of Exodus, the burning bush falls under this category as a divine vegetal vessel for the voice of God, as

qualities of such examples in depth, concluding with the understanding that these trees gain their powers through outside sources, divine or magical. Where possible, I address different religious beliefs that include trees (ancient and contemporary) and have included the plants/trees in question per the framework of that religious tradition. I find that the usage of Nature as Spirit as a rhetorical category (Herndl and Brown) does not adequately account for diversity in spiritual natures. The Judeo-Christian Tree of knowledge functions differently than the Norse Yggdrasil; Ask and Embla in *The Poetic Edda* are people made from trees radically different from the wooden effigies in the Mayan *Popol Vuh*. Stories of trees in different spiritual traditions, if conflated, lose unique manifestations of their participation. To focus on the manifestations of the vegetal bodies or representations, I have selected to emphasize the means of their representation over the spiritual backdrop although I recognize that these can never be truly separate. If this dissertation seeks to develop Nature as Participant, it is therefore understood that nature can be object, resource, or spirit *as well as* agent.

is illustrated in the image above. A Christmas tree also can transcend into this category, as countless children's books can attest to the magic and wonder of the tree's participation in the Christmas event.[5]

Animated Low

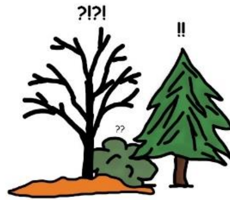

Figure 12. Animated Low

The category of animated tree is broken into three sections: low, moderate and high. In the lowest level of animated tree, characteristics of the tree expand to evoke ideas of animacy without revoking the foundational tree-ness of the entity. This includes minimal movement or mobility and minimal physically human characteristics: the entity remains rooted in place, even if movement in branches or trunk occurs, and can display emotions or ideas though without an identifiable voice, face, etc.

The animations comprise either projection, internal generation, or both, although it is difficult to assess which unless the context for the animated tree demonstrates it. In the illustration, the conifer appears to be expressing shock and sadness at the felling of the deciduous tree. It is unclear if the anthropomorphism is a projection on the tree by the

[5] Colleen Monroe and Michael Glenn Monroe's *A Wish to be a Christmas Tree*, for example, enters this vein, although the trees themselves are moderately-highly animated. Still, it is their status as prospective Christmas trees which grant them their agency. There are dozens of such books, usually with a plot line of a sad tree that then is chosen to be a Christmas tree, thus exemplifying the magical and transformative spirit of the holiday.

illustrator, or generating from the tree and captured by the illustrator. What is important is that the tree can express low levels of animacy within the frame of the illustration.

I find low level animism in the description of the trees mourning Orpheus' death in book 11 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

> The mournful birds, the stricken animals, the hard stones and the weeping woods, all these that often had followed your inspiring voice, bewailed your death; while trees dropped their green leaves, mourning for you, as if they tore their hair. (More n.p.)

Contemporary examples include J.K. Rowling's Whomping Willow from *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* and the main character in Shel Silverstein's children's book, *The Giving Tree*. Low level animism is also found in treatments of real arboreal subjects: the treatment of ancient trees as silent witnesses to human history implies that they care about our existence and desire our stewardship.

Animated Medium

Figure 13. Animated Medium

Building from animated trees with low animacy toward agenthood, animated tree 2 (medium) refers to fictional trees defined by creator or user as primarily tree with anthropomorphic qualities. Characteristics of these entities may include verbal communication, capacity for bipedalism, and humanoid attributes such as facial

expressions, etc.—albeit limited on all accounts. Visually, these entities appear tree-like with minimal but identifiable modifications. Not all these attributes must occur to be categorized in this section, but many do go together. As is featured in the illustration, the deciduous tree, the bush and the conifer now have eyes and implied movement, although they do not appear to be fully humanoid. There is no question now as to projected animism as the characters appear to have their own agency within the frame of the illustration.

John Wyndham's 1951 science fiction novel *The Day of the Triffids* presents the triffid plant as a mobile, dangerous being bent on attacking and feeding off blind humans and animals. The triffid in this case begins in the novel as a benign plant, firmly situated in the section "Scenery," progressing over the course of the plot to "Animated Medium" by demonstrating mobility, communication, and the capacity for judgement and planning. In this example, the Triffid is still acting first and foremost as a plant, not a humanoid, therefore leaving it lower on the spectrum.

Animated High

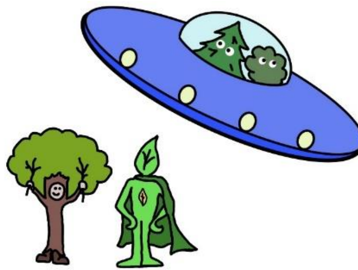

Figure 14. Animated High

Animated trees on the far right of the continuum feature strong human attributes or characteristics including (but not limited to) bipedalism, facial expressions, verbal and gestural communication with humans, and demonstrated cognition. These animated

beings are usually considered tree-like or plant-like due to visual or occupational connections to trees, not necessarily because they are trees. Another common tract is that these beings have significantly evolved or transformed from an earlier tree/plant form to humanoid vegetal being through fictive circumstances (radioactivity, aliens, etc.). The tree or plant attributes of these beings are often additive or aesthetic, so that while the character may appear visually tree or plant-like, its agenthood is granted by the more dominant humanoid qualities.

Generally, this section can be divided into four main categories. It should be mentioned that these are by no means the only categories, but rather are common umbrella tropes for many manifestations of these characters. The categories are: Ent, Spirit, Alien, and Mascot.

Ent

Figure 15. Ent

Ents are a specific reference to J.R.R Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy which has had a significant impact on the Western contemporary fantasy genre. J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* features a tidy spectrum:

Objecthood	**Thinghood**		**Agenthood**
Tree	Huorn	Ent	

In the Tolkien's Middle Earth, Ents are trees what shepherds are to sheep. Huorns occupy a liminal space—one could consider them "undomesticated"— as different from trees as

wild animals are from sheep. These categorizations are not solid, however, as the characters observe that some trees become more Entish over time, while aging Ents become more tree-ish, ceasing to move and speak, and becoming (eventually) nearly indistinguishable from trees. Huorns occupy a nebulous position between tree and Ent and reflect this vacillation.

In Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, the main Ent character, Treebeard is described by Merry and Pippin as:

> a large Man-like, almost Troll-like, figure, at least fourteen foot high, very sturdy, with a tall head, and hardly any neck. Whether it was clad in stuff like green and grey bark, or whether that was its hide, was difficult to say. At any rate the arms, at a short distance from the trunk, were not wrinkled, but covered with a brown smooth skin. The large feet had seven toes each. The lower part of the long face was covered with a sweeping grey beard, bushy, almost twiggy at the roots, thin and mossy at the ends. (71)

Representation of Ents in visual adaptation is understood in two different ways, in one case emphasizing the man-like attributes and in the other, the tree-like. In Peter Jackson's 2002 film adaptation, the appearance of the Ents gestures towards this tree-ish diversity, while maintaining a literal woody aesthetic. Jackson's interpretation pulls Treebeard's representation more firmly toward the Huorn category.

Figure 16. March of the Ents, *The Two Towers*

Alternatively, the 2006 musical adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* pulls the Ents' representation firmly in the opposite direction of Jackson, and features highly humanized interpretations: wizards on stilts with a green, leafy lighting. Given that the word "Ent" deriving from the Anglo-Saxon for Giant (indeed Tolkien refers to them as primarily "Man-like"), the musical's interpretation is perhaps the most literal, even if it conflates the wizards or Istari with the Ents.

Figure 17. "The Ents"

Treebeard's differing manifestations inhabit a curious position on the continuum, because in those representations where Treebeard is more human than treelike, there is a strong resemblance in role between Treebeard and the Lorax. The Lorax is a being who serves as interlocutor for the truffula trees in Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* who in no way resembles a tree himself, except that in this world, both truffula trees and the Lorax have fluffy fur/foliage. Both Treebeard and the Lorax speak of their stewardship to visiting humans (or hobbits), yet only Treebeard is plotted on the continuum because of his described treeness.

Spirit

Figure 18. Spirit

Spirits are naturally more complicated as the understanding of spirit is culturally specific. While trees with spirits or spirit trees, such as understood in pantheism or Shinto, do not necessarily take on human form, there is an abounding genre of tree/plant spirits that have human form as a means for communication and/or relatability with humans, or a means by which to distinguish them from trees. A popularized example of this are the ancient Greek representations of nymphs who have become a strong basis for derivative imaginings in western culture.

Nymphs are nature spirits from Greek and Latin mythology, embodying various natural phenomenon and locations (usually) as young women. Initially straightforward, the language surrounding these figures introduces a level of complexity. Nymphs are most often associated with naiads, spirits of the water, but there are a range of examples that include plants and trees, referred to as hamadryads. The term dryad refers specifically to spirits of oak trees, though colloquially the term is often interchangeable with hamadryad (just as nymph is with naiad). To make the nomenclature even more complex, the most famous Greek myths featuring these beings and involving trees is that of Apollo and Daphne, where a water nymph (naiad) is transformed by her father into a

laurel tree as a means of escape the young god's advances. The most classic image of a human-tree transformation in western art, then, depicts not a tree spirit but a water spirit.

Figure 19. Mosaic from Pompeii features the Pan and a hamadryad (tree spirit).

Alien

Figure 20. Alien

Tree or plant aliens occupy a particularly visible arena given the extent of the western horror, science fiction and superhero genres. Beginning as early as the Victorian era, monstrous plants have taken on high levels of animacy which have led to their connections with extra terrestrials. The animated plant-alien flourished with Christian Nyby's film *The Thing from Another World* (1951), while plant monsters in the noir film *Little Shop of Horrors*, and novel *Day of the Triffids* were transformed in later adaptations to include alien origin stories (*Little Shop* in 1986 and *Day of the Triffids* in

1962). There is a surprising range in manifestation of plant-aliens but all display high levels of animism and agency.

Marvel Comic's plant-alien-superhero Groot has gained prominence in contemporary cinema with the 2014 *Guardians of the Galaxy* film, with his first graphic appearance in the 1960s where he was more of a supervillain than the lovable character gracing screens today. Groot is portrayed as an alien tree-like humanoid with the capacity for rapid growth, regeneration, and control over other trees/plants. The phrase "I am Groot" is the only way he appears to verbally communicate with other characters in the Marvel universe, although it appears that the words are laden with unarticulated meaning left unintelligible to the audience without a translator. The only variation of his stock phrase in the films comes at the end of *Guardians of the Galaxy* when Groot sacrifices himself to save his friends, explaining "We are Groot." In addition to this pluralistic notion of self as a tree alien (which vegetal philosopher Michael Marder would certainly approve of), the other characters point out that Groot has no understanding of sex or gender.[6] The comic book interpretation of Groot is certainly less directly humanoid being more fluid in shape due to the flexibility of the graphic medium. His representation is also less positive than the film, as the character was initially introduced as an alien invader capturing humans for experimentation.

Mascot

[6] Groot is a regenerative tree alien, however, on at least one occasion in the film Groot produces glowing seeds as a source of light. In the film, this is an aesthetically pleasing, innocent power; in plant terms, Groot is disseminating seeds.

Figure 21. Mascot

The final subcategory for the Animated High section is that of Mascot. For lack of a better word, mascot here encompasses traditional school mascots (like the Stanford tree mascot) as well as other tree costumes and cosplays in which there is no contextual narrative for the person dressed as a tree to be thought of as tree itself. For example, Groot is a tree-alien-superhero/villain within the parameters of the Marvel Comics, but a child dressed as Groot for Halloween is outside of that world. Their performance is more akin to a mascot: in the world of Marvel Comics Groot *IS* a tree-alien while in the world of children dressing for Halloween, Groot is a costume. There is little probability of the audience assuming the child is a tree, even though the performance is based on Groot costuming. Elizabeth Wilson claims in *Adorned in Dreams* that “Dress is the frontier between the self and the not-self” (148) and “Clothing marks an unclear boundary ambiguously, and unclear boundaries disturb us” (147). Such are the boundaries between mascots and tree costumes, where there are varying levels of performative commitment to the tree representation. One distinction might be between the child dressed as Groot for Halloween versus a person cosplaying (costume play) as Groot at a convention, where attention to detail and accuracy in the performance is paramount.

Treeness and plantness are often incorporated into costumes without the goal of representing a literal tree, or tree being. Just the way Adam and Eve’s leafy outfits in the

Garden of Eden are significant but do not transform them into literal plants, tree and plant costuming is significant when used for aesthetic purposes. Beyond the inclusion of flower crowns and corsages, there are many instances where full tree and plant costuming has entered popular culture, notably in Miss Universe pageants. It is not uncommon in beauty pageants for the extraordinary nationalistic costumes to be based on flashy birds, or flowers, but while birds and flowers can be ornamental and still recognizable, tree costumes tend to incorporate the whole body in a singular representation. In 2014, Miss Venezuela Migbelis Castellanos dressed for the National Costume division as the golden araguaney tree, National Tree of Venezuela.

Figure 22. Miss Venezuela, 2014

The following year (2015) saw Miss Nigeria, Debbie Collins, as an equally nationalistic palm tree.[7]

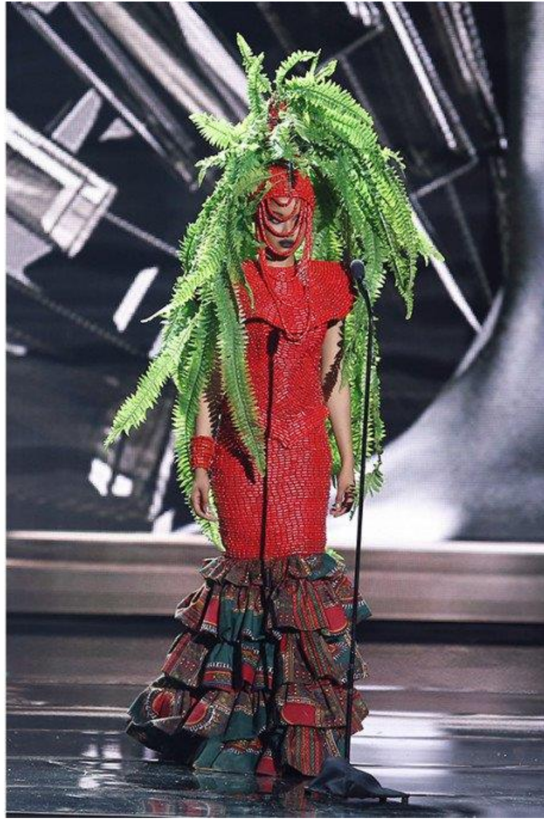

Figure 23. Miss Nigeria, 2015

The Possibility of a Circle

While the continuum thus far has been set out as linear, there is the possibility of reconstructing the continuum as a circle. On the farthest end of agenthood, the vegetal trappings of humanoid plant beings are aesthetic rather than integral to the character, meaning that the plant entity itself has come full circle to be considered once again as a scenic element. It is important to say, however, that participation is not relegated to one

[7] I personally cannot wait for an arboreal, maple inspired Miss Canada.

side of the spectrum or the other, as has been demonstrated in the contents of previous chapters. Rather, like visibility, participation is often occluded on the left side of the continuum and taken for granted on the right.

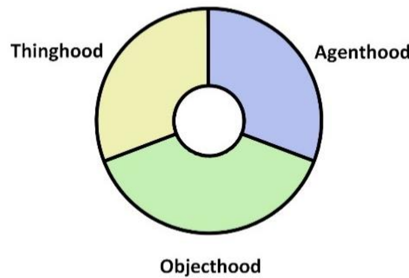

Figure 24. Continuum as circle

This can be illustrated by examining Miss Venezuela's costume. Her costume (compared to Miss Nigeria's) uses the golden araguaney as a means of emphasizing her female body, not the attributes of the tree itself. Miss Venezuela's golden tree costume does not obfuscate her body nor her face. She is a female body, first and foremost—an agent with minimal tree characteristics. Due to the coloration, it fits in with the generally flashy costumes we are accustomed to viewing in such pageantry, and is hardly recognizable as a specific tree (unless that tree had up and gone to Vegas). The golden tree costume therefore adheres to the expectations of the competition, using its tree-ness to awe the audience. The referent is clearly evoked without obscuring the body of the model. Miss Nigeria's costume is certainly more tree-like—emphasizing the tree to the point where it obfuscates her face—which is also what made critical reception of her costume laughable. In the context of the Miss Universe pageant, the focus is on the

attractive framing of the human body, not in the accuracy or completeness of the costume.

While fundamentally similar (they both were costumed as nationalistic trees) there is a big difference between the performances of tree pageantry. The elements of the Animated Tree (high) are secured in Miss Nigeria's costume—even if they are out of place for the competition—but in Miss Venezuela's costume, it is a little more complicated. Technically, they occupy the same section on the continuum, however, I argue that the tree elements on Miss Venezuela's costume are treated primarily as scenic sparkle, that it would be possible for the same costume to move full circle on the continuum to Scenery, that which is additive and background to the privileged human body. The golden araguaney is a colourful backdrop rather than an integral part of the costumed character.

To sufficiently explore how the continuum can help to tease out human-plant interactions in performed encounters, it is helpful to think historically. How have trees, plants, and vegetal being been incorporated into theatrical practice? The following chapter will address the treatment of trees in the history of the theatre, following the structure of the continuum from objects, to things, and finally to agents.

Figure 25. Willow on the Grounds of Cawdor Castle, Scotland

FROM NŌ TO GODOT:

EXAMINING REPRESENTATIONS OF TREES IN THEATRE HISTORY

Given that scholarship surrounding the history of the theatre largely overlooks or underplays trees as important to meaning making, re-examining texts and productions for their treatment of trees and tree participation allows for "reversal, parody and change" of the initial scenario which treats the encounter between human and tree as between agent and object (Taylor 31). The scenario's repeatability can be viewed within each section (the slight variations of people as trees, for example) and across (interactions with nature more generally) while still flexibly accommodating the changes and transformations which allow synercentrism.[8] Initially in this chapter, I focus on the common use of trees as scenery or symbol, which is the conjuring of a physical location to produce both the "scene" as a physical environment as well as the "highly codified environment that gives viewers pertinent information" (29). Throughout the chapter, however, I argue the range and diversity of encounters with and applications of trees on stage asks us to "situate ourselves in relationship to it; as participants, spectators, or witnesses," and in doing so, negotiate our assumptions and habits in place about trees as participating in the scenario.

The application of Diana Taylor's scenario model[9] aids in the understanding of the encounters between trees, actors, and audience members in the case studies of this chapter. The examples and treatments demonstrate the "multifaceted work in the scenario

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[8] My theory of synercentrism may be found in 'Towards a Tree Continuum,' and refers to the possibility of encountering environmental subjects not as resources, objects, or spirits (poetic), but as participants in the encounter.

[9] Detailed in the introduction of this dissertation.

[of environmental encounter] itself" (Taylor 31). In each, audiences are asked to confront the embodiment of the social actors—in this case, trees—particularly in those instances where the subject's embodiment is a surprise. Scenario "structures our understanding" (28) and by examining how trees are encountered in theatre and performance, our current understandings are revealed while new frames of encounter are simultaneously evoked.

The following sections should be understood as extensions of an interconnected whole, like fingers on a hand, or, branches on a trunk. While the prop tree in *Matsukaze* is a scenic device it is also a tree/person to at least one character. Similarly, the materiality of the tree in *Waiting for Godot* affects the characters' actions as much as the tree in *The Apple-Tree* does, albeit in different ways. Many of the examples are initially understood as stage objects by the audience, while their treatment and/or behaviour opens room for their participation in the plot. Others are culturally understood to be spiritual, or have spiritual connotations, which link to Herndl and Brown's three modes of persuasion (nature as resource, object, or spirit) but (as will be demonstrated through the analysis of their treatment) these trees demand a materiality that resists a solely poetic treatment. This chapter is broken into four sections, as follows:

- Trees as Scenic Devices
- Trees as Plot Devices
- Trees as People/People as Trees
- Trees as Themselves

These four sections correspond generally to the tree continuum (applied in text where helpful) as:

- Trees as Scenic Devices — Objecthood
- Trees as Plot Devices — Objecthood - Thinghood
- Trees as People/People as Trees — Agenthood
- Trees as Themselves — Thinghood-Agenthood

The first section addresses trees as scenic devices by analysing the hallmarks of traditional Japanese nō theatre, and specifically the fourteenth century play by Kan'ami (reworked by Zeami), *Matsukaze*. The second section examines trees which contribute to and participate in plot development, or on which the plot hinges. I examine specifically the events in the Dutch medieval play *The Apple-Tree* as well as the curious role apple trees play in other (mostly European) contexts. The third section, trees as people (and people as trees), encompasses a large area than that of the first two sections, looking at both Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Pinocchio*, the original Victorian-era novel by Carlo Collodi and the National Ballet of Canada's 2017 interpretation of it. The final section, trees who "perform" on stage as themselves, focuses on Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* for the possibility of understanding a tree as a tree, as well as host of other things.

In amongst these dominant examinations are brief discussion of trees in productions of the Canadian "North," the practice of apple wassailing in cideries, tree mascots, and theatre in the park. I have also incorporated into the four sections particularly poignant trees from historical texts such as the apple tree in "Yr Afallenau" from the Welsh Black Book of Carmarthen; Ask/Embla and Yggdrasil from the Norse *Poetic Edda* and *Prose Edda*; the effigies of carved wood and Lady Blood's interactions

with both the calabash tree (One Hunahpu) and the Red Sacrifice Tree in the Mayan *Popol Vuh*; and "The Wood of the Suicides" in Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*.

Trees as Scenic Devices

Perhaps the most direct function of a tree on stage is to evoke a background or a situation in which the ensuing action will take place. The tree sets the stage, and then is promptly set aside in favour of the dramatic action, even when that action uses the tree as an interactive device to hide behind, climb onto, etc. The tree on stage in this sense is scenic, "[a]n object placed in its setting, existing both in itself and as part of its background. Participation in a context" (Burke 29). I am suggesting here that the common perception of trees as primarily scenic devices (Objecthood on the continuum) leads to their invisibilization in the history of the theatre. When we start looking at the theatre *for* the trees, a vast diversity in use and representation emerges.

Trees are ubiquitous in many different theatrical lineages yet in contemporary productions we pay them little heed beyond setting (literally) a tone, theme, or location for the action to occur. Rarely do trees play specific roles or take matters into their own hands, and yet they play a crucial role in scenic development and circumstance. They can be pivotal place-makers, by evoking imaginaries or restricting/facilitating actor movement. Even when trees are central to action, such as the magical vanishing tree in Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, scholars "afford the tree prop only passing notice in their explorations of magic and dramaturgical innovation in the play" (Nardizzi 32). The dismissal of trees, then, occurs even when the individual production affords them significant action and contribution to the plot. Kenneth Burke's term,

"terministic screen" accurately reflects the ready dismissal of trees as anything but scenery, as for him a terministic screen is a kind of lens produced from language[10] by which we experience the world (ideologically, biologically).

> We *must* use terministic screens, since we can't say anything without the use of terms; whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another. (Burke 50, original emphasis)

The language identified by Herndl and Brown through their model for environmental rhetoric certainly exposes the terministic screens in place which limit or deny arboreal (or, more generally, environmental) agency. In the theatre, however, practices of suspension of disbelief, puppetry, and manipulating objects into subjecthood are common ground, making the theatre's general dismissal of trees a particularly specific failing. The trend of relying on trees as scenic elements to represent generic "environments" is so common in the world of theatre that it obscures any desire to cast trees as anything else, and the language frequently found in scripts reflects this.

The power of trees as scenic elements, however, should not be downplayed just because they do not take the spotlight the same way as an actor might. Pamela Howard's *What is Scenography* addresses the role of scenic elements as completing the theatrical experience, with equal, if primarily supportive, importance to the action itself. As a collaboration,

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[10] Burke's focus on language as producing ways of seeing and interacting meaningfully contributes to this study, specifically because the ways in which trees are discursively treated pigeon-hole them into the areas mapped out by Herndl and Brown in their model for environmental rhetoric. Theatre and performance, in their embodied forms, present a possibility to connect (or disconnect, as it were) the language to the trees, and in doing so, offer the possibility for the expansion of these screens.

> A space is dead until the performers inhabit it and become the mobile element of the stage picture, telling the story which is enhanced by the use of that space," both "springing from and being dependant upon the other (Howard xxv)

Howard's 'dead space' is enlivened by moving actors, but it also serves as a catalyst for the movement, direction, play, etc. "These are powerful objects that on first glance may not seem to have anything to do with the subject, but have often become central to the scene" (Howard xxv) and as such they cannot be dismissed or downplayed in their importance.

As set pieces, trees can convey meaning both spatially and temporally: they can conjure regions, biomes, nations, as well as seasons. The appearance of a tree on stage isn't always just to add 'green' to the production, but to contribute to the world of the action, or reflect the quality of the action or mood. Although a staple in any performance where the 'outdoors' or 'nature' is evoked, the trees themselves are often considered to be supplemental, even when the effect of their presence shapes the production. Their presence feeds cultural imaginaries and regional stereotypes, while leaving little or no trace in reviews or production notes.

Canadian theatre, in particular, has a penchant for using trees to emphasize country and the 'Northern-ness'—a tradition which dates to the late 1920's with playwright Herman Voaden and the white masculinized imaginary of Canada.

> In putting *his* North on stage, Voaden took inspiration from paintings by the Group of Seven, especially those by Lawren Harris and Tom Thompson, and he created sets with stylized rocks, hills, and trees flooded with silver-grey or blue light. (Grace xv)

In more Canadian contemporary productions, such as *Sled*,

> … Judith Thompson goes to great lengths to specify a number of visual and aural details which, she hopes, will represent North to her southern audiences; these

> include birch trees, the Northern Lights, the semblances of snow, wolf howls and snowy owl hoots (Grace xvii)

As a Canadian from Northwestern Ontario—the semiotic 'home' of many a 'North'— I am frustrated at seeing my own home represented poorly or stereotypically, spurring on my interest in the North on stage, and subsequently, trees as North on stage. While the Group of Seven's[11] work is powerful and ingrained in the national imaginary, a lived relationship with environmental subjects dismantles the voyeuristic gaze that presents untouched landscapes.

> Cindy Cowen, a southerner who has lived in the North, suggests that the land determines how northerners see themselves … If this is so, then staging the North will involve an attempt, at least, to *re*present who we think we are. (Grace xx)

The environmental representation, particularly through the design/inclusion of trees, would have a direct impact both on the characters in the play and a northerner's ability to see themselves in the production.

First Nations theatre in Canada takes on a more dynamic approach to the inclusion of trees in scenic design, allowing for room for transformation and reciprocity between actor and scenic element. In the now canonical Monique Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (premiered in 1990 in Toronto), the setting description takes this flexibility to heart:

> The theme of the set, costumes and props is also transformation; objects and set pieces appear to be one thing but become something else; they can be turned inside-out to reveal another reality. The pine of cloth becomes a garment, a canal, a volcano; the gilded portrait frame is pulled away from the wall where it has been camouflaged in the foliage of the tree and the rainforest; the pyramid

[11] The Canadian landscape painters from the 1920s, called 'The Algonquin School' or 'The Group of Seven' consisted initially of Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald, and Frederick Varely. Associated with the group, though not official members, are Tom Thompson and Emily Carr.

> becomes the staircase of a Vegas-style show; and the limbs of the tree of life can be a playground or a place from which to hang oneself. (Mojica 17)

On Canada's west coast, Marie Clement's *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* (2000) also uses transformation in the scenic design for disturbing affect. Clement's play covers serial murders of native women in Vancouver all ruled as "accidental", and the trees featured on stage function as both scenery and stand ins for the bodies of the women. The sound effects of trees falling (logged by men) and splitting open echo the murders. The artificial props—furniture, etc.—take the place of the murderers, their impossible absence in the dominant narrative made vivid through the staging where household objects come to life and violently destroy the women around them. The absence of the murderer's human form, the agent in the act, requires the scenic elements to take up that role, the impossibility of which clearly illustrates the absurdity in labelling the murders "accidental."

In the history of theatre, however, not all forests evoked in the text manifest as tree props. Shakespeare scholar Vin Nardizzi argues that gesture and deictic language has the power to transform the set, the stage, even the playhouse, into "virtual woodlands" (22). This process is called a *fiat sylvius* (a term by Michael D. Bristol) that holds within the dramatic framing the power of transformation. It functions as a signal for the suspension of disbelief and a catalyst for imagination. Nardizzi uses *fiat sylvius* to explain the frequent blurring between the wooden playhouse and the woodlands of England in early modern plays in his 2013 book *Wooden Os: Shakespeare's Theatres and England's Trees*.

The *fiat sylvius* that conjures forests and trees through gesture and language then can evoke trees on the stage even when the scenic design erases them materially. In Canadian theatre this can resolve the lure of hyper realism, while in the early modern period, it worked to reveal the "tree" in other stage objects.

> Shakespeare routinely conscripted the structural woodenness of the theatre to perform the role of tree, woods, forest, orchard, and park. When a character invokes such a woodland setting verbally, his or her words indicate that the actor also physically motions towards some thing. This thing could be a stage tree prop, but it could just as easily have been one of the elongated, trunk-shaped posts of painted wood supporting the heavens. (Nardizzi 21)

The materiality of the theatrical space, and the recognition of wood as tree and tree as wood produces a host of scenic possibilities.

> Unlike other structures in "wooden" London, theatres called frequent (but not invariable) attention to themselves as woodlands in performance. [..] Shakespeare's acting troupe could have supplemented such verbal prompting by employing tree stage props. These devices, which were likely wooden planks cut, redundantly, into the shapes of trees, could have been trotted out for particular scenes or remained onstage as a backdrop for the duration of the performance. But the inclusion of these objects in a late sixteenth-century inventory of stage props in *Henslowe's Diary* suggests that tree props worked to conjure a specific dramaturgical effect rather than create a general sense of "forest" or "woods": the Admiral's Men had on hand a "baye tree," a "tree of gowlden Apelles," and a "Tantelouse tre" (Nardizzi 20-21)

John Leland and Alan Baragona's *Shakespeare's Prop Room* offers a slightly different view of the history of tree props on the early modern stage. While they agree that specific tree props were constructed, there is also evidence of generalized forests and woods against which these specific props would gain higher visibility.

> The theatre was known to construct stage trees if necessary. Chambers cites "lathe for the hollo tree" among expenses for a 1573-74 Court Play. But they were often not necessary, and some people even see trees where the text mentions none. The controversial astrologer Simon Forman wrote that he saw Macbeth and Banquo "Ridinge thorowe a wod," that in *Cymbeline* Imogen comes upon "The Caue in the wodes," and that in *The Winter's Tale* "the child was carried into bohemia &

> there laid in a forrest &brought vp by a Sheppard." Although none of these three Shakespeare texts mentions trees, G.F. Reynolds thinks Forman wrote what he saw, and that what he saw was "a collection of trees, perhaps supplemented by a painted curtain." (Leland and Baragona 82)

Between Leland and Baragona's description of prop trees and Nardizzi, it is evident that there are two major applications on the early modern stage. In *Shakespeare's Prop Room* trees seem to manifest as scenery, appearing for audiences even when not specifically referenced in the text. Nardizzi's argument regarding the specificity of particular prop trees however introduces trees as participating meaningfully to productions *because* of their specificity. While I will discuss this further in the chapter, we can see it clearly at play in *Macbeth* where even if the "wodes" were debatably staged, the tree props handled by Malcolm's army and the third apparition would have been practical. The combination of mental conjurations and material props work together to produce evocative set designs in the history of theatre in which environmental subject, trees, can participate meaningfully. In the following section, I will discuss the Japanese theatrical tradition nō, which uses pine trees in its scenic design, and specifically the play *Matsukaze*'s inclusion of an additional pine prop integral to its plot.

***Matsukaze*: Japanese Nō Theatre**

What better theatrical tradition to first discuss the ubiquity of trees than traditional Japanese nō theatre which features up to four trees as central scenic devices, regardless of production or story? Traditional nō[12] theatres as seen today are architecturally based on Shinto shrines (adapted to this form from earlier circular constructs), Shinto being the

[12] In this dissertation I will be using the spelling "nō" while maintaining the spelling from external sources where quoted as "noh"

native religion of Japan before the sixth century (Fisher Sorgenfrei 91-2). A pantheistic religion, Shinto "assume[s] that everything—trees, birds, seas, animals, mountains, wind, and thunder, etc.—has its own soul or spirit called *kami*" (91). The Shinto belief system is reflected in nō theatre not only with architecture but also by the inclusion of trees in the set design.

Shinto is not the only religion which impacted the development of nō theatre, although it is the most readily conveyed through the scenic design. As Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei explains in the section on nō in *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*,

> The texts are primarily Buddhist, emphasizing that actions in one lifetime determine how a soul is reincarnated in the next. They also emphasize salvation in the afterlife. In contrast, performance elements derive from aspects of Shinto (or Shinto-Buddhism). These female-oriented elements include demon-quelling dances, stamping feet, ritual purifications, possession by gods, the stage architecture, and more importantly, the presence of spirits and ghosts. (98)

Architecturally, the stage is a square, roofed building with four posts and a long bridgeway (*hashigakari*) on the left, leading between the stage and the greenroom. "…[T]he *hashigakari* is seen as a passage from this world (the realm of the audience) to the world of the spirits (embodied by the actor who crosses this bridge)" (Fisher Sorgenfrei 94). Along the bridgeway are three pine trees, decreasing in size to "give a sense of distance" (the-noh.com) at which important blocking may occur in the production. These pines are referred to as *sannomatsu* (third pine), *ninomatsu* (second pine), and *ichinomatsu* (first pine), per their position.[13] It is a hallmark of Shintoism that trees line the passage between worlds. Today, pines are still used in Japanese Shinto new

[13] In indoor stages, these are often artificial replicas.

years' celebrations, where celebrants place *kadomatsu* or "gate pines" in front of their doorways to temporarily house kami. The bridgeway pines then herald the arrival and the departure of spirits in the drama, melding religion and secular performance.

Before moving in for a closer look at the use of pine tree imagery on the nō stage, it is helpful to note that Fisher Sorgenfrei also acknowledges Buddhism as another great influence on nō theatre, particularly in ways that have resonance with the earlier description of Shinto. Her distinctions between Shinto's architectural influence and Buddhism's textual influence on nō, which convenient, can be misleading. As Royall Tyler argues, the Buddhism in the plays is difficult to locate as they "are not exactly untidy, but they do not really yield their patterns easily" (39). Rather, esoteric Buddhism "flavors Noh so thoroughly that few specific instances of its presence stands out" and that "One finds a clear intuition that all things, animate or inanimate, are alive" (24). Untidy as well in its doctrine: Tyler adds that this version of Buddhism, as found in the Japanese medieval period that brought forth nō theatre, is "common, average Buddhism" (39) with no clear lineage or rigor from schools or sects. "The Buddhism of Noh is a Buddhism which admits stones, plants, trees, humans, spirits, gods, and Buddhas into an open brotherhood of the numinous" (39). The most prominent motif from esoteric Buddhism employed in nō (according to Tyler) is the practice of twinning, and introducing non-dual opposites. Many special trees are bifurcated, either physically[14] or metaphorically. In the

[14] Although the bifurcation of trees has a positive and spiritual heritage, in recent years, the splitting of trees in Japan have taken on a more negative tone. Post 2011 in F1NPP, the area surrounding Fukushima, "morphological changes in Japanese fir, a Japanese endemic native conifer" have revealed "significantly increased number of morphological defects," specifically, bifurcation (Yoshito and San'ei). Rather than a single central spire along which all other branches grow, the trees are split into two, and the central spire

play *Takasago*, for example, there are two trees, the "pine of Sumiyoshi" and the "pine of Takasago" that despite being separated by great distance, "the communication between them is nonetheless everlasting and complete, so that separation in space is mere appearance, and the gap between past and present likewise" (Tyler 28). Therefore, in my discussion of the use of the pine tree on the nō stage, it will be important to keep in mind that while the scenic design has many connections to the Shinto religion, the Buddhism of nō is imbedded throughout, twinned like the pines.

The main stage is bare, save for two painted backdrops, one parallel to the audience and one perpendicular. The perpendicular panel has bamboo,[15] while the back panel most visible to the audience, the *kagami-ita*, features the impressive *oimatsu*, or old pine tree.

Figure 26. National Noh Theatre Stage via the-noh.com

essentially disappears. Although not yet proven, Yoshito Watanabe and San'ei Ichikawa's research shows, there is an increase in deletions of the leader shoots of the fir trees in those "that elongated after the spring of 2012, a year after the accident" and could be causally linked to "contamination by radionuclides" in that area.

[15] Bamboo is also included in the kadomatsu arrangements.

The oimatsu is “said to be the eternal backdrop of noh,” and rumored to be based on the Yōgō Pine tree at the Kasuga Shrine in Nara (the-noh.com). Others “believe that the image is a reminder of the time when Noh plays were performed outdoors at temples” emphasizing a scenic origin (Newton). The oimatsu has become so enmeshed with the genre that is virtually the logo of nō. All plays in the nō traditional are produced in front of the same kagami-ita, even if the action of the drama takes place indoors. Whether in a forest or a palace, the defining scenic element of nō (or the comic kyogen, also performed on the same stage) is the oimatsu, emphasizing the Shinto and Buddhist roots of the performance and the crossover between worlds in the repertoire of performance. The continual presence of the oimatsu and the bridgeway trees works in competing ways, however, for while they define each performance by physically manifesting their presence, they are also easily dismissed as trees, understood instead only as symbols of spiritual meaning. This tension becomes problematic in contemporary adaptations where the tree-ness of the oimatsu is downplayed in favour of other significations of spirit worlds and the bridgeway trees are removed entirely.

Apart from being consistently used in the overall stage design, tree props are rarely used in performance. However, in addition to the four scenic trees featured in all nō plays, the popular play *Matsukaze* (originally by Kan’ami but substantially reworked by his son, Zeami) includes a prop pine tree that is integral to the plot. Because nō is so minimalistic in terms of set pieces, the inclusion of another pine tree is notable. The prop itself is described in the stage directions as a “stand with a pine sapling set into it” and moved by the stage assistant. It is unclear in the translation by Royall Tyler whether this

prop is a living tree, a severed sapling, or a representative branch, though the drawings of the prop would suggest either of the latter two. The description provided in the dialogue is of “a solitary pine tree with a wooden tablet fixed to it, and a poem slip hanging from the tablet” and a “lonely pine tree … ever green and untouched by autumn” (21-2), much like the painted or representative pines already in use in on the bridgeway and oimatsu.

Matsukaze is one of the most well regarded of extant nō plays, written by Kan’ami (no date). The text was presumably revised and extended by Kan’ami’s son, Zeami, a famous nō playwright and dramatic theorist who wrote several treatises on actor training and methodology. Zeami’s work is still highly influential on the production of nō and surrounding scholarship. Katheryn Wylie-Marques explains that “only recently has scholarship revealed that Zeami was closely involved with Sôtô Zen *shugyô* and that Zen aesthetics and cultivation practices may have deeply inspired his conception of actor training” (132). The movement of the actors on stage can be likened, for example, to the practices of walking and *zazen* meditations as found in several different Zen Buddhist traditions. In the Rinzai school, the practice of *zazen* (mindful seated meditation reaching toward enlightenment) is achieved using *kôans*—unsolvable stories or statements—for the practitioner to think upon and expand their knowledge of the self and the world. I must admit that it seems much of this dissertation has arisen from a similar practice, as I have continually thought on the *kôan* regarding the sound (or absence of sound) of a tree falling in the forest while sitting immobile in front of the computer or while walking. In regards to Zen Buddhism, Zeami “calls the actor ‘a vessel of nature’” and that “the fundamental properties of dance and song have always arisen from the Buddha nature

that is stored in all sentient beings" (Wylie-Marques 138). Here there appears to be a rift: in Shinto and esoteric Buddhism, all beings are alive, not just sentient ones. However, in nō and in medieval Japan, there is significant cross pollination and blurring between belief systems. In nō—and particularly in *Matsukaze*—there is room for the stillness of *zazen* and Zen to complement the Shinto/esoteric Buddhist system of belief that grants liveness to all beings, so that the pine trees have complex layers of representation and being that the actors can interact with and inhabit.

The plot of the drama *Matsukaze*[16] begins when a priest encounters a pine tree (the prop) at the Bay of Suma that "has a curious look. There must be a story connected with it" (21). A villager explains that the tree is linked with the memory of two fisher girls, Matsukaze and Murasame, and the priest says a prayer in their memory. The priest seeks lodging at a fisherman's hut, inhabited by two fisher girls who return from a day at work wheeling and interacting with a brine cart, lamenting their hardships. After some resistance, they agree to let the priest stay with them, but react in shock when he reads the poem slip from the tree written by Yukihira. The girls explain that they are the ghosts of Matusake and Murasame, who died in misery upon the death of Yukihira whom they loved. The girls interact with a cloak and court hat (Yukihira's) as the chorus recounts their story. Finally, Matusake enters a wild state during which she believes that the pine tree *is* Yukihira. She becomes mad, dancing around the tree. The play ends with the chorus describing a storm, concluding:

> Your dream is over. Day has come.
> Last night you heard the autumn rain;

[16] I am using the translation by Royall Tyler from *Twenty Plays of the Nō theatre*.

This morning all that is left
Is the wind in the pines,
The wind in the pines. (32)

The drama uses the word play of pine (in Japanese, as in English, matsu means both pine and wait/long for) and the names of the girls to suggest elemental qualities: Matsukaze translating to Pine Wind and Murasame to Autumn Rain. The two portray the Buddhist quality of non-dual opposites, each performing their grief in different but complementary ways.

The actor's movement is specifically dictated in the script by trees: the three bridgeway trees and the prop tree.[17] The different stage trees, however, prompt different movement and interaction by the actors. Teemu Paavolainen explains in "From Props to Affordances: An Ecological Approach to Theatrical Objects" that there are two distinct kinds of stage objects, attached and detached. Attached objects "articulate possibilities for locomotion—paths and barriers, enclosures and occluding surfaces—but not for manipulation" while detached objects are "easily graspable—as are prototypical props" (121). The distinct qualities Paavolainen describes are demonstrated in the difference between the three bridgeway pines and the prop tree. The three bridgeway pines are attached objects, featured in all traditional nō stage design, and indicate clear, unchanging positional movement for productions. In *Matsukaze*, the entrance of the two ghost sisters is described as follows:

[17] Interestingly the oimatsu on the kagami-ita is never referenced in the script. Further research would be required to assess whether the oimatsu is *ever* referenced in scripts or acknowledged by the actors in performance—an undertaking too large for the purposes of this dissertation.

> *Murasame enters and comes down the bridgeway as far as the first pine. She wears the* tsure *mask. Matsukaze follows her and stops at the third pine. She wears the* wakaonna *mask. Each carries a water pail. They face each other.* (22)

The position of the actor's body according to the first, second, or third pines organizes the entrances and exits, and makes the bridgeway a dynamic performing space. It also suggests importance of character, as the shite will often move to the third pine (closest to the main stage) while the tsure will remain at the first pine upon their entrance. In the case of *Matsukaze*, Murasame is the tsure while Matsukaze is the shite. The hierarchy of the characters and the movements of the actors are all defined by the bridgeway trees, as recognizable for the audience as the traditional masks and costumes might be. In addition, the moving of the women between the bridgeway pines may also indicate or foreshadow their ghostly existence.

The prop tree in *Matsukaze* however is a decidedly detached theatrical object which allows for a different kind of actor-object encounter. The first indication that the prop tree is different than the other trees used in the set design is that it is brought onto stage by the stage assistant as the first action in the play. It is set at the front of the stage, shortly followed by the entrance of the priest. In this manner, the tree is made to be a dynamic, moveable prop from the first moment of the play, similar to the actors who likewise enter and exit. Even though it is not moved again over the course of the play (or at least, any additional movement is not referred to in the stage directions) it is clearly designated as detached because of the act of carrying it on stage. In comparison, the three bridgeway pines and the oimatsu are all attached, persisting beyond the constraints of the production, to the point that they supply referential constancy from play to play. The prop

tree, additionally, is specifically interacted with *as a tree*. While the bridgeway trees are place markers, their tree-ness does not necessarily feed the action or scene. Their constancy makes them overlooked. The prop tree on the other hand is unique to the production and therefore affords (to use Paavolainen's term) a different kind of interaction.

The prop tree is encountered by all the characters in *Matsukaze*, but is only directly addressed by the priest and Matsukaze. The priest speaks about the pine as exposition while Matsukaze interacts with the prop tree both as itself and in her fantasy that it is Yukihira. The priest's dialogue calls attention to the prop and its centrality in the story—not just as an idea but as a material object that will be critically interacted with. Without the prop tree, the idea of the lover as a tree could still be evoked by the attached objects on the stage (say, the oimatsu) but because it is specifically a detached prop being hailed, the audience is made aware of its importance, materially and to the story.

Matsukaze has the most dynamic encounter with the prop. Before she 'sees' the tree as Yukihira, she "stares down the bridgeway as though something were coming after her" (30) as though to suggest the entrance (or desire for the entrance) of an additional character. She then returns her attention to the prop:

> Oh joy! Look! Over there!
> Yukihira has returned!
> (*She rises, staring at the pine tree.*)
> He calls me by my name, Pine Wind! (30)

Although Murasame attempts to convince her sister that the prop is not Yukihira, Matsukaze argues that the tree and Yukihira are one and the same.

> (*She looks at the pine tree*.)

This pine *is* Yukihira! (30)

Moving between the first pine on the bridgeway and the prop tree, Matsukaze dances, eventually circling the prop tree "suggesting madness" (31). All the action in this sequence is choreographed in the text to corresponding pines. The movement connecting the bridgeway and the prop tree reminds the audience that these place markers are indeed trees as well as vessels for *kami*: a material and spiritual reality that is sometimes lost in plays where the first, second, and third trees are treated as markers, nothing more. By directing her attention and gestures between the bridgeway and the prop trees, the material tree-ness of the markers is emphasized and transforms the stage, tree-ness being the critical nature for the presence of *kami*. To use Nardizzi's language, *Matsukaze* employs *fiat sylvius* to suddenly fill the nō stage with pines of various sizes and materials—pines that are important because of their tree-ness and therefore spiritual significance, not because of their practical application in blocking.

On the continuum, the trees in *Matsukaze* fall under a wide range of Objecthood. The bridgeway pines and oimatsu all work as Scenery and Objectified trees for this production, while the prop tree expands to encompass Dedicated Tree (as a tree in memoriam of Yukihira). Within the world of the play, the prop tree takes on elements of Agenthood as from Matsukaze's point of view the tree is Yukihira.

Because of the trees usefulness as objects for staging, blocking, scenery, etc. there is considerable adaptation in contemporary productions which erase or drastically alter inherent arboreal nature of these objects. The residual presence of the oimatsu in many modern nō productions becomes a stylistic reference to the genre rather than a

meaningful scenic element that works on multiple levels. Contemporary productions of nō plays sometime even adapt the kagami-ita to include different backdrops for different cultural or political contexts—going as far as a skyscraper in one instance, according to Edith Reisner Newton. Newton discusses a contemporary set for *This Lingering Life* by scenic designer Mikiko Uesugi (2014) that included a three-dimensional deciduous tree behind a scrim where lighting could alter the mood of the scene and acting as "a reminder of the continuity of life from season to season" (Newton). Breaking from tradition by using a deciduous tree introduces a more visible marker of time as the evergreen oimatsu does not show seasonal change. Mikiko's design fuses the traditional tree motif with contemporary affect by applying modern lighting technology usually absent from nō theatre. Because traditional nō uses masks, any lighting must be static enough for the actors to manipulate the mask's expressions by changing the position of the mask according to the angle of the light. Where the mask uses static light to express, Mikiko's static tree makes use of the introduced lighting design to become a dynamic scenic element.

Yoshio Hosokawa's opera *Matsukaze* opened in 2011 and offers a German language interpretation of the nō play. Directed by Chen Shi-Zheng, this version of the nō play is staged in a black box with minimal props and set design, and does away with much of the traditional aspects of nō, including the masks, the set construction (pillars, lighting etc.), the costumes, and the structure of the libretto. The only traditional aspect that remains aside from the basic story line is the oimatsu. However, integral to this discussion is the production's choice to include only a single pine tree rather than the five

included in the original format. There are no bridgeway trees and no prop tree around which the character Matsukaze can dance. The traditional actions dictated by the first, second and third pines, and the watchful presence of the oimatsu, are fused with the prop tree that Matsukaze believes is Yukihira. To use Paavolainen's definitions, the distinct attached and detached objects used in the traditional staging of *Matsukaze* are fused into a singular attached object. By transforming the detached, movable, manipulatable object into a stationary, unchanging attached backdrop, the actual motion afforded by the tree is very different. Matsukaze can no longer move around the tree to signal her madness.

Figure 27. "Matsukaze" by Grace Beahm

The tree itself in the opera is an inverted, massive construction taking up the entirety of the back stage made of surgical tubing (Vassilandonakis). Visually overwhelming, the backdrop is an evocative, ghostly presence appearing almost alien in conjunction with the costumes and other scenic elements. It is hardly even recognizable as a tree, and indeed, does not function in the same way as the trees in traditional nō. In a

review by Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei she describes this interpretation of the oimatsu as "an unwelcome distraction" (286).

> A fuzzy object that at first appeared to be a gigantic piece of seaweed slowly descended from the flies, engulfing about half of the visual space. Eventually, it became evident that it was the pine tree, although it seemed to be upside down, with roots growing from the top, as it floated in the air. (Fisher Sorgenfrei 287)

As a tree, Chen's oimatsu is impossible in form, colour and inversion. The roots are minuscule in comparison to the massive crown of the tree, even though it hangs exposed before a dark abyss. The tree in the opera is more of the spirit or symbolic world than the trees on which the oimatsu is supposedly based. The opera goes as far as to nearly erase all that is tree about the backdrop without removing it completely, favouring the scenic design over the historical lineage and plot device of the tree, or as Fisher Sorgenfrei puts it, "a taste for gaudy spectacle" (286). The inversion works mysteriously, perhaps to signal the shift between worlds in place of the absent bridgeway pines, and its overwhelming presence on the stage is inescapable throughout the production, stamping modernism and contemporary abstraction in the place the pine might stand.

Trees as Plot Devices

Trees as contributors to plot differ substantially from trees as ornamental props—even as important as they might be for the setting of the play's action. To contribute to the plot, it is necessary that the tree forward the action of the play and interact with other characters. They do not need to be sentient or human-like, or even animate to contribute to the plot, although these trappings are frequently applied.

Matsukaze already pushes towards this application of trees in the theatre with its use of the tree-prop. The interactions between it and the characters meaningfully propel

the plot, but stop short in that the prop-tree itself does not *do* anything but represent people (the sisters, Yukihira, etc.). The storyline is built around the prop tree, but only in terms of how the characters interpret the detached object. The tree is a catalyst for the plot, but does not contribute to its development. The three bridgeway pines that appear in all traditional nō staging, additionally, contribute scenically, even aiding in blocking the action, but not as heavily in terms of the production's specific storyline.

Using Kenneth Burke's five elements of dramatism (agent, act, scene, purpose and agency) what is important for a tree to be employed as a plot device is its ability to "act" within the play. This does not mean that the tree must internally generate the act (like an agent) but that it is capable through some means of changing the scene (understood through the scene-act relationship). Often this means the tree in question is an extension of another agent's agency as will be seen shortly in the case of *The Apple-Tree,* where it is God who gives the tree the ability to trap the other characters.

In the following section I focus on different apple trees that all contribute meaningfully to various plots (the play *The Apple-Tree*, the poem *Yr Afallennau*, and the repertoire of apple wassailing). In each, the tree is interacted with directly by being hailed by the characters and either applauded or condemned for its perceived actions.

The Apple-Tree

The 14th-15th century[18] Dutch play, *The Apple-Tree* or *The Blessed Apple Tree*, is an allegorical morality play telling the story of how the impoverished and starving Frank

[18] The first documentation of *The Apple-Tree*'s production is in 1600 but Morgan, Kouwenhoven, and translators argue for its having been written at least a century earlier.

Goodheart and his wife, Faith Trustwell, appeal directly to God to enchant their apple tree to grow fruit in all seasons and to entrap anyone who touches it without permission. Over the course of the drama, a pedlar, a young man, a young woman, Death, and the Devil all become trapped in the apple tree until Frank releases them in exchange for something he wants from them: the pedlar for his pack, the young man and woman for their tunic and veil, Death for forty more years of life, and the Devil for the cessation of temptation. Much like other popular morality plays of medieval Europe, *The Apple-Tree* is designed to relay religious (Christian) teachings while also being entertaining and exciting enough to draw a crowd. The structure of the production is certainly moralizing but the actual result has been criticized by latter-day critics for being overly enthusiastic in its comedy, undermining its religious message (Kouwenhoven 6). Throughout the play, the apple tree itself is an integral scenic device that facilitates the unfolding of the plot and most the comedic action. Additionally, the connections between Frank's apple tree, the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge (as represented in the Judeo-Christian tradition) are clear referents that cannot be missed.

According to Jan Karel Kouwenhoven's introduction to Edwin Morgan's version, "*The Apple-Tree* forms part of the rich legacy bequeathed by the 'rederijkers' (Fr. rhétoriqueurs), citizens with a taste for literature in the vernacular" (Kouwenhoven 5) in 15th century Netherlands. Medieval Dutch drama[19] included:

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[19] *The Somonyng of Everyman* is often considered to be the quintessential English morality play, despite its Dutch roots. In fact, the most recent edition of the Routledge *Theatre Histories: An Introduction* textbook explains that it was "…likely based on an earlier Dutch version that was itself inspired by a Buddhist fable from a millennium earlier" (119). It is then not shocking that other Dutch plays, such as *The Apple-Tree*, enter English repertoire, or that Dutch themes resonate on the island. The argument has even been made for

> mystery plays, moralities, saints' lives and miracle plays, all intended for open air performance, [that] exudes an earthy piety of popular appeal. Its crowning achievements are *Elckerlijc*, which also exists in English as *Everyman*, and *Mariken van Nieumeghen*, about a female, and repentant, Faust. (Kouwenhoven 5)

While there are several English translations of the original Dutch text, I will use Edwin Morgan's version as published in 1982. Morgan's translation, informed heavily by Jan Karel Kouwenhoven's literal translation and notes, was created for the Medieval Players, a British travelling troupe committed to the practice of performing traditional English plays, in original script (when possible). Their repertoire included such classics as *Gammer Gurton's Needle* by Mr. S, *Mankinde*, and *The Pardoner's Tale* by Geoffrey Chaucer. It is then not surprising that a theatre troupe dedicated to the production of medieval English theatre would gravitate toward a translation of *The Apple-Tree*, nor is it shocking how familiarly 'English' such a production appears. According to an archive held by the University of Bristol, The Medieval Players tried to incorporate as much as possible historical methods of performance in a variety of ways: They were

> Acrobatics, stilt-walking, fire-eating, juggling, singing, dancing, and full and direct engagement with the audience through use of booth and trestle staging were characteristic elements of productions. (University of Bristol, Medieval Players Archive, Overview)

The staging practices of the Medieval players makes this version of particular interest as "[n]o evidence remains for any early performance, but one can easily imagine the work

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Hodge's character in *Gammer Gurton's Needle* to be a Flemish stereotype (Hayes). According to Douglas Hayes, Flemish weavers were frequently stereotyped in literature and performance as drunken, foolish characters—an interpretation often overlooked in modern studies of Tudor drama since references are not always overt. The cross-cultural exchange between English and Dutch drama has deeper roots than simply adaptation, as has been argued for the English-izing of *Everyman*. Therefore, it is unsurprising that *The Apple-Tree* "has been revived in both Holland and Belgium," as well as England in the late 1900s (Kouwenhoven 5).

being staged around a tree in a market square" (Kouwenhoven 5). The outdoor performances by The Medieval Players evokes this production history, implying that living trees were at least occasionally used for the set piece of the apple tree.

The apple tree functions in several different ways as identifiable on the continuum. First and foremost, it is an attached set device affording movement on which the plot depends (the climbing, the getting stuck, etc.) making it an Objectified Tree. Secondly, it is empowered tree, transformed by the Lord to have the ability to contribute to the plot, while also supporting allegories (as per Kouwenhoven's argument) comparable to the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Thirdly, and returning to the Objectified Tree section, it is possibly a living tree made to stand out by the theatrical framing of the production.[20]

Much like *Matsukaze*, the movement in *The Apple-Tree* is defined by the central tree set piece. Each of the characters interacts with the tree directly. All the characters speak of the tree, many describing both it and its apples, and five of the eight characters climb onto the tree and become stuck. The structure or tree being used for the production must have enough room to house all five characters while also providing room below for banter between the couple and the apple thieves.

The first victim is Snapperupper, the pedlar. Thirsty from travelling, he climbs the apple-tree and eats his fill while the Frank and Faith condemn him as a robber below.

> "—Christ, I can't stir! I'm stuck! What's wrong?
> Sitting here like a statue, never saw such a thing.
> I'm nailed to the tree. […]" (17)

[20] It is impossible to designate the potential living tree on the continuum without knowing the specifics surrounding that particular live subject.

There is no evidence that Snapperupper hears Frank and Faith's comments, nor they his. From the dialogue, it is apparent that they have seen the thief and are content to leave him in the tree, but based on the ensuing action the couple introduces a ladder to facilitate the climbing of the next victims. Willie Wildoats and Jenny Joycat arrive, lured by the apples. They call to Snapperupper to give some to them, and in reply he encourages them to "Come up and try some apples, climb up!" after which Willie tells Jenny to "Leap up the ladder" (17). Now three apple thieves, all lured by the tempting apples, are entrapped. "You can bet your last apple, we're all in the same boat" states Jenny (18) and the three remain in the tree during the ensuing action.

The remaining victims, Death and the Devil, shift the drama from rural comedy to religious allegory more concretely, although whether it would effectively land as a moral lesson with the audience is debatable. When Frank falls ill, prompting Death to arrive, he tricks her (in this play Death is specified as a woman) into climbing the apple tree to fetch him a last meal: "Out of pure compassion/I shall fetch you the fruit and freely give you it" (Death 19). It is curious here to note that she is the only character to be tricked into climbing the tree, the only one who did not intend to have an apple for herself, and later, the only character who attempts to warn another about climbing the tree. It is here that Frank's moral compass spins in the comedic action, and the reason why *The Apple-Tree* is criticized as mentioned earlier. The offer of a last meal, a mercy for a dying man, is made a mockery and Death is quite literally cheated. Similarly, when the Devil arrives, he does not seek to condemn Frank, the thieves, or steal apples himself, but only to save Death: "Ahoy, Death darling, what in hell's name are you doing?/Are you trying your

hand at horticulture?" (21). Death attempts to warn the Devil about the tree, but he fails to rescue her, joining instead in her fate.

Perhaps the morals of the play relate most strongly to the fact that human beings are tempted and lured by apples while allegorical figures like Death must be tricked into climbing the tree. The connections between the lure of Frank's apples and the luring of Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge are obvious.

> What we do have, I suggest, is an allegory. The apple-tree symbolizes life, as what it would appear to be, Man's own, and as what it really is, God's gift. Thus it conveys knowledge of good an evil like its counterpart in Paradise (Kouwenhoven 6)

Snapperupper, Willie and Jenny all are lured by the tempting apples towards sin (stealing) and are rightfully punished by the Lord via the apple-tree. "Man's great enemies are still at large, even though in Christ they have already been nailed to a tree" (Kouwenhoven 6-7). Frank's role however is a little less straightforward. On the one hand, he is defending his property—as accepted by the Lord's blessing of the tree—while on the other hand he participates in the luring of the victims and is the executer of their punishment. Certainly, Frank and his wife occupy a contentious position as they use the Lord's gift both to their material advantage and to confirm their faith: "Let him give us apples and he'll gain my adoration" (14) says Frank of the Lord. The morality only continues to muddy with the application of the ladder, the trickery of Death, and the eventual extortion of the victims.

The interesting part of the play, from the perspective of how the tree participates in the action, is not its use as a stage device, nor as a plot point, but the ways in which the characters attribute the blame to the tree and not Frank. After agreeing to pay Frank and

Faith for their release, both Jenny and Death verbally admonish the tree. Death cries "Thanks be to God for this grand change/to clamber down from that cursed tree!" and Jenny adds "Damn the apple-tree!" (23). Women blaming the tree specifically may be an allusion to the temptation of Adam and Eve, as Eve is certainly "lured" to the fruit first, but, regardless of blame, the men follow their lead and add to the condemnation of the tree that an ambiguous "he" has taken their belongings.

It is most logical to understand the pronoun "he" as referring to Frank—after all, surely he has been the one to collect the items—however, the dialogue arrangement casts an alternative reading. Both Snapperupper and Willie complain of their losses in direct response to Death and Jenny's curses of the apple tree. Frank, Faith and the Devil have already exited by this point, so there is no clear referent, only inferred. Jenny states that her veil has vanished, even though in the previous scene the trapped characters directly agreed to give their belongings to Frank. There appears to be a kind of amnesia where the characters argue that their items have either vanished or been "plundered" by "him" (24) rather than specifically traded for their release. Given that Snapperupper and Willie are responding to the cursing of the apple-tree, it appears that the apple-tree is at fault for their losses, either in place of Frank or alongside him. The blame is not placed on Frank or even the Lord, but the "cursed tree" (23). The apple-tree is therefore given a kind of agency in the action, participating in the plot by holding them captive, transforming it from a set piece or staging strategy to an otherworldly, empowered *thing*. The comedy of course is found in the impossibility of such a tree, and the childishness of becoming trapped in a tree.

In the introduction to *Medieval and Tudor Drama* John Gassner explains the connection between the medieval audience and the players produced by staging methods as one that promoted inclusivity rather than distancing, even with didactic religious goals.

> This means that even after the early drama left the church building, the main objective was to make a ceremony of playgoing and play-production such as prevails in ritualistic performances. The public and the players were involved in acts of communion, though not necessarily solemn ones from start to finish. The tendency in staging the religious plays was to unite the playgoer with the actor instead of separating the one from the other, as we do in producing plays behind a proscenium arch, and seating the playgoer at a psychological distance from the stage. (xiv)

The unification is achieved through staging, including in popular forms such as the round, the market square, halls, and pageant wagons.

If Kouwenhoven's assertion is correct—that *The Apple-Tree* can be imagined best as performed in the market square with a real tree as a stage device—then, I argue, that the unification Gassner identifies in Medieval religious performance goes a step further. By including a real, living tree as central to the plot, the message of the play endures beyond the limits of the individual performance. As a site-specific method of production, the tree is somewhat like a local casting. It pre-exists the performance, so local audiences may already have relationships with it, and it extends beyond the performance afterwards, so that the cultural residue of the performance may continue to define and inform human-tree relationships beyond the production. The ephemeral trappings of a production re-frame the tree. The tree's reframing invites a new level of appreciation and scrutiny of its material body from the audience that would otherwise go overlooked. Dramaturgically, the framing of the subject matter (the tree, and the religious allegory) in the local becomes a powerful means of situating the possibility of sin and redemption within the

community. The tree itself becomes a material marker reminding the community to learn from the mistakes of the characters, as Snapperupper pleads with them to do. In terms of the comedic action, the material tree also plays a role in the action as it is unlikely that every production would be able to access and use an actual apple tree. Frank and Faith's dependence on, say, an oak tree, would add hilarity to their hopelessness and wonder to the Lord's ability to transform it into a viable, apple producing tree. Similarly, the tree's physical structure might not be able to realistically support five characters. Kouwenhoven's argument that the production can easily be imagined using a real tree in an outdoor setting is at odds with the play text. The final lines of the play, spoken by Jenny, suggest that the production is taking place inside a hall, not out of doors. In this case, the tree employed in the production is representational, disrupting the idea of a lingering cultural residue on a material body that pre-exists and endures beyond the production.

Before moving on to the next section, it is prudent here to at least briefly acknowledge the importance of apple trees in multiple historical and cultural contexts. "Henry David Thoreau once wrote that 'it is remarkable how closely the history of the apple tree is connected with that of man' " (qtd. In Pollan 4-5). While the Judaeo-Christian tradition has an apple at the heart of the fall of man, other cultural contexts have honored or blamed the apple for a range of mythic events. Apples as dangerous, poisonous, or sinful are a common theme: the apple of discord which sparks the Trojan War, Snow White and the poisoned apple, the biblical fruit from the forbidden tree, the fighting apple trees of Oz. Apples in a more positive light appear elsewhere, including the

golden apples in the Garden of the Hesperides, as symbols of fertility in Norse mythology, icons of American identity/nationality like Johnny Appleseed and the boom of the global apple industry. Apples are at the heart of multiple festivals (Savior of the Apple Feast, Allantide, Apple Day, etc.) and are featured as important ritualistic foods (Rosh Hashanah) or symbolic gifts (apples for teachers). While the fruit has a rich history the trees themselves make less frequent appearances.

In the Black Book of Carmarthen (Welsh manuscript from approximately the 1200s) includes the poem *Yr Afallennau* where Myrddin (one of the bases for the Arthurian Merlin figure) speaks directly to apple trees. Lee Raye writes a short natural history analysis of these apple trees, arguing that "Scholars looking at 'Yr Afallenau' have usually been so focused on the prophesies and the story behind what is happening in the poems that they haven't looked at the apple trees themselves." Raye goes on to analyse the disparities between the verses arriving at the conclusion that each stanza in this ancient poem is addressed to different crab apple trees. The specificity of each tree is unusual as the tree itself is the Myrddin's object of attention, not the fruit it bears.

> What made Myrddin choose to talk to an apple tree? Is there some connection between apples and madness? Why should an apple tree have the magical power to make someone sheltering in or near it invisible? (Raye)

Raye extrapolates from the poem that, although no connection has been proved, there is a delightful resonance between Myrddin's mad addresses and wassailing, which "involve[s] drunk participants addressing poetry directly to apple trees, much like

Myrddin does." Apple wassailing[21] is a performative ritual to ensure the production of a good harvest of apples for cider. Like the Yr Afallenau, the interesting part of this ritual is that although the result is focused on the fruit, the act itself includes the tree as participant. The participants offer cider to the (usually) oldest tree in the orchard, and carol or sing to the tree. In other words, the trees cannot be overlooked in favour of the apples.

Circling back to Raye's analysis of the apples in the Myrddin tale, as well as the Dutch play *The Apple-Tree*, there is evidently a performative and literary European tradition of interaction with apple trees. Whether this is an indication of madness or god is debatable for each example, but in each the tree itself is directly addressed as a participant in the plot of the events. The tree holds power over the character addressing it, and only through acknowledgment and ritual will supply the supplicant with that which he/she desires: security. The apple trees in *The Apple-Tree*, Yr Afallenau, and a wassail all offer security to those addressing the trees themselves by sheltering them, providing sustenance, and even protecting them morally from sin. The tree is the provider of the security, therefore contributing substantially to the performative plot. Especially in the case of the wassail, there is the distinct possibility that the harvest will *not* be good. The tree, in the performative ritual, has a level of power contributing to the outcome. Within the ritual, there is no guarantee that the tree will provide the necessary component for the desirable outcome (in this instance, apples), therefore the tree must be understood as

[21] The term wassailing also refers to carolling. Early versions of the song "Here we come a-carolling" uses this term instead.

contributing to the ritualistic plot which (in theory) culminates with the harvest. The potential that the harvest will not be good provides the framework that grants the tree authority and agency in the ritual.

Trees as People/People as Trees

Trees thus far have been identified as contributing substantially to scene and action in the theatre, which now prompts the question of agenthood. Is the apple tree in *The Apple-Tree* an agent or merely an instrument of the Lord's power? Both Death and Jenny identify the tree specifically as responsible for their entrapment. While this could be understood as a comedic error, or even an error in translation (through time or language), it is equally possible to understand their ire towards the tree as pointing towards agenthood. Death and Jenny, once release from the tree, respond:

"DEATH: Thanks be to God for this grand chance
To clamber down from that cursed tree" (23)

and

"JENN: […]
Damn the apple-tree!" (23)

It is important to note that the Lord is not identified as responsible for the magical "stickiness" by the captive characters, rather all negative attention is directed towards the body of the tree and all gratitude (as in the case of Death) towards God. The tree then is made to take on a role of agency at the end of the tree, at least partially, as an antagonist. Is the tree a scenic device, a plot point, or are we now arriving at the point where the question of tree-as-character may be asked?

The problem of tree as agent or character in a dramatic production is often resolved by synthesizing the agent and the means or instrument he or she uses (agency).

Understanding vegetal agents as human (due to their capacity for action, agency, and purpose) can lead to the understanding of a tree as person[22] or a person as tree. Consider the opening stage description of Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*.

> Two enormous elms are on each side of the house. They bend their trailing branches down over the roof. They appear to protect and at the same time subdue. There is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous absorption. They have developed from their intimate contact with the life of man in the house an appalling humaneness. They brood oppressively over the house. They are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears trickle down monotonously and rot on the shingles.

The elms here are scenic devices with contributions to theme, mood, etc. based on their "appalling humaneness". The anthropomorphism here is crucial to the scenic design: the elms are not *just* trees, but brooding, sinister, (in the simile) women that foreshadow and resonate with the events of the play. The combination of tree and human, scene and agent, produces surprisingly evocative and unsettling results begging questions of the natural order and the supernatural. Yes, the anthropomorphism here may detract from the trees as trees, but as Theresa May argues, theatre studies should be wary of "becoming so preoccupied with the 'snarl of anthropomorphism' that it ignores animal [or, tree] representation altogether … [b]oth perspectives are necessary and applicable plant and people interactions" (336). Far from being detrimental to the study of trees in theatre, examining the ways in which humans and trees co-perform or are fused reveals much

[22] For the analysis of trees as people in terms of legal status, see Chapter 3's discussion of Christopher D. Stone's *Should Trees Have Standing? Law, Morality, and the Environment.*

about the relationship between these entities and the possibilities for understanding trees as performers[23].

In the following sections I examine two theatrical examples where trees are made important because of their human characteristics. First, I look at Shakespeare's *Macbeth* where Birnam wood 'miraculously' marches on Dunsinane (as cover for the rebel army) and Macbeth's treatment of such a prophecy considering the surrounding pathetic fallacies. Then I turn my attention toward a now famous wooden character whose origins as a talking log are often overlooked: *Pinocchio*. My examination of Pinocchio as a tree-human hybrid covers the original story by Carlo Collodi as well as the National Ballet of Canada's 2017 production in Toronto.

Macbeth

Vin Nardizzi's *Wooden Os* covers the early modern period in a thorough examination of how trees and wood were leveraged in drama and the playhouse, as well as the cultural, political, and economic connotations of their representation and use. His book covers William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (the Globe) and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (multiple theatres), Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (the Rose

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[23] In addition to trees who take on anthropomorphic or human qualities, there is the matter of trees who encase actual people. In this sense, the two are not synthesized, but the tree entombs the human for positive or negative affect. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest* Prospero reminds Ariel that he was freed from a pine tree, where he had been imprisoned by the witch Sycorax (he also threatens Ariel that he will put him back). In the Arthurian tradition, Merlin is often entombed in a tree or a stone by the sorceress Morgaine, where (depending on the version) he either dies or lies sleeping for eternity.
In the Broadway production of *Little Shop of Horrors*, the victims of the carnivorous Audrey II emerge as the faces of flowers/buds at the end of the play. On a more positive note, the Broadway musical *Into The Woods* features Mother Willow who speaks to her daughter from beyond the grave as a willow tree, and Daphne's transformation into a laurel tree in the ancient Greek myth saves her from rape by Apollo.
The conflation between human and tree resonates even in the Christian tradition where Christ is nailed to a tree, with the cross becoming the symbol for both sacrifice and the Christ figure.

theatre), and Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (revised, the Fortune theatre). Rather than repeating Nardizzi's already astute analysis of plays that reveal early modern relationships to woodlands and ecological scarcity (perceived and real) in the old and new worlds, or cover similar plays such as Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *As You Like It* where the events take place in forests, I will address a less commonly analyzed play for its unique use of trees which blurs the line between people and trees in a supernatural context: Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

The gruesome tragedy *Macbeth* follows a Scottish general's political takeover of the kingdom through murder and intrigue, and his subsequent downfall. The action is catalyzed by a series of prophecies made by three witches to Macbeth and his companion Banquo, promising the former increasing levels of power and the latter a royal lineage. In the first scene of Act IV, Macbeth encounters the witches for the second time in the dramatic action. This time, in a cavern, the witches do not hail him as thane of Glamis, Cawdor, and king hereafter, but offer apparitions and prophecies in their cauldron. The third apparition appears as "*a Child crowned, with a tree in his hand*" (IV.i) and speaks the prophecy:

> Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until
> Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
> Shall come against him. (IV.i)

The possibility of a forest mobilizing against the castle at Dunsinane (a good 16 miles away in actuality) is unsurprisingly laughable for Macbeth. For an audience already aware of the play's construction, Macbeth's dismissal of the warning smacks of hubris and lays the course for his eventual downfall. Despite the perceived impossibility of the

first two apparitions (no child of woman born and the display of Banquo's lineage) these apparitions inspire Macbeth to action and murder. The crowned child with a tree in his hand, however, is the only warning that inspires nothing of the kind.

> That will never be
> Who can impress the forest, bid the tree
> Unfix his earth-bound root? Sweet bodements! good!
> Rebellion's head, rise never till the wood
> Of Birnam rise, and our high-placed Macbeth
> Shall live the lease of nature, pay his breath
> To time and mortal custom. (IV.i)

The social order of the play begins with Duncan at the pinnacle of power and Macbeth at the base. As the play goes on, Macbeth gains social status and rises, first to Thane of Glamis (through Sinel's death) then thane of Cawdor (as the previous thane committed treason) and finally, king by the murder of Duncan. Being now on the top of a political pyramid built on treason and murder, Macbeth fears retribution from Macduff and Banquo, as per the apparitions' warnings. It is then critically important that the one warning he dismisses out of hand is the one that mirrors his own rise to power, connected with Malcolm. Now seated upon high Dunsinane, the allegorical seat of power, Macbeth ignores the possibility of Birnam Wood (the rebellion, if considered allegorically) to rise up against him. It is a perceived impossibility for Macbeth, just as it was for Duncan, to lose his crown by such an unnatural opponent as a moving wood, even as his own murder of Duncan was a "breach in nature" (II.iii) toward a man who "love[d] him highly" (I.vi). The natural order overturning is a readily identifiable theme in the play—"fair is foul, and foul is fair" (I.i)—and nature itself revolts against Macbeth, laying the groundwork for the possibility of moving trees. In II.iv, Ross and an Old Man note the "…heavens, as

troubled with man's act,/Threaten his bloody stage" which "'Tis unnatural,/Even like the deed that's done" (II.iv), complete with rumors of horses eating each other. Indeed, Macbeth acknowledges that "Stones have been known to move and trees to speak" (3.4) after being faced with Banquo's ghost—an inverted foreshadowing of the moving trees to come. There is increasing potential in the dramatic framing for Birnam wood to march against Dunsinane, both allegorically and as part of the pathetic fallacy. In addition, if through Nardizzi's application of *fiat sylvius* the playhouse becomes Birnam Wood when Macbeth pronounces it as such (V.iv), then the audience is implicated as being part of Malcolm's rebellion.

Although the dramatic framing can accommodate the possibility of trees moving "'Gainst nature still" (2.4), the trees themselves do not move of their own accord. Upon marching on Dunsinane castle, Malcolm pauses in Birnam Wood and decides

> Let every soldier hew him down a bough
> And bear't before him: thereby shall we shadow
> The numbers of our host and make discovery
> Err in report of us. (V.iv)

Malcolm's military tactic is an arboreal version of Lady Macbeth's approach to disguise the plot against Duncan: to "…look like the innocent flower,/But be the serpent under't" (I.v). Malcolm's forces appear to be trees with the revolt hidden beneath thee boughs. Malcolm, who is hailed king at the end of the play, is the mirror of the child apparition, crowned holding a tree.

The tree props in the play appear as only unattached objects, held and manipulated by the apparition and (presumably) by Malcolm's soldiers. Visually they are never static or attached objects but rather are in constant motion by means of their

manipulation. Macbeth's mistake, then, in assuming their immobility is built into fabric of the play where trees, forests, and woods are always in motion, never as backdrops or scenic devices. All references to forests, trees, and woods in *Macbeth* are couched in action and movement— "trees to speak" (III.iv); "trees blown down" (IV.i); "The wood began to move" (V.v)—if not direct references to Birnam Wod and the prophecy. And aside from the park where Banquo and Fleance are set upon by murderers, trees are not a major part of any background scenery in the play. Macbeth's error in dismissing the Third Apparition's prophecy is reflected in every arboreal representation in the play.

Trees moving and speaking, as alluded to in earlier scenes, is made possible by the loophole in the play that it is not the trees themselves doing the action, but the people manipulating the trees. The tree's animacy can therefore only be understood by the very human interaction with the otherwise objectified tree. It is problematic then to apply agenthood to Birnam Wood, because truly it is the human behind the tree that produces the act.

In 2016, Portland dancer Asher Woodworth made headlines when he was arrested dressed as an evergreen tree for impeding traffic. His objective was to disrupt the mundane social choreography of the intersection and introduce an element of ceremony to the space, and so he covered himself in evergreen boughs and moved slowly across streets. In an interview with Jake Bleiberg, Woodworth explains: "I just figured it would be really interesting for someone to look over and see a tree where they weren't expecting to see a tree". The surprise of a tree suddenly appearing suggests the same kind of disbelief implied in *Macbeth* based on the basis that trees cannot move fast enough to

escape our notice. The surprise of the tree's mobility therefore is facilitated by the human choreography, but it is ultimately Woodworth's motion that draws attention to the treeness of his costume. Arrested for his performance he elucidates further that it was the human element, not the tree element that caused significant disruption: "yeah, I was dressed as a tree, but that had nothing to do with why I was arrested. I was arrested just because I was slowing down the pace of business as usual" (Bleiberg). For the political system of Scotland, Birnam Wood is importantly an oncoming army and not marching trees, and so for the police in Portland, Woodworth's performance is importantly of a man-as-tree. The tree-person-connection can also be seen in Greek mythology in the case of Daphne, who is transformed into a laurel tree to escape from Apollo. The laurel tree becomes an important recurring symbol of Apollo not because of the tree itself, but because of the human referent. This has already been briefly touched upon in the case of *Matsukaze* where the pine tree is seen as Yukihira by Matsukaze, but is not conflated in the same manner by other characters who identify the tree as a tree.

The impossibility of trees moving appears to have set a narrative pattern to combine human beings (mobile) with trees (immobile). There are hundreds of examples of talking or sentient trees in various cultural traditions, ranging from Plato's *Symposium*, Dante's *Inferno*, "The Dream of the Rood"[24], to the weeping date palm in Islamic tradition. Once locomotion gets involved, however, the trees cease being primarily trees and become heavily humanized, if not actually human. The most widely accepted

[24] An Old English poem (composed approximately 8th century, published in the Vercelli Book in 10th century) telling the story of Christ's crucifixion from the perspective of the tree cut to make the crucifix.

examples of this process are the representations of humanoid trees such as Peter Jackson's interpretation of J. R. R. Tolkien's Ents in *The Lord of the Rings*, and insurgence of treant figures in fantasy role playing games (discussed further in Chapter 2). More recently, the alien superhero, Groot, has gained hold in popular culture as a tree alien in the *Guardians of the Galaxy* films as well as Marvel's comic books. The treeness of these characters is aesthetic and, in the realm of the fiction, cultural; treeness is conceptualized as the trappings of race and culture, while the humanoid bipedal appearance and mobility remains constant.

Mascots and puppets are further examples of treeness being used as a costume for people (like Woodworth's performance) or detached object for manipulation (like the apparition in *Macbeth*). The distinctions between mascot and puppets (typically) are: puppets are objects manipulated by humans to represent while mascots are individuals in costumes; mascots function as good luck charms and as a nexus for a collective identity, while puppets have their own identities; and while mascots tend to inhabit our world, puppets are housed within their own. Consider for example, a sports mascot that inhabits our world through advertising, events, merchandise, etc. in comparison to Elmo who inhabits the world of Sesame Street. In many circumstances, the term mascot functions rather like an econ: a creature representing a large idea or organization, such as the panda being the mascot for the World Wildlife Foundation. However, I am more specifically referring to mascots in live performance (not logos) which typically involves in contemporary contexts a costumed person or animal. To use a University mascot as an

example, at Arizona State University the mascot is Sparky the Sun Devil who is related but distinct from Sun Devils which refers more generally to the body of ASU students.

The marching band at Stanford University uses the Stanford Tree as an unofficial mascot (sometimes accused of being the worst mascot in America[25]) and whose costume is reinvented annually with each new "tree" performer elected. In 2006, the Stanford tree received national notoriety when "The student wearing the costume of the legendary mascot was suspended from duty … [for] taking drinks inside the tree" (Rubenstein). To build off the earlier ASU example, it is interesting that not all Standfordians are trees even if the Stanford tree is the mascot—a shortcoming which would have been fascinating to plumb had an entire body of students envisioned themselves collectively as a forest.

Not as wild or notorious as the Stanford Tree, in Thunder Bay, Ontario, the St. Joseph's Foundation featured a tree mascot for 33 years (1981-2014) based on the silver birches growing outside of the healthcare facility's building. The mascot, Benny Birch, had a birthday party thrown for him every year as a fundraiser, raising "over a million dollars" before his retirement. These tree mascots are performative human-tree hybrids, made significant by their human ability to interact with audiences in human ways (dancing, greeting, etc.).

[25] A general Google search of the Stanford Tree Mascot results in long series of mascot lists, including: "the 10 worst mascots of all time" "the 23 dumbest mascots in college football" "the 25 worst college mascots" "Stanford tree #1 worst mascot in the country," etc. The Wikipedia page dedicated to the Stanford Tree Mascot includes in its description "the tree regularly appears at the top of internet "worst mascot" lists."

Figure 28. “Benny Birch’s 31 Birthday Party” *The Walleye*

Puppets, another tree-person combination, function a differently than mascots, primarily because although the human is manipulating the objects in the agent-object relationship, the magic of the suspension of disbelief attaches the agenthood to the object. The puppet often inhabits a world build on the suspension of disbelief, while the mascot may move more fluidly between worlds. There are very few commercial puppets of trees. Folkmanis Puppets (a popular North American puppet realtor) features a single tree puppet “Tree, Enchanted” as well as several animal puppets who live in trees or tree stumps (scenery).

Figure 29. Folkmanis' "Tree, Enchanted"

Considering that Folkmanis has puppets ranging from a nautilus to "Mozart in Piano" it is rather impressive that "Tree, Enchanted" is the company's only plant based characters (as appears on their website's puppet listing).

On the other hand, puppets made from trees often have their tree-ness invisibilized. While wood may be a common material to work with for marionettes and rod puppets, it is their transformation from wooden object to character that is focused on. However, there is at least one famous (or infamous, depending on the version) puppet who is not only made from wood, but from a sentient piece of wood.

***Pinocchio* by the National Ballet company of Canada**

Possibly the most famous puppet in literature and the theatre is Pinocchio, the Victorian era Italian character from the novel by Carlo Collodi (Carlo Lorenzini). Carved from a talking log, the puppet child gets into all kinds of mischief and adventures, learning moral lessons each chapter, until he becomes a real boy. Pinocchio has become the basis for a long list of adaptations, including the famous Disney animated film, as

well as science fiction characters who explore the idea of sentience and what it means to be human (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s android Data, *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, *Bicentennial Man*, etc.). Interestingly, what is often overlooked in modern interpretations, and I would argue is integral to the original stories, is the fact that Pinocchio is first and foremost made of wood—specifically, a talking log.

Vin Nardizzi argues early modern England and Europe as having a peculiar relationship with wood and wooden products based on perceived (and real) scarcity of trees. While Collodi was not writing in the same era, under the unification of Italy, the rate of poverty, the failing of crops, and the sudden increase in Italian immigration to the United States also produced a sense of scarcity, rather than the wondrous leaps in technological improvement from the industrial revolution occurring elsewhere in Europe. The original audience, I argue, would most likely have made a more direct connection between the material of wood and the source from which it came, just as can be seen in Nardizzi's analysis of early modern drama. The means of production today obscure the linkage between material and source; in a more contemporary context, it is not all that surprising that the technology of the day is reflected in the interpretations of Pinocchio as robotic. Therefore, Pinocchio is seen primarily as puppet, not as tree in carved human form, as though the material the puppet is made from is somehow distinct from the tree from which the wood is sourced. I wish to re-establish that material-source connection using events from the original story and the National Ballet of Canada's interpretation of *Pinocchio*.

The beginning of Pinocchio emphasizes the magical piece of wood that will become the puppet (who is fashioned only in chapter three). The first lines read:

> Centuries ago there lived—
> "A king!" my little readers will say immediately.
> No, children, you are mistaken. Once upon a time there was a piece of wood. (3)

The "regular woodpile log" (Collodi 3) is revealed to speak, giggle, feel pain, and even move suddenly enough to injure Geppetto, all before being given human characteristics by the carpenter. On the continuum, Pinocchio the log would be firmly housed under Animated Low, while Pinocchio the puppet would be considered Animated High. Pinocchio the log is a sentient piece of wood: "Pinocchio himself (or itself?) is mysterious from the beginning--first a piece of wood, but a very special piece of wood in that it speaks even before it is transformed into a puppet" (West 172). The wondrous piece of wood that starts the series of adventures is overlooked in the Disney adaptation, and therefore, many of the following adaptations. In the original novel, it is not human invention that creates the life in the puppet, or the interventions of the magical Blue Fairy, but the magical properties pre-existing in the wood or tree itself.

> The mysterious pre-existence of Pinocchio, a sheer potentiality hidden in a piece of wood and waiting to be liberated into form, brings mythic elements into the story. As critic Rodolfo Tommasi has noted, in his reading of the symbolic and allegorical qualities of the tale, Collodi certainly would have been aware of Celtic and Nordic myths of talking trees that had been incorporated already into the French and Italian fairy tale traditions in writers such as Perrault and Luigi Capuana; moreover, Dante had provided a striking example of such magical vegetation in his *Inferno*, in the circle of the suicides who must suffer eternal pains as gnarled, speaking bushes and trees. (West 173)

It is perhaps important to recognise here that not only is Pinocchio a puppet made from a sentient log, the marionettes at the Marionette Theatre are as well. While the Disney

version has the other puppets on strings (setting the basis for Pinocchio's song), Collodi's does not. Based on Italian *commedia dell'arte* characters, the marionettes, Harlequin and Puncinella, both recognize Pinocchio as one of their own and act of their own accord. They too fear being used for firewood for although they are sentient, they are treated first and foremost as wood by the puppet master.

The arc of the story exposes the importance of Pinocchio's material self. Rebecca West explains that:

> The first 15 chapters of the unified book are made up of these [serialized] pieces, and in the last of them Pinocchio is hanged and dies. Collodi killed off his character evidently with no intent of resurrecting him, but the editor of the *Giornale per i bambini* pleaded with him to continue the very popular story, so in 1882 and into 1883 Collodi published piecemeal "Le avventure di Pinocchio," which became chapters 16 to 36 of the book. (West 169)

If the original 15-chapter story is analyzed, the arc concludes with the puppet hanging, as if dead, from the branch of an oak tree, battered about by the wind very much like a broken branch. The storyline of becoming a "real boy" is then a secondary extension to the already developed arc from log to death in a tree.[26]

The National Ballet of Canada's 2017 premiere of *Pinocchio* adds a peculiar twist to the story by maintaining the darkness of the original while adding a strong dose of Canadian nationalism. As a result, the woodiness of the production is unmistakably overt. The ballet begins with the cry "TIMBER!" opening the scene on a massive fallen pine

[26] Aleksey Nikolayevich Tolstoy wrote an adaptation based on his memories of hearing *Pinocchio* called *Adventures of Buratino* or *The Golden Key* likewise following a puppet come to life. Buratino does not become a real boy at the end of the series. Burratino means puppet in Italian and is also a minor Commedia dell'Arte character. Pierrot, another Commedia dell'Arte character, also makes an appearance in the Russian version.

tree. Gepetto and a group of lumberjacks (decked in red plaid) attempt to chop the tree with axes and saws but are unsuccessful until the Blue Fairy and her entourage (who act as narration for the production) arrive and grant Gepetto a magical blue axe. Gepetto strikes the tree with the axe, upon which the trunk bursts into sparkling blue lights and splits open to reveal a hollow core from which Pinocchio emerges.

Figure 30. Skylar Campbell with Artists of the Ballet in “Pinocchio” Photo: Aleksander Antonijevic

The Canadiana of the opening sequence is unmistakable, and illustrates quite clearly the relationship between the forestry industry, the natural world, and Canadian identity. In addition to the many animals that appear in Collodi’s tale, choreographer Will Tuckett’s version of the tale includes racoons, beavers (who are also tourists to Niagara, wearing Canada t-shirts), a (drunk) moose, a Mountie, and a host of lumberjacks. ‘Lumberjack’ is a Canadian term, referring to the dangerous occupation of forestry workers in the historical era of tree felling without automated or gas equipment, using instead axes and saws. Popular to both Canada and the Northern US (Minnesota,

Wisconsin, etc.) the lumberjack exudes masculinity and oneness with the natural world[27]. Not only are lumberjacks one of the most stereotypical visual representation of Canadians, second only to the Mountie—who appears later in Act 1 to the motif of *Oh Canada*, the base of the felled tree is conical and evidence of a beaver[28]. Pinocchio himself after emerging from the tree is dressed in denim lederhosen and a red plaid[29] shirt as a Canadian interpretation of the iconic Disney costume.

Unlike the Disney version, Gepetto and the Blue Fairy are not the co-creators of Pinocchio. While many interpretations of the story attach a Frankenstein narrative of creator and creation,[30] the original emphasizes the liveness and magic of the wood *before* its manifestation in puppet form. The tree is magical from the beginning, with Gepetto in the role of liberator. Tuckett's approach to the "birth" of Pinocchio resonates with other classical tree-beings, including the origin story of Ariel who is released from a tree by Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Prospero reminds Ariel:

> […] It was mine art,
> When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape
> The pine and let thee out. (I.ii.291-293, pg 170)

Ariel pre-exists Prospero's act, but it is his "art" that frees Ariel from his predicament and brings him into the world of the plot.

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[27] Folk heroes and cultural icons include Paul Bunyan in the Northern US states, and Joseph Mufferaw (Big Joe Mufferaw) a French-Canadian logger, and have substantially contributed to the popularity of the lumberjack myth in fashion, food, and myth.

[28] Felling a tree manually usually involved chopping dominantly on one side, to ensure the tree topples in the desired direction. Trees in this production have been cut conically, like a beaver might fell a tree.

[29] During the production's run, the store at the Four Seasons Center sold out of plaid shirts due to high demand

[30] This is particularly echoed in robotic adaptations where man is responsible for the advancement of technology

The labour of forestry and the ensuing relationship between father figure and tree-being are meshed in *Pinocchio* and *The Tempest*. Nardizzi explores this relationship in *The Tempest* at the Globe theatre by focusing the presence of logs and logging on the island, infused with new significance. Prospero, says Nardizzi, recounts on multiple occasions that he has "removed," "rifted," and "plucked up" trees and forests, making the destruction of the pine holding Ariel no singular incident (122).

> …Prospero could have magically knocked down and divided innumerable trees in the prehistory of the play or still be doing so on the island while the other characters occupy the stage. But it little matters when Prospero fells trees. the more significant fact is that in doing so, he artfully eliminates the labour of the wood workers that the Virginia pamphlets designate as key to the colony's re-establishment and makes obsolete the iron tools that would be needed to chop and lumber wood. He is a magical lumberjack. (Nardizzi 122)

Likewise, Gepetto makes obsolete the lumberjacks in Tuckett's ballet with the help of the Blue Fairy's magical axe which can do the work none of the other lumberjacks can achieve. Nardizzi traces clear connections between the Globe's production of *The Tempest* and "a colonialist imagination eager to remedy a resource crisis at home" (121), while the Canadiana ballet employs a nationalist imagination of the early North American colony hinging on similar resource abundance.

Colin Richmond's scenic design in *Pinocchio* takes the lumberjack's forest literally. Many of the scenes take place in forests, but other than the original tree from which the puppet emerges and a projection of an imaginary money tree (a child's drawing) there are no complete trees on the stage. Instead there are twelve, 6-10 foot tall stumps which in the *Episode 1: Design* promotional video Richmond calls "chopped off, cut off trees" that have been hacked by axes—many with axes still embedded (About the

Ballet, The National Ballet of Canada). The dancers use the stumps (which are on rollers) in the choreography, obscuring paths and disorienting Pinocchio as he gets lost. In the sequence before Pinocchio is beaten and robbed by the Fox and Cat, the forest is intended to be forbidding and frightening. Richmond's design choice to make the forest composed of partial, half-felled trees adds an important layer to Pinocchio's fear. As far as we know, in the ballet Pinocchio is the only animate puppet (evidenced by the lumberjack's surprise and fear, and the puppets on strings in this production) and yet the visual similarity between the stumps and the felled tree from which Pinocchio emerges presents a frightening correlation. Were these stumps potential Pinocchios that simply didn't make it for want of a magical axe? The human qualities of Pinocchio as a tree/person hybrid produce a different relationship between audience and scenic design, where logged forests can transform from a historical evocation of Canadian lumberjacks to a frightening promise of violence against Pinocchios. The "trees" on stage are more than scenic elements because of the agent-scene relationship, and introduce the possibility of fostering a relationship between audiences and the natural world by means of their representation on stage.

Finally, it would be remiss to spend so much time discussing the tree/person relationship without at least briefly acknowledging the rich cultural legacy in which trees are people and people are trees. People as trees appear to be a concept out of science fiction—a vegetal interpretation of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*—however, in at least two separate religious/cultural cosmologies people are formed from trees,[31] and trees are

[31] Much how Adam and Eve are formed of clay in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

integrally linked to the lives of the gods and of mankind. Norse mythology and Mayan cosmology both feature people made from trees, and prominent trees at the heart of their core written works. In Norse mythology, both the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*[32] include the origin of man as the creation of Ask and Embla from an ash and an elm tree, respectively. In the *Poetic Edda* their creation flows directly into the description of Yggdrasil, an immense ash tree, interconnected to the world (with a host of fauna feeding and living in it), also known as the best tree, the windy tree, and the suffering tree (upon which Othid scarified himself and inscribed sacred runes). In a completely different cosmology half way around the world, the *Popol Vuh* tells the Mayan creation of humanity as a series of failed experiments, one of which included carving men as effigies from wood. A series of plagues supposedly wipes out the wooden men, although there is much evidence to show that the Lords of Xibalba and the wooden men are either together or interchangeable. Elsewhere in the Popol Vuh trees and people intertwine, including a calabash tree with the skull of One Hunahpu (who impregnates Lady Blood while in this form), and the substation of sap for blood in what was meant to be a human sacrifice.

Trees as Themselves

Given the proliferation of trees in theatre and the performing arts, and the sheer number of attached meanings/interpretations/etc., when can it be said that a tree performs as itself? What is the difference between a tree on stage and a tree as itself on stage?

[32] The written sources for much of our contemporary knowledge of Norse mythology arises from the *Poetic Edda* and the later (and somewhat adapted) *Prose Edda*.

In the three major examples already mentioned in this chapter, the plants and trees are not diminished to objects because of their engagement, either as important scenic markers, plot carriers, or by anthropomorphization. Rather they are integral to the production through the various ways trees can be meaningfully included in performance. The pines in *Matsukaze* are more than colorful backdrops; the apple tree is more than a sticky situation. To argue that performing as "just" scenery is the same as a performance of treeness is to impose very human centric assumption that the natural environment is a backdrop and that plants are objects the same way inanimate blocks might be. It is to introduce a gestalt notion of plantness that can be inserted into any dramatic text or production with little consideration of the arboreal subjects included/represented.

The fact is to understand a tree as behaving like a tree on stage is extremely difficult since most trees in the realm of theatre and performances are employed as woody extensions of our own ideas. While the trees already mentioned in this chapter are important as trees, it is their human or magical characteristics/connections which make them meaningful in the drama. This is not to argue that a tree performing as tree produces a more "authentic" performance, but rather it is a performance where different questions may be asked of the material body on stage by means of its staging, inclusion, and characterization on stage. Rather than finding the human in the tree to be the reason a tree is made important in the dramatic action—consider the debate of Yukihira in a pine—what occurs when the tree is a tree, and that is why it is included?

I propose that while trees can function as (primarily) scenic devices as seen in *Matsukaze*, plot devices as seen in *The Apple-Tree*, or human(oid)s in tree form as seen in

Pinocchio, trees performing as themselves is less visible and often met with significant confusion. The possibility of a tree as itself might initially be understood to only pertain to living trees, and indeed, as can be seen by the end of this chapter, this is a method for arboreal performance. However, I propose that there are also representative trees in theatre and performance that perform 'treeness' over the other semiotic meanings usually attached to trees on the stage.

Trees on stage take on two general tracks: the first being live trees serving as scenic representations and second, representational trees performing as live trees. By using live trees, the tree (like all live "actors") is both scenic and itself, therefore doing double representational duty. The methods of including live trees in performance will be discussed further in Chapter 2: Living Trees, which examines gardens and parks as theatrical arenas. Representational trees being leveraged as live trees in theatrical productions is far more nebulous and difficult to assess in terms of performativity. By looking at the semiotic instability of the tree in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, I will discuss the potential of seeing a tree *as a tree* on stage, and the confounding results this produces.

WAITING FOR GODOT

To unpack this confusion and discuss possibly the most famous performing tree in contemporary theatre, let us examine the tree in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. As part of a very minimal set— "A country road. A tree. Evening"— the tree in Beckett's play demands attention, from the characters and the audience (7). Michael Worton discusses in his essay "*Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*: Theatre as Text" that the tree in

the play takes on dozens of meanings through the character's referential discourse: "the tree thus means so much that it can have no single meaning, and we should remember that Vladimir and Estragon are not sure if it is even a tree" (81). The interpretation of the text, and the absurdity of it, hinges on the uncertainty of meaning. Is it a cross? The gallows? A willow? A metaphor? The Saussurian relationship between signifier and signified is destabilized to the point that the tree may not even be a tree given the character's description of it.

> …their first reference to the tree immediately calls its symbolism into question. They argue about what kind of tree it is, why it has no leaves, and finally whether or not it is even a tree to begin with […] Not only do the characters question whether or not the tree represents the site of their salvation; they also question its very existence as a tree. This exchange strips the image of its ability to convey any kind of explanation to the characters or the audience. (Atkins 74)

The uncertain existence of the tree (a real tree or a metaphor?) is a point of much debate by academics and critics alike. Given its importance in the text and as one of few scenic inclusions, the tree is often considered to be the sixth character. Indeed, given its "growth" from Acts I to II, it is the only participant on stage that changes.

> The tree is not just 'an arbitrary feature in an arbitrary world', nor is it a symbol of hope. Rather, in its multiplicity, it serves as an indicator of the play's strategies of saying indirectly, and functions as a 'visual' and 'concrete' representation of the essential textuality of the play. (Worton 81)

Given the substantial importance of the tree to the script and production (as a set piece), I argue it is important to investigate the tree further. If the tree cannot be understood solely through its referential meaning, then we must apply an alternative paradigm to understand it. The tree works to hold a plethora of meanings because, like real trees that hold cultural significance, the imbuing of magical, cultural, or textual meanings is seen as

an arbitrary act that does not generate from the tree, but from those beholding it. The tree itself is not an 'arbitrary feature' as Worton suggests, but *the process of meaning-making is*.

Vladimir and Estragon's debate on whether the tree is a tree (and not a shrub or a bush) is frequently understood to be a deconstruction of the tree itself; however, I argue that their debate is not at odds with the materiality of the tree, but instead works to expose the complicated and confused relationships humans have with the natural world and the passage of time.

The idea that we should inherently know a tree when we see one is problematic. Recognizing a tree as a tree is far more uncertain and reliant on regional definitions[33]. The meaning-making process of attaching the De Saussurian sound image to concept is dysfunctional not only in the world of *Waiting for Godot* but in many interactions in the real world as well. To reflect further on Saussure, "*the linguistic sign is arbitrary*" (62) and so calling a tree a shrub is a question of signifier/signified relationship. What is taken as a surety—that a tree is a tree, and is recognizable as such—is exposed here as a linguistic breakdown of the sign that additionally reveals a lack of knowledge of the tree-subject beyond that of referential representations. Linda Kershaw, botanist and writer of *Trees of Ontario Including Tall Shrubs* explains that the primary difference between a tree and a shrub is merely size.

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[33] I have personally been working on improving my tree identification as part of the process for writing this dissertation. In summer months leaf identification is the primary method of deducing the species or variety of deciduous tree. In winter, even the familiar grounds on which I practice my identification becomes alien and strange. Only uniquely structured trees or those with lingering leaves that freeze to the branches are easily identifiable. Conifers, of course, are in their glory throughout the seasons (save tamaracks) but are always a little more difficult to begin with.

> Most of us have a fairly clear idea of what a tree is. Trees are tall, long-lived plants with stout, woody trunks and spreading canopies. A giant sugar maple or perhaps a towering spruce might come to mind with the word 'tree.' Many smaller trees, however, fall into the grey area between trees and shrubs. Robust specimens would be considered trees, but younger or less robust specimens might be called shrubs. (Kershaw 12)

The murky definitions distinguishing between shrubs/bushes and trees differ from region to region, sometimes including the caveat of a central trunk, other times referring to various minimum height standards. Using Kershaw's ruling,

> …a tree or tall shrub is defined as an erect, perennial, woody plant reaching **over 4 m** in height, with a distinct crown and with a trunk (one or more of the trunks on a multi-stemmed specimen) reaching **at least 7.5 cm** in diameter. (12)

Therefore, a species like a sumac may be considered a tree or a tall shrub, making the differentiation negligible. The staghorn sumac is a member of the cashew family with red fuzzy fruit, reaching heights of six meters, as featured in the image below.

Figure 31. Staghorn Sumac in the Guelph Arboretum

The tree, as a tree, confounds Vladimir and Estragon *and* the audience because we are confronted not with allegorical or metaphorical meanings but because we are confronted with it as a tree. Michael Marder, vegetal philosopher, explains:

> If animals have suffered marginalization throughout the history of Western thought, then non-human, non-animal living beings, such as plants, have populated the margin of the margin, the zone of absolute obscurity undetectable on the radars of our conceptualities. (Marder 2)

Plants and trees are utterly alien and marginalized—to the point where when confronted with one that is presented "as is" it is confounding to critics and audiences alike. A tree as a tree is absurd on stage.

Additionally, Vladimir's pronouncement that the tree could be a willow is in fact not negated by Estragon's assertion that it is a shrub or bush,[34] because there are dozens of species of willow that remain small. The iconicity of the weeping willow and Estragon's statement "no more weeping" (14) leads to the associative assumption that the tree in question might be weeping willow (a species that reaches great heights). In France, particularly, pollard willows are just as common (see Monet's "The Willows of Vetheuil" and Van Gogh's "Pollard Willows And Setting Sun") and appear nothing like the gentle cascading branches popularized on stage and in film by Disney's *Pocahontas*, *Into the Woods*, and *Avatar*'s tree of souls.

The tree as tree also resonates with the play's meditations on time and waiting. The stage directions at the top of Act II state "The tree has four or five leaves" (57) making up the only visual difference between the acts. The appearance of leaves works as

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[34] Canada, Australia, and regions of Africa, the term bush also refers more broadly to forest, wilderness, or wilds.

an indication of the passage of time, either over night as Vladimir claims or longer as Estragon insists. Vegetal temporality as theorized by Marder is defined by the difference between human and vegetal perceptions of time.

> Since we cannot accompany, continuously, the temporality of vegetal growth (whether in plants or ourselves!) that passes unnoticed below the threshold of human perception, it will appear to us, in any given period of lingering with the plant, that its time is virtually nonexistent or, in Aristotle's terms, that its movement is immeasurable. Paradoxically, there needs to be a break or a rupture in our temporal approach to the plant—for example, coming back home after a long period of absence [or the break between dramatic acts]—in order for us to register the passage of time expressed in the spatial increase of the plant's stem, leaves, and so forth (Marder 103)

The surprise of leaves is not an unusual reaction to vegetal growth. While it is true that mature leaves do not appear overnight, the suddenness of leaves equally points towards the rupture in temporal approach to plants as it does to the actual passage of time. In *Waiting for Godot*, time is virtually nonexistent for the characters as well as the tree—in fact, given Marder's description of vegetal temporality, the tree evidently registers the passage of time more reliably than the characters who bicker about when it was they waited last. Marder's meditation of leaves resonates further with the play:

> The leaf: an ephemeral register for the inscription of vegetal time as the time of repetition, a register not archived but periodically lost and renewed, such that these losses and renewals themselves make up the temporal, temporalizing trace imprinted on it. (Marder 114)

The dramatic action repeats itself in act two, the leaves and the "dead voices" of Vladimir and Estragon's conversations marking the passage of time.

> Estragon: All the dead voices.
> Vladimir: They make a noise like wings.
> Estragon: Like leaves.
> Vladimir: Like sand.
> Estragon: Like leaves.

Silence. (62)

Leaves, as per Marder's description, are both symbolic and literal markers of time. The tree in *Waiting for Godot* has the capacity of being both while not losing its "self" in the semiotic breakdown.

> Acts of repetition do not clarify anything whatsoever, do not consolidate or crystalize the structure of meaning they carry, but simply affirm, with renewed energy, the sense of vegetal existence, a sense which fuses with this very existence in all its heterogeneity and finitude. (Marder 115)

Time and trees are culturally intertwined; the curious temporality of vegetal existence frames short-lived human actions as absurd. The re-iterability of vegetation leads to a slow, cyclical repetition that is almost immeasurable by the human eye except by the rupture of the temporal approach. Estragon repeats the comparison of leaves to dead voices, echoed in the "miraculous" presence of leaves on the prop tree, but the repetitious act clarifies nothing except for the tree's vegetal presence on stage—a temporality distinct and separate from the human.

Worton explains that many "critics have compared Beckett's 'dead voices' to Dante's souls in Purgatory" (82) but stops short of connecting the correlation between dead voices and leaves through the most arboreal of Dante's passages: "The Wood of the Suicides" in Canto XIII of *Inferno*. Upon arriving at the mysterious wood in the second compartment of the seventh circle of hell, Virgil encourages Dante to break off a branch of a nearby tree, only to discover that the trees are sentient and suffering the fate of men who are 'self murderers'. While Purgatory might have dead voices, "The Wood of the Suicides" have trees crying out in pain and fear by means of wind in their leaves and branches. Estragon's comparison between dead voices and leaves echoes the leaves and

voices of the seventh circle, perhaps even more so than the disembodied voices in *Purgatory* because of their connection to suicide. The tree's voice in Ciardi's English translation of *Inferno* is literally made up of the wind, just as the sound of dead voices for Estragon "rustle," speaking "Each one to itself" as would leaves in the wind (63)[35].

The debate of whether Vladimir and Estragon should hang themselves and stop time is a recurring event in the play, although with the interpretation of the wood of the suicides, even their deaths would not resolve their predicament. Recurrence of suicide, leaves as voices, and leaves as purgatorial indicators of time, therefore, are among the many interpretations of the text:

> Even if leaves here and the tree throughout the play are privileged, they must be perceived less as objects with allegorical meaning than as signifiers in a complex web of textual play. (Worton 82-3)

The tree itself hold performative power in this 'complex web' even if none of the implied significations for the tree occur. The various purposes attached to the tree are left unrealized: it is the place marker for an event which never occurs; it carries the threat of death for a suicide which never occurs; it is a hiding place that cannot shelter the characters; it is the basis for a balance position which neither Vladimir or Estragon can do; it is a scenic element that continuously invades the action. The tree is made up of attached meanings and usages none of which work for the characters. By not functioning properly the tree is transformed from material object to a *thing* being wrestled with, as Bill Brown would claim. Brown's "thing theory" hinges on the idea that when *objects*

[35] The trees in Marie Clement's *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* are also known for producing sounds (falling, cracking, wind in leaves) as sounds of the dead.

cease to function in predictable manners, they become *things*, asserting a peculiar kind of power into our interactions with them. While the pines in *Matsukaze* are certainly housed under Objecthood, and the puppet in Pinocchio under Agenthood, the tree in *Waiting for Godot* stands firmly in that nebulous terrain of Thinghood. It resists predictable applications of trees on stage: as scenic devices, as mediators of plot, and as people in tree-form. On the continuum, the best place to locate the tree (with the caveat that it might not be the *only* place to locate it) would be as a charismatic or misbehaving tree. Within the framework of Beckett's play, there is a tree behaving in none of the common, practical applications for communication setting, purpose, or character, but simply, and absurdly, as a tree.

Case Study #1: Range of Representations in *Into the Woods*

In this section I examine the 1986 musical (and the 2014 film adaptation) by James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim, *Into the Woods* as a dramatic performance that explores plants as practical stage objects, magical plot devices, and even agents. *Into the Woods* is riddled with environmental encounters between characters and plants/plant products, most of which go unexplored in scholarship. Instead of studying the individual folkloric plots (Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, etc.) for their interpretation of the narrative, I look at the plots as scenarios in which the vegetal can be understood as participating in the plots.

Following from Chapter 1, I find that *Into the Woods* includes examples from three of the four major sections:

- Trees as Scenic Devices (objecthood)
- Trees as Plot Devices (thinghood)
- Trees as People/People as Trees (agenthood)

Like many of the productions discussed in Chapter 1, there is no attempt to include real trees in *Into the Woods* given its fairy tale framework. All the trees and plants, therefore, are representational. If I were examining a specific outdoor production of the musical, then I could analyze how site-specific performance works to present Trees as Themselves. Without such a performance available for research now, this section will have to remain unaddressed for the time being. I can imagine, however, that an outdoor production of *Into the Woods* might feasibly incorporate local flora in the same way that *The Apple-Tree* might have been performed around “a tree in a market square” (5) as discussed by Jan Kouwenhoven in Chapter 1.

Into the Woods combines six plots from popular western fairy tales to tell a new story of their intersection. Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and the Beanstalk, Rapunzel, Cinderella, a Childless Baker, and a Witch, all weave together. To reverse the Witch's curse of childlessness upon them, the Baker and his wife must collect a series of magical items from the other fairy tale characters while they all circle one another in the woods. Rather than ending with the curse's reversal, however, the story continues beyond the "happily ever-after" to reveal the disruption in the kingdom caused by the fairy tale characters getting their wishes. Specifically, the magical beanstalk leads to Giants wreaking havoc on the kingdom, killing the Baker's wife (after she has produced a child, mind you,) and causing all the characters to first blame one another, then the Witch, and then themselves. The Witch disappears, the Baker's wife dies, Cinderella's relationship with the prince dissolves, Little Red Riding Hood's Granny dies, Jack's mother dies[36]. The characters left at the end of the play band together to form a new family unit and finally leave the woods.

Fairy tales in *Into the Woods* are leveraged in ways that depend on the audience's familiarity with each plot while simultaneously overturning and intertwining them to create a new synthesis. Applying Diana Taylor's terminology, the fairly tales are scenarios: "exist[ing] as culturally specific imaginaries—sets of possibilities, ways of

[36] Motherhood in *Into the Woods* is evidently fraught with peril at every stage. In addition to those mothers already listed, the Witch blames her mother for cursing her when she lost the beans; the Baker's father stole beans (and was cursed for it) for his pregnant wife (the Baker's and Rapunzel's mother); Cinderella's mother is a ghost from the very beginning of the play; and the "Big Tall Terrible Lady Giant" who cares for Jack in a motherly way goes on the rampage to avenge her husband's death when Jack fells the Beanstalk. Even the relationship between Rapunzel and the Witch is a contentious pseudo mother-daughter (or Stockholm) dynamic which ends with Rapunzel effectively disowning the Witch.

conceiving conflict, crisis, or resolution—activated with more or less theatricality" (Taylor 13), and their usage in the production "makes visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes" (Taylor 28). I read these scenarios for encounters between characters and audiences with trees and plants, unpacking the formulaic structure to expose the meaningful contributions the vegetal offers the plots. I do not mean that Lapine and Sondheim rewrote the plots specifically for plant performativity, but by examining the expressions of plant performativity in each of the production's intertwined scenarios, patterns emerge. Certainly, through the production the refrain from the opening score, "The woods are just trees/the trees are just wood" is ultimately disrupted by the representations of trees and plants in the play, just as the expectations of happy endings in the individual plots are broken down.

Even if plants are not necessarily the primary focus on the individual plots or the overall production, they are ubiquitous. By analyzing the production with a focus on the plant usage and inclusion, new understandings of both the overall framework and how vegetal participation can be gauged on stage emerge.

Each fairy tale scenario in the play can be broken down into an embodied negotiation of an attached and a detached vegetal stage item, which in turn can be located on the Continuum. According to Teemu Paavolainen's "From Props to Affordances: An Ecological Approach to Theatre Objects," attached and detached objects can be classified as objects that produce opportunities for either movement (around the object) or manipulation (of the object) by the actors. An attached object might be a set piece nailed

to the theatre floor (a bridgeway pine on the nō stage), while a detached object would be a more conventional prop (the prop tree in *Matsukaze*).

In *Into the Woods* the inclusion of a major vegetal attached and detached object in each of the plots structures the scenario of encounter. The detached object (or prop) defines and facilitates the action of the attached object (set piece), as will be shown in the analysis of each plot. In each instance, the vegetal object is acknowledged as being initially wondrous, and then later reframed as dangerous. To complicate the matter however, Paavolainen's terminology does not adequately suffice, as the term "object" does not always accurately describe that which is attached or detached (given the continuum's range from object to thing to agent). I will instead use the terms "attached item" or "detached item" to more broadly encompass the range of plant representations available in this production.

Little Red Riding Hood

Detached Item: Flowers

Attached Item: Grandmother's House (Oak Trees)

In the plot of Little Red Riding Hood, the eponymous girl on her way to Grandmother's house (attached) is lured off the path by a wolf who encourages her to pick flowers (detached).

In the libretto, the house "stands under three large oak trees" (I.ii) while in the 2014 Walt Disney Pictures adaptation directed by Rob Marshall, the house is inside of the tree. In both variations, Grandmother's house and the woods in which it is located are inseparable, one literally housed within the other. The actress's movement through the

woods is defined by the attached item, while her distraction is caused by the detached flowers that she collects. By stopping to collect flowers, the props on the stage, the action of going "into the woods to grandmother's house" is delayed long enough for the wolf to fulfill his role in the plot (I.i). Little Red Riding Hood at first believes that "Granny might like/a fresh bouquet…" (I.ii) but eventually learns that "Even flowers have their dangers" (I.ii).

Applying the continuum to Little Red Riding Hood is the most straightforward of all the subplots in *Into the Woods*. The vegetal elements can be identified as either scenic or objectified. The flowers and woods are scenic in that they have no additional powers or abilities and are low in terms of visibility. Grandmother's house is similarly constructed but slightly more visible because of its objectification. The oak trees of Grandmother's house are recognizable because of their relationship to the house. While it is possible for an argument to be made that the oak trees of Grandmother's house enter Dedicated Trees, I identify that strata to be more accurate if the relationship were based on the trees: Grandmothers' tree would be located in Dedicated Trees but Grandmother's house which is related to the trees only by proximity means that the trees themselves are objectified by such a relation and are not specifically dedicated.

Objecthood *(Low visibility)*				**Thinghood**				**Agenthood** *(High visibility)*
Scenery	**Objectified Trees**	Dedicated Trees	Econs	Charismatic or Misbehaving Flora	Enchanted or Empowered Tree	Animated Tree 1 (Low)	Animated Tree 2 (Medium)	Animated Tree 3 (High)

Figure 32. Continuum for Little Red Riding Hood

The "hungry little girl" (I.iii) Little Red Riding Hood treats the vegetal items in her subplot as objects, presenting a highly resource based relationship (if we consider Herndl and Brown's model) in which metaphors of consumption run rampant.[37]

Jack and the Beanstalk

Detached item: Beans

Attached item: Beanstalk

The story of Jack and the Beanstalk straightforwardly demonstrates the connection between detached and attached items in the play. The magic beans Jack trades for his cow grow into an enormous beanstalk that facilitates his encounter with the giants and, in turn, endangers the entire kingdom. Thus, the detached item transforms into the attached item, thereby exposing their magical qualities and their direct influence on the plot. The linkage in Little Red Riding Hood between the flowers and Grandmother's

[37] Little Red Riding Hood stuffs her face at the Baker's shop, is led astray collecting flowers, and is eaten (along with her grandmother) by the wolf. We can see a similar resource and consumption structure emerge in the Little Red Riding Hood scenario appearing in the case study of Phantom Limb Company's *Memory Rings* analyzed later in this dissertation.

house is not quite so obvious, even though in terms of the plot development, her delay with the flowers is what allows the wolf to eat Granny before she arrives.

The beans and the beanstalk are more intimately linked, where the acquisition and accidental planting of the beans cause the stalk that will grant the giants access to the kingdom. Importantly, while the beans are called magical and wondrous by the characters, before they are planted it is evident that the adult characters do not actually believe they are. As the Baker says to his wife: "Magic beans! Are we going to dispel this curse through deceit?" (I.ii) and Jack's Mother says to him: "Only a dolt would exchange a cow for beans!" (I.ii). In this way, they are scenic—like Little Red Riding Hood's flowers—until they are planted and reveal themselves to be magical.

But the beans *do* transform in to enormous beanstalks, leading Jack to the world of the giants where he steals an assortment of items (money, a hen that lays golden eggs, a harp). The giants chase him back to the earth, causing mayhem, destruction, and (in the stage version) death. The beanstalk takes on the qualities of an Enchanted or Empowered Tree (plant) there by proving retroactively that the beans should have been believed to be magical by the adult characters. The beans however exhibited low visibility as objects, while the beanstalk shows a substantial increase in visibility and transcends objecthood into thinghood.

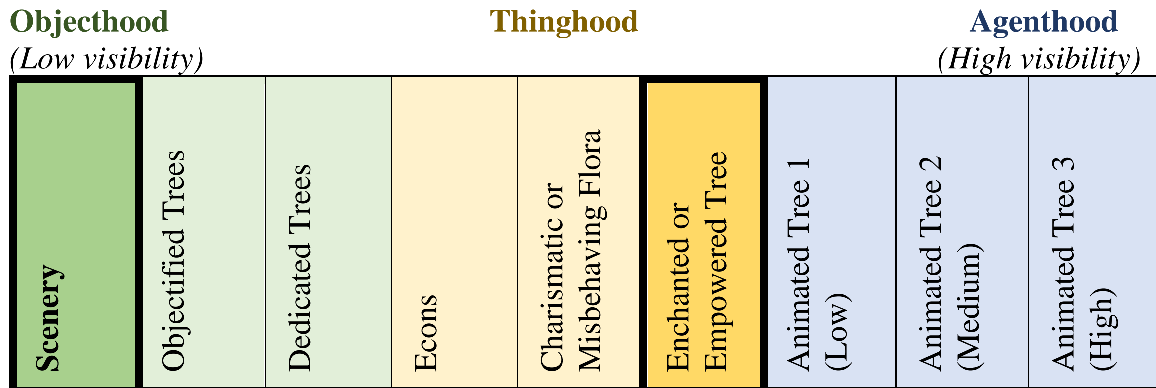

Figure 33. Continuum for Jack and the Beanstalk

The treatment of the beans and the Beanstalk in Jack and the Beanstalk bridges objecthood with thinghood, reflecting Jack's negotiation of his mother's practical request that he sells the cow, with the more nebulous problem of his relationship with Milky White (the cow) and his inability to accept realties.[38] Jack is responsible finally for the felling of the beanstalk, severing the bridge between the kingdom and the Giants in the sky, but accidentally kills a Giant in the process.

Rapunzel/Witch

Because the plots of Rapunzel and the Witch are so intertwined, I will discuss them together. Separating them would otherwise limit and disjoint the discussion which is otherwise rather delightfully intricate. There are two pairings of detached and attached items that present themselves in the Rapunzel/Witch plots, that I will discuss in turn:

Detached item: Rapunzel/Rampion

Attached item: The Witch's Garden

Detached item: Rapunzel/Corn

[38] His mother berates him on multiple occasions for being a fool and not having a grasp on reality.

Attached item: Thorns

The story of Rapunzel has a rich vegetal history which makes her subplot in *Into the Woods* a little more complicated than the straightforward attached/detached dynamics in Little Red Riding Hood and Jack and the Beanstalk. While the central elements of Rapunzel are her being locked in a tower and using her long hair as a rope, her name actually refers to a leafy salad green, more commonly known today as rampion. In the backstory of the Childless Baker's plot, it is revealed that his father stole rampion from the Witch's Garden for his pregnant wife:

> He was robbing me, harassing me
> Rooting through my rutabaga,
> Raiding my arugala and ripping up the rampion
> (My Champion! My favourite!)
> …
> But I let him have the rampion—
> I'd lots to spare.
> In return, however,
> I said, "Fair is fair:
> You can let me have the baby
> That your wife will bear
> And we'll call it square (I.i)

The child born becomes the witch's favourite—this time under the name of Rapunzel rather than rampion. In this framework, the rampion is the detached item stolen from the Witch's Garden (attached). And because the child is used as a substitute, Rapunzel herself becomes a kind of detached vegetal item in the same way the rampion is used.

Later in the play, however, another pairing of attached/detached items arises. The Baker and his wife have been told to find "hair as yellow as corn" at first thought to be Rapunzel's hair (I.i). But Rapunzel's yellow hair, exclusively cared for and used by the Witch, cannot be used as an ingredient because of the Witch's contamination. Substituted

for her hair instead is the literal silky hair from the ear of corn, again, building striking vegetal similarities between Rapunzel and vegetables. The attached item working as counterpart for the hair exists elsewhere in the production, when the witch uses Rapunzel's severed hair to lure her prince up the tower only to fall on a sea of thorns below and be blinded.

Both pairings incorporate thinghood and agenthood on the continuum. In the first pairing, the Witch's Garden falls under enchanted/empowered tree or plant, as the items in the garden and under the protection of her spells. The rampion/Rapunzel in this case is obviously located under Animated Tree 3 (high) given the conflation between the plant and the child. Similarly, in the second pairing, the thorns are enchanted by the witch, while the conflation between the Rapunzel's hair and the ear of corn again fall under agenthood.

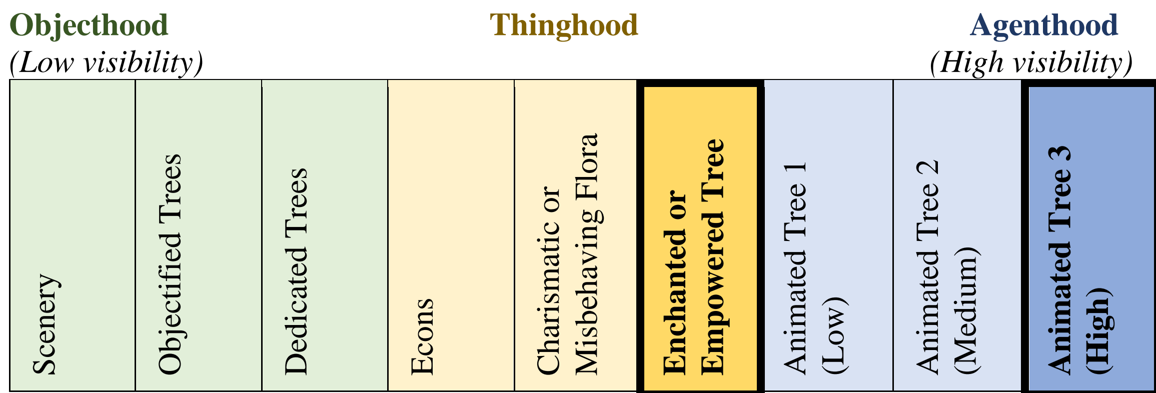

Figure 34. Continuum for Rapunzel/Witch

In Rapunzel, magical plants and people become irreparably intertwined through physical contact, (consumption, injury) connecting Thinghood with Agenthood. While Rapunzel is certainly more human than Pinocchio (discussed in Chapter 1) they both fit into the same categories on the continuum because of their vegetal original stories. Pinocchio the

talking log eventually transforms into a real boy; the Baker's parents are forced to trade their child for the greens stolen from the garden, effectively transforming plant into child as well.

Baker

Detached item: Beans/Greens

Attached item: Family Tree/Falling Tree

The plot of the childless Baker and his wife is the thread that winds the rest of the fairy tales into a cohesive whole. At its heart is a curse placed by the Witch onto the Baker's family: for stealing vegetables (specifically, the magic beans) from her garden, the Baker's family is cursed to be barren.

> And I laid a little spell on them—
> You too, son!
> That your fam'ly tree would
> Always be a barren one… (I.i)

The beans, which become integral to Jack and the Beanstalk, and the stolen greens, central to Rapunzel, are treated as detached scenery—objects that by their manipulation (theft) lead to the dramatic action.

That item which is negotiated around, however, is not necessarily a physical attached set piece, but rather the predicament by which the plot unravels: the barren family tree. While applying the metaphor of the family tree to understand the attached object might appear to be a stretch, it should be mentioned that in the Broadway musical—not the film adaptation—the Baker's wife is killed by a falling tree knocked over by the Giant. The curse is lifted, in that the couple is granted a child, but the family tree is upended by the death of the Baker's wife. The family tree and the tree that kills the

Baker's wife would be located on the far right of the continuum as its connection to personhood is high.

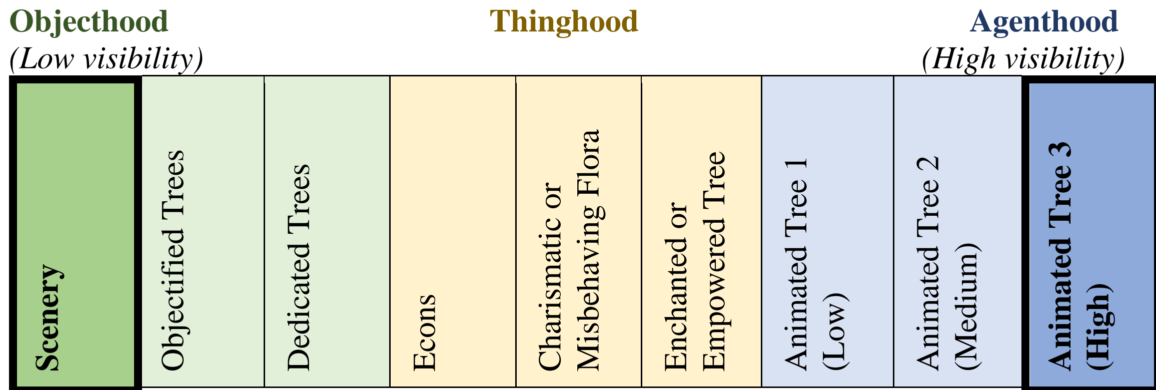

Figure 35. Continuum for Baker

The Baker's plot, like Rapunzel's, entwines objecthood and agenthood, as his metaphorical family tree is barren because of the theft of the beans, and his wife is killed by a collapsing attached tree (effectively destroying the nuclear family structure) knocked over by the Giant.

I will add here that the Giant responsible for knocking over the tree that kills the Baker's wife could be considered either an attached or detached item for this section. Attached, the Giant is a stage object that appears once the Giant falls over, detached the Giant is a moving speaking character. Relevant to this discussion on vegetal performance, the Giants are presented in very tree-like terms. Not only are their presence in the kingdom a direct result of the beans/beanstalk, they die by being felled. The first male Giant dies when Jack fells the beanstalk. The Giant's wife is similarly felled, Cinderella explaining to the Baker that "What's important now is that we find a way to fell the giant" (II.ii). The Giants on the continuum would exist in Animated Tree 3 (high)—barely recognizable as tree or plant figures, yet are felled just like the beanstalk is.

Cinderella

Detached item: pumpkin, branch, lentils

Attached item: transformed pumpkin, tree, Mother's Ghost

The story of Cinderella has so many variations that part of the discussion of *Into the Woods*' interpretation must address the versions that are implied but not necessarily present in the Broadway play or the film adaptation. To borrow Kenneth Burke's words, the story of Cinderella is "charged" by the cultural connotations and resonances, increasing the symbolic intensity of each item in the story (the slipper, the pumpkin). As a scenario, the story "structure[s] our understanding" and "haunts our present" (Taylor 28) so much that it is difficult to establish precedent and we must negotiate the multifarious trope in its entirety. Although much is made of the shoes, gown, and the stroke of midnight, there are multiple vegetal objects that feature importantly in variants of the story. While Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and the Beanstalk, and Rapunzel all have variations (they too are scenarios), their differences tend to be less ungainly than Cinderella.

There are two general frameworks for the Cinderella story 1) a fairy (godmother or otherwise) transforms vegetables into the necessary items Cinderella needs to attend the festival, or, 2) an enchanted tree on Cinderella's mother's grave grants these same gifts. Most modern interpretations of the folk select one of these tracts or combine elements of both. Kenneth Branagh's 2015 film of Cinderella combines the frameworks by providing a backstory to the wishing tree, explaining that the branch it grows from is a last gift from Cinderella's father before he dies. The film then jumps tracks and continues

to follow the fairy godmother storyline as the source for the magical gown, shoes and carriage. Disney's 1950 animated film shows only the fairy godmother narrative, transforming pumpkins to carriages, and *Into the Woods* shows only the wishing tree narrative (found in the Brothers Grimm *Aschenputtel* and the Finnish *The Wonderful Birch*) that showers silver and gold down on the desperate Cinderella. In the fairy godmother version, the detached vegetal object becomes the means for the plot to progress by first transforming into the carriage (attached) and at midnight reverting to the detached pumpkin. In the wishing tree version, the attached vegetal object (the tree) grants the same series of transformation but remains attached throughout. The detached component to that second version can either be understood as the branch Cinderella is said to have grown the tree from, or the gifts given to her from the tree (the dress, the slippers).

Into the Woods includes yet another vegetal object (detached) used on stage by the stepmother to prevent Cinderella from going to the ball. She tells Cinderella, "I have emptied a pot of lentils in to the ashes for you. If you have picked them out again in two hours' time, you shall go to the Ball with us" (I.i). The lentils are collected by birds that Cinderella sings to for help. The lentil sequence evokes the Roman myth of Cupid and Psyche (Ovid's *Metamorphosis*), where for Psyche to win back her love, she is forced by Venus to sort grains before dawn—a seemingly impossible task until she receives aid

from kindly insects[39]. Like Psyche, Cinderella cannot go to the festival to meet her love until this seemingly impossible task is achieved.

Into the Woods shows the central interaction between Cinderella and the natural world as that between the girl and the tree at her mother's grave (in the libretto, an unspecified species, in the film adaptation, a golden willow). Using the continuum, it is evident that the tree itself occupies multiple strata, which I will explore beginning on the left.

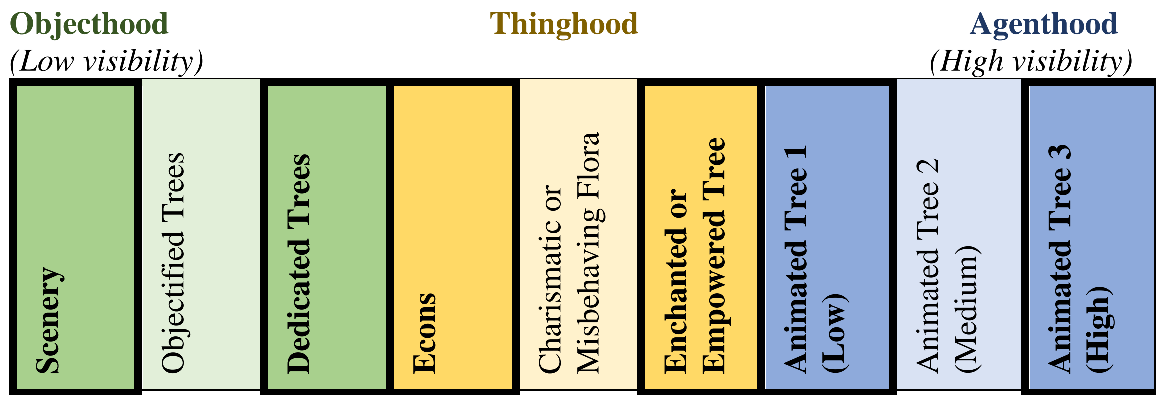

Figure 36. Continuum for Cinderella

Theatrically, the tree, the pumpkin and the lentils are primarily scenic, providing a backdrop or objects to facilitate Cinderella's transformation from servant to eligible bachelorette. The tree in this sense is much like any tree in the woods where the characters go to live out their plot lines. However, because the tree is dedicated to Cinderella's mother, we can understand it to exist within the section of Dedicated Tree. Unlike the Little Red Riding Hood plot where the Grandmother's house is also an oak

[39] Pysche's second task, to collect golden fleece from violence sheep, she is saved by a magical talking reed (an enchanted or empowered plant) who instructs her to collect fleece caught on branches and bushes, not directly from the sheep. Elements from the story of Cupid and Psyche is adapted into several European fairy tales including Beauty and the Beast, Cinderella, Rumpelstiltskin, and The Little Mermaid.

tree (housed under Objectified Tree), this tree's presence is a direct result of Cinderella's act of remembrance toward her mother: "Cinderella had planted a branch at the grave of her mother and she visited there so often, and wept so much, that her tears watered it until it had become a handsome tree" (I.ii). The tree itself is remarkable because of its connection to her mother, and is made more visible because of it.

Moving into Econ, it must be considered that any live production on *Into the Woods* must grapple with the physical representation of the tree: is it deciduous? Coniferous? Large? Small? The species of tree—even if vague—can directly feed into the econicity of its performance. Brothers Grimm's *Aschenputtel* specifies a hazel tree; the Italian *Cerentola*, a date tree; the Finnish and Russian variations a birch. The species of magic tree on the grave then relates to an audience's perception of a special tree. Referring back to Chapter 1's discussion of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* we can see the complexity that arises semiotically when a production calls for the inclusion of "a tree" with no further specifications. In fact, *Waiting for Godot* is actually more specific than *Into the Woods* because it is at least inferable that the tree on stage is deciduous from the description of the leaves. The film adaption of *Into the Woods* uses a visual technique to echo the libretto's mention of Cinderella's weeping by representing the tree as a weeping willow. Produced in the United States, a weeping willow holds cultural connotations that in another geographical context might be lost.

The tree, regardless of its semiotic connotations or econicity, obviously has abilities beyond that of the average tree. Its ability to grant wishes and to house the ghost of Cinderella's mother designate it as either an empowered or enchanted tree. Fitting with

the fairy tale framework, having the ability to conjure slippers and a dress from thin air is an essential part of the Cinderella story,

Depending on the choices made in the individual production, the tree's act of granting Cinderella's wishes may have an embodied manifestation, moving it along the continuum to Animated Tree (low). The libretto describes: "shiver and quiver, little tree, silver and gold/throw down on me" (I.ii) which can be interpreted as a low level of animated tree, moving on its own accord when fulfilling its enchanted or empowered abilities. In the film, there is supernatural wind and the tree's branches "shiver and quiver" around Cinderella until costume is transformed. Flexibility in the production choices makes room for a range of tree animation.

Finally, the tree can be read through the rightmost section of the contiunuum, Animated Tree (high) because of the conflation between Cinderella's Mother's Ghost and the tree. The Mother's Ghost sings to Cinderella:

> Do you know what you wish?
> Are you certain what you wish
> Is what you want?
> Ask the tree,
> And you shall have your wish. (I.ii)

The libretto specifies that the ghost of Cinderella's mother "appears within the tree," and it is her voice heard (I.ii). In a recording of the 1991 staging with Kim Crosby and Merle Louise, the tree is revealed to have Cinderella's mother inside by means of a hollow in the tree trunk, covered with a scrim. When the ghost appears, the lighting reveals the actress inside the otherwise inconspicuous trunk.

Figure 37. Kim Crosby in 1991 production of *Into the Woods*

A brief google search of regional and community production reveals many similar stagings, where the mother's face and upper body pops out through a hollow or between branches of the tree. The film adaptation film takes a less common route available due to its medium, where Cinderella's mother is a ghostly translucent spirit sitting on the tree, the silks of her dress blowing into the sweeping branches of the willow in a magical wind that brings Cinderella her gown and shoes. The relationship between tree and ghost is unclear. Is the tree on the grave a tree or a manifestation of the Mother's Ghost? Is it the tree singing or the Mother's Ghost, or both? The ambiguity offers a range of interpretations in each production offering varying levels of agency to the tree. Given that at the end of the play a tree is (in a manner of speaking) responsible for the death of the Baker's Wife, the relationship between motherhood, death, and trees are unsettlingly foreshadowed in Cinderella's scene. Cinderella's Mother's Ghost sings to her and grants her wishes; the Baker's Wife's Ghost reappears at the end of the play to remind her

husband that their wish of a child was granted even if "sometimes people leave you/halfway through the wood" (II.ii).

Applying the continuum to *Into the Woods* demonstrates the sheer range of plant and tree representations in the musical, and offers distinctions between the subplots and their treatments of plants and trees. Cinderella plot combines all three sections of objecthood, thinghood, and agenthood, almost as if the indecisiveness of her character spills onto the representations of the plants and trees associated with her plot.

Conclusion

Otherwise an eclectic collection of objects, settings and persons, using the continuum to study the vegetal representations in *Into the Woods* offers new and unique insight into the play and the character relationships. The continuum is a useful framework to categorize and analyze the wide variety of plant representations on stage and in dramatic literature without losing them to human-centered terminology or relegating them to colourful backdrops. For a play whose recurrent theme suggests the woods are a powerful and magical space for journeys and transformation, it is only appropriate that the woods themselves are treated as dynamic. The refrain goes: "The woods are just trees,/The trees are just woods" (I.i) but it is evident throughout that the world of the play that this explanation is too simple. The company sings:

> "You can have your wish,
> But you can't just wish--
> No, to get your wish
> You go into the woods,
> Where nothing's clear
> …
> Into the Woods
> And through the fear,

You have to take the journey" (I.v)

And the Baker's wife admits:

"And to get what you wish,
Only just for a moment…
These are dangerous woods" – Baker's wife

The woods as a metaphorical mire for the character's wishes only addresses the vegetal in part. To only examine the metaphor is to discard the many tangible and important plants playing roles through the dramatic action. For the Baker's wife, the dangerous woods are not just morally dangerous, but physically. Her decision that "…it's time to leave the woods" are her last words before being killed by a falling tree (II.ii). While the metaphor is indeed evident throughout, it is also evident that the metaphorical going into and then out of the woods only partially resolves the character's problems. At the end of the first act, the characters sing "Into the woods,/ Then out of the woods/ …/ And happy ever after!" (I.v). Act two, however, reveals that even with all their wishes granted, the characters are still proverbially lost in the woods. The same pattern repeats at the very end of the play. The woods, then, is not a physical space that one can come in or out of—it cannot be just trees. Simultaneously, the woods as a collection of trees and plants (magical and not) is not simply a metaphor, but tangible participating forces, things, and people. In the world of the play, the fantasy of the woods has more complexity than a simple dichotomy. Negotiating this complexity, and its myriad of manifestations, is where the continuum, as I have demonstrated here, is a useful and essential framework for the process of analysis.

Case Study #2: Spanning the Continuum in *Little Shop of Horrors*

The most mass produced and recognizable theatrical production significantly featuring a talking, thinking plant is undoubtedly the 1982 musical adaptation of *Little Shop of Horrors* by Alan Menken and Howard Ashman. Audrey II[40] is a peculiar plant being who transforms in each iteration of the story, beginning with the original 1960 film as a (half-butterwort, half Venus Flytrap) plant hybrid, becoming an alien plant-being (perceived as being) hell bent on taking over Earth in the Broadway musical, and finally emerging as a fully self-conscious and goal-driven "Mean Green Mother from Outer Space" in the 1986 film adaptation of the musical.

The 1960's horror comedy is certainly not the first artistic work to include a carnivorous plant or a dangerous plant hybrid. In fact, the dangerous plant motif occurs far earlier with roots in Europe's orchid industry, and the threatening genetically altered (or hybridized) motif is still occurring with the utmost sincerity in artistic works today. I will address each in turn to contextualize the peculiar history of Audrey II.

Background

Prior to the 1960 *The Little Shop of Horrors*, the carnivorous or dangerous plant is most readily seen in the genre of short stories on orchid rearing and orchid hunting, notably including (among others):

"The Purple Terror" by Fred M. White (1898)
"The Flowering of the Strange Orchid" by H. G. Wells (1905)
"Green Thoughts" by John Collier (1932)

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[40] For the sake of clarity, I will be referring to the carnivorous plant star of *Little Shop of Horrors* generally as Audrey II, as it is called in the Broadway musical and the 1986 film, though the 1960's original film calls it Audrey Junior. In the sections referring specifically to the 1960's film, I will use Audrey Junior accordingly.

"The Reluctant Orchid" by Arthur C. Clarke (1956)

It is useful to remember that while these stories are works of fiction, they address in fantastic scale the very real industry of supplying new and unusual orchids to self-claimed naturalists in Europe. These procurers each hope to grow wondrous blooms from ambiguous lumps of tissue, bringing them fame, fortune and, as H.G. Wells writes, "even immortality. For the new miracle of nature may stand in need of a new specific name, and what so convenient as that of its discoverer? "John-smithia"!" (Wells, n.p.). This framework is the definition of discovery scenario, with all the trappings of exoticism, trade, heroism, and destruction.

In most of these stories, the basic premise is as follows: the explorer (or, once removed, the naturalist) discovers a mysterious and dangerous exotic plant. Lured by his own desire for fame, fortune, and immortality he facilitates the growth or procurement of the plant, which endangers him and those around him. Ultimately, the discoverer must sacrifice himself in an act of heroism order to destroy the plant and save the world. In sum, the scenario generally follows the series of events: the discovery of the plant, the nurturing of it (revealing the discoverer's hamartia), a series of mysterious deaths, the revelation that the plant is unnatural in its desires, the eventual (or implied) death of the discoverer, and the death of the plant. White's story, "The Purple Terror" transplants the formula into the jungles of Cuba, following orchid hunters, while the other stories mentioned above take as their setting the hot house of the unwitting armchair naturalist eager to grow a monster. It is a difference akin to monster movies which either take the route of the monster being created in a lab by mad scientists or discovered in some dark

recess of the unexplored world (consider *Frankenstein* versus Bigfoot). Both routes remain today, with the armchair naturalist evolving into Seymour Krelbourne, and the orchid hunters in films like the 2004 horror film *Anacondas: The Hunt for the Blood Orchid*. The 2004 film conjures the same formula, with the exception that the island of Borneo's anacondas take on the monstrous role, not than the orchid itself. The orchid is rather a MacGuffin,[41] in this case synonymous with the fountain of youth, and the reason behind why the anacondas are particularly aggressive. The Blood Orchid is not the monstrous, blood drinking orchid of "The Purple Terror," but evokes the same monstrous-plant anxieties.

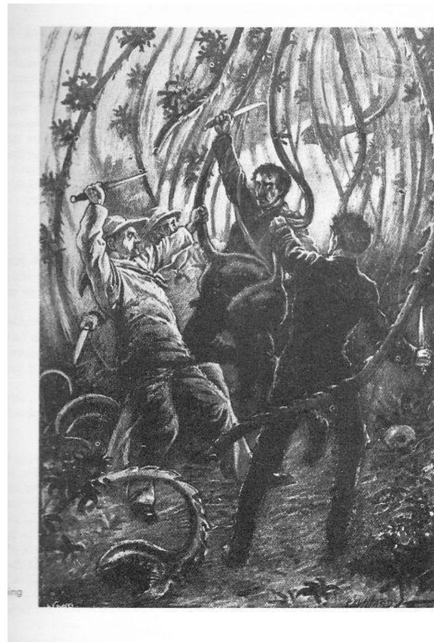

Figure 38. "The Purple Terror"

"Green Thoughts by John Collier (1932) (rumored to be the basis for *Little Shop of Horrors*) still includes the elements of the dangerous plant murdering unsuspecting

[41] A MacGuffin refers to a plot device or object in film that the characters seek, thereby fueling the rest of the narrative events, such as the holy grail.

victims and its eventual destruction at the hands of a human, yet it departs significantly from the conventions of "The Purple Terror" and "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid" by offering a (somewhat) vegetal perspective. Collier's story presents a Mr. Mannering who is given a peculiar orchid to rear in his hot house (green house). He expresses "joy and happiness in being the discoverer and godfather of a new sort of orchid" (Collier 233) and does not seem to correlate the orchid's impressive growth with the mysterious disappearances of his cousin Jane's cat and cousin Jane herself. Despite the concerning disappearances, Mr. Mannering is:

> full of the most exalted visions of the blossoming of his heart's darling, his vegetable godchild. It would be the largest known, by far; complex as a dream, or dazzlingly simple. It would open like a dancer, or like the sun rising. (Collier 235)

Realizing too late that one of the buds appears as the missing cat's face in floral form, Mr. Mannering is attacked by the orchid until his head too is one of the unnatural flowers, along with the cat and Jane.

Generally unperturbed by this metamorphosis, Mr. Mannering observes his newfound vegetal life, only disappointed "by the thought that he would now have no opportunity to name his orchid, or to write a paper upon it, and, still worse, there grew up in his mind the abominable conviction that, as soon as his plight was discovered, it was he who would be named and classified" (Collier 237). It is interesting to note here that while Mr. Mannering is slowly learning his new abilities and limitations as a plant, his dominant fear is not that he is no longer human but that he has changed positions from discoverer to the object of discovery and has no capacity to speak. He is now the subaltern, and (understandably) this is a concerning reversal of fortunes.

Unfortunately, his wretched nephew soon appears, taking over his uncle's home, abusing his maid, drinking his liquor, discovering the plant—and the fact that the flower heads are capable of consciousness and feeling. Realizing by means of a letter that his uncle had planned to cut him off, the nephew advances with a pair of scissors toward the plant, concluding that "…in the vegetable world, only the mandrake could voice its agony – till now." (247). The plant in this version is far from the horrific blood thirsty orchid in "The Purple Terror", as even though the plant is responsible for the consumption of the cat, Jane, and Mr. Mannering, the wretched nephew is certainly presented as the more dangerous being in the narrative. The vegetal perspective of Mr. Mannering literally humanizes the plant, bringing the vegetal "thing" into agenthood, and offering the readers not just a glimpse into Mr. Mannering's predicament but into a world where the conventional scenario of discoverer consumed by discovery no longer completely demonizes that transition. In effect, "Green Thoughts" presents a reversal to the formulaic structure that allows for a non-binary vegetal perspective.

The threatening genetically altered (or hybridized) plant motif is another recurring element in the science fiction genre, historically and in contemporary works, with notable inclusions being John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), Biollante in *Godzilla Vs. Biollante*, Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014), as well as the original 1960 film *The Little Shop of Horrors*.

Wyndham's triffids are the dubious result of (possibly) Russian genetic engineering of crops. Disseminated around the world by a freak accident triffids become peculiar anomalies easily normalized by human populations.

> The first wave of public interest soon ebbed away. Triffids were, admittedly, a bit weird—but that was, after all, just because they were a novelty. People had felt the same way about novelties of other days; about kangaroos, giant lizards, black swans. And when you came to think of it, were triffids all that much queerer than mudfish, ostriches, polliwogs, and a hundred all of things? The bat was an animal that had learned to fly; well, here was a plant that had leaned to walk—what of that?
> […]
> People were surprised, and a little disgusted, to learn that the species was carnivorous, and that the flies and other insects caught in the cups were actually digested by the sticky substance there. We in temperate zones were not ignorant of insectivorous plants, but we were unaccustomed to finding them outside special hothouses, and apt to consider them as in some way slightly indecent, or at least improper. (29)

The triffid's slow creep from one part of the continuum to the next offers a peculiar effect. While the blight in *Interstellar* is fixedly plant-ish (albeit, misbehaving in a sense), and Biollante from *Godzilla Vs. Biollante* is specifically a monster hybrid (involving DNA from Godzilla, a rose, and a girl), triffids offer more this analysis because they do not stay in one sphere or another. The blight's effects may be horrible, and Biollante is certainly a monster of epic proportions, but the triffid's transgression between silos on the spectrum produces the horrific. The continuum is in this way very useful for understanding the genre of plant horror as the act of moving from one silo to the next, for while in *Into the Woods* it is the presence of different kinds of plants along the continuum which constructs the fantasy, the more horror-based *Little Shop of Horror* emphasizes the slow transformation of an object to a thing to an agent as the object of horror. It is not the type of animated plant which is horrific, but the overturned assumption that a plant is a plant which is unsettling.

***Little Shop of Horrors* (1960 film)**

The Little Shop of Horrors, the 1960 film directed by Roger Corman, rumoured to be based on "Green Thoughts," certainly sustains several of the key elements of the Orchid discoverer scenario as well as the genetically altered plant motif. Seymour "discovers" Audrey Junior as a small bud in a Japanese florist's shop and nurses it to health with his own blood in the attempt to win fortune, fame, and love. It is not revealed until later in the film that the plant is a "cross between a butterwort and a Venus flytrap," thus explaining its curious taste for human blood. Seymour explains to Mr. Mushnick that the Venus fly trap only feeds on insects three times until its full grown, growing miraculously each time. Working under the assumption that Audrey Junior will grow similarly, Mr. Mushnick justifies keeping the plant alive, believing that only one more death will be necessary. Of course, Audrey Junior continues to feed every night at sunset until the end of the film when its buds open for the "Society of Silent Flower Observers of Southern California," revealing the disembodied faces of its victims. Seymour decides to kill the plant by leaping into its mouth wielding a knife, and then reappears as a flower, saying "I didn't mean it" before the end credits roll.

The hybrid Audrey Junior is a plant in the film, beginning life as an object growing in a coffee can, transforming into a thing by means of its desire for blood, culminating as an agent with Audrey Junior's ability to speak and hypnotise Seymour into murdering. With each transformation, the characters have increasing difficulty justifying their protection of it, even with the fame and fortune accrued.

Feeding Audrey junior from his fingertips appears to be benign to Seymour initially, due to the plant's small size, but as Audrey Junior grows larger and his appetite

increases, the rationale for continuing to feed and protect the plant becomes more complex. The first murder occurs as an accident, where Seymour attempts to hide the body in a variety of places before deciding to feed it to Audrey Junior. The subsequent murder of the dentist is self defense. Then when Mr. Mushnick, taking a turn to watch the plant, is threatened at gun point by a burglar, it is the plant which saves him and the shop. Finally, the last murder occurs while Seymour is hypnotised by Audrey Junior, and encounters a prostitute who "volunteers" (through a misunderstanding). Stephanie Lim's analysis of *The Little Shop of Horrors* proposes that the original 1960s film displays a symbiotic relationship between Seymour and Audrey Junior that is lost in the more antagonistic killer plant model of the Broadway musical and 1986 film adaptation. In the original, Audrey Junior aids in "eliminate[ing] the "bad eggs" of society" (Lim 212) while "providing economic stability and social growth to an entire community" (197). In a word, the monstrous plant is undoubtedly horrific (underscored by the refrain "feed me!") and yet the overall effect of the plant's appetite improves Skid Row, a neighborhood plagued with poor business and shady residents. The moral questionability of the murders and the protection of the plant increases degree by degree, just as the plant's representation moves up the continuum from curious object to dangerous agent.

The horror of the carnivorous plant is not simply that it eats people, although this is the culmination of the plot. The horror, as *The Little Shop of Horrors* so accurately displays, is caused by the slow progression from something ordinary and justifiable, into increasingly extraordinary and unjust circumstances. To apply the continuum to Audrey Junior, it is not that the Butterwort/Venus Flytrap hybrid occupies multiple strata which

makes it notable, but that it wriggles its way into different silos over the course the film. Comparatively, the tree in Cinderella's story in *Into the Woods* is magical from the beginning, so its ability to grant wishes, speak, and represent the deceased, is not seen as a basis for horror, or even surprise, even though it has generally similar abilities to Audrey Junior (who speaks, grants Seymour fame and fortune, and shows the faces of the dead in its blooms).[42]

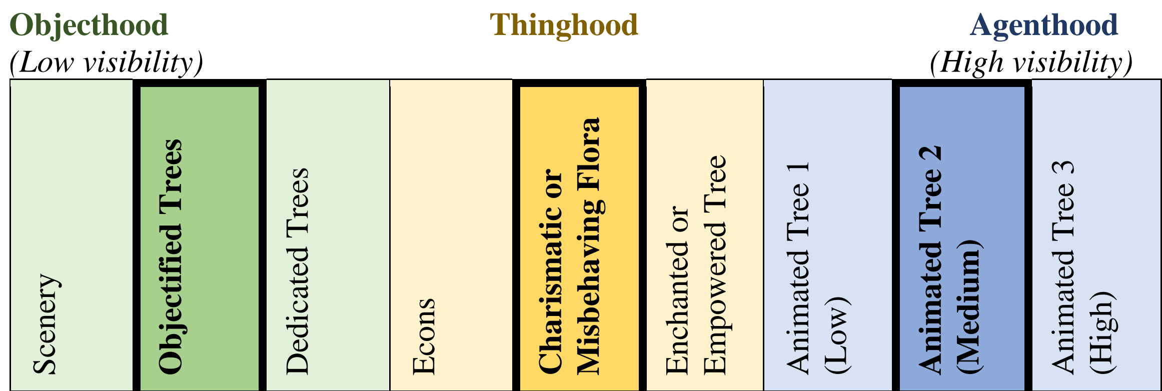

Figure 39. Continuum for Little Shop of Horrors, Original Film

In the beginning of the film, Audrey Junior occupies the space of an objectified tree (in this case, plant) because of its visual peculiarity. Once Seymour discovers Audrey Junior's appetite for blood (and consequently, human flesh) Audrey Junior enters the range of charismatic or misbehaving flora due to this peculiarity. Without a way of categorizing what Audrey Junior truly is, except for a mysterious cross, Audrey Junior is a thing. Finally, once Audrey Junior begins to speak, and gain powers such as hypnotism,

[42] The nature of the deaths between these two vegetal stars are distinctive. In *Into the Woods*, the tree is planted on Cinderella's mother's grave, while Audrey Junior actively feeds on the dead bodies Seymour provides him with. Anyone with even a basic understanding of botany, however, would know that trees feed on whatever is below them (via roots) even as they consume sunlight, air etc. above ground. The method of consumption the deceased and their subsequent absorption into the tree or plant appears natural in the subterranean tree example and unnatural in the above ground mouth of Audrey Junior, even if the result is fundamentally the same.

the plant enters moderate animation, which includes limited capacity to speak, move, etc. while still being immediately recognizable as plant.[43]

Little Shop of Horrors: Broadway Musical and Film Adaptation of Broadway Musical

While genetically altered plants like triffids or the disease of blight in crops are ultimately fatal for human beings, the plants rarely transcend past thinghood (assuming they even make it out of objecthood). Even the triffids, who are slowly understood to have communication amongst themselves and the uncanny ability to seek out humans, only enter low animation. With the alienizing of Audrey II, however, comes intent—an identifiable enemy who is not simply biologically programmed to be fatal to humans by means of its survival, but who is *choosing* to kill off people. Alluded to but not fully fleshed out in Audrey Junior's hypnotic powers in the 1960 film, Audrey II's alien agent form and dynamic speech sets the musical apart from its historical legacy of the plant horror genre. Audrey II transforms over the course of the production into a fully, highly animated being "alive and aware, … functioning at high, human-like intellectual levels" (Lim 203) rather than a sensory driven creature capable only of expressing hunger.

Objecthood	**Thinghood**	**Agenthood**
(Low visibility)		*(High visibility)*

[43] The continuum range for the musical and film adaptations of *Little Shop of Horrors* is essentially the same, except for that Audrey II as an alien being capable of thinking, reasoning, planning, etc. more adequately falls into high animation (not moderate).

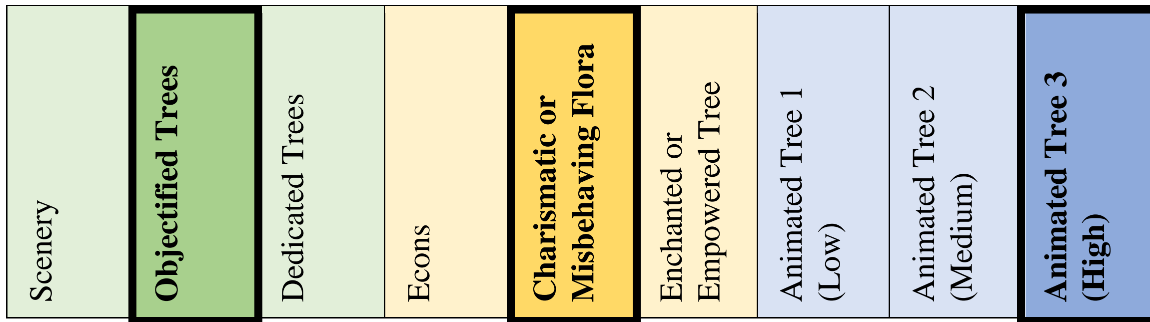

Figure 40. Continuum for Little Shop of Horrors, Musical

In the Broadway musical by Alan Menken and Howard Ashman, Audrey II is revealed to be an alien, appearing in the flower shop during a "total eclipse of the sun" and serendipitously found by Seymour. Stephanie Lim writes that "By presenting a plant as coming from an unknown, alien world, audiences automatically "other" the plant beings, and, thus, the killer plant fear is constructed" (204). Rather than being an anomalous hybrid of a butterwort and a Venus flytrap, two mundane, if carnivorous, plants, Audrey II is an alien invader. Audrey II's alien status prompts new questions of intent and scope which are inherently unknowable, and therefore terrifying.

The musical features a heavier handed moralizing attitude to the story, particularly with the reprise song "Don't Feed the Plants" which begs the audience to disregard the plant's promises of fame and fortune. This explicit warning evokes the history of carnivorous orchid stories while resonating with the new alien attributes of Audrey II. "Don't Feed the Plants" plays with the dichotomy of plants as objects, needing to be fed by human caretakers, and plants as agents, capable of bargaining and granting wishes.

> Please, whatever they offer you,
> Don't feed the plants! ("Don't Feed the Plants!" Finale)

The success of *Little Shop of Horrors* prompted productions across the US and globally, so that like the finale "Don't Feed the Plants!" suggests, Audrey II has ultimately been successful in taking over the world in a theatrical sense. The puppet of Audrey II, an integral part of any production, has become heavily commercialized for a range of theatrical levels of production—high school to professional. Musical Theatre International advertises the following:

> One of the longest-running Off-Broadway shows, *Little Shop Of Horrors* the charmingly tongue in cheek comedy has been produced worldwide to incredible success with technical aspects running the gamut from Broadway to PTA budgets. Companies can even rent the series of increasing[ly] large Audrey II puppets directly from Music Theatre International. ("Little Shop of Horrors")

The rental for Audrey II from MTI assures prospective producers that "All four plants – from seedling to psychopath – are included" ("Audrey II Puppets") and so Audrey II puppets are trafficked all over the globe from production to production.

> Thus the plants worked their terrible will, finding
> jerks who would feed them their fill, and the plants
> proceeded to grow, and grow, and begin what they came
> here to do, which was essentially to:
> Eat Cleveland
> And Des Moines,
> And Peoria, and New York,
> And this theatre ("Don't Feed the Plants!" Finale)

Indeed, given the sales of live Venus flytraps at performances (such as the touring production I attended in 2007 at Magnus Theatre, Thunder Bay[44]) if an alien plant life form ever *did* want to take over the world, creating a smash off-Broadway hit would be an incredibly effective method of global dissemination.

[44] Yes, I bought one.

There is a dual effect for this puppet rental system, however. The first is beneficial, since creating four dynamic puppets per production is a costly and complicated process, renting ready-made Audrey IIs (which only require one puppeteer at a time) makes small scale productions possible and certainly more lucrative[45]. The second effect of the rentals is that it concretizes the image of Audrey II.

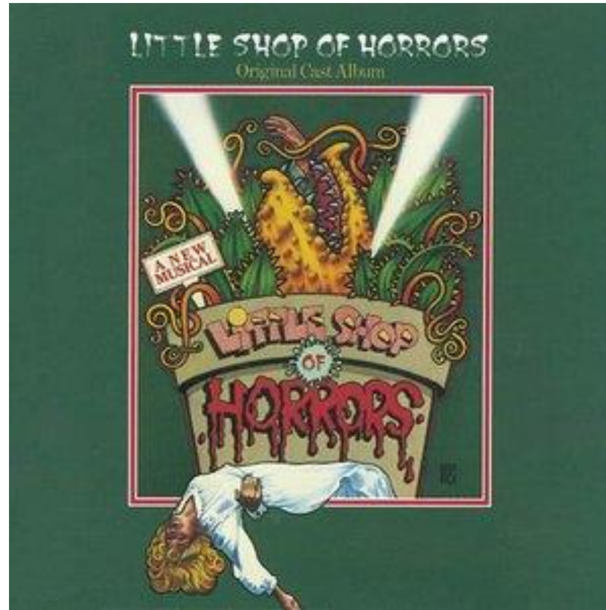

Figure 41. Cover of Original Cast Album of Little Shop of Horrors

Audrey II is based on the original film's basic egg shape and wide opening mouth; none of the incarnations of the plant resemble anything like a butterwort or a Venus flytrap, except for perhaps the mouth. The mass production of Audrey II puppets, as well as the precedent of the 1960 film and the subsequent popularity of the 1986 film, solidified Audrey II's appearance. Thus, productions tend to mimic, recreate, or rent the same basic puppets, so that regardless of production, Audrey II is highly recognizable.

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[45] At least, as lucrative as small-scale musicals can be, that is.

Even the 2006 London revival's reinterpretation of Audrey II as a pitcher plant only looks slightly different from the basic pod design (directed by Matthew White). Such continuity in the physical representation of Audrey II is largely unseen in other plants and trees integral to theatrical performances, such as the tree in *Waiting for Godot*, or the mother tree in *Into the Woods*, both of which are created anew in each production with a delightful range of imaginative interpretations. Species, shape, form, and semiotic layering are unique to each production, while in *Little Shop of Horrors*, Audrey II is a generally consistent pod-like mouth with leaves. The visual consistency solidifies Audrey II as an agent regardless of any individual production, in much the way as we can expect certain characters to be portrayed across genres or productions (like Cinderella, for example).

In anticipation of the obvious retort "surely Audrey II's design is based on the needs of puppeteering, not just because it's an agent?!", allow me to offer an example. The black and white 1964 television show *The Addams Family* includes a loveable, carnivorous African Strangler/Dandelion, Cleopatra. Morticia's pet, this plant is a hand puppet controlled by the actress, and made to eat meatballs. As can be seen from the following image from the television film, she does not visually match the more iconic Audrey II construction, while still being a carnivorous plant puppet. *The Addams Family* television series would have preceded the musical adaptation of *Little Shop of Horrors*, and therefore the construction of Audrey II as is now popularized would not have been in the cultural imaginary.

Figure 42. *The Addams Family* “Cleopatra”

In the revamp of *The Addams Family*, *The New Addams Family* features a different construction for Cleopatra that does not visually evoke the original, and instead evokes Audrey II. The episode “Cleopatra, green of the Nile” (episode 55) aired between 1998 and 1999, years after Audrey II had gained global notoriety as both a theatrical and film franchise. Cleopatra in this incarnation has an oblong, pod-like head, red lips, and even a sign that reads “Feed the Carnivorous Plant”—all semiotic connections to the cultural imaginary which at the time of its release would obviously refer to the popular Audrey II construction.

Figure 43. *The New Addams Family* “Cleopatra”

In examining *The Addams Family* and *The New Addams Family*’s differing interpretations of Cleopatra, it is evident that the mechanics of puppetry is not the sole basis for the visual construction, but rather the reinterpretation of Cleopatra resonates with the popular imaginary of carnivorous plants popularized through *Little Shop of Horrors*.

The 1986 film adaptation of *Little Shop of Horrors* by Frank Oz, starring Rick Moranis, maintains much of the musical’s form, except for the ending. Whereas in the musical the finale explains that Audrey IIs have taken over the world, the film adaptation had to rewrite this ending based on poor reception with trial audiences. Instead of dying himself, Seymour vanquishes Audrey II by electrocution, and the song “Don’t Feed the Plants!” is cut from the film. Alluding to the original ending (which has since been released and can be viewed on YouTube) a small Audrey II plant hidden in Seymour and Audrey’s new garden bed, smiles sweetly at the camera. An additional change to the story is the inclusion of a new song by Ashman and Menken, “Mean Green Mother From Outer Space” which was nominated for the Oscar’s Best Original Song (the first ever to

include profanity).[46] In this song, Audrey II connects his existence to classic monster movies and admits his alien existence:

> Don't ya talk to me about old King-Kong.
> You think he's the worst? Well, you're thinking wrong.
> Don't talk to me about Frankenstein.
> He got a temper? -HA!-He ain't got mine.
> You know I don't come from no black lagoon.
> I'm from past the stars and beyond the moon.
> You can keep the thing,
> Keep the it,
> Keep the creature, they don't mean shit! ("Mean Green Mother from Outerspace")

To have a song by the villain offers a far more animate and agentified representation of Audrey II than Audrey Junior's repetition of "Feed me" with varied inflections. The crux of the production, and the representation of Audrey II remains the same as the original film: Audrey II's transformation from object to agent.

> Seymour: Look, you're a plant! An inanimate object!
> Audrey 2: Does this look inanimate to you, punk?! If I can talk, and I can move, who's to say I can't do anything I want?
> (spoken sections from "Feed Me (Git It)")

The movement from object to thing to agent is not so much a movement of the plant itself, although the growth and development of Audrey II has a significant contribution. Rather, it is the human character's recognition of Audrey II as moving from one sphere to the next, and struggling to understand it. As can be seen in the quoted segment from the

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[46] The song "Mean Green Mother from Outerspace" has sparked debate as to Audrey II's gender, although the usage of 'mother' may very well refer to motherfucker as much as it does to mother. The voicing of Audrey II in both the 1960 and 1986 films have been male, and so I have referred to Audrey II as "he", as is commonly done in reviews of *Little Shop*, although I should admit that the more appropriate pronoun for Audrey II would have to be gender neutral.

song “Feed Me (Git It),” Seymour struggles to accept that Audrey II is anything but an inanimate object even while holding a conversation with him.

As a thing, the unconvincing explanation of a carnivorous never-seen-before hybrid, still retains enough water for Seymour to justify continuing to feed Audrey II. Even the capability for rudimentary vocalizations expressing hunger, resists transferring out of thinghood. Seymour is already used to general sounds coming from Audrey II (definitely a thing) when the exclamation “Feed Me!” emerges from the plant. It is not until Audrey II begins to make promises and convince Seymour to kill Orin the Dentist that Seymour accepts that “Tuey” (his nickname for the plant) is more than just a peculiar vegetable.

Seymour’s understanding of Audrey II evolves over the course of the film:

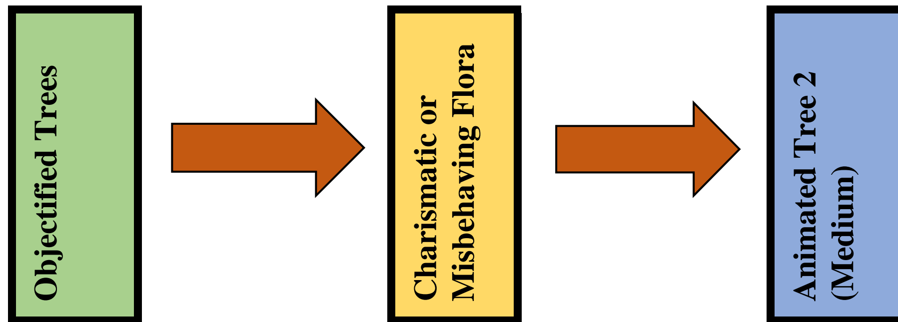

Figure 44. Continuum in Motion

Whereas the botanical examples from *Into the Woods* demonstrate either multiple strata simultaneously or in context with one another, there is not demonstrated an inclusion that so readily moves between sections. After all, once Audrey II is identifiable as a *Thing* or an *Agent* it is almost impossible to understand it as an *Object*, even if Seymour struggles to hold onto this preconceived idea. By the end of the film Audrey II has reached full self-awareness, which includes the rejection of the objecthood and thinghood.

Figure 45. Giant Sequoia in Yosemite National Park, California, USA

LIVING TREES:

EXAMINING LIVE AGENTS IN DRAMATIC ARENAS

In Chapter 1: From Nō to Godot, I examined how the continuum can be used to analyze stage productions. In this chapter, I exit the theatre house to study how the continuum can be used in performance of everyday life in those arenas that house living trees and plants: gardens and parks. While it is perhaps easier to demonstrate the transitions from objecthood to thinghood to agenthood on stage (see the Case Study on *Little Shop of Horrors* preceding this chapter) in the performance of everyday life new challenges are presented in understanding these same patterns.

I find that Samuel Taylor Coleridge's suggestion of the "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment" is very useful in developing an understanding of why applying the continuum to stage productions is a relatively easy process while applying the continuum to, say, a garden presents itself with all kinds of mental and linguistic roadblocks. A tree as agent, according to the continuum becomes more and more fantastic the farther right along the spectrum, but because it is housed within art, the temporary willing suspension of disbelief remains intact. The tree and plant beings in *Into the Woods* do not greatly challenge the audience's understanding of trees as living biological entities; the audience is not asked to extend their belief in the magical beans to the world outside the play. When the framing of traditional drama is removed, in both the custom of suspending disbelief and the clear confines of a "temporary" performance, new challenges arise for understanding trees as participants in our everyday encounters.

Although Coleridge's quotation is often reduced to the "suspension of disbelief" I argue that the more important parts in his phrasing are "willing" and "for the moment." It is permissible to say that trees are agents within a dramatic text or singular performance, but when similar theories are applied to actual living trees, the *willingness* to suspend one's disbelief becomes more difficult within western systems of thought—even though the theory of *conatus*[47] remains intact. Likewise, the temporary suspension of disbelief "for the moment" is threatened and ambiguous without the clear bookends of a play.

The hesitancy to grant trees agency could be attributed to many different ideological systems, but as performance studies has in more recent history granted theories of agency to animals, and is now investigating the role of environments in performative acts,[48] the time to unpack the agency of living vegetation (rather than representation) is now at hand. One of the major hurdles of course is that there is a lacuna in the language of vegetative agency. This could be attributed to a residual Christian belief system that dictates "all living things but man be classed as mere automata" (Burke 155-156) or scientific rhetoric that readily dismisses theories that are not purely secular (Burke 253). Burke reminds his readers:

> Plato equated the divine with the abstract, apparently because both transcend the realm of the senses. Hence, nearly everything that this greatest of dialecticians says of "heaven" can be profitably read as a statement about *language*. And that man cheats himself who avoids Plato because of a preference for purely secular thought. Even the doctrine of the heavenly "archetypes" is sound enough, if read

[47] The Latin phrase from 17th century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza translates to "the endeavor of each being to continue being" (144). Growing and surviving, as any organism might do, is an act performed by an agent thereby qualifying the organism as agent through Burke's agent act relationship. A bubble has no discernible conatus or pull towards survival, even though it has motion. A tree, on the other hand, does.
[48] Performance Studies International's 2016 Melbourne conference dedicated to Performance Climates is evidence of this.

> as a statement about the relationship between class names and names for the individuals thus classified by common essence. (253)

Scientific thought, according to this logic, resists suspensions of disbelief because of problems in language. Reflecting on Herndl and Brown's heuristic of Nature as Resource/Object/Spirit, it is understandable that the limitative scope of much environmental rhetoric precludes the possibility of trees as agents without a dramatic frame. If the suspension of disbelief is foundationally built on poetic discourse, then the removal of the dramatic framing of a play (and thereby the means for suspending disbelief) creates ambiguity in language and understanding. Within the aims of this dissertation, such language is only not only operable within dramatistic framing, it can also reveal integral underpinnings unduly discarded. Ideological state apparatuses generally work against arboreal agency, but there is an increasing interest and development of methods emerging in science, literature and performance art for the expression of plant agency—even if those methods have not yet become widely accepted. New methods of communicating these ideas are necessary, particularly when shifting scenes from a dramatic performance to performance of everyday life. Importantly, the language itself must align not with the three modes of persuasion as previously discussed, but as something else. As I propose in the introduction, a synercentric persuasion, where encounter and participation is of utmost importance, could facilitate the understanding of such ambiguities.

For example, Elyse Pomeranz is a visual artist and anthroposophist working out of Toronto, Canada. Over the past thirty-five years, she has developed a practice called *Tree Conversations* in which she uses a form of meditation and imaginative cognition to

communicate with specific trees, painting as she does so to reveal what she interprets as messages. Her collection of approximately four hundred paintings from ten countries show startling diversity in style and content while the approach is systematic drawing on scientific research as well as shamanism. Pomeranz's work can be easily classified according to Herndl and Brown's heuristic as poetic discourse because of the implied spirituality, or perhaps entering scientific discourse in her systematic approaches and research which supports the artistic practice. In examining her work, I argue that the classification of her work as either of these modes is problematic not just because of their history of opposition, but because the emphasis is in the wrong place. In either a scientific or poetic understanding, the basis for classification is the message in the painting. If it is verifiable and replicable it is scientific, if not, poetic. But perhaps the more useful consideration, especially from a performance studies lens, is *not the result* of the conversation but *the act (or attempt) of conversing*. If the practice is instead examined as an act of encounter (with the paintings as archival evidence of live encounter), then a synercentric mode may be applied which does not necessitate the strict categorical opposition of object versus spirit. Instead the ambiguity may be celebrated and lead to arboreal participation in the act.[49] Entertaining the idea of tree input in visual art is radical in Pomeranz's work.[50] Regardless of whether Pomeranz's paintings are scientifically

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[49] In this way, *Memory Rings* might likewise be understood to be an enacted archive of experience of the PLC's visit to Inyo National Forest; the play and the paintings all exist in a dramatic frame removed from the trees they base themselves upon.

[50] It might very well be asked how flowers or trees influenced Monet in *The Water Lilly Pond* or the trees in *Poplars (Autumn)*, but when the language turns toward degrees of vegetal participation, the ambiguity of agency too often stops the conversation short.

provable as tree conversations, her artistic practice opens the door for arboreal agency and participation in a scenario where dialogue is possible. The potential for dialogue exists in the encounter where bodies are present, not necessarily in the theatre or art gallery where the work is displayed afterwards.

It becomes increasingly clear that even though studying the application of the continuum on stage is fruitful in many ways, if I want to argue for synercentrism and arboreal participation with living trees, I must look beyond the playhouse toward other dramatic arenas.

Objects in the Garden

Gardens, parks, and arboretums are the performative arenas where trees (and other vegetation) are included for themselves as well as any additional aesthetic purpose that serves the space and its users. In these spaces, they are both the scene and the agents within the scene. Courtney Ryan argues in “Playing with Plants” that “while plants are living beings, they have been taxonomically reduced to objects” (337). The average garden becomes less a site of preservation and more a spectacle of attractive, useful, or edible vegetation.

The domestication of vegetables and fruit demonstrate the objectification of plants quite clearly. Carrots, for example, originally grew in a wide variety of colors (purple, black, white, orange, red and yellow) until orange was popularized by 18th century Netherlands (whose flag, incidentally, is orange). Heritage varieties are still available, but are treated as colourful deviant. Similar histories exist for cauliflower, tomato, beans, and potatoes all of whom have been reduced to arbitrary aesthetic standards frequently

mistaken for health standards.[51] Elsewhere, fruits and vegetables that do not conform to arbitrary standards have had their own makeovers: in 2014 France's Intermarché supermarket chain launched "Inglorious Fruits and Vegetables," and in 2015 Canada's Loblaw grocery stores introduced a "Naturally Imperfect" produce line. At a 30% discount, Canadian consumers can purchase fruit and vegetables that are "[w]eird, small and misshapen" (Kozicka). "Inglorious Fruits and Vegetables" included posters designed by Patrice de Villiers of "of the grotesque apple, the ridiculous potato, the hideous orange, the failed lemon, the disfigured eggplant, the ugly carrot, and the unfortunate clementine" in 2014 (Cliff) selling the vegetables and fruits as tasty and fun

Figure 46. Patrice De Villiers Inglorious Fruits and Vegetables

In gardens where plants are not grown for consumption, the processes of objectification might appear less insidious. To be desirable, an apple must exhibit certain

[51] Having worked for a farm for several years, I can attest to the frequent awe of customers when they realize nothing is in fact "wrong" with their purple cauliflower.

qualities, and while shape is flexible for Intermarché's campaign, taste is essential. So, what about the plants we don't eat?

The qualities of a desirable tree differ greatly from those of a desirable fruit, excusing those trees whose which produce fruit, edible sap, or (in the case of Linden trees) edible cambium. Size, shape, foliage, strength, all factor into trees as ornaments or lumber. Because taste does not particularly factor in, the visual appeal or the utility of the tree are the leading qualities. In *The Hidden Life of Trees*, Peter Wohlleben writes about visual and resource based tree industries. Of the forestry industry, he explains that a healthy age of a tree is often dictated by the age at which the wood is best suited for lumber and use, not on the health, average ages, or qualities of the trees themselves. Thus, trees are routinely thought to be "old" at ages which are in fact young for their species: "[a]s people, we easily lose sight of what is truly old for a tree, because modern forestry targets a maximum age of 80-120 years before plantation trees are cut down and turned into cash" (Wohlleben 33) even when the same tree species are capable of living hundreds of years. Just like the 'normal' apple in the grocery store, resource discourse has greatly shaped our cultural assumptions of what is healthy or normal for trees based on our uses for them. The same desires and assumptions play out in the world of visual appearance as well, for while a twisted tree may withstand the wind more effectively, a straight tree makes a good two by four.

On the continuum, it is evident that both the aesthetically appealing apple and the "grotesque apple" inhabit the far left under objecthood, the former fitting neatly into scenery and the latter as an objectified fruit. I identify the "normal" apple as fitting into

the Scenery section for it creates a normalized aesthetic backdrop upon which the objectified or grotesque apple stands out.

In terms of trees, the standards of what is a "normal" tree sets the scenery upon which ornamental trees might stand out. Wohlleben expresses a distaste for a specific ornamental variety, the copper beech. It is a year-round red leafed tree[52] (also known as *Blutbuche* or blood beech, in German), comparable to the Crimson King Maple in North America.

> The color is a result of a metabolic disorder. Young developing leaves on normal trees are often tinged red thanks to a kind of sunblock in their delicate tissue. This is anthocyanin, which blocks ultraviolet rays to protect the little leaves. As leaves grow, the anthocyanin is broken down with the help of an enzyme. A few beeches or maples deviate from the norm because they lack this enzyme. They cannot get rid of the red color, and they retain it even in their mature leaves. […] These red trees keep appearing in Nature, but they never get established and always disappear again. Humans, however, love anything that is different, and so we seek out red varieties and propagate them. (229-230)

Wohlleben's dislike for the copper beech based on an 'unhealthy' appearance differs from a dislike of misshapen apples. While the grotesque apple retains its taste and nutritional value, the copper beech suffers from its lack of anthocyanin in ways that are eventually fatal. When the purpose of plants is to provide a colorful backdrop, as Ryan suggests, then the health of a plant is only important in so far as it retains the ideal aesthetic. Red trees, as Wohlleben writes, do not photosynthesize as well as their green counterparts, and therefore would eventually die out without human intervention.

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[52] It is vital to emphasize that Wohlleben is critiquing trees that are red year-round, not ones that turn red seasonally. The appearance of red in autumn is a result of the chlorophyll being redrawn into the tree, leaving a chlorophyll-lacking leaf which appears red. Because there is no (or little) chlorophyll in a Crimson King Maple or a copper beech, there is no colour change in the autumn as nothing is drawn back into the tree.

Ornamental and specialty varieties of trees are usually the result of genetic modification or selective breeding regimens. The visual spectacle emerges from human exploitation of desired qualities (size, colour, intoxicants, taste, nutrition). As Bergman offers in *Green Culture*, "[w]e can begin to realize that nature is so endangered and exploited, not merely because a group of men are exploiters, but because we have written mastery into the structure of our desires" (Bergman 299). In the case of the copper beech, the human desire for visual difference feeds the industry of ornamental tree breeding, even if the process succeeds in replicating trees with genetic handicaps. It is understandable to think of trees as objects because of the extensive ways in which practices of ornamental and resource breeding has transformed living trees into ideal candidates for resource or object appeal. For the copper beech, this objectification has come at the price of its long-term survival.

At the same time, although the motive for including such plants in a garden, or the planting of a garden in general may be in service of aesthetics, the objects included take on power beyond that of their appearance because of their physical presence. Their embodiment on stage directly impacts the dramatic action. Una Chaudhuri explains in *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* that on the realist stage, specific items

> (to name only the best known) Nora's Christmas tree, General Gabler's pistols, Laura's glass menagerie, Willy's suitcases are, for want of a better word, *characters* in the play. Their significance is not confined to the short circuitry of symbolism; rather they exercise a direct, unmetaphorical power in the formulation of the dramatic action. (80)

The pistols, the suitcase; these objects gain character status because of their material centrality to the plot. In Chapter 1: From Nō to Godot, I discuss this similar participation

in detail, although I do not refer to all of them as characters specifically. The pistols "act" in *Hedda Gabbler* by means of their presence on the stage, and contribute to the plot must in the same way the central tree in *The Apple-Tree* does. Building from the way that these theatrical objects gain character status according to Chaudhuri, plants within a garden too can be understood to "act" by means of their embodied presence. Despite not having specific or clear plot, I argue the scripts in a garden can produce moments of plant performance. Perhaps not all plants can be categorized as characters (just as not all objects on the realist stage directly contribute to the dramatic action) but it is a starting place for seeing arboreal agency in gardens.

The performative power of objects in both Chaudhuri's examples and my own rises from their contextualization and relationship to an arena where we may encounter them. As the stage contextualizes and frames the actor's performance, so too does the garden contextualize and contain the plant's performance. Gardens are collections constructed into landscapes, and so gardens as a method of exhibition is as important as the collection of plants themselves. Chaudhuri and Fuchs' *Land/Scape/Theater*, offers that with the advent of modern theater a new spatial dimension developed in which landscape "held itself apart from character and became a figure on its own" (Chaudhuri and Fuchs 3). In this text, the chronological order in which landscape was used as a term for painting and then later for visual fields implies that landscapes in paintings predate and led to the development or recognition of landscapes in real life. This is a development of perceiving land as landscape. "Landscape, then, was the framing, or staging, of geography. The primary medium of this staging was in fact not theater but

painting" (15) but with the development of perspective in painting (and set design) landscape is a mode of seeing that is not limited to any discipline. The call to arms for theatre and performance studies is to join the discussion of landscape as framing and as agent, without distancing itself from other artistic mediums which have created and informed this process.

Chaudhrui and Fuchs' call to arms is echoed in John Dixon Hunt's *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory* discussion of the plethora of disciplines which have contributed to what might be called garden studies:

> The subject of landscape architecture has no clear intellectual tradition of its own, either as a history, a theory, or even a practice. This is, in fact, its great advantage, and it is to be welcomed (as many involved in it are quick to declare), but it also has drawbacks. Its territory is adjacent to, even contested with, geography, anthropology, geology, botany, engineering, architecture, philosophy, fine arts, and literature. If we enlarge our lens to take in the uses to which gardens have been put, then the fields of theater, museology, sport, musicology, and zoology (to add a few more) would be drawn into the study of gardens. (6)

The multifaceted history and influence in garden studies is unfortunately for Hunt hampered by the "compartmentalized structure of academic learning" and the fact that "Nobody can bring to the subject a full repertoire of competences; conversely, anyone who crosses subject boundaries to tackle gardens is inevitably going to arrive with some colonizing instinct" (7). The inclusion of performance studies in 'adjacent territory' to landscape architecture offers a possibility for understanding by harnessing "that slippage from material thing to mental idea that lies at the heart of a landscape experience" (Hunt 33). In landscape architecture and garden studies, much like theatre, there is a complicated relationship between the practice and the theory, the repertoire and the

archive, which creates exciting ambiguities. Gardens themselves, however, function as both archives and repertoires. As an archive,

> Gardens are privileged, then, because they are concentrated or perfected forms of place-making. This concentration takes various shapes: the representation of many topographical features (valleys, hills, plateaus, springs) or the display of various organic and inorganic forms (shrubs, woods, waters, rocks, earth) can achieve that sense of plenitude which has been associated with gardens ever since the first one (Eden contained, of course, "every tree that is pleasant to the sight"). (Hunt 11)

By means of representing a vast selection of topographies, species, biomes, etc. gardens can effectively produce biological archives. The inclusion of herbaria, or preserved plant specimens, in many garden organizations, creates a connection between gardens and museums (which will be discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter). The problem in the living garden, of course, is that the specimens on display are living and constantly in flux according to season, care, etc. making the garden more of a vegetal repertoire than a static archive. By working within scenario, embodiment of and within landscapes, offers a unique contribution to the myriad ways landscape architecture and garden studies are viewed, with a lynchpin of synercentrism. The tree and the garden cannot be separated, much in the same way that the play and the playhouse affect on another, and so the practices of landscape design directly influence the act of encounter.

Earlier I mentioned that as the stage contextualizes and frames the actor's performance, so too does the garden contextualize and contain the plant's performance. This is not entirely accurate, for while the theatre houses the actors, the garden is *made up of* actors. Therefore, to move beyond trees and plants as objects, we must look at the dramatic arena of gardens, parks and arboretums not just as spaces in which plant

performance occurs, but as living communities of performing plants. To explore this further, I will look specifically at the history and development of the arboretum.

The Arboretum as Archive

Arboretums are botanical gardens which focus particularly on the exhibition of trees. They encompass large areas of land, encouraging visitors to wander along trails or clearings which aesthetically display trees based on themes of species, geography, or discovery. Arboretums are particularly popular in the western world, although they are found globally and potentially have roots stretching back to Ancient Egypt where there is hieroglyphic evidence of the use of trees in Egyptian architecture and ritual. Max Guilmot's "The Initiatory Process in Ancient Egypt," for example, discusses such evidence from the ruins of the Osireion of Abydos, built by Seti I in 1300 BCE. The architecture of the ruin includes "…circular pits, unearthed around the central hall and still filled with fertile soil, used to shelter verdant trees, symbols of the eternity of Osiris resuscitated" (19). Elsewhere, similar characteristics appear on hieroglyphs and sarcophagi, which Guilmot argues (in conjunction with other architectural similarities and relics) proves that the Osireion of Abydos was built as a reproduction of the now destroyed Temple of Osiris. The architectural design indicates the complexity both in technology and ritual used in Nineteenth dynasty Egypt and earlier. The evidence linking the two include a "…sarcophagus that has depicted upon it a rounded knoll crowned with four trees guarded by two ram-headed gods" (19) so that "The knoll and the four trees therefore allude to the famous sepulcher of Osiris" (20). Living trees were essential components to the architecture and the ritual worship of Osiris of which there are still

visible traces. In North America, however, the popularized form of arboretum is a colonial import and are often located near university campuses as educational and recreational facilities. From Ivey League institutions to the New American University, these large botanical gardens have heavily influenced methods of environmental encounter in North America.

Gardens, arboretums, even some parks consist of collections of colourful 'objects' with explanatory text, and suggested routes for the visitor. Even if the subject matter is "nature," little about this set up is "natural." Rather, the encounters occurring between visitor and subjects are carefully choreographed much in the same way a museum-goer's experience is curated. In arboretums, as museums, there are power structures in place that dictate modes and hierarchies of encounter.

One of the oldest (if not the oldest) arboretum in North America, the Arnold Arboretum, began in 1872 in Boston, Massachusetts when a portion of James Arnold's estate was transferred to Harvard College. As explained on *The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University* "Our History" webpage:

> [The] income from the legacy was to be used "for the establishment and support of an arboretum, to be known as the Arnold Arboretum, which shall contain, as far as practicable, all the trees [and] shrubs … either indigenous or exotic, which can be raised in the open air."

Co-designed by Charles Sprague Sargent and Frederick Law Olmsted, "[s]ince its inception, it has served as a model and benchmark for similar institutions, both in North America and elsewhere." (*The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University*). The Arnold arboretum is now a part of the emerald necklace designed by Olmsted which consists of a series of connected parks laid out over seven miles. Comparatively, a far more recent

example of a university arboretum is the Arizona State University Tempe Campus which, instead of including a separate grounds for the arboretum space, dedicated the entire campus as an arboretum in 1990 ("Arboretum – Tempe Campus." *Arizona State University*). A vastly different approach, these two arboretums offer different aestheticized forms of nature while still providing a cinematic encounter based on recreation and education: one which is clearly separated from an urbanized campus, and the other which synthesizes the two[53].

Initially the aesthetic difference is striking. In the Arnold Arboretum, visitors may take secluded walks along trails seeing in context depictions of local and exotic trees and shrubs. The arboretum maintains

> its living collections in the naturalistic style originally established by Sargent and Olmsted; for the most part—with some exceptions made for the cultural requirements of some plants—the collections are still arranged according to the Bentham and Hooker classification system. (*The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University*)

This simulation appears naturalistic, even though the species are neatly arranged in naturally impossible orders and labeled clearly. There is at times, an illusion of being in a non-curated forest. The ASU Arboretum, on the other hand, has a different challenge. Having walked the grounds almost daily for three years, the illusion of non-curation is practically non-existent. Given the biodiversity available in a desert, it would be difficult

[53] I will mention that for the three years I lived next to the ASU campus and walked its grounds every day, I never clued in that it was an arboretum, perhaps because I maintained the belief that the two are inherently separate.

to create lush grounds in which secluded trails might wind[54]. Because there is an openness to the Arizona desert, urban buildings are almost always visually present disrupting any suspension of disbelief. However, it is these buildings which provide the cinematic structure needed for the arboretum visitor.

The history of arboretums remains curiously connected to the history of theatre aesthetics. Working in the late 19th century, Olmsted's naturalistic designs were reflective of popular aesthetics. In 19th century Russia, Europe, and the US, naturalism and realism in the theatre was at its peak. Anton Chekhov and Henrik Ibsen both worked within conventions of realism, and productions often included highly naturalistic designs[55]. Emile Zola, the claimed leader of the naturalism movement, offers the following in his *Naturalism in the Theatre*:

> In the theatre, states Zola, "[W]e would need to intensify the illusion [of reality] in reconstructing the environments, less for their picturesque qualities than for dramatic utility. The environment must determine the character" (Zola 1881: 369) (*Theatre Histories: An Introduction* 347)

For the Naturalists, depictions of the environment (not necessarily 'natural' environments) is central to the understanding of character and the social politics of productions. Even though naturalism as a specific movement effectively disbanded after 1914, the similar aesthetic style of realism remains pervasive even today.

[54] This is not impossible, however, as is evident by the construction of the nearby Desert Botanical Garden. Mind you, for the display of trees, the sheer size of the location would have to be considered and, likely, would be rendered financially unfeasible.
[55] See V.S. Simov's 1898 design for Moscow Art Theatre's production of *The Seagull*, image available on page 352 of *Theatre Histories: An Introduction, Third Edition*.

Outside of traditional theatre spaces the design and performance of nature was likewise reaching a level of popularity hitherto unseen on the continent. The creation of parks and gardens and the incorporation of nature into university campuses all flourished well into the 20th century. Each with strong political and social roots beginning in the 19th century, the development of nationalized parks in North America gained traction in the early 20th century: the National Park Service in the US formally began in 1916; Parks Canada was founded in 1911; and the first national park now protected by CONANP (Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas) in Mexico was decreed 1917.
A cultural and political zeitgeist shaped the early development of natural spaces for recreation and education in North America, thereby shaping the methods of encounter still in place today.

The encounter with "nature" is a simulated encounter, as much with an idea of nature as the ecological subjects. The ways in which the visitors are encouraged to move through the space, look upon appealing vistas, read informational material, all refer to and reflect ideology. Even a lack of grooming or plaques signal to visitors an area is more "wild", even if the map and path have led them there. As discussed earlier, most of Olmsted's designs were based on visual spectacle, encountered while mobile (carriage or on foot). It is important to stop for a moment and consider what this form of encounter—a form which has reverberated across North America and more over the past two centuries—says about the ecological subjects being observed. First, the encounter is primarily visual rather than sonic, tactile, or any other sensory experience, except for perhaps scent depending on season. Second, the encounter is predicated on the moving

viewer, and since vegetation is rooted, any encounter is short lived. In fact, attaching the term “encounter” may be going too far.

German landscape architect C.C.L. Hirschfeld explains in the *Theory of Garden Art* that one of the primary objectives of the natural landscape garden is to produce a sense of greatness of scale.

> The enjoyment of greatness provides the mind and imagination with nourishment that brings complete contentedness; the individual rises above the lowly common perspective to a higher realm of images and sensations; he feels that he is no longer mundane but rather a creature empowered to tower high above where we stand. It is through the landscape, more than through a garden, that nature offers us the delights of greatness. (Hirschfeld 152)

The enjoyment of the panoramic landscape is for the pleasure of the visitor, and is more than a little suggestive of a colonial narrative of overseeing the land. The landscape “empowers” the visitor, and rather than establishing a meaningful reciprocal relationship, provokes a sense of ownership and control. The scenario of visually discovering a pristine, seemingly “untouched” landscape added with narratives of nationalism feeds directly into the American wilderness ideology that combines stewardship with power. It is the framing rather than the ecological subject which creates the conditions for the encounter, since within these arboretums and parks (with a few exceptions that will be addressed) trees, lakes, mountains, etc. are treated primarily as beautiful visual objects.

As much as landscape design and curation seeks to create scenes in which visitors may wander about, I must return to the earlier point that arboretums are not just the space which houses trees, like some sort of archival venue, but the living trees themselves. In this way, landscape architects like Hirschfeld or Olmsted worked to produce sublime landscapes on which to frame or facilitate, human or divine experience. Given the scope

and angle of my research, this methodology works to keep trees and plants in the realm of objecthood on the continuum. To use Diana Taylor's language, I propose that rather than archives, arboretums and gardens are repertoires.

The Arboretum as Repertoire

Diana Taylor asserts that "performance activate[s] current controversies about what and how museums display," making museums "both a place and a practice" (66). Her book, *The Archive and the Repertoire* illustrates the contrast between archival artifacts and live performance (repertoire) as a means for performing cultural memory and developing community engagement. "Museums have long taken the cultural Other out of context and isolated it, reducing the live to a dead object behind glass" (Taylor 66). Botanical gardens occupy a curiously heterotopic place in that they both reduce 'the live to a dead object' while precisely exhibiting the live subject.[56] Do arboreal collections consist of subjects or objects? That depends on if the arboretum is an archival space for objects or resources, or if there is a traceable vegetal repertoire that moves beyond these designations.

If museums as both places and practice, as Taylor suggests, then arboretums which already share so much with museums must be understood as both places of display and archive, as well as performance. I argue that the arboretum (and the botanical garden more generally) is both an archival system and a vegetal repertoire—a status that may initially appear at odds with itself. As Burke writes, and was mentioned at the top of this

[56] Zoos and menageries also have similar problems, although the liveness of animals has not particularly been in question for the last few decades.

chapter, the strategic spots where ambiguities arise indicate important relationships between the 5 elements (agent, act, agency, scene, purpose). In this case, the scene-agent ratio is complicated because the arboretum's method of display produces both scenery and agents. Rather than pigeonhole trees into one or the other, the ambiguity should be embraced as an indication that something more is occurring in these spaces. The arboretum is a method of preserving, educating, and displaying specimens, yet because those specimens are living, gardens may be understood as spaces of constant vegetal repertoire. Yes, that repertoire is at a slower pace than human performances, but that does not negate its existence, only the human interpretation of it. Trees are under constant change, growing, competing for nutrients and light, losing and gaining foliage. If one were to apply theatrical terms, we could easily apply the theatre's 'season' to the 'seasons' within which trees perform.

Encounters with living trees works differently in a place like an arboretum than a traditional theatre space, namely because even when they are reduced to objects, the living tree is still acting in the scenario. Even as the tree is on display as an object, it remains a living subject. A primary issue in the politics of museum studies is who is speaking for whom.

> In the drama of the specimen, the curator was a ventriloquist whose task it was to make the object speak. Through scenarios of production and function, curators converted objects into stories: they showed the process by which ceramics and textiles were manufactured, step-by-step, or how they were used in daily life and ceremony. The Smithsonian anthropologist Otis T. Mason was explicit on this point in 1891 when he defined "the important elements of the specimen" as "the dramatis personae and incidents." (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 35)

Performance and museum studies scholar Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett's book *Destination Culture* unpacks the history and usage of museum display. The multifaceted transmission of the discovery scenario indicates its complexity. The signage, routes, guide books, maps, docents all contribute to the encounter, serving as a disembodied curator. The tree itself isn't designed to contribute anything to this encounter other than the embodied example and the stamp of authenticity. By "authenticity" I mean that the inclusion of a living specimen is, much like a museum artifact, made important because it is the "real" thing. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett tackles this intricate process in "The Limits of Detachment":

> Not all that the ethnographic surgeon subjects to cognitive excision can be physically detached, carried away, and installed for viewing. What happens to the intangible, the ephemeral, the immovable, and the animate? The intangible, which includes such classic ethnographic subjects as kinship, worldview, cosmology, values, and attitudes, cannot be carried away. The ephemeral encompasses all forms of behavior—everyday activities, storytelling, ritual, dance, speech, performance of all kinds. Now you see it, now you don't. The immovable, whether a mesa, pyramid, cliff dwelling, or landform, can be recorded in photographs but presents formidable logistical obstacles to those who would detach and carry it away. The animate has been collected, both dead and alive. Dried, pickled, or stuffed, botanical and zoological specimens become artifacts for the museum. Alive, flora and fauna present storage problems that are solved by gardens and zoos in which living collections are on view. But what about people? Bones and mummies, body parts in alcohol, and plaster death masks may be found in museums. Living human specimens have been displayed in zoos, formal exhibitions, festivals, and other popular amusements. If we cannot carry away the intangible, ephemeral, immovable, and animate, what have we done instead? Typically, we have inscribed what we cannot carry away, whether in field notes, recordings, photographs, films, or drawings. We have created ethnographic documents. Like ethnographic objects, these documents are also artifacts of ethnography, but true to what I would call the fetish-of-the-true-cross approach, ethnographic objects, those material fragments that we can carry away, are accorded a higher quotient of realness. Only the artifacts, the tangible metonyms, are really real. All the rest is mimetic, second order, a representation, an account undeniably of our own making. We have here the legacy of Renaissance antiquarians, for whom "visible remains" were used to corroborate

> written accounts. Objects, according to Giambattista Vico, were "manifest testimony" and carried greater authority than texts, even contemporaneous ones. (29-30)

Using this explanation, household items that would be unremarkable if found on the street, say, a pair of abandoned shoes, become the visible remains of a larger whole when placed in an exhibit with the label "Auschwitz." The shoes themselves are powerful because they metonymically stand in for something larger, and it is their "realness" which conveys authority. Trees in an arboretum are the tangible metonyms, removed from the intangible, the ephemeral, and the immovable. Their cultural relevance, usage, and contexts are absent when displayed singularly as specimen examples. In fact, photos or representations of trees would better display trees in their regional contexts and groupings except that it would diminish their "realness," and therefore their value as attractions.

For example, the visible (fossilized) remains of megaflora in the Petrified Forest National Park (Arizona) have a different impact than sculptures of trees, even if both are made from rainbow coloured stone and only superficially reflect the living Triassic trees. Consider the difference between the outdoor trails and the NPS visitor's center dioramas. On the trail, sections of fossilized trees[57] lay scattered as evidence from a late Triassic river basin—visitors can walk along and even touch the fossils. In the diorama in Rainbow Forest Museum, staged representations of the trees are erect, in context with

[57] The tree species of the fossils is surprisingly diverse—over a dozen have already been identified. Usually referred to as rainbow wood because of the fossilization impurities in quartz, the trees range from conifers, tree ferns and gingkoes ("Frequently Asked Questions." *Petrified Forest.*). Visually, the massive fallen trunks appear similar to the fallen redwoods or sequoias found in the Southwest and Western coast of the US.

other Triassic period flora and fauna. Both encourage spectators to “rediscover Petrified Forest!” (NPS website main page) and encounter the massive fossils along with living flora and fauna of the painted desert.

In the encounter with the metonym, the viewer is participating in a discovery scenario. The spectator discovers the object within a choreographed dance of exhibition methodologies and ideologies. In some cases, the gaze is defined as unilateral and evidence of “the tyranny of western aesthetics” (as Gloria Anzaldúa shows in *Borderlands: La Frontera*, 90) and at other times, defined as a means of dismantling colonizing power structures. Tony Bennet from the new museology school of thought argues that museums should try to

> …allow the people to know and thence to regulate themselves; to become, in seeing themselves from the side of power, both the subjects and the objects of knowledge, knowing power and what power knows, and knowing themselves as (ideally) known by power, interiorizing its gaze as a principle of self-surveillance and, hence, self-regulation. (76)

While the dynamic of coercion and self-regulation is still in place, it is less autocratic than the panopticon, and offers moments of empowerment through knowledge. At the Petrified Forest, spectators are invited to learn about paleo botany by a variety of transmissions while also being regulated in terms of movement. In other words, specific fossils are advertised as inviting touch, photos, etc. to exorcise this behaviour and prevent visitors from going off trail elsewhere or taking home specimens. Self-regulation is after all not always an oppressive structure but rather can be the regulation of conduct necessary for events designed to make power structures visible and malleable.

Much of this governance is accomplished through self surveillance through community development rather than through what Luis Althusser calls repressive state apparatuses seeking to control behavior through more directly aggressive means. Despite Bennet's optimism, however, even with education as a goal dismantling systems of power, power transferred to the public does not always extend to the object being surveyed. The discovery scenario encounter is caught between spectacle and education, with the spectator playing out the role of privileged voyeur and student simultaneously.

According to the legacy Kirschenblatt-Gimblett cites, the authority of the fossilized tree is higher than in the diorama's representation—even if that representation more accurately reflects the ephemeral and intangible aspects of the paleo-ecosystem. The visible remains of the artifact in this case works much like tombstones in a graveyard: as object markers of history. The attraction for tourists is not the diorama, which could be imported to a great number of other museums, nor is it the rainbow stone itself as much of it is available for purchase elsewhere[58]. Rather it is the authentic experience of encountering the fossil in that specific location. In this example, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett's theory of the material fragments hold true because the fossils, even though outdoors, are artifacts not living subjects. In living collections, the authority and authenticity of the transplanted tree on display becomes more complex and opens room for the tree to act as agent in the discovery scenario. In scenario, specific

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[58] On the NPS website, under FAQ about petrified wood, the park makes the following argument about fossil sales: "The park allows this to give visitors an opportunity to easily find a legal source of petrified wood, possibly making it less likely that people will illegally remove it from within the park." ("Frequently Asked Questions." *Petrified Forest*)

repertoires with fixed frames repeat over and over with enough flexibility to transform. The performative discovery of fossils, in this case, occurs and reoccurs in the various trails and centers around the park. The transmission is multifaceted (composed of images, models, labels, etc.) and visitors are made to situate ourselves in relationship to the scenario, whether as participant, witness, or viewer. In a discovery scenario, the gaze (and thereby the power) is made to be unilateral. Every design aspect is to visually display the trees for either aesthetic or educative purpose. To survey the park is to visually conquer it, with the encounter as an event to be accomplished. In museums and in the petrified forest, there are few opportunities for the objects on display to gaze back at the visitor, but in an encounter with living trees, it can be done.

The processes of how gardens and gardening affects vegetal subjects reveals how trees can act as things or agents within the discovery scenario. Unlike the fossils in the petrified forest, living trees grow and change according to their environments, which makes their curation more complex. Gardeners therefore must put every effort into manipulating both the tree and its immediate environment to produce the ideal collection specimen. The wonderful habit trees have of not doing what they are told adds a complicated layer to this process that does not occur with the exhibition of objects. Fossils and shoes will generally stay put, but a tree may attempt to kill its neighbour. While the drama of this performance is perhaps not quite on par with that of a zoo, it is (albeit slowly) always occurring.

***Things* in the Garden**

On the continuum between objects and agents, is that nebulous terrain I call thinghood, building from theorist Bill Brown's argument that when *objects* cease to function in predictable manners, they become *things*.

> [W]e begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. (Brown 4)

Things have ambiguity, ambiguity which Burke would argue exposes a ratio between dramatic elements, because they can no longer be easily classified according to function or use. The idea of objects asserting themselves from Brown's examples generates from the frustration of malfunction or resistance. If the objects comply to human expectation, then they continue to be objectified. The introduction of ambiguity—of an object misbehaving, disrupting its object-ness—creates the possibility for agency.

Frustration leads to agency while compliance leads to objectification. This pattern of reasoning could be extended to any number of situations involving resistance. In scenario, the rupture of the repeated frame is what becomes a powerful transformation. Any group seeking to shift the dominant narrative must differentiate themselves by non-compliance in some shape or form. To be completely compliant with the dominant narrative is to be a cog in its inner-workings.

As I've shown so far in this chapter, the idea of a 'Tree as object' is already rife with ambiguity because trees are living while objects are usually inanimate. Yet trees are all too easily objectified. The ambiguity of trees as both agents and objects makes them

questionable living organisms according to Rival as they are "at once somewhat alive, and somewhat dead" (Rival 27). But if misbehaviour is evidence of *Thingness*, as Brown posits, where can we see such action among living plants and trees? Since trees take hundreds of years to grow—a time frame that is relatively imperceptible—it is helpful to focus first on how smaller, and shorter-lived plants clearly misbehave.[59]

In yards all over my neighbourhood, physical and chemical wars are being waged between gardeners and dandelions; the delicate flowers and vegetables are under constant threat of invading weeds. Even the lush green lawns are under continuous scrutiny as gardeners desperately try to keep up with watering, weeding, mowing, etc. all to maintain a power structure in which the very nature of the plants they employ is suppressed. The action is fast and furious; the language is anthropomorphic, funny and hostile. The plants are to blame for their actions, however much of these actions are a part of their survival.

While arboretums, parks, and gardens would usually be considered ideological state apparatuses in their exhibition and control over cultural and social norms, it is worth saying that from a tree's perspective the governing bodies of these places are more like repressive state apparatuses. For humans, these spaces are not necessarily under the same kind of surveillance unless laws are broken within them (just try camping in an arboretum and see how far you get) and an RSA, like a police officer, is called in. The system which controls the plants, on the other hand, extends its full repressive force onto its vegetal

[59] By 'misbehave' I refer to behaviour that works in opposition to the controls placed upon the plant to grow in a particular way. Whether or not the plant realizes that this behaviour is antagonistic is of little importance. In its acts of resistance, it is antagonizing the hierarchies of power regardless of intent. See Pollan's argument that "[c]onsciousness needn't enter into it on either side, and the traditional distinction between subject and object is meaningless" (xiv).

subjects. Gardeners are the police force of the vegetal world, and their aggressive strategies can mean life or death for the plants. Weeding, mowing, trimming, planting—the curation of the garden relies on forcibly manipulating its subjects with little room for negotiation. There are even cases of 'plant shaming' on social media sharing sites (including Imgur, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter) in which house and garden plants are photographed 'holding' message boards which describe the way in which they are disobedient. This is an adaptation of the more prolific dog/cat/child shaming in which misbehaviours are made public with the animal/child in question.

Plant shaming[60] goes something like this:

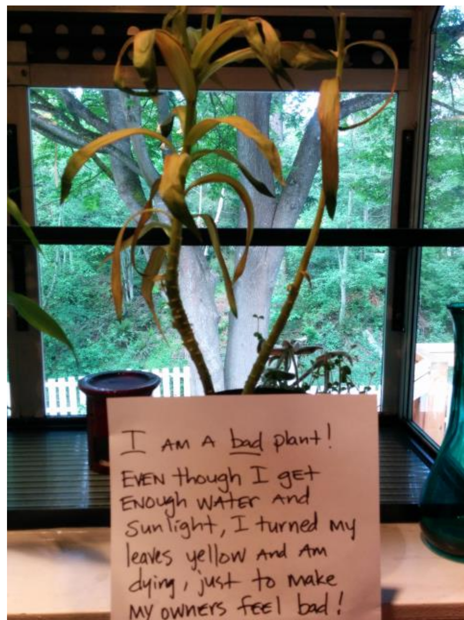

Figure 47. "Plant Shaming"

While the ethics of having a public shaming outlet on social media for a child are obviously concerning, when applied to pets and plants, humor appears to trump morality.

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[60] #treeshaming exists but produces mostly results referring to a 2015 Reese's Christmas chocolate that did not look like the image on the package. Results including actual trees are usually about struggles in setting up holiday trees indoors.

Many of the pet shaming memes are the result of owner being amused, embarrassed or upset by pet behavior, even if they inadvertently caused said behaviour. Accidents do happen, however, and the circle of blame continues to comedic effect. This is in large part because publicly shaming a child may have long lasting social ramifications, while shaming a pet or plant currently does not. Of course, #stopdogshaming exists as a response to unwarranted demonization of specific dog breeds (say, Montreal's 2016 controversial decision to pass a bill on pit bull restrictions) but is rarely connected to the humorous meme of #dogshaming. #stopplantshaming is usually applied in jest to the memes themselves, gesturing toward the social bias that plants do not have feelings in western culture.

Like pet shaming, in plant shaming the one to blame in theory is the owner, the provider of care, nutrients, and water with which the plant will do as told. However, the frustration that arises in a plant not growing as desired leads to an ambiguity where, as Brown argues, the object becomes a thing. The thing is now understood as capable of resisting or defying the owner (the one taking the photo, writing the text, and presumably is in control in every other way) thereby subverting the hierarchical order. The thing, in a sense, is given agency *because* it has misbehaved/is misbehaving.

Because of their size and longevity, trees are less likely to be the subject of plant shaming. Perhaps this is partially due to their inability to fit visually into a photo,[61] or maybe it is because their acts of resistance are simply slower. It takes a long time for trees to do anything (let alone something they're not supposed to do) compared to a

[61] Photos are the media of choice for plant-shaming.

tomato plant which can germinate, grow to maturity, reproduce, and die in the same year. And, to complicate the matter, "misbehaviour" is a matter of perspective. Many trees and plants are simply following biological imperatives, and even if they are complying with human desire, they may be reprimanded. For example, the residential street on which I currently live, dozens of maple and linden trees have had their canopies severely pruned to avoid growing into the telephone wires. These tree species are specifically planted in residential areas to provide dense foliage; the Norway Maple is an invasive species whose best redeeming quality is its exceptionally full crown. However, human needs have changed since their initial planting, and therefore the trees are treated as antagonistic enemies of powerlines. They are now inconvenient to maintain and visually unappealing because of the severe pruning.

Having grown up on a farm, I can offer first hand experience of trees 'misbehaving' by looking at *Populus tremuloides*, or trembling aspen[62]. Aspens are the bane of many a farmer's existence because of their habit of invading any available open space. Keeping fields clear and ready for planting requires extensive upkeep of bordering aspen forests as they will, over time, send up shoots on their widespread root systems. On my family farm which is only semi-active, the aspens invade the fields so slowly that cutting them back is usually a losing battle. This process might be seen by the farmer as antagonizing—trees that simply aren't respecting the clear boundaries of the farm—

[62] Also known as quaking aspen, American aspen, trembling poplar, white poplar, and in North Western Ontario, where this example is taking place, simply poplar.

whereas from the tree's point of view, it is an ongoing fight for reclamation. The stakes are high on both sides: sustenance and survival.

Trembling aspens are clonally propagated, meaning that rather than reproducing sexually they use stolons or rhizomes underground. A stand of trembling aspens might seem to be collections of individual trees, but underground these individual bodies are interconnected with the same root system, making them all parts of a single organism. Overtime, individual shoots die off or emerge allowing the massive organism to effectively move. The trees do have the capacity to cross pollinate, but since stands are frequently all male or all female, the odds of successful pollination are small, leaving cloning as the primary method of survival. The largest of these stands is Pando, a single male trembling aspen organism (based on DNA testing) in Fishlake National Forest, Utah that "is believed to be the largest organism ever found at nearly 13 million points … over 106 acres, consisting of over 40,000 individual trees" (Forest Service). Pando is currently under monitoring because of a distressing lack of regeneration in the roots in some areas. While the individual trees appear healthy, the organism as a whole may be in danger.

To understand environmental expression, I find applying de Certeau's distinctions between strategies and tactics to be of use. Strategies are the expressions of dominant power which "privilege spatial relationships" and "pin their hopes on the resistance that the *establishment of a place* offers to the erosion of time…" (1254). Tactics, on the other hand, "do not obey the law of the place, for they are not defined or identified by it" (1248) and instead rely "on a clever *utilization of time*, of the opportunities it presents and of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power" (1254). In summation, tactics

play within the overarching designs or strategies defined by systems of power by using time over space (1247). At the farm, the farmer's strategy could be to cut back new growth each year, clearly define the borders of his or her property, build fencing, make roads, etc. While these strategies appear temporarily effective in culling the forest, they contribute directly to the aspen's advantage over time. To stimulate the regeneration of young aspen in the Pando clone, the USDA are burning, cutting and ripping roots—all proven methods of producing more aspen growth (USDA website). There are dozens of ways that trees can influence farmland, from shading to chemical imbalances, invasive root systems wreaking havoc on irrigation systems, but by the time the dominant power discovers the tactics working against it, it is often too late. Should the shoots have time to grow into trees, the forest now capitalizes on its own strategy of demarcating its land. Based on its clever use of time the aspen may proverbially win the war. After all, Pando is estimated 80,000 years old[63]—one of the world's oldest known living organisms.

Ultimately, misbehaviour leads to either the protection or destruction of the subjects. If an appropriate framework can be strategized to incorporate the tactical resistance into the system of power, then the system of power will protect the subject. Thus the USDA Forest Service protects Pando through the discovery of its immense age and size (and the replication of this discovery in tourism). The system of power at the farm cannot incorporate such acts of resistance or misbehavior, and so the subject is threatened. While the USDA works to protect its clonal charge, on the farm, I have

[63] Claims have been made that it is closer to 1 million, but without dendrochronology determining age is an imperfect art.

participated in cutting down invading aspen shoots. If the object is no longer functioning as object but as an errant thing, the thing must be removed.

More than Things: Encountering Econs

While some plant things are treated antagonistically, others are celebrated due to their weird and wonderful unique characteristics. Particularly large individual trees, for example, assert themselves while moving in a single direction (up). Gigantism can be understood as a form of vegetal misbehaviour capable of prompting positive and negative reactions: imagine our horror at a gigantic dandelion compared to our glee at the biggest pumpkin at the fair. Gigantic trees, however, are celebrated with enthusiasm.

Both sequoia and redwoods are from the same family Sequoiodeae, date back to the Jurassic period, and produce massive and towering specimens. Many of the living examples of this megaflora have names to differentiate one another, sometimes describing their physical appearance, other times functioning as dedications to the people who worked for their survival. At the very least, in most groves names are given to the oldest, the largest (by volume), and the tallest. This heightens the experience for visitors who are able to claim they experienced “the tallest tree” regardless of which grove they visited, thereby effectively diffusing the successful tourism experience across a wider region. Of course, there are the oldest, largest, and tallest overall as well which remain particularly important for parks and, in the US, for the American psyche.

Two of the best-known sequoias[64] from the Sequoia National Park include the General Grant Tree and the General Sherman Tree. The General Sherman Tree "is the world's largest tree, measured by volume. It stands 275 feet (83 m) tall, and is over 36 feet (11 m) in diameter at the base. Sequoia trunks remain wide high up. Sixty feet above the base, the Sherman Tree is 17.5 feet (5.3 m) in diameter." (NPS). The General Grant tree comes second to this, although it was originally considered the largest until the General Sherman tree was proved to be slightly larger using updated measurement tools. The introduction of new information is why although William Tecumseh Sherman served under Ulysses S. Grant during the American Civil War, the General Sherman tree is the largest. This could also be why the General Grant sequoia is frequently referred to as "the largest in its grove" by NPS to emphasize its importance without General Sherman usurping its authority (NPS). Only in the final line of the NPS webpage on the General Grant tree is the General Sherman tree even mentioned as the world's largest sequoia.

Because of their size, both the General Sherman tree and General Grant tree have played important roles in American nationalism since the early 1900s.[65] Because of its assumed pre-eminence, the General Grant tree has a particularly interesting history as an ecological agent and econ. It is "The Nation's Christmas Tree" (NPS website). As the National Park Service explains on the General Grant page of their website,

> At one of the early gatherings, Colonel John White, longtime Park Superintendent, expressed the feeling that brings people here year after year. "We are gathered here around a tree that is worthy of representing the spirit of America

[64] As mentioned earlier, American terminology distinguishes between a redwood and a sequoia (while European terminology uses 'redwood' for both), and so in keeping with the Californian site, I will be using the term sequoia to describe the following American econs.

[65] Could it be that it is the success of econs Grant and Sherman in propagating American Nationalism that the Giants Grove is seeking to replicate in its nationalistic transplant of redwoods in Ireland?

> on Christmas Day. That spirit is best expressed in the plain things of life, the love of the family circle, the simple life of the out-of-doors. The tree is a pillar that is a testimony that things of the spirit transcend those of the flesh."

The ritual of a Christmas "Trek to the Tree" is ongoing and sponsored by the Sanger Chamber of Commerce (NPS). What is intriguing about this performative event is that the encounter with General Grant hinges both on tree as representation (of America, etc.) as well as tree as living being. Its impressive size precedes its connotative associations, but those connotations have re-scripted the performative encounter. Therefore while the General Grant tree is no longer the largest, the connotations and rituals do not move to General Sherman tree, nor would such a suggestion even be considered. The repertoire of performance is localized with the living body of General Grant and cannot be supplanted.

As well as being the "Nation's Christmas Tree", General Grant is "…the only living thing Congress has named as a national shrine, per the National Parks website. It is a memorial to American men and women who have given their lives while serving" (Brait). General Grant's status as national shrine not only supplies a narrative of nationhood, but also works to protect the living tree. As can be read in Ellen Brait's 2015 article, special protection in the form of firefighters was afforded to the tree when the Rough wildfire threatened the area. The importance of the giant sequoias to American culture, politics, science, and economics continue to secure the preservation of these arboreal entities and the tourism of encounter. By continuing to provide a framework for the discovery of these tree's importance (culturally and scientifically), the NPS strategically protects these massive trees.

In the annual “Trek to the Tree” a ritualized service is held which includes singing, non-denominational prayer, and the central act of laying a wreath. Simultaneously functioning as a traditional symbol of advent, the wreath at the base of General Grant is a memorial placed by a member of the National Park Service—even on years when war meant there was no official service held (Sanger website). By doubling as symbols of memorial and advent, the gesture toward the tree occupies an interesting niche. The memorial connotations reach back to ancient Greece while the advent wreath is a more recent Lutheran invention now commonly used as holiday décor in North America. Advent in the Catholic tradition “means both approach and arrival (from the Latin *advenire*) and this means that we can try again each year, as far as we are able, to allow the great, divine being who committed himself to humanity on earth through the event of Golgotha, to approach and arrive in us” (Jaffke 19). Whereas the memorial wreath signifies a looking backward, advent and its ornamental trappings signify a looking forward. The symbolism behind memorial wreaths extends far back into multiple different cultures and customs, although a fitting connection with most is for the living vegetation to stand in for a kind of spiritual rebirth of those remembered. Usually laid at the foot of graves, tombs, sculptures, or buildings, the laying of a wreath at the base of a living tree feels slightly out of place. As the tree itself is a living memorial/shrine, the wreath appears a nice but redundant gesture. What must be unpacked is the fact that the tree itself in this case is less a living being and more a metonym already. Memorial trees are frequently used as methods of remembrance as well as financing parks/gardens/arboretums, etc. Rhetorically, their role as memorials or shrines is poetic;

the actual tree itself is unimportant in comparison with what they stand in for. Trees as memorials[66] rarely represent themselves, but rather the humans who use them for the act of remembrance. By conflating the holiday and memorial connotations the "Trek to the Tree" event celebrates the General Grant tree in its roles as the nation's Christmas tree and national shrine, brought together under the guise of natural wonder.

Figure 48. Trek to the Tree Ceremony

In the photo both military and park service members frame the laying of the memorial wreath event at the base of General Grant (NPS, Trek to the Tree 2014)

In either the advent or the memorializing of the "Trek to the Tree," an interesting if not intentional result is the partial erasure of the tree as an embodied being within the event. Narratively, the event produces General Grant as a compilation of the connotations for the purposes of the ceremony, whether it be an act of looking forward or looking backward. General Grant is not rhetorically understood as participating in the ceremony,

[66] See "Dedicated Trees" and the case of the Vimy Oaks in the Continuum

rather functioning as a scenic device for the purposes of the ceremonial plot. In Burke's Scene-Agent (or lyric) relationship, as offered at the beginning of this chapter, there is ambiguity in the dialectic pairing of people and things. While the wreath is a metaphor, the tree itself is both agent and scene in a live encounter. Just as the wreath and ceremony work dually for the holiday celebration and memorial event, General Grant pulls double duty as an econ.

Even though individual animals or plants are rarely made into econs (it is usually the species or the ideal), the use of superlatives transforms the specific into the econic. The ancient bristlecone pine known as Methuselah tree is an econ as the "oldest," and General Grant/General Sherman are the largest. Their privileged status in the human imaginary transforms their role from scene to agency. The catch to this process is, of course, negotiation of the agent and the scene, as surely the living representative of the ecotype and the hyperreal econ can be thought of as such. An encounter with a living wolf compared to the Big Bad Wolf would reveal such disparity, and similarly, the econic ideal of General Grant as featured on park memorabilia is in negotiation with the living sequoia present during the "Trek to the Tree." Within Herndl and Brown's model, General Grant is an econ and product of human discourse about nature, made distinct and important due to the attached superlatives. Given a synercentric encounter, however, the living General Grant is present as econ and as tree participant in the encounter. The wreath is laid at not just the base of the 'Nation's Christmas tree' but at the specific living tree's base—a root system which is affected by the movements and presence of the ceremony's participants. The connotations are dependent on the living embodiment.

Whereas an artificial tree, or even a substituted sculpture or monument, may last longer without ceremonial involvement that tracks hundreds of people to its base, this ritual needs the real. Reflecting to Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, the presence of the General Grant tree hinges on its realness, its historical agency and, therefore, its stamp of authenticity.

While sequoias are indeed a spectacle, they are also a living trees. The visual encounter with the object is transformed through the rhetoric of names, of personality, of historical contextualization. Essentially because of the framing provided strategically by the NPS, the audience is more willing to suspend disbelief for the tree's agency. Because we are made witness to both the spectacle *and* the arboreal body in the scenario, we must negotiate the agency as a cultural product emerging from human interventions as well as an embodied, imposing pillar of wood.

For many practical reasons, however, the physical encounter with the living tree is impossible to maintain, whether that be for the safety of the tree or to satisfy the multitudes of humans wanting to encounter it. The NPS and the state of California rely on simulation to attract and satiate tourists while safely scripting their encounters with giant sequoias.[67] The Fresno Yosemite International Airport, for example, includes an area where visitors can walk through a false giant sequoia grove on their way to baggage claim. A remodeling/rebranding effort in 2009 brought in the "Sense of Place" lobby design which includes a "series of 25' tall sequoia trees, growing from floor to skylight" designed and constructed by NatureMaker in collaboration with the airport, an

[67] Perhaps we only overlook the simulation of these natures because of the contrast with locations like Disneyland.

architectural firm, and the National Park Service ("FIY Airport is a "Walk Through the Forest""). The creation of "High Sierra naturescapes" aimed to present Fresno as "The Gateway City to Three National Parks" and "create a memorable experience for its passengers that would attract more airlines, increase the number of daily flights, boost regional tourism, and improve the city's image" ("Fresno Case Study"). In the design, spectators are invited to admire, learn, and interact with the sculptures—the interaction coming in the form of walking through a recreation of the Wawona Tree, a famous giant sequoia in Yosemite National Park with a tunnel one could drive a car through.[68]

NatureMaker is an artificial tree sculpture company founded in the early 80's that seeks to reimagine fake trees in art. The cofounder and president of the company Gary Hanick is quoted on the website as saying:

> NatureMaker has engendered an entirely new experience of Nature as art, indoor tree as destinations themselves in immersive themed environments, interior landscaping, and exhibit design … be it for prestigious hotels, resorts, casinos, retailers, museums, libraries, zoos, nature centers, commercial buildings, atriums, public art projects, theme parks and entertainment design, trade show exhibits, as well as luxury homes [it] has been a force in introducing nature as ambiance for cutting edge interiors.

With an extensive portfolio including installations in museums, casinos, retail, and zoos (to name a few) NatureMaker even entered the world of theatrical set design with the NBC's "The Sound of Music Live!" in 2013. Tree sculpture art is a simulative archive, very different from the live repertoire of the garden or park. Through NatureMaker's artificial construction, the historical experience of walking through the Wawona Tree's

[68] The Wawona tree fell in 1969 and is now known as the Fallen Tunnel Tree—a transformative name change that will be discussed further in the next chapter.

tunnel can be relived by tourists, even though the living tree collapsed nearly fifty years ago.

General Sherman and General Grant adhere to the power structure's strategy, and by means of their legibility gain agency within the scenario. But for every econ there are thousands if not more trees that do not have the luxury of size, shape, or species to attract human attention. If the strategies of parks and arboretums rely on superlatives to foster arboreal agency, what about those less remarkable trees? Every day trees that are neither the largest, the oldest, or most unique? What about the nameless trees that grow adjacent to General Grant? And even if we forgive those adjacent trees for not yet meeting our expectations, not *quite* fitting into the dominant narratives of the park, what of trees who *actively resist* the machinations of their caretakers? Gardens are constantly full of surprises. Certain plants won't take,[69] while other weeds take over. Insects and disease invade even the best maintained garden space while birds and squirrels pillage what they consider to be their personal larders. The power of the gardener as RSA may be vast and the strategies forceful, but they do not hold absolute power.

Imaginary Giants

Wohlleben writes about the stunted growth of transplanted redwoods in Europe in *The Hidden Life of Trees*. Native to the Sierra Nevada mountains, these redwoods "were often planted in city parks by princes and politicians as exotic trophies" (169-170) but

[69] Since embarking on this dissertation, my husband has bought me three bonsai trees, a rose bush and a Venus Fly Trap. I imagined they would be as witnesses to my writing, facilitating my critical reflections by their embodied presence. Contradictory to this imaginary I imposed, I have not been able to keep a single one alive.

"[e]ven though quite a lot of them are more than 150 years old, very few have yet topped 160 feet" (169). Iconic because of their size, it is curious that these transplants in Europe do not grow to reflect their American parent's height. Wohlleben cites two dominant reasons for this growth difference: isolation and the mechanics of planting. A central thesis to *The Hidden Life of Trees* is the idea that trees need communities for a wide variety of purposes, whether that be competition or shelter. Without competition, young saplings will initially grow too quickly to adequately sustain themselves later. Without shelter, saplings are dangerously exposed to the elements; even sunlight can be detrimental to saplings as their leaves are still new and likely to scorch. And without communities or parents of their own species, these little trees are at a disadvantage. This does not mean they will necessarily die immediately, but they are unlikely to reach the same ages as redwoods in communities do.

> And what about the many other trees in the park? Don't they form something like a forest, and couldn't they act like surrogate parents? They usually would have been planted at the same time and could offer the little redwoods no assistance or protection. In addition, they are very, very different kinds of trees. To let lindens, oaks, or beeches bring up a redwood would be like leaving human children in the care of mice, kangaroos, or humpback whales. It just doesn't work, and the little Americans have had to fend for themselves. No mother to nurse them or keep a strict eye out to make sure the little ones didn't grow too quickly. No cozy, calm, moist forest around them. Nothing but solitude. (170)

In arboretums, the diversity of trees is designed to provide visitors with a wide range of tree species from a wide range of areas, and so it is unlikely that every species being displayed will have a complete community. This is comparable to "[m]useums, [which,] for their part, are high density sites, giving the visitor the best they have to offer within a compact space and tight schedule" (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 7). The health of the tree, the

aesthetics of the display, and the practicalities of space and resources are all in continuous tension. The odds of creating an entirely supportive ecological environment are dependent on the skills and abilities of the gardener, as it is entirely possible for trees to not get along, or behave antagonistically toward one another (stealing nutrients, sunlight, space, etc.). Because of the lack of supportive communities, or general isolation, the saplings (and later, the trees) are dependent on their caretakers, and the "mechanics of planting … haunt the trees for the rest of their lives" (Wohlleben 171). The effects of pruning roots to keep them in nurseries (and mobile) interferes with their sense of direction underground and restricts their ability to find water and food by themselves (Wohlleben 171). Thus, they are dependent on human watering, except that trees like the redwood giants eventually exceed the amounts reasonably provided by the gardeners, "And so, one day, the care simply stops" (Wohlleben 172). The result for the redwoods are stunted trees, likely to topple or break branches leading to rot and eventually collapse. While these trees may still live to be a century or two, their parent's lifespan in California can be up to two thousand years. Wohlleben goes on to describe other urban trees (which he calls the "street kids of the forest" (174)) which experience similar fates.[70]

Without family sheltering and nurturing the sapling's growth, and the added complication of root and branch shearing, the European redwoods in parks and gardens do not reflect the American redwoods in their habitats. Yet, because they are living examples, they do not have to be exact replicas or even healthy to retain that "manifest

[70] Look at any street tree and you can find evidence of root suppression (sometimes in the forms of cages) and growth patterns produced by isolation.

testimony" and authority. The discovery scenario hinges on the visitor's encounter with the tangible metonym, and nothing but the "real" will do in this arena. Even if the size is not matched, they hold the genetic authority and—even more valuable—the promise of growth. It takes hundreds of years for a redwood to reach giant proportions, so even if the particular tree has not reached the same heights (and may never) the stunted versions are forgivable to an extent.

The critiques Wohlleben offers have not stopped the transplantation of redwoods across the Atlantic. Beginning in the Spring of 2017, "Giants Grove aims to return to Ireland Giant Redwoods that were once native to Ireland[71] by creating a grove of over 2000 redwoods adjacent to Birr Castle" as "a lasting monument to our diaspora [with] the potential to be a major tourist attraction for many years to come" (Giants Grove). The site already boasts a castle from the 17th century (although a castle was present on the ground as early as the 12th century), beautiful public gardens and grounds, and a giant telescope built in the 1840s. By using sponsorship to grow redwoods[72] in Ireland, Giants Grove seeks to "create a tangible and lasting link between diaspora lives across the globe with redwood trees and family roots in Ireland" (diaspora page). The question of why redwoods (rather than any other species) appears to be embedded in their impressive size, their threatened status in the face of climate change, and the climatic similarity of Ireland as a coastal region. Therefore, the Giants Grove effort not only seeks to use redwoods as

[71] Prior to the last ice age
[72] The Giants Grove website proposes a two phase planting plan which includes both sequoiadendron giganteum (commonly known as sequoia) and sequoia sempervirens (known as redwoods). It is important to add that European writers use the term redwood to refer to both while Americans distinguish the species by the common name.

a metaphor for diasporic homecoming, or awe, but also for research and conservation purposes (although those purposes are less prominent in their pleas for sponsorship). Advertised as a 'domain of discovery' Birr Castle is touted as "one of the most extraordinary places in Ireland … an environmental and scientific time capsule," the inclusion of a redwood grove will further its reputation as a fascinating bridge between scientific and environmental research as well as the Irish tourism industry. But will Giants Grove ever be populated by giants? If Wohlleben's assertions about other European redwoods is revealing of this site, then giants will most likely only appear after several generations of trees have come and gone—long enough for a community to be established to properly nurture the growth of giant trees. With gigantism as its primary selling feature, it appears counterintuitive to advertise enormity without any proof. What is being presented to sponsors is less about the Giants Grove itself and more about the idea of awe inspiring nature as reflected in trees like General Sherman or General Grant (discussed below).[73] Whether any of the individuals in the grove will grow to be true giants is somewhat irrelevant to the project; what is more important is the promise of gigantism that will only be revealed in an ambiguous future. And the promise need not be fulfilled for it to impact the public as it practically eclipses the actual living trees present in the grove.[74] The results of this arboreal experiment will remain unknown to its generous public sponsors, and the grove will be defined by its utopic design.

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[73] For more information about sponsoring saplings and the promise of trees, see the dissertation's Conclusion on the 'Adopt a Baby Bristlecone' 2016 fundraiser by the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association at Schulman Grove Visitor Center, Inyo National Forest.

[74] This is not intended to disparage the project's goals, but to illustrate the need for a synercentric reading of it.

Questions of agency, of definition, of scale and scope all become relevant when rethinking nature since “[t]o ignore them is to proceed on intellectual foundations that may ultimately prove unsustainable” (Cronon 26). William Cronon argues in the preface to *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* that in order “to protect the nature that is all around us, we must think long and hard about the nature we carry inside our heads” (22). At the same time as we seek to conserve a species, as is seen in the case of Giants Grove, we should heavily consider the ramifications on the trees themselves who may not be able to live up to our images of giants in our heads. The first step toward understanding arboreal agency is recognizing the extent and limitations of interventions. If ‘nature’ is as much an ideological construction as anything else in our homocentric world, then to argue for arboreal or vegetal agency, we must recognize the role that simulation and performance plays in nature.

The logics of naturalization can also be read in the Giants Grove example, where the presence of giant redwoods in Ireland prior to the last ice age is the justification for reintroducing the species today. By growing a redwood grove, there is an attempt to recapture and simulate an imaginary pre-historic nature and speak to issues of diaspora and nationhood in Ireland. Giants Grove may over time be read as natural by means of the strategic invisiblization of their construction which grants them cultural power. Giants Grove will not just represent a Californian redwood forest, or even an ancient Irish redwood forest; as a simulation, it threatens the difference between a real forest and a forest of the imagination.

The desire to produce a grove of redwoods in Ireland as is being done at Giants Grove for whatever cultural, scientific, or socio-political purpose, will still depend on the success of the trees themselves. The trees, even in this most basic of forms, are participants in the production of Giants Grove by their will to survive and the perceived success in doing so successfully. The experience of a living grove is not the same as a virtual representation; the trees themselves impose their embodied tactics into the encounter as is measured by their survival and growth. The simulation is not faked, it indeed threatens the real/imaginary, true/false divide. There is clearly a difference, to the creators of Giants Grove, and to its patrons, between a representation and a "real" tree, even though the physical trees being planted will most likely never conform to the imaginary of gigantism.

Case Study #3: Discovering Cacti in the American Southwest

In this case study, I am departing from the dissertation's focus on trees to address two cactus examples that showcase my arguments on performing and participating plants. While neither are trees, the following encounters are simply too useful to the dissertation overall to not include. The first is an unusual cactus from Baja California Sur, the Creeping Devil, while the other is the star of the Sonoran Desert, the Saguaro. They are both incredibly charismatic and compelling, albeit in startlingly polarized ways. I demonstrate through my analysis that the encounters between humans and the cacti in these two cases are scripted to allow for vegetal agency and, more to the point, the encounters themselves facilitate plant participation in the encounter. As such, not only is the institutional or performance framing of the cacti created with the intent to draw attention to the vegetal bodies in the encounter, but the encounter itself is synercentric.

#0001

At the far end of the 'Discovery Trail' of the Desert Botanical Garden (in Phoenix AZ, hereafter DBG), hidden underneath an enormous Organ Pipe cactus, there is a three-foot horizontal cactus labeled #0001. This cactus is not particularly visually striking. It is difficult to discern where it begins or ends, although significant parts of it are definitely in a state of decomposition. Yet this cactus, not the towering Organ Pipe Cactus, is the object of interest in this scene, and, somewhat metonymically, of this dissertation prospectus. A sign located nearby declares:

> *CREEPING DEVIL*
> *Stenocereus eruca*

Congratulations! You found plant #0001: the first plant officially documented and planted in the [Desert Botanical] Garden. In 1939, it was three feet long. Today the cactus with devilishly sharp spines has crept 45 feet.

The sign casts the visitor as the discoverer and #0001 as the object of the discovery. The visitor is applauded for their ability to "find" this unremarkable plant in amongst cacti planted specifically for impressive aesthetic appeal.

Figure 49. The Creeping Devil Cactus

The Creeping Devil is the long whitish cactus located mostly on the very bottom of Figure 49. It can also be seen stretching across the upper left quadrant.

Figure 50. Organ Pipe Cactus

#0001 is barely discernable in this photo of the overshadowing Organ Pipe Cactus.

Rather than emphasizing its looks (which are unremarkable), #0001 is made notable in the sign by its age, its devilish species, its act of "creeping" in the garden over the last 77 years, and a numerical code alongside its species name. #0001 is one of few plants in the DBG that the organization advertises with a number as a name in addition to its common and Latin species name—a number that refers to the individual plant rather than all plants of its kind. These qualities differentiate this odd cactus in a way which may be interpreted as creating a participant in this game of hide-and-go-seek.

Enhancing the 'Discovery Trail' are frequently changing events, light shows, sculptures of glass and metal towering over the visitor or luring them to various areas of the garden. #0001, on the contrary, is snake-like, low to the ground, not impressively coloured or prominently placed. What makes #0001 notable is that it moves. As it grows forward, the rear end dies,[75] so that a Creeping Devil cactus will effectively move its three-foot body over large areas, given time enough. Over time, the DBG will have to move the signage to keep up with the cactus' slow but steady wandering, and visitors will have to "find" #0001 in a variety of changing locations This unlikely cactus ruptures the framework, bringing into question exactly who is controlling or "discovering" whom. #0001 has travelled a total of 45 feet in the DBG, which means that over its 77 years of growing, visitors to the DBG may have "discovered" #0001 in a variety of locations. Today a visitor might encounter it entirely by accident while looking for a lizard or water fountain in the shade of the Webster center, or as I did, by photographing the Organ Pipe

[75] A process known as clonal propagation.

Cactus above it. The process of "discovering" the first cactus ever planted in the DBG becomes more involved in this exchange as there is entirely a chance that #0001 may not stay put. The choreography of discovery in this encounter is, in fact, created equally both by the DBG and #0001.

Once encountered, the dynamic between the discoverer and #0001 is based not on aesthetic and photographic appeal, but rather an acknowledgement of #0001's ability to persist, change, and even move over time as a historical agent: the sign applauds the reader for "finding" #0001 and then asks the reader to consider #0001 as a being that has changed over time, and which continues to 'creep' as it has a mobility of its own. While plant growth is not particularly unique, in comparison to how the DBG constructs most of its flora exhibits as living sculptures (with "dead" sculptures amongst them), #0001 offers a moment of rupture where the object of discovery is granted, if not a life, at least a history, of its own.

In the discovery scenario of the DBG and the "finding" of #0001 there is embedded an acknowledgement of #0001's individuality set apart from the control of the DBG. The DBG's careful design of the discovery trail and the aesthetically pleasing, photographable plants, is at odds with #0001 that is notable because of its tactical survivance (to use Gerald Vizenor's terminology) of creeping 45 feet without regard to the changes in infrastructure the DBG has set forward over the past eight decades of operation. The organization's expression of control is the creation of the "discovery" narrative, enacted by placing the sign which distinguishes the Creeping Devil from other

plants and locates it firmly in "place". #0001 eventually comes out on top in vie for power since a sign will by no means constrain this wandering cactus.

I place #0001 squarely in the center of the continuum, as a charismatic or misbehaving flora. While the rest of the garden plants would fall to the left of #0001 (mostly in the Objecthood section) #0001 does not adhere to the rules of the DBG, which otherwise revolve around visual appeal. It has a charm all its own based on its movement and framing. Interestingly, although I created the continuum to span low to high visibility, without the DBG's signage, #0001 is relatively difficult to notice given its size, colouration, etc.

Unfortunately, not all gardens celebrate vegetal acts of resistance in the same way as the DBG does with #0001, which is why I phrased the section of the continuum as Charismatic *or* Misbehaving Flora. While #0001 may be an unusual example of a plant that is charismatic because of its misbehaviour, more often than not, misbehaviour on the part of a plant is a negative attribute. Self-claimed vegetal philosopher[76] Michael Marder claims that spatialization (akin to strategies) is a dominant method of expression for both fauna and flora—a position which prompts Courtney Ryan's interest in transplantment (where flora become moved by human intervention)—but I suggest that the temporal and historical expressions (the tactics) are also necessary to our understanding of environmental expression. Even though the DBG constructs the scope of the environmental encounter by creative a discovery game for the visitor, #0001 participates

[76] While the term "vegetal philosophy" has yet to take root in philosophical discourse beyond Marder's work, it indicates a growing interest in plant thinking and ethical interactions with plants, one that reaches beyond the discipline of philosophy into performance studies if Courtney Ryan's analysis of Vaughn Bell's installation work is considered.

in the scenario by resisting the methods of control placed upon it in two ways. First, #0001 can be understood both through Ryan's transplantment which allows it the tactical ability to resist the DBG's strategies of landscape and garden design by movement over time. Secondly, #0001's rootedness causes the human discoverer to have to "find" it on its own terms; the discoverer is the one moving and searching, enduring the heat and the sun to locate #0001. By engaging in both strategic and tactical performance, both the human and the environmental participants "negotiate" power with in the scenario. Even as #0001 and the trembling aspen discussed in Chapter 2 subvert the authority of the dominant power (humans in these cases) their rootedness also places them within a position of authority in the environmental encounter. Within the encounter, there are tactical moments in which #0001 and the aspen ruptures the framework of power, as well as moments which grant them strategic power, bringing into question who is "discovering" or controlling whom. Therefore, both strategies and tactics come into play in the performative encounter and hold the potential for vegetal agency. The frustration of a misbehaving plant has already transformed the plant from an object into a thing with agency, and so #0001 and the trembling aspen both participate in the battle for place in human/vegetal encounters.

Standing With

But while #0001 is a charismatic vegetal being because of its ability to roam, many other plant things participate in our lived encounters in a more stationary way. In Arizona performance artist Kimi Eislie has approached the same issue by interrogating the ways in which we can learn to encounter the saguaro cactus. The saguaro is an econ

reflecting a desert imaginary, prompting encounters that are heavily informed by the ideological trappings of these giants rather than the individual cacti themselves. In some ways, it is easier for humans to encounter #0001 as an individual cactus at the Desert Botanical Garden because there are no filters of iconicity informing and altering the experience. The saguaro, on the other hand, is heavily affected by such imaginaries. Take for example my sister-in-law, a professional photographer, who expressed dismay when discovering that not all saguaros have arms[77] and many that do, do not conform to the Looney Toons imaginary she was familiar with.

Figure 51. Saguaros at the Desert Botanical Gardens

To reconnect with the saguaro on a more meaningful and reciprocal level, Eislie developed a performance project "How to Duet with a Saguaro" (2015) in which "Through a series of 'somatic' experiments, including one that involved standing with the cactus for an hour, the artist uncovers new meanings of both 'duet' and 'performance'"

[77] Saguaros are usually 80-100 years old before they grow additional limbs.

(Eisele 1). In her duets, the saguaro is a participant in a synercentric encounter involved in mutual infinite play.

An extension of "How to Duet," Tuscon's Borderlands Theater created a series of events called Standing with Saguaros which invited everyday visitors to replicate Eislie's somatic experiments with substantial support from the National Park Service, radio and online information/marketing.

> #IStandWithSaguaros is a campaign to befriend, support, and connect with the saguaro cactus, Carnegiea gigantea, iconic species of the Sonoran Desert. If you stood with a saguaro cactus for an hour, what would you discover? Try it.

The Standing with Saguaro's project seeks to connect humans with the "real" saguaro, not the imaginary one on billboards and postcards, but a "real" saguaro, and therefore the "real" southwest desert. Whereas the other Arizona cactus mentioned in this dissertation, #0001, is framed to be a thing found in a finite discovery game, the saguaro in the Standing with Saguaros project provokes what is said to be a mutual discovery where the performers are both human and non-human. Importantly, for the performance event, there was no specifications on what saguaro the encounter should be with. Participants were invited to—no matter where they were in Arizona—find a saguaro and spend an hour "being there" with it. I participated via distance from Canada with the substitution of a Maple tree as the iconic species of my region.

But how do we really measure participation other than by human terms? Is this an act of reciprocity, an invitation for reciprocity, or a fantasy of reciprocity? The answer, of course, depends. Each individual experience may reverberate in a different way. Certainly, for the indigenous communities in the Sonoran Desert, there is no question as

to the saguaro's reciprocal status—the saguaro is a sacred agent. In Eisele's I Stand with Saguaros project, there is likewise no question; the saguaro is treated as something with the potential to reciprocate rather than as a discoverable object or a conquerable thing. At the very least we may analyze the modes of encounter to assess how participation and reciprocity is being created in thought if not deed.

Participants in Eisele's project were asked to take saguaro selfies to memorialize their encounter. Already we can see this as being somewhat problematic because in "transplanting" the experience from the real world where the saguaro is present to a virtual one, the cactus becomes an additive object in the frame where the focus is the human taking the photo. Additionally, requiring evidence of the encounter is a kind of conquest scenario, where the objective of the encounter is to capture the photo as proof.

The reaction to the request produced interesting results. Even though the project called specifically for selfies, few of the images produced from this campaign[78] are actual selfies. Instead, most of the photos were obviously taken by third parties to accommodate the whole cactus into the frame. The only proper selfie taken was by Kimi Eisele herself.

[78] At least, the images that are made publicly on the website and associated Facebook and Twitter boards.

Figure 52. Eisele Saguaro Selfie

If the point of a selfie is to emphasize the “self” with an interesting backdrop or location, then the lack of actual selfies indicates something else was being captured in the photos. Many of the images instead feature the person standing side by side, often to compare sizes – this is a “standing with” where both parties, plant and human, are featured equally as participants. Another popular image sequence featured from the project is the candid human facing the saguaro which is even farther removed from the selfie motif illustrating the encounter between cactus and person. Below, I recreated these popular stagings using a friend, Rayna Hillman, at the Desert Botanical Garden.

Figure 53. Standing with (left) and Figure 54. Encounter (right)

Rather than taking the selfie as a way of evidencing the discoverer's accomplishment (thereby foregrounding the person, not the saguaro) the resulting photos displayed a concern about the presence of the saguaro as an agent rather than a scenic device.

Standing with Saguaros engages in an attempt towards reciprocity by "being there" as per Taylor's scenario model. Like the DBG example of #0001, discovery is implicit here: in selecting a saguaro to stand with, to learning something new about the species. But unlike the emphasis on the visual spectacle, or the 'hide and go seek' followed by 'you found it' game, this discovery is more subdued and more about recognition. This encounter is active asking participants to commit to what might be an exhausting and dehydrating hour of "being there" with a saguaro, and exploring the national parks spaces with all its ideological trappings. "Being there" with the saguaro, opens the door for learning, listening, and interaction that transforms the scenario from a unilateral act to a reciprocal encounter.

Presence does not necessarily mean participation. A person physically present only to conquer or fell a tree, for example, could hardly be described as participating in a meaningful reciprocal synercentrist encounter. At the same time, participation does not necessarily mean presence, as can be seen in the following chapter on the Methuselah. One can have "intimacy without proximity" as feminist studies and science and technology studies scholar Donna Haraway suggests in *Staying with the Trouble* (79). Haraway introduces this idea in a discussion of Margaret and Christine Wertheim's crochet coral reefs (particularly Margaret's 2009 TED talk on the project). By interacting

with material representations of the reef (crochet corals) there is intimacy without proximity which "is not 'virtual' presence; it is 'real' presence, but in loopy materialities…The crochet reef is a practice of caring without the neediness of touching by camera or hand in yet another voyage of discovery" (Haraway 79). Those participating in the coral reef encounter through the crochet project experience an intimacy in encounter that protects the reef from potential damage, much in the same way the efforts to hide the Methuselah have prompted intimate encounters with other trees or productions like *Memory Rings*.

How can we be sure we are participating with trees when we are with them? What does it mean to differentiate presence and participation? As Kimi Eislie proposes in Standing with Saguaros, presence is a stepping stone towards participation. The act of being with the saguaro or tree leads to encounter and synercentrism. I would further add that being present as a means towards participation is not just a physical proximity, but that practice of caring that Haraway identifies, which can be facilitated by being mindfully present with trees and tree representations. I come into contact with the blue spruce next to my drive way every day, brushing it with my shoulder as I enter and exit my car, and yet the moments I am most mindfully present with the tree are when I am looking at it through a window.

The #IStandWithSaguaros campaign directly asks us to radically reimagine the scenario, to reconfigure the relationship in performance between human and flora. Rather than a colonial discovery of the desert object, or the conquering of the desert space, there is introduced another option which asks the human participant to be open to being

discovered and to exist in the desert without an agenda for a given space of time—an intimate experience, to be sure. Standing with Saguaros introduces the idea of bridging the human and non-human divide through the performance, and a starting place for developing reciprocity that both acknowledges the scenario framework and works within it to change the dynamic.

Figure 55. Ancient Bristlecone Pine, Inyo National Forest, California, USA

ANCIENT TREES AS AGENTS

In this chapter I address the ways in which living trees have been “agentified” by their relationships with history and discovery. First, the synechdochal relationship between plants and time (leading to their demonization) is addressed. Whereas chapter 3 introduced plant misbehaviour as a tactical expression of agency that might inconvenience or frustrate human encounters, this chapter exposes the contradictory nature of plant horror and plant sentimentality. When plants are witness to history, it can produce anxieties in apocalyptic frames with plants as indifferent to human erasure, or alternatively, plants as benevolent witnesses and guides for humankind. Additionally, the act of participation of the ancient bristlecone pines is extended to the ways in which these ancient trees have written human history (almost as much as we have written ours upon them) through the application of dendrochronology of the preserved ancient bristlecone pines. When the dating of tree rings was extended to preserved bristlecone pines (no longer living, but not decomposed) the ability to date and understand anthropological ruins transformed, changing the story of human history in North America.

Moving from the tension between vegetal horror and sentimentality (two sides of the same coin) I address the similarities between the discovery and conquest of the Americas and the historical encounters with trees. I use Michael Marder’s *Plant-Thinking* to address a new paradigm for encountering plants that relies on meeting them at least ‘halfway,’ and apply game theory as a method for changing the pattern of conquest to engagement in the case study of the Methuselah tree. Linking back to Phantom Limb Company’s production and their recent video release in which they claim to have “found

it," I discuss the dangers of authenticating the discovery narrative as well as the power of labels to build terministic screens (Burke) in the encounter process.

Plants as Historical Witnesses

In *Unthinking Eurocentrism* Ella Shohat and Robert Stam offer the example of persistent myths about shared pasts by analyzing a series of ads made by the Greek National Tourist Organization in 1991. In these ads there are "alluring images of Aegean seascapes, classical monuments, and mythological icons, anchored by the captions "Greece: Where It All Began" and "Greece: Chosen by the Gods"" (55) dripping with a sentimentality that blocks meaningful engagement. By using the myth of western civilization's origins in Greece, the objects within the photographs are encumbered with meaning.

> Overwritten with the prestige of a classical myth, the Greek waters invite the tourist into what is projected as a shared past. Ads for the equally crystalline waters of the Caribbean, by contrast, appeal not to historical origins but to "get-away-from-it-all" sensuality ("It's better in the Bahamas"), evincing little interest in the indigenous myths and history of the region. Both sets of ads reverberate with communal tensions about the meaning and interpretation of history. While the Greek ads are about remembering and reflecting, the Caribbean ads are about reawakening the dormant senses and, implicitly, about forgetting history. The former forges links to a European past, the latter obscures historical connections. (56)

Even if the objects in the photographs are visually similar (say, a beach,) the contextualization of History compared to a sensual, a-historical present drastically changes not only the interpretation of that image but the imaginary encounter. Physical evidence of human history in the form of iconic ruins, monuments, etc. further the imaginary shared connection to the past. Naturally enduring objects such as beaches, trees, rocks, etc. do not elicit similar responses in such a paradigm regardless of their

longevity or historical existence, erasing their participation in a shared past,[79] What could be called the "convenience" or problem of both history and eurocentricity is the absence or erasure of the subject's participation, changing a synercentric encounter to one that is based on the three prongs of Herndl and Brown's model. Either the subject is long gone, interpretable by contemporary "authorities," or, the subject is not part of the dominant power and is only interpretable by contemporary "authorities." The framework of a "shared past" has enormous importance to the legibility and interpretation of historical subjects, and, I argue, environmental subjects. Referring to the representation of trees in Canadian poetry, D.M.R. Bentley writes in *Mnemographia Canadensis* that

> "Precisely because they are transgenerational, long-lived trees such as the oak, the beech, and the yew can provide a living link with the past, particularly when they are associated with specific historical events and personages." (Bentley n.p.)

Trees straddle a unique boundary of sharing a past while being "timeless" or removed from actual participation in the past. They are either historical subjects or objects on which narratives of history are haphazardly imposed.

Michael Marder in *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* argues that plants exist in a different temporality than humans. "The ultimate meaning of human ontology is drawn not from our life but from our relation to our own death; the plant, on the other hand, lacks such a relation, and therefore its temporality is entirely subservient

[79] For example, in Canada the Pimachiowin Aki project has been working for more than a dozen years to designate a section of Manitoba and Ontario's boreal forest a UNESCO World Heritage site. The proposal itself focuses on the area's exceptional beauty as well as being representative of First Nation's culture, but without the 'archival evidence' of traditional ruins (such as found at Teotihuacan or Chichen Itza) the argument must be based on the testimony (repertoire) of the First Nations within the region. Such testimony is then dependant on the communities involved as, for example, the Pikangikum first nation withdrew support in 2016 due to a conflict of interest in the land, forcing the application to be withdrawn. Attempts are being made to resubmit.

to the order of life” (Marder 100). Marder explains, using Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*, that humans cannot perceive time as a constant, and rather experience it according to “rhythms of consciousness … oscillating between, say, the distended duration of boredom and the condensed waves of intense joyfulness” (104). Therefore, humans and plants experience and exist in time differently, and for the human to perceive vegetal temporality, it is actually by means of difference in vegetal spatiality: the growth of new leaves over time, etc.

> The internal interruptions of vegetal temporality are the cipher of finitude at the heart of infinity, the traces of aging on the ostensibly immortal body of the plant. The sobering acknowledgement of this body’s precariousness, fragility, and temporality goes a long way toward preventing the unethical treatment and abuses of vegetal life, which is usually taken to be an eternal reserve that, try as we may, cannot be depleted. But it also makes the love of plants possible. As Bergson states. “It is easy to argue that the tree never grows old, since the tips of its branches are always equally young, always equally capable of engendering new trees by budding. But in such an organism—which is, after all, a society rather than an individual—*something* ages, if only the leaves and the interior of the trunk…*Wherever anything lives, there is, open somewhere, a register in which time is being inscribed* …” … Only temporal, finite, mortal beings may be the recipients of love; to attribute these qualities to a plant is to confirm that it is potentially *lovable*. (Marder 112)

Plants therefore inhabit a liminal position of mortal and immortal, lovable by means of their temporality, and immortal by means of their questionable relation to senescence. Senescence, the biological process of deterioration over time, is in fact absent completely in some plant species. Ronald M. Lanner, author of *The Bristlecone Book*, explains that the Great Basin Bristlecone Pine does not have senescence, so as the Methuselah reaches its 5,000th birthday it is still as healthy and likely to reproduce as a newly mature tree of the same species.

Because of this liminality, vegetation stands in curious relation to human history. The fetishizing of plants is rampant as

> [w]rapped in the covers of myth, vegetal life turns all the more numinous and obscure, so that its meanings are completely withdrawn, made unapparent and indiscernible, paving the way for projection of human purposes and goals onto it. (Marder 29)

Vegetation's unusual longevity and habit for being projected upon makes plants the subject of both delightful fascination and of horror, depending on which direction one is looking: a nostalgic Eden behind us, and a frightening wilderness ahead. Their seeming indifference to human survival is a post of discomfort, to say the least, and can be tracked throughout art history as an area of anxiety.

To explain, consider the bookends of Thomas Cole's series of paintings, *The Course of Empire*. In the series "from the 1830s, Cole depicted the movement from 'savagery' to 'civilization' and the problem of lapsing back into the darkness of wilderness", and of "dangers that thwart progress and end in the ruin of civilization" (Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden" 142). The first two paintings in the series of five, *The Savage State* and *The Arcadian or Pastoral State* (1834) are based on nostalgia: the imaginary 'savage' in tune with the wilderness surrounding him[80] or the beauty and idleness of a Grecian golden age. There is lush vegetation in both, with evidence of improving agricultural control.

> Wilderness, in short, was a place to which one came only against one's will, and always in fear and trembling. Whatever value it might have arose solely from the possibility that it might be "reclaimed" and turned toward human ends—planted as a garden, say, or a city upon a hill. In its raw state, it had little or nothing to offer civilized men and women. (Cronon 71)

[80] Rife with 19th century European stereotypes of Native American culture.

As Cronon says, by the end of the same century this attitude shifted so that "Thoreau in 1862 could declare wilderness to be the preservation of the world suggest[ing] the sea of change that was going on" (71). At the time of *The Savage State* and *The Arcadian or Pastoral State*, however, those attitudes had yet to shift. What is presented is a nostalgia of potential, of fruitful possibility where the frightening wilderness in *The Savage State* might be mitigated by its transformation. Even in the edenic portrayal of a nature-based history, the interest is leaning toward the possibility of controlling that wilderness.

The third and fourth paintings, *The Consummation of Empire* and *Destruction* (1836), shift visual perspective to the valley, into the seat of human civilization, to document the imaginary city's great rise and violent fall. In these two paintings, evidence of vegetation is minimal and distant, if included at all. While they are fascinating in their depictions of human life, they could equally be said to display a severance of man and nature. The fires of *Destruction* appear to wipe out not only human civilization but any plant life too.

The final painting, *Desolation* (1836), is perhaps the most fascinating as it combines both the wreckage of the imaginary city and the reappearance of the vegetation from *The Savage State*. Whereas *The Savage State* has a nostalgic potential for progress, *Desolation* is the absence of that potential. It is the "fear and trembling" incarnate.

Figure 56. Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire: Desolation* (1836).

All of paintings in the series incorporate evidence of human life, but *Desolation* is the only painting to not include humans themselves. What is left is quickly vanishing under the dark foliage, wiping the slate clean before…well, the future is uncertain to say the least. The absence of people adds to the hopelessness in the painting, for while *The Savage State* included the spark of humanity in the wilderness, *Desolation* documents only its removal into nothingness. The only standing witnesses to the events are the column in the foreground (a ruin and mute testimony) and the mountain formation which is featured in the preceding paintings. The plant life appears to almost greedily consume the remnants of civilization, their indifference to human life a threat and an inevitability.

The portrayal of vegetation in *The Course of Empire* begins to show a trend in dystopic art where the plant life moves from scenic element to agent. Because of the correlations between human disappearance and plant appearance, the horror of one is transferred to the other, even if there is no causation. This can be understood through thing theory where the plant, doing something it should not—in this case, moving beyond

human control—asserts itself by means of its “thingness” and participates in the encounter as a horrific antagonist.

The use of plants to indicate the passage of time and the absence of human life can be seen in the wide range of dystopic films, books, and plays. The 2007 film *I Am Legend* (featuring Will Smith) has in its advertising the ruins of New York with vegetation indicating the passage of time since a cancer-cure gone wrong has infected humankind. Suzanne Collins heavily employs tensions between civilization and the natural world in *The Hunger Games*, echoing classics like *The Lord of the Flies*, and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, even Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*. In more horrific science-fiction genres like *The Day of the Triffids* or the film and musical versions of *Little Shop of Horrors*, the plants become even more animated as agents. The horror and wonder of such events are reminiscent of Cole’s paintings: civilization broken down and re-inhabited by the non-human. A frightening take-over by lawless wilderness; the expulsion from Eden all over again; a literal version of the march of Birnam Wood on Dunsinane.

The sheer volume of representations of plants taking over human buildings, ruins etc. points to an anxiety, which I suggest arises from the breakdown of the perceived division between human and non-human. The speed at which plants reclaim property exposes the porous relationship between the human and the vegetal. Plants are not just evidence of time passing, but also an abject reminder that they are always in the periphery, waiting for a good moment to root themselves in all kinds of places. I use the term abject intentionally, drawing from Elizabeth Grosz’s theory of abjection and the

porous body, as plants invading our man-made environments disturbs us in psychic and even in visceral ways. Consider the gag reflex that might be triggered when removing mould from one's home, the long tentacles of forgotten potatoes in search of nutrients and light, or the disturbing sight of a tree growing in the center of a now derelict but once cherished family home. It exposes our lack of control, and a vegetal indifference to our fate.

From a vegetal perspective, these stories tell a different tale of reclamation. The play *Flesh and Blood and Fish and Fowl* by Geoff Sobelle and Charlotte Ford (first premiered in 2008) consists of civilization's last office space being taken over by plants and taxidermied animals. In a video interview Sobelle and Ford claim one of their inspirations as the re-inhabitation Chernobyl by the natural world since the nuclear disaster in 1986. "In a way it was like a new Eden," Sobelle explains on his website, "the world just continues, continues, continues." The dramatized vegetal take over of the office mirrors the real-life re-inhabitation occurring in Chernobyl and Pripyat, as documented by photographer Michael Day 26 years later. Day says in an interview with Rob King for the Daily Mail:

> The years of neglect and abandon mean that vegetation has grown unchecked for 26 years, meaning Pripyat is now contained inside a forest. The gardens and parkland between the buildings have grown, and it is now impossible to get a sense of the scale of the place as you generally cannot see past a few buildings, away from the roads. Once inside the town itself, you really feel like you are in woodland, with only subtle clues that you are completely surrounded by apartments and shops and workplaces in between the trees.

Of course, the horror of vegetal take-over comes hand in hand with the erasure of humans. The threat isn't so much the presence of vegetation—indeed, the 'return to

nature' of locations like Chernobyl can be read as a form of healing—but the absence of humans, or, in the biblical wilderness, the absence of God.

Figure 57. Michael Day "Ukrainian government escort looks at the deserted city from the hotel roof"

In Chernobyl, and other sites of nuclear disaster, the act of witnessing the effects of nuclear radiation is a tricky business. Those who live through the disaster have the experience stamped upon their bodies, their genetics. Those who visit in the aftermath risk their lives to bring the means of witnessing (photographs, reports, data) to those who remain outside of the area. Trees, of course, have no such luxury.[81] Their steadfastness to one place can be interpreted as a long form of witnessing—indeed the effect of long exposure to radiation will be embedded in their bodies for other species to interpret later—but there is very little choice in the matter. For example, the trees in F1NPP, the area outside of Fukushima Japan, who have shown evidence of morphological defection

[81] This is not to suppose that all people are able to leave sites of disaster, but rather to acknowledge the fact that as ambulatory beings, humans at least have that option available, even if circumstances prevent them from using it.

bear witness to the nuclear disaster through their bodies. These fir trees have lost something that is usually so definitive to trees: they are growing without central trunks, that part in which the tree's whole life is written as rings. Bifurcation or twinning is seen in esoteric Buddhism as a holy and meaningful gesture of non-dual opposition (as mentioned in Chapter 1), but in this case, it will ultimately be a death sentence for many of the saplings. For the fir, the act of witnessing is an act of rewriting the body through the recording of the event, radically transforming the self, in many cases at the cost of its life.

Given that plant misbehaviour is an important method of participation as a thing or agent perhaps the attachment of the horror genre to misbehaving plants is demonstrative of the more sinister side to this behavior. While misbehaviour might be laughable on small scales such as a garden plant not reproducing, or, say, my rosebush that won't make up its mind as to if it's dead or not, on larger scales it is a threat to human life. Consider the history of the potato as written in *The Botany of Desire*. If ever there was desire for control of a plant, the potato would be the prime example. Pollan explains that although the potato was a staple in the Americas, its success in Europe was delayed due to fear and suspicion of this tuber.

> Even after people recognized that this peculiar new plant could produce more food on less land than any other crop, most of European culture remained inhospitable to the potato. Why? Europeans hadn't eaten tubers before; the potato was a member of the nightshade family (along with the equally disreputable tomato); potatoes were thought to cause leprosy and immortality; potatoes were mentioned nowhere in the Bible; potatoes came from America, where they were the staple of an uncivilized and conquered race. (199)

Potatoes did end up being remarkably successful in Ireland, France, and Russia, despite the struggle required to convince the populace to farm and eat it. It fed both the common people (being nutritionally complete if eaten occasionally with milk) and the stereotypes of in civility since in the Manichean allegory the potato was aligned with the chthonic, the uncivilized—even the unholy, given its absence from the Bible. When fungus wreaked havoc on potato crops in Ireland causing widespread famine, yet another apprehension was attached to the plant. The historical anxiety surrounding the potato reveals an important relationship between plant agency and our desires for control. As Marder explains, vegetal anxiety is in a large part "[t]he fault of the plant, … [and] hinges on the fact that it is a thing that has overstepped the confines of thinghood…" (23-4). Problematically, as Marder further points out in *Plant-Thinking*, the construction of plants as either sentimental (the crop that saved us from famine!) or horrific (the blighted crop) leads to abuses against their agency. If the plant is under complete control, or as complete as possible, its agency is reduced to objecthood and humans are granted license to do whatever they want as an extension of that control. If the plant exerts agency by misbehaving, then it is likely to be punished for that misbehaviour to re-establish human control.

To read nature as evil is to ascribe the horror to the wrong source and fetishize the vegetal body. While plants indicate the absence, they are not the root cause (forgive the pun) for the horror. According to Noël Carrol's definition of horror, "categorical incompleteness is … a standard feature of the monsters of horror" (33) and chthonic growth or obscuring foliage contributes significantly to the camouflage of unknown

threats.[82] The less is seen, the more terrifying the danger is perceived. The return of vegetation in Cole's *Desolation* obscures humanity's future and suggests its absence already. The lack of agricultural correlates to the lack of human presence. Additionally, the creeping vines on the ruins of civilization—Cole's fictive city or Chernobyl—suggest a kind of desecration (intended or not) of which human kind, and its legacies, are victim.

If plants *are* lovable, as Marder suggests they are, then perhaps their liminal existence can be something other than the basis for an uneasy relationship with out own existential crises of mortality.

> Soulless yet living, the plant seems to muddle conceptual distinctions and to defy all established indexes for discerning different classes of being in keeping with the metaphysical logic of "either/or." (Marder 28).

When it comes to vegetal, rather than human, agents there are striking differences. Trees of many species routinely thrive several times longer than the average human lifespan. While people come and go, leaving traces of their cultures behind as ruins or relics, trees can endure. Rather than relics or ruins, the body of a *living* ancient has a certain fascination for a species unlikely to live beyond a single century.

Taylor's scenario argues that the act of witnessing is an integral component. We can see it referenced in Cole's paintings by the continued presence of the mountain peak, and in the column in the foreground of *Desolation*. Even though these witnesses are not alive, they invite the viewer to carry the role of witnessing with them. The existence of something that was physically present for historical events offers an imaginary framework for the act of witnessing. When the thing that was witnessing is also *alive*,

[82] An example of this would be the tension created in *Jaws* by the unseen shark lurking beneath the surface.

new connotations arise. Trees as witnesses have been implemented literally since antiquity if one looks at the plane tree in Plato's *Phaedrus* (an important scenic element), the Bodhi tree in Buddhist traditions, or the legendary dry tree recorded by Marco Polo in the following account:

> It also contains an immense plain on which is found the ARBRE SOL, which we Christians call the *Arbre Sec*; and I will tell you what it is like. It is a tall and thick tree, having the bark on one side green and the other white; and it produces a rough husk like that of a chestnut, but without anything in it. The wood is yellow like box, and very strong, and there are no other trees near it nor within a hundred miles of it, except on one side, where you find trees within about ten miles' distance. And there, the people of the country tell you, was fought the battle between Alexander and King Darius. ("Of a Certain Desert That Continues of Eight Days' Journey" Translated by Henry Yule)

The dry tree is included in the background of a floor mosaic in Pompeii thought to depict the battle of Issus. The tree, seen below without any foliage, is the only scenic element.

Figure 58. *The Battle of Issus mosaic*

Even though the examples I draw from are from literature and art, they were based on real living trees. In Burkian terms, this creates a point of tension in the scene-agent relationship.

Burke explains that in philosophy, rather than starting afresh to understand each of the five key terms independently, the philosopher is more likely to generate understandings of each in relation to the one which he or she is already most embedded in. For a philosopher firmly positioned in the realm of agent, looking at scenes "…would amount to an "agentification" of scene even though the terms for scene were placed in dialectical opposition to the terms for agent" (Burke 128). Referring to Hernik Ibsen's 1882 play *An Enemy of the People*, Burke explains, "If you took the hero's state of mind as your point of departure here, you could say that the whole scene becomes a mere aspect of the rôle, or person ("agent")—or that the physical body of the agent is itself but "scenic," to be listed among the person's "properties"…" (Burke 10). I find this useful in understanding the floor mosaic of the battle of Issus as the tree is an agent through its role as witness in the scenario. If the battle is the point of departure, then either the tree is a part of the battle as an agent, or the battle is as much scenery as the tree. Because the dry tree is a significant inclusion (it is not just any tree), and from the way in which it is shown to be also in the throes of war (warlike without adornments of leaves or fruits), it can be read as a participant in the scenario—a Burkian agent within the circumference of the scene. The inclusivity of a tree in the mosaic does not automatically make it a participant. Indeed, the trees in Cole's paintings suggest a vegetal agency in their persistence through the fall of civilization, but are not individually agents participating in the scenario. The trees in Cole's works are witnesses, but not actively involved – just like the mountain formation. Their agency is implied, in contrast to the explicit agency of the dry tree. The distinction between them is based on—I would argue *historical*—context.

Using Burke's contextual definition, the idea of agency becomes tied to the discussion of motives which stresses placement or derivation (usually the two interwoven). In geometric substance, "An object [is] placed in its setting, existing both in itself and as part of its background. Participation in a context" (29). Building from this assertion, it is understandable that the tree in the mosaic and the trees in *Course of Empire* are in relation to their visual contexts, participating in the action to various degrees. However, the dry tree has an additional context which exists outside of the frame—it has a history of encounter before and after the events depicted in the mosaic, whereas the vegetation in *Course of Empire* is only contextualized within the individual paintings. Therefore, while the scene-agent ratio in *Course of Empire* might imply vegetal agency through interpretation, their status as agents is only extant within that interpretation. Given the context of the dry tree, the tree's agency within and without the mosaic is explicit and positions the dry tree as an agent. The story of a shared past gives the tree explicit context outside of the painting, and the individuality of the tree characterizes it as not a place or setting, but a witness or participant in the event. For ancient trees, it is this historical agency which affords them the status of agents while other trees may escape this designation.

When the subjects of history are human, either literally or by means of production, there is incentive to remember—even if the act of remembrance alters the shape or meaning of the past. In natural history, that incentive is removed. However, instead of relegating natural histories to the annals of pure information, it is possible to identify species that cross institutional silos and invite interaction. Plants and trees with

explicit connections to human history are identifiable in the scene-agent ratio as crossing designations, becoming agents *because of* their participation in various encounters over time. question that remains, which Marder eloquently phrases, “How is it possible for us to encounter plants? And how can we maintain and nurture, without fetishizing it, their otherness in the course of this encounter?” (3).

So far in this chapter, the plants have been theoretical, imaginary, and at the whim of appropriation—a fact identified already in analyzing *Unthinking Eurocentrism.* Examining the mosaic of the battle of Issus and the participation of the dry tree in the event can only go so far because of the medium in which it exists. I must move away from vegetal *representation* to the trees themselves. And what better way to do this than to approach it using Marder’s plant-thinking:

> …in the first place a promise and the name of an encounter, … an invitation to abandon the familiar terrain of human and humanist thought and to meet vegetal life, if not in the place where it is, then at least halfway. (Marder 10)

The Trees that Re-wrote History

The lure of a shared past is not the only reason why humans have been fascinated by ancient trees. There are many practical reasons the history of humans and the history of trees are enmeshed, even beyond the many ways we have used plant material to survive. Dendochronology is the scientific study of tree rings (dendro being Greek for root, and chronology as study of time). By examining the appearance of tree ring patterns once can deduce information pertinent to the fields of botany, fire history, geology, and climatology. The simplest of tree ring studies can be done by anyone with the patience to count the number of lines which approximate the number of years the tree has lived. The

process involves boring into the core of a living tree and removing a small tube of tree material, displaying a cross section of the rings without killing the specimen being studied.[83]

While scientists like Edmund Schulman were made world-famous for their discovery of particularly old specimens (Schulman is the discoverer of the Methuselah Bristlecone pine), others made substantial contribution to the use of dendrochronology by connecting it to anthropology. Andrew Ellicott Douglass, considered the "founder of modern dendrochronology", "opened the door for dating archology sites all over the southwest using tree-ring dating methods" which compared "tree-ring patterns of a timber used as a beam in an ancient dwelling against the known, dated pattern of trees in the area" (*Pioneers of Dendrochronology*). Douglass "began to build a time line [in the American Southwest]. For example: Casa Grande was built in 725 A.D., Chaco Canyon was dated at 919- to 1130 A.D. and so on. However, his time line had a gap that included the years 1260 AD to 1286 AD. Those years include the era when pre-historic people inhabited the Show Low Ruin" (*Show Low Historical Society Museum*). By using his ring dating method, Douglass filled in this gap and provided important information to archeologists at the site. Wesley Ferguson extended the continuous chronology (the attempt began by Schulman) back thousands of years by developing a new method of boring to include dead wood. By cross-dating, Ferguson's work on dead bristlecone pine material was used "to recalibrate the radio-carbon dating system … [a] recalibration [which] caused a major re-interpretation of western European history as many sites

[83] Except for in the famous case of Prometheus, as will be discussed.

turned out to be older than thought, thus "re-arranging" the chronology of significant historical events" (*Rings of Time: A look at the science of tree-ring dating*). Henry Michael worked closely with Ferguson and "travelled the world sampling and dating trees, including beams within the pyramids of Egypt and the Cedars of Lebanon" (*Pioneers of Dendrochronology*). While it may not initially appear to be politically dangerous to date trees, Michael's "findings indicated that these trees of biblical significance were not as old as once thought, which ended up enraging the Lebanese government" (USDA handout). Because the bristlecone pines in California were (and continue to be) used for research into dendrochronology, they are commonly referred to as "The Trees that Re-wrote History" (*Welcome to the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest*), an epithet that positions these select trees as agents and, potentially, subversive.

While visiting Schulman Grove in the White Mountains of California, I was advised by park volunteers to read *The Bristlecone Book* by Ronald M. Lanner, as it was recommended reading for those working at the Schulman center. Lanner's natural history includes the expected information about growth phases, propagation, architectural differences, as well as the cultural resonance bristlecone pines have bad. In a section that echoes Michael's pushback from religious and political powers in Egypt and Lebanon, Lanner says the following:

> Ancient bristlecone pines have been a problem for "young earth creationists," who take the biblical account of creation literally. They believe that Noah's flood occurred about 4,000 years ago and that it uprooted all existing trees or buried them in sediments. Therefore, new trees that grew up after the flood cannot have many more than about 4,000 annual rings. On the other hand, creationists know that several Great Basin bristlecones exceed 4,600 rings, and that Prometheus (also called "the Currey tree"), from Wheeler Peak, Nevada, had at least 4,862 annual rings when it was felled in 1964. They counter this unfriendly evidence by

> suggesting that extra annual rings were added in wet years, or that trees were created with their rings already in place. The first suggestion, which relies on the formation of large numbers of "false rings," is contradicted by research showing such rings to be extremely uncommon in bristlecones growing in harsh sites. The second notion can be neither proved nor disproved, so it cannot be evaluated by the means of science. (Lanner 17)

Bristlecone pines, and other long-lived trees, appear to have the power to re-write history scientifically in terms of climate and event information, as well as culturally and socially. Micheal's Lebanese cedars and the bristlecone pines in the Great Basin threaten not only history, but contemporary beliefs, especially when it comes to the superlative "oldest" thing in the world.

There are multiple contenders for the oldest living thing. A bristlecone pine, a Californian creosote bush (King Clone), a Tasmanian King's holly, the Pando clone quaking aspen grove in Utah, to name a few. The ages of these organisms range from several thousand years to perhaps even a million. Ronald M. Lanner, a forester and scientist who strives to write for general audiences, argues that clones like the King Clone or Pando do not extend the same kind of grasp on our imaginations as singular non-clonal plants like bristlecone pines.

> A bristlecone pine's roots, trunk, and crown develop from a seedling and stay right there on that spot of earth. When we look at one that has a thousand annual rings, we know it has spent a thousand years right there, and much of the ancient material is still there. It doesn't wander, as a clone can. It must remain stationary and resist everything the environment can throw at it. (102)

Even though clonal plants may reach ages far older, the visible traces of their longevity are lost. Bristlecone pines, and other ancient non-clonal plants, stand like ruins, even if their hold on life is based on a single strip of living cambium no more than a few inches wide linking a root to a branch. Because these sentinels are stationary, we can more

easily imagine and idealize their role as witness to the march of human history, rather than moving, wandering organisms with their own agendas. The problem with this method of imagining plants in history is that divides plant life into either moving clones or stationary individuals, erasing the fact that even the most stationary of trees is still always in continuous motion of growth, change, and adaptation. Not to mention that even the oldest living tissue of a bristlecone pine (sapwood) is less than 200 years old at any given time, so the difference biologically between clonal and non-clonal plants is minimal. While some might blame science for setting the record straight on anthropological histories, giving ancient trees agency as historical subjects allows them to participate in encounters, which will be the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

***Plant*ing Flags: Scenarios of Discovery**

The Methuselah bristlecone pine was "discovered" by Schulman in the late 1950's. Prior to this discovery, the giant sequoia (like General Grant) was believed to be the longest-lived tree species, reaching ages of several thousand years old; it was generally thought that "great age was correlated with great size" (Lanner 84). The theory that adversity breeds longevity, as per Peter Wohlleben's argument in *The Hidden Life of Trees*, disproved the proposed correlation between size and longevity. As part of a park fundraiser, I purchased a small cross section of a bristlecone pine, likely a small branch naturally broken off a tree. The cross section only measures 3.5 by 4 inches, and yet it easily boasts a hundred rings or more. Examining the rings on a slice of ancient bristlecone pine reveals an extremely compact growth, often invisible without magnification.

Figure 59. Cross Section of an Ancient Bristlecone Pine

Schulman's decision to examine the bristlecones of the white mountains led to the discovery that smaller, less visually impressive trees were more long lived that any other documented. Taking core samples from the bristlecone pines in the white mountains of California revealed older and older specimens, leading to a 1958 National Geographic article by Schulman on his findings. Bringing global attention to what was seen as the oldest tree in the world,[84] named Methuselah, the new-found celebrity status of the bristlecone pine was both had both positive and detrimental results.

I am using the word "discovery" here purposefully with two implications. The first is the scientific sense of discovery—the rigorous research and inclusion of new facts into the scientific and general community. The second has the overtones of colonial discovery, where the subject being "discovered" is rendered mute and impotent, leading to the potential for ideological and physical acts of violence. While the majority of the

[84] With an even more recent discovery of a tree older than Methuselah by several hundred years in 2012. As of yet, this tree is unnamed, frequently designated as a question mark in indexes.

rhetoric around the “discovery” of Methuselah employs the scientific definition, the latter is unmistakeably present. Especially when it is recognized that the public “discovery” of ancient living things frequently follows the same destructive patterns.

There is a long history connecting discovery of plants to the discovery of places and peoples. The rich history of the spice trade and the silk road, the crucial role slavery played in the production of rubber, sugar, tobacco, cotton, and other plant based products, the introduction and homogenization of foreign plants to provide food security. Trees of considerable size and uniform shape made possible nautical exploits, warfare, and colonization. Herndl and Brown would couch these histories in either the ethnocentric or the anthropocentric, depending on whether the plant in question falls under status of resource or object. Although the subjugation of peoples in these histories usually ethically eclipse the appropriation of plants, the trafficking of peoples and plants appear to go hand in hand. The act of discovery places humans on par with the resources or objects being acquired, thereby dehumanizing in the process. The frequency with which discovery narratives are employed also offers evidence of their sanitation.

> In this regard, the Columbus story is crucial to Eurocentrism, not only because Columbus was a seminal figure within the history of colonialism, but also because idealized versions of his story have served to initiate generation after generation into the colonial paradigm. For many children in North America and elsewhere, the tale of Columbus is totemic; it introduced them not only to the concepts of “discovery” and the “New World,” but also to the idea of history itself. (Shohat and Stam 62)

The discovery scenario of the ancient bristlecone pines is heavily reminiscent of the discovery of the Americas. First there is the issue of who is discovering whom. Given that the trees in question germinated around 2800-3000 BCE, they certainly precede the

human scientists who stumbled across them while conducting research. Shohat and Stam articulate this problem when describing the discovery of the Americas, saying “it is as accurate to say that Europeans became part of indigenous history as to say the reverse” (59). Given the similarity of the act, the question becomes did the tree become a part of human history, or humans become a part of the tree’s history? Because trees cannot communicate directly through methods currently scientifically accepted, their silence acquiesces to human centrality. It is important to note that similarly, when Christopher Columbus reads a royal proclamation for the kingdom of Spain on a Caribbean shore to the collection of crew and indigenous peoples gathered (I use the present tense since this scenario is repeated with overwhelming frequency) there is never a possibility for the indigenous to be anything other than peripheral to the event. Taylor writes

> As opposed to narrative that, as Greenblatt argues, can “create the illusion of presences that are in reality absences,” the scenario can vacate physical presence. The Amerindians, though physically present, are acknowledged only to be disappeared in this act. They, like the animals Columbus says they resemble, become part of the landscape, found objects to be transferred (like servants and slaves), not subjects or landowners. Their humanity is postponed for some later date… (Taylor 60-1)

Because of their silent subaltern status, the Amerindians in this discovery scenario are objectified, becoming nothing more than an additional resource spread out before the European conquerors. Akin to Herndl & Brown’s heuristic for nature writing, the Amerindians in the discovery scenario are made to fit one of the three possibilities: resources (made by the comparisons landscape and ownership), objects (categorically defined based on external criteria—made evident by the application of the misnomer “Indian”), or spirits (the fantastic invention of the other, made into either the motif of the

idealized noble savage or the cannibal). What is missing here, just as is missing in the nature based application of the heuristic, is the act of inclusion: the possibility of or invitation for participation. The current framework for peoples and plants indicates a lack of synercentric encounter that instead transforms the subjects into the options set forward by Herndl and Brown, silencing the subaltern. Referring to Columbus' description of the event: "More seminaked people dance in the background, and in the far distance they become almost indistinguishable from the trees, seemingly "at one with nature."" (Taylor 61). Visually like Cole's *The Savage State* the lack of distinction between indigenous body and terrain illustrates the problematic trampling of the other, where not only is there no attempt at meaningful encounter there is not even a framework of inclusion possible in the narrative.

> Peripheral to the action, seemingly, stand those who through this act of transfer become the dispossessed, potential slaves and servants. Columbus interprets the "no contradiction" as a sign of the indigenous people's acceptance of their new subordinate status. The mute acquiescence of naked, defenseless native peoples is forever plotted into the sequence. (Taylor 57)

Taylor argues that contemporary iterations of the discovery scenario normalizes "… the extraordinary conceit that discovery is still possible, that "undiscovered" peoples still exist, without questioning the obvious: *Undiscovered by whom?*" (Taylor 54). In the discovery of the Methuselah, and other long-lived trees or plants, the same question arises. Who is discovering whom?

A prime of example of this is the cliff dwelling cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) on the coast of Lake Superior known as Manido Gee-zhi-gance (Little Cedar Spirit Tree in Ojibwe) or the Witch Tree. Manido Gee-zhi-gance is presumed to be anywhere from 300-

500 years old, depending on *who* is counting. Many date it according to archival evidence: “The earliest written record of this aged specimen is from the French Canadian explorer Sieur de la Vérendrye in 1731, who called it a mature cedar at the time” (Dybas “Spirit of Lake Superior”). The record by Vérendrye is undoubtedly a useful marker, however, it obscures the possibility of already established relationships between Manido Gee-zhi-gance and the local indigenous peoples. Others such as Grand Portage Reservation Tribal Council historian John Morrin acknowledge that “there is no official documentation of the year that native people first spotted the tree … [b]ut there are reports that a French explorer wrote about it in the 1730s, describing it at the time as a mature tree” (“Finding Minnesota: North Shore’s ‘Witch Tree’”). The absence of a written record by the indigenous peoples follows the colonial trend of European “discovery” narrative to relocate the origin of the tree to the 1731 record, despite the fact the record indicates the tree as mature and therefore pre-existing that date. Scenarios such as Columbus’ discovery or even the implied “discovery” by Vérendrye “have become so normalized as to transmit values and fantasies without calling attention to itself as a “conscious” performance” (Taylor 54). The implications of erasure slip in unchecked. Shohat and Stam argue that:

> The notion of the indigenous peoples as “prehistoric” or “peoples without history” – in the double sense of lacking both textual historical records[85] and meaningful development toward a goal – is another Eurocentric misnomer. (Shohat and Stam 59)

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[85] Technically, trees *do* have textual records. Dendrochronology has granted tree rings a legibility which speaks to their lived experiences. Different than say, embodied archives like tattoos which will eventually disappear along with the subject, tree rings are lasting impressions that can survive thousands of years beyond the lifespan of the subject. In this way, tree rings are akin to ancient human writing on paper—even in the way that they are impressions on similar materials.

The march of European "discovery" in the Americas is constantly in the process of erasing histories. Given this starting point there is no surprise that the participation of plants—even those ancient ones that inspire such awe and wonder—has been a low priority. In a paradigm when members of the human species are othered, appropriated, forcibly silenced, removed, disappeared and dispossessed, what hope is there for approaching the understanding of vegetal encounter? Indeed, is this a question that should even be asked in light of such a fact?

Tragedy is not a competition; nor should it be made into one. The relationship, however, between peoples and plants is not so easily divided as to suggest that injustice towards one does not affect the other. Consider food security, access to traditional medicines, sacred plants, the empowerment of self-reliance. The vegetal and the human are so deeply intertwined that the ethics of one may imply the ethics of the other. To examine how encounters with trees can be reframed into synercentric encounters may help understand encounters with peoples, and vice versa.

Yet, there are important differences—one being that while human rights are arguably defensible (even if in certain instances they are abused) the idea of plant rights *for plants' sake* is almost laughable in contemporary discourse.

> If animals have suffered marginalization throughout the history of Western thought, then non-human, non-animal living beings, such as plants, have populated the margin of the margin, the zone of absolute obscurity undetectable on the radars of our conceptualities. (Marder 2)

The consideration of plants is nearly inconceivable—a status that not-so-long-ago certain populations of humans and animals shared. Part of the problem that Marder identifies is the human refusal to meet plants halfway.

> No genuine encounter happens without our eventual exposure, unwilled and unplanned, to that which, or the one who, is thus encountered. "Plant-thinking" is in the first place a promise and the name of an encounter, and therefore it may be read as an invitation to abandon the familiar terrain of human and humanist thought and to meet vegetal life, if not in the place where it is, then at least halfway. (Marder 10)

Marder uses the history of philosophy in *Plant-Thinking* to explain how the relationship between plants and humans is stuck in a non-reciprocal dynamic. Beginning with Aristotle's *De anima* to Nietzsche's theories of will to power, the agenthood of plants has been under philosophical scrutiny for centuries. Marder explains that many subsequent theories still hinge on *De anima*'s assertion that plants only exhibit three of the four types of movement necessary for a soul. A plant can "move by altering its state, by growing, and by decaying, though not by moving its position" (20). Even so, "Plato and his followers were convinced that plants could be counted among desiring beings," a stance which "Aristotle vehemently denied" (39). Aristotle's following has, Marder argues, unleashed violence against plants (21) and, with consensus from following philosophers (like Hegel), and overall "negative[ly] impact[s] on the value of vegetal life" (25).

The ontophytology of plants, as Marder calls it, has been in a state of upheaval, but rarely considered from the perspective of the plants themselves. Far from suggesting that plants be asked their opinions on the matter, (although artists like Elyse Pomeranz certainly would argue for such an approach,) "vegetal phenomenology supplies plant-

thinking with a normative ideal, the ideal we might approximate but never reach, unable, as it were, to put ourselves entirely in the plants' shoes, or rather roots" (10). Given contemporary knowledge of the movement of plants, from individual clonal propagation like #0001 to rapid plant movement in the Venus Fly Trap, it may be possible to reattribute the fourth type of movement. Alternatively, as Marder suggests, we can theorize a possibility where three of the four types of movement are sufficient for the plant soul, and that imposing structures that are animal based onto plants is to misunderstand what a plant is and to fetishize plant life. Marder's thesis seeks to alter expectations and ideas about plants, foregrounding and celebrating their "thingness" and otherness which make them agents and participants in synercentric encounters. By refusing to simply lay human ontologies onto plant life, and instead engage plants from their own peculiar, and sometimes uncanny, ontophytology, Marder makes meeting plants halfway possible in vegetal encounters.

Making it Personal: Collection and Vandalism of Ancient Trees

Ronald M. Lanner writes in *The Bristlecone Book*

> The question is often asked: Might there be some 5,000-year-olds still out there in the White Mountains or the Snake Range? Certainly there might be, and they could be of marginal value to dendrochronologists. But Biology is not a sporting event, and finding the oldest or the biggest is of more benefit to the finder's ego than to science. Nor can we ever be certain of the maximum age attainable for a tree of any species. But humanity thrives on tales of ancient living things. (89)

The sporting event of finding the oldest or the biggest is a form of play known as *agon*, as defined by Roger Caillois in *Man, Play and Games*, which bases itself in active competition rather than chance, simulation or vertigo. When the *agon* is based around "discovery", the competition is simultaneous between the discoverers and the unknown.

For there to be a discovery there has to be a realm in which there are things to be discovered. Since the element of competition implies a claiming of discoverables (so that one person's discovery is not appropriated by another), discovery in this formula leads to conquest. It is not surprising rhetorically that the term conquer is used both for military control *as well as* the *agon* in activities like mountaineering as both require significant acts of force and will against an opponent (either another army/population or a mountain). The act of conquest in relation to ancient trees likewise produces sometimes violent results. To confirm that the tree in question is the oldest, largest, etc. the processes of verification can be detrimental. The Prometheus tree is a famous American example of how confirming longevity led to the felling of, possibly, the world's oldest tree. Far from being the thoughtless act of destruction the media has sometimes made the felling of Prometheus to be, the circumstances of Donald Currey's now well-known act are worth discussing.

Prometheus, a bristlecone pine in eastern Nevada, was bored by Currey—a graduate student at University of North Carolina—in 1964. Currey was studying dendrochronology techniques but failed to get overlapping cores from the tree he designated as WPN-114, named the Prometheus tree by the park advocates in the late 50's ("Don Currey and the Prometheus Tree handout). After breaking two borers, he received permission from the US Forest Service to fell the tree and examine the complete cross section of the trunk. The decision was met with resistance as the first Forest Service employee assigned to cut the tree down refused and was replaced by someone who would comply with the request. The discovery of Prometheus' age, (4844 counted rings,

estimated at 5200 years total,) only occurred because of the felling, weaving together the destruction of the specimen and the discovery of its age ("OldList").

There are several components in this story that are of interest. While most investigations or commentaries on the felling of the Prometheus tree surround the ethics of felling ancient trees in the name of science, it is worth noting that there is a significant divide between the scientific and the poetic in this instance. Applying Herndl and Brown's heuristic, the different approaches to the tree are clearly located in the scientific or the poetic by means of the tree's name.[86] Prometheus evokes imaginaries of legendary Greek titans—more specifically, a titan linked to the survival of humans. A titan who, according to the traditional myth, brought stolen fire to humans and suffered an eternity of pain as a result.[87] The relationship between Prometheus and mankind posits the tree as a witness and a guardian, and the felling of the Prometheus tree the equivalent of betraying the protector of human life. The relationship between the Prometheus tree and mankind is therefore build on a kind of a shared past, but problematically, the dynamic is less about a mutual history than it is about claiming the tree's body and literal roots in past events as one's own. This method of conquering the past, erases the participation of the tree in that history by imposing an external mythology. The same way that indigenous peoples 'become' ahistorical though the processes of colonization, ancient trees become

[86] Nature as resource does not come into play in this example. Even though bristlecone pines have been used for building (the derelict remains of the Mexican Mine at Schulman grove, for example) these uses do not enter into the discussion of the oldest beyond Andrew Ellicott Douglass' dendrochonrolocial approaches.

[87] Prometheus had his liver torn out and eaten every day by a great bird, only to have it regrow each night.

ahistorical through the objectification of the eager "discoverer" out to claim a "find" rather than engage in an encounter.

Opposite of this evocative relationship, WPN-114 is a code designation for a specific object in the scientific discourse. It removes the emotional attachment of Prometheus, and obfuscates the specific tree from the public imaginary. The emotional evocation of a name that already holds rich connotations of a legendary relationship and the grandeur of Greek history in the West does not occur in the use of a code as a designate. I do not mean that code names cannot become more meaningful (we can consider R2-D2, C3P0, or, in my personal experience, cactus #0001 at the Desert Botanical Garden) but it is to say that within the realm of scientific discourse, the endowing of code designate with emotional or imaginary meaning would be to lose scientific objectivity and thereby transform the original discourse into the realm of the poetic.

Only knowing the value of the specimen after its demise is a central problem to the story of the Prometheus tree. The encounter between human and tree is only made meaningful in this paradigm of discovery retroactively. The tree is a casualty in the discovery scenario, with a kind of nostalgic hindsight that plays out the event as a sad, unfortunate, but necessary event. However, the nostalgia betrays an attitude that the value of the specimen is its contribution to either the scientific discourse or the poetic discourse. Certainly, the value of the Prometheus story in the poetic sense is at least in part enabled by the confirmation that it was the oldest tree found to date. If the tree had been "discovered" to be less aged, then the poetic narrative would not have taken hold in

the same way. Nowhere in this discovery narrative is the tree embodied or even valued for its own sake—even the protection of an ancient tree is framed as being important for future human generations rather than for its continued survival for its own sake. It is ironic that what evidently makes the tree worth protecting is simultaneously what endangers it. To borrow Lanner's wording, humanity may thrive on tales of ancient living things, but it also thrives on tales of their discovery and conquest.

The discovery and conquest of ancient trees is a recurring trope, resembling the discovery and conquest of indigenous peoples. Like Taylor's scenario theory, it is continually playing out, reverberating in different forms. David Hill from *The Guardian* identifies a hoax article from 2014 that is still bouncing around social media in which the

> world's oldest tree" had been cut down along the Brazil-Peru border in the Amazon. It stated that a "giant Samauma tree that is thought to be over 5,800 years old" in the "Matsés Indigenous Reserve" had been "accidentally" felled by illegal loggers, and quoted "local tribesman leader Tahuactep of the Matsés tribe" saying it had "brought darkness upon not only our people, but the whole world.

Not only is tree in question not the oldest tree (although Chapter 2's discussion of the various ways superlatives are attaches to trees does tend to complicate these kinds of claims) but the peoples in question are also partially fictitious and extremely exoticized.

> For starters, there's no such thing as the "Matsés Indigenous Reserve", and the Matsés's leader, or rather, "president", is really called Daniel Vela Collantes. (Hill)

Hill explains that there are very real problems in logging and indigenous control over Amazonian forest, but the rouse of the oldest tree being felled detracts from the facts. It also presents the situation with a sense of finality. Like the felling of the Prometheus tree, there is only a retrospective burden of guilt, rather than a call to arms. Not to

mention that the rhetoric of what "Tahuactep" is claimed to have said is both highly theatrical and apocalyptic. Candace Slater in "Amazonia as Edenic Narrative" argues

> …that the tendency to see the amazon—or the Amazonian nature—as a kind of Eden fosters a skewed and largely static approach toward a multilayered and decidedly fluid reality. The problem is not just that this vision is often false or exaggerated but that it obscures the people and places that actually exist there (114)

Edenic narrative for Slater falls under two general categories: the first is an evocation of harmony and dominion over nature, the second a post-Eden nostalgia that emphasises the loss of that control. Slater explains that the latter are "stories that highlight nostalgia for a perfect past or deep fears about continuing loss [and…] may imply hope for the rediscovery of paradise" (116). In the hoax article about the Matsés tribe, the post-Eden nostalgia and anxiety are in full force, as well as the blurring between human and tree which is an overly simplistic interpretation of indigenous Amazonian cultures and a dehumanizing act. In consuming such stories, looking for facts is made irrelevant in favour of the formula. It does not particularly matter if the tree is verified as the oldest, only that it fits the formula of the discovery and conquest narrative, mingling the elements of nostalgia and anxiety of future discoveries. This example runs parallel to Taylor's first example of the discovery scenario in *The Archive and the Repertoire* about a 1995 news article claiming to have "discovered" a "new" tribe in the amazon rainforest. The Amazon, or rather the Amazonian imaginary of Slater's definition, is all about the discovery or rediscovery of Eden, and both examples clearly demonstrate the stakes of such scenarios. Either apocalyptic or idealized to a fault, the promise of discovery in the Amazon presents both the vegetal and human inhabitants as resources, objects or spirits,

and in doing so erases their very real embodied presence in the encounter. There is a need for offering participation in the encounter in a radically embodied way—a way that is not obscured by narrative but takes the present embodied participants as vitally important to the understanding of the scenario.

Changing the Encounter from Discovery to Participation

The *agon* in discovery seeks to silence the environmental subjects, transforming them into either resource, objects, or in some cases, watchful guardians that are more-spirits-than-trees. In these cases, the actual subjects are erased or replaced in favour of human centric interpretations. The vegetal body is appropriated, displaced, or fetishized. When the discourse eclipses the body, what approach can there be to redirect the attention back to the physical tree? I propose that by altering the discovery narrative to disrupt the implied conquest of the tree allows the possibility for meeting halfway.

After Schulman's discovery of Methuselah and the publication (and publicising) by National Geographic of its existence in 1958, the Methuselah tree enjoyed a new-found celebrity. Unfortunately, the allure of the "World's Oldest Known Living Thing" led to an increase in visitors and vandalism. Wherever there are audiences there is unpredictability: nature preserves are no different. Many initiatives are in place at federal, state, and provincial parks to protect the sites from increases in foot traffic, unauthorized "collecting," hunting, or camping, waste removal, and vandalism. From personal experience working for the provincial park service in Ontario, I can attest to the frequency with which visitors damaged living trees for fire fuel (from breaking branches to ringing trees by removing bark—a process which kills the tree), carving names or

messages into trunks, or plucked vulnerable species of plants/flowers/saplings for enjoyment or identification.

In a location where the vegetation or wildlife have significant scientific or cultural importance, additional measures can be placed to discourage unwanted behavior. These include increased presence of guides and security, rerouting or cordoning off trails to prevent easy access, and offering alternative sources of "collectables." For example, removing pieces of petrified wood from the Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona is illegal. The park allows the Fred Harvey Company (Xanterra) to sell pieces of petrified wood (obtained from alternate sources) "to give visitors an opportunity to easily find a legal source of petrified wood, possibly making it less likely that people will illegally remove it from within the park" (NPS website FAQs). Similarly, museums and science centers often feature touchable exhibits next to exhibits that should be left alone, allowing visitors to get it out of their systems in a manner that protects the collections on display. Other caretakers or stewards of ancient trees have taken different approaches to protect the trees. Manido Gee-zhi-gance (Little Cedar Spirit Tree) is protected by removing access to the tree by the public. To visit Manido Gee-zhi-gance, one must either arrange an accompaniment from the Grand Portage Band to ensure appropriate conduct is maintained, or see the cliff dwelling tree only from canoe or kayak on Lake Superior. In November 2016 I visited the (supposedly) 500 year old Comfort Maple tree in the Niagara region of Ontario and spent the majority of that visit picking up trash.

Ronald Lanner explains trail etiquette with ancient trees as being composed of four main points:

1. Remove no living specimens from the trees
2. Remove no dead specimens (for firewood or souvenirs)
3. Walk only on trails to prevent erosion
4. "Be satisfied" with memories, photos, or sanctioned souvenirs (9)

Lanner explains that violation of the first rule led directly to Methuselah "being vandalized and subsequently having its location kept from the public" (9). Of course, the problem nascent in the trail etiquette rules is the idea of assuming the public will indeed be satisfied when there are alluring rewards to breaking them—even if visitors are educated as to the consequences of their actions.

Allow me to explain this process by understanding the activity of discovery as a kind of game. Roger Caillois' *Man, Play, and Games* defines play as free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, governed by rules and make-believe, classifiable into four dominant areas including agôn (competitive, active), alea (chance, passive), mimicry (simulation), and ilinx (vertigo) as avenues of play. Within each kind of play there are systems of rules as well as approaches to play that must be adhered to, otherwise the play is corrupted. In any instance that play ceases to be voluntary (gambling as an addition) or when play becomes real life (a soccer player becomes a professional athlete) play transforms into something else. Visitors to parks and museums play at discovering exhibits or objects, while for Columbus (and other explorers/discoverers) the act of discovery and conquest was real. For visitors to play at conquest, acts of collection, vandalism, or destruction become part of the game, kept only under control when the

provider can offer non-destructive forms of the same activity (a gift shop, touchable exhibits, etc.) to "satisfy" the visitor.[88]

Finding Methuselah, for the park visitor, is a game. Unlike the discovery scenario with #0001, the bristlecone pine cannot use tactics of movement as a measure of participation in the act of discovery. In the performative game of finding Methuselah, this ancient tree is vulnerable and relatively unprotected in the encounters, transformed into an object of collection and conquest by the rules of the game when thousands of visitors hunt for the tree annually. Within the parameters of a discovery and conquest game, satisfaction only occurs when the act is complete. In response to the acts of vandalism toward the Methuselah tree, Shulman Grove in Inyo National Forest removed all signage and images of the tree to stop the game entirely. "Since anonymity is its best defense against souvenir hunters, the Methuselah tree is not marked, signed, or identified in any manner" (*Welcome to the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest*). The absence of the end goal in the game corrupts the game's rules which dictate that by completing certain steps the explorer will be rewarded with "discovery," and, implicitly, the option of conquest. By erasing the end of the discovery and conquest narrative, where the visitor is congratulated and rewarded[89] for 'discovering' the tree, the stakes and purpose of the act is transformed.

[88] I purchased the cross section of bristlecone pine wood photographed earlier as a fundraiser for the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, both to raise money for the Schulman Grove Visitor's Center as well as to provide amateur collectors with a legal alternative.
[89] Validation ranging from satisfaction, to photos, to "collections" (and by collections I mean the removal of branches, bark, etc. from the living tree itself).

The secrecy surrounding the location of Methuselah is not common to encounters with other ancient trees, although the varying levels of protection certainly indicate a kind of anxiety surrounding the competing desires to protect and to see. By removing the signage locating the Methuselah to the public, the Inyo National Forest discourages the explorer imaginary in relation to this ancient body and redirects it to a more general construct of discovery. Since the tree of importance is relatively "undiscoverable" there is no incentive to collect pieces of it as those pieces would be unverifiable and therefore worthless in the parameters of the game. What is in place now is a different kind of game—one with ambiguous objectives and outcomes.

James Carse's *Finite and Infinite Games* argues that there are two different types of games. The first, labelled as finite, consists of games that include set structures, constraints, and limitations. These games are identifiable in terms of their formalized structure and their acknowledgement and adherence to rules. Players in finite games win titles (19) in which they are publically accepted to be winners. Infinite games are considerably different in that they do not have formalized rules, and in fact need to have changing rules over the course of play (9). Title is not the objective in infinite games, rather, the continuance of play is the objective and exists beyond the individual players. Finite games can be played within infinite games, but the reverse cannot occur. Where as the title of "discoverer" is important to the finite game of discovery and conquest (proven by the collection and display of authentic specimens) a more general role of "explorer" without a specific end goal (no proof is needed) is taken on by players in the infinite game.

When I first began to map out the discovery scenario as a game I soon discovered that identifying the players is more complicated than I'd anticipated. The humans moving about the park, searching for that which has been objectified as the "goal" (literally, the objective of the game) take on the role of discoverers, while those playing with no specific goal I call explorers. In his chapter on "The Freedom of Plants" Marder explains that plants too have the capacity to play. For the purposes of encounter in a scenario framework that takes its root in performance studies, playing plants is particularly important. Play is defined as an expenditure of resources and energy non-productively for fun, learning, interaction etc.

> Schiller's memorable example of this aneconomic expenditure, which earns the appellation of "physical play" …is precisely a tree: "The tree puts forth innumerable buds which perish without developing, and stretches out for nourishment many more roots, branches, and leaves than are used for the maintenance of itself and its species. What the tree returns from its lavish profusion unused and unenjoyed to the kingdom of the elements, the living creature may squander in joyous movements" … If the plant could enjoy its existence, the non-productive buds and unnecessary—within the economy of nourishment and procreation—roots, branches, flowers, and leaves would have furnished the objective evidence of its *jouissance*. (Marder 144)

Because this form of plant play has no finite goal, the tree is engaged, like the explorer, in an infinite game.

With the removal of Methuselah in the Find-the-Methuselah game, the new goal of ongoing continuous play and exploration changes the game from finite to infinite. It may not be impossible for the visitor to "find" the Methuselah on their own, but the lack of structures, constraints, limitations, and public recognition certainly deters the same kind of play which led to the souvenir-driven vandalism the tree experienced shortly after

its being made public. What is interesting is that given Marder's argument that plants can indeed also play, the infinite game offers the chance for mutual play.

An Encounter with…?

If encountering Methuselah is not possible because of the measures taken to ensure the tree's anonymity, what exactly can be encountered? I argue that the removal of the sign redirects the attention from the contextual curation to the actual subjects. Whereas a sign makes a thing important by directing out attention to it (dedicating the tree, ascribing econicity to it, etc.), the lack of a sign allows the visitor to make their own choices. Additionally, the participation of the environmental subject is now based on its own terms, rather than a fantasy of participation dictated by a contextual sign. In the #0001 example, the importance of the Creeping Devil Cactus is clearly marked by the sign applauding the visitor for having "discovered" the moving clone. Without a sign, this cactus may have escaped notice, *or* it would have been noticed for reasons outside of a discovery scenario—such as its tactical ability to move over time and subvert the garden's attempts at control.

Signage in gardens not only frames the individual plants or trees growing in that space, but the parameters of the encounter as well. Kenneth Burke's theory of terministic screens applies here, as the screen defines the modes of encounter according to the terms laid out in what Taylor calls the multifaceted systems in the transmission of the scenario. For Burke, terministic screens are like ideological lenses corresponding to language, where the terms used construct and direct attention toward one field rather than another, and shape the thinking within said fields (Burke 50). Like ideology for Althusser, one

cannot be outside of the use of terms meaning one cannot intentionally break free of a terministic screen, since the intent to break would be housed within that screen.

By having the parameters of signage in a garden or park, the terministic screen already primes the participants in the encounter. Including things like facts indicates a screen of objective institutional learning, while including poetry suggests a screen of subjective experience. Any kind of marking corresponds to screens that define the parameters of encounter, directing the attention to the biology of the plant or its graceful form; the memory of a loved one, or a historical event.

In the case of Methuselah, the screen is more ambiguous. It is not absent because that would imply that one could escape the trappings of ideology or terministic screens altogether. But without the markers that indicate which of the thousands of trees is the Methuselah, the terminus of the screen blurs. In the infinite game, the poetic framing of the Methuselah is still intact, but because the tree itself is “undiscoverable” the emphasis is placed on encounters with any and every tree. The direction of attention is diffused. Any of the trees next to the Methuselah are just as likely to be meaningfully encountered by visitors as the Methuselah itself. With a marker or designation, these trees might otherwise go unnoticed in favour of the tree “discovered” as important in both scientific and poetic discourse. Barbara Kirchenblatt-Gimblett’s terminology of *in context* or *in situ* displays in museum studies also offers some insight to this discussion. An *in context* method of curation or display is achieved through a combination of items in an exhibit with “particular techniques of arrangements and explanations to convey ideas” (Kirschenblatt-Gimblet 21) while an *in situ* curation uses the representational quality of a

single specimen to signify a larger whole. They rely on different kinds of screens to direct attention to their subjects. In an *in context* display, the techniques of arrangement, signage, etc. are crucial to understanding—this is seen in #0001 whose longevity is made visible by the sign. An *in situ* representation is always limited in that there is a risk the represented objects will become only spectacle and "displace scientific seriousness" (Kirschenblatt-Gimblet 21). Thus, interpretations of ancientness or aesthetics are written on the physical appearance of bristlecone pines, rather than a contextualized explanation.

The Methuselah Walk is a 4.5-mile loop trail through the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest. Already at 10,000 feet, the trail itself changes 800 feet in elevation and takes 2-3 hours to complete. Hikers are encouraged to move in a counter clockwise direction because several sections of the path along the mountainside are very steep and wide enough for only one person at a time. The Methuselah Grove itself is at the midpoint of the walk, meaning that visitors will have already traveled at least an hour on foot before arriving at the area where the Methuselah tree grows. The only markers along the trail include rest benches and numbered posts. The posts correspond to an interpretive trail guide available by donation at the trail head and the Schulman Grove Visitor's Center, created by the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association and the USDA. Without the trail guide, *Methuselah Walk: Your journey through the oldest known living forest…* there is no written information on the trail indicating the different groves or individual trees.

With the trail guide in hand, each of the posts correspond to a numbered paragraph covering topics ranging from "Reduced Competition on Dolomite" to "Lightening Strikes" educating the reader on various ecological concerns in the White

Mountains. Post 8 (featured below) identifies the tree to the right as possibly centuries old, given that "one-inch thickness of growth may take a century to accomplish", and overtime will begin to resemble the tree on the left side of the image.

Figure 60. Century-old "Sapling"

Given that the posts are vague without the trail guide to explain their presence (and at times the posts fall over and roll away given the poor soil conditions) there is plenty of room for the attention to wander over the scenic vistas, the gnarled trees, or the various birds and insects that populate the mountainside. The terministic screen creates the visual field of importance. Without the sign (or rather, without the trail guide that explains the numbered post) the possibilities for encountering something that might disrupt the terministic screen are broader. For an infinite game, there are an infinite number of things to pay attention to and trees to encounter. But let's imagine for a moment that the finite game is still in play—how would one even attempt to play out the discovery of the Methuselah tree?

With the trail guide, the visitor follows the post toward number 16: Methuselah Grove, a historic location. But just before arriving at the grove where Schulman famously identified one of the oldest living trees in the world, the visitor will pass another grove: The Sculpture Garden.

Figure 61. Sculpture Garden Grove

The Sculpture Garden (post 14) is a section of the trail where trees thousands of years old have been literally sculpted by the elements to produce “contorted shapes [that] seem to defy nature” (trail guide) with striking colours produced by fungi feeding on the dead wood. Most of the “sculptures” are, importantly, no longer living. The death of the living tree appears to transform the body into a sculpture – an interesting ontological effect.

Bill Brown quotes Stein in “Thing Theory” as having said “Things are what we encounter, ideas are what we project” (3) and we can see this at play in the ontological

distinction between the tree and the sculpture. On the dead body of a tree, what I will refer to as the sculpture, the ideas of longevity, history, etc. are imposed with ease as they fit an in situ style of curation which the visitor might be familiar with from museums or art galleries. Is this because we are used to objectifying trees? Or seeing the march of history in relation to sculptures/ruins and other man-made objects? There is a certain kind of ontological similarity between the sculpture of the ancient tree and the column in Cole's *Desolation*, standing tall and resilient as a testament to the passage of time. Although the grove is particularly famous for the oldest *living* tree, it is the dead wood or "sculptures" that appear to grab the visual attention. In part, this is due to the mechanics of growth. To successfully survive thousands of years, trees will grow slowly, remaining small and nondescript. Wohlleben explains that "…in the case of trees, being old doesn't mean being weak, bowed, and fragile. Quite the opposite, it means being full of energy and highly productive" (Wohlleben 97). It is the shorter-lived tree which grows tall and ornately, leaving behind beautiful remains. The encounter here between human and sculpture is an encounter of ideas rather than an encounter with the thing. The most photographed bristlecone pine sculpture is located on the Discovery Trail, a 1-mile loop from the Schulman Grove Visitor Center's parking lot.

Figure 62. Ancient Bristlecone Pine

As you can visually see, there is no living tissue on this tree. The barren limbs and twisted trunk have made it the subject of many artistic works. Because of this tree's charismatic form, it is often used to represent the Methuselah, regardless of the lack of evidence to support such a claim.

Phantom Limb Company, an experimental theatrical group focusing heavily on marionettes and multi-media theatrical production and design (PLC website, About), premiered in 2015 a dance drama called *Memory Rings* which circles around the Methuselah. The central set design includes a tree structure imitating the above photo.[90] I will go into detail about the play itself in the following case study, but it is worth exploring here the ways in which this theatre company uses the discovery scenario in its

[90] Images of the central tree structure are included in the *Memory Rings* case study following Chapter 3.

online promotional material. In the summer of 2016, Phantom Limb Company (hereafter PLC) posted video on their *Memory Rings* production page composed of footage taken at the Schulman Grove in Inyo National Forest. Laid over the black and white footage are the following words:

> after three days of searching at 12,000 feet
> and two years of research and inspiration
> Phantom Limb found the world's oldest living tree
> The Methuselah 5,000 years old
> MEMORY RINGS coming soon

Since the company claims it has site specific authenticity and authority, I will read their promotional video as such. However, having spent multiple days in Inyo National Park (September 2016) myself, I can identify several moments in the video where their claims for authority and authenticity are unfounded and only serve to put forward a discovery scenario. Perhaps this is because the odds for overlap of visitors to the park and theatre goers for this production are limited, or perhaps it is in the name of artistic license. I do not condemn the production or its promotional video, but an unpacking of the claims made by a so-called discoverer is warranted, especially when there are limited opportunities to verify such claims.

First and foremost, none of the footage included in the video is shot in the Methuselah grove. Three individual shots may come from the Methuselah trail loop (which is 4.5 miles long) but none from the grove itself. It is possible that the video includes erroneous footage to contribute to the secrecy which protects the Methuselah., however, based purely on the promotional material, the claims of discovery already counteract any framework protecting the tree by obscurity. Instead the company places

itself in the elite position of sole discoverer that audiences at *Memory Rings* can experience vicariously.

Secondly, the tree featured when the script reads "The Methuselah 5,000 years old" is not the Methuselah. Revealing any kind of "truth" about the Methuselah would mean endangering it, but simply provided with the information given to the public at Schulman grove there are some obvious points to be made that explain the errors in the video while safeguarding the ancient subject. The image on top of which the line "The Methuselah 5,000 years old" appears is the very same tree pictured, located on the Discovery Trail. It is a very iconic, and very dead, ancient bristlecone pine. Given the structural and aesthetic similarity to the tree in the dramatic production, it would be understandable for this tree to be the artistic basis for the production, as it has been for many other works of art. Even in my own experience, this tree was the most photogenic. Throughout the promotional "discovery" video, the only living trees included are in brief background shots. All close in the video are on entire trees or sections of trees that have long been dead. This undermines the reality of the "oldest *living* tree" (emphasis mine) in favour of a more aesthetically appealing object. The living ancient trees are reduced to objects or scenery on the continuum. The *in situ* display of the production's Memory Tree based on the bristlecone sculptures clearly enters into the realm of spectacle, but problematically includes contextual information that is at odds with the site specific accuracy the company claims to be producing.

Finally, the claim that the discovery was located at 12,000 feet is factually misleading as the grove is at 10,000 feet, meaning that either the "discovery" was made

drastically off trail (breaking the third rule of Lanner's etiquette, and surpassing the Great Basin Bristlecone Pine's growing region which peaks at 11,000 feet in the Patriarch Grove, 12 miles from the Schulman Visitor's Center) or in a different location all together.

Although I am identifying these errors as suspicious flags in the claims for authenticity, it could be that they are misguided attempts to attract an audience while protecting the actual tree from future would-be discoverers.[91] What is of concern, regardless of discrepancies, is the claim of discovery and what this does to the encounter with ancient trees (Methuselah or not). In the video, the company follows with the scenario of discovery including the physical exertion of the act, the time taken to do such a work, culminating in the finite "goal" of locating the lost or hidden treasure, thus granting the discoverer the right to claim authority over the subject. Claiming to have searched for days and finally 'discovered' the tree implies that the finite game was accomplished. But unless there is a form of verification (following the rules of the finite game, accepted by the public) the confirmation of discovery is impossible. Instead what occurs is a claim of authority and authenticity without any support, thereby corrupting the game. Claims of discovery like this are riddled with problems and only serve to objectify the being being discovered. Just like the example of the hoax article describing the felling of the giant Samauma tree in the Amazon, it is irrelevant as to whether the facts are

[91] PLC's methods go directly against the ESIA and USDA's mandate to protect the tree. Upon my visit to Inyo, none of the rangers knew of such footage even being taken (no permissions had been granted) and were greatly concerned that such a video had been made and disseminated to the public. At this time, no formal action has been taken against PLC, possibly due to the video's lack of accuracy.

real—as long as the formula of the discovery and conquest are followed, facts play a very small role. No where is there a mention of protecting the tree, or discouraging other would-be discoverers from going on their own explorative treks, leaving the actual tree exposed and vulnerable for the sake of an "authentic" art that is profitable but unsubstantiated.

If I set aside my personal experience at the park and entertain the idea that the claims made in the video are accurate, there is evidently a final problem. The Methuselah, while often touted as the oldest living tree, has been publicly known to be second in that title since 2012. Setting aside Prometheus, which is no longer a living contender for such a title, the acknowledged successor to the title is another, unnamed ancient bristlecone pine from the White Mountains in California. Its core samples were collected by Ed Schulman in the 1950's (the same time that he collected the Methuselah's samples) but only counted by Tom Harlan in 2010. Neither a code nor a name has been publicly awarded to this tree which is a total of 5062 years[92] but it is the oldest non-clonal tree in the world to be officially dated by dendrochronology. Like any other unnamed tree, it is usually signified by a question mark in documents or charts. Whereas the Methuselah has been actively erased from public access, leaving only a mythological legacy, this unnamed ancient didn't capture the public imaginary in the same way and leaves no traces for would-be explorers to follow. Comparable to the shifting of titles between General Grant and General Sherman (as discussed in Chapter 2) the passing on

[92] Methuselah is dated at 4845, Prometheus at 4844 (at time of felling) according to the Rocky Mountain Tree-Ring Research database (OldList).

of title from Methuselah to its elder does not easily replace the legacy of Methuselah as an econ, especially if that successor does not impose its own contextual legacy. There is no cultural frame or screen to accommodate PLC's finding of an unnamed ancient tree, while there is one already in place for Methuselah.

Because Methuselah and the unnamed tree are unmarked, the desire for "finding the tree" can be imposed onto the sculptures which already visually adhere to ideas of history and witness following the rules of in situ display. Given the proliferation of massively imposing and striking sculptures throughout the area, the allure of the living trees is less conspicuous. While still lovely, the distinctive needles and bark obscure the moulded limbs and trunk—not to mention that the older the tree, often the shorter and stump-ier it is. The quest for a photogenic ancient subject that the discoverer can find and bring back evidence of is at odds with the living state of the trees.

The visitor then, on a mission to find Methuselah, arrives at post 16, The Methuselah Grove, having just been exposed to some of the most striking shapes in the region. Which tree is Methuselah remains unknown to the general audience. On my first hike through the Methuselah Walk, I completely missed the grove by accident because of its non-descript visual presence (keep in mind, I reached this point after over an hour of hiking). On my second walk through, I made certain not to miss the Methuselah Grove by carefully documenting the posts. If the finite game is still in play, then the discovery narrative attaches itself onto whatever body best ideologically fits the ideas of an ancient tree, or whatever screen will accommodate it—as can be demonstrated through the PLC

promotional video. If it is the infinite game being played, then the encounter becomes one where the tree being encountered can be met halfway and participate in the encounter.

If I put aside the discovery narrative or screen's attempts to control the encounter according to the rules of a finite game, then the scenario is open to "reversal, parody, and change" (31). Whereas a fantasy of participation might be imposed in a discovery scenario where the subject can in fact be found (and verified) by the public, the lack of such a finite objective suggests that this fantasy breaks down. In that it does not "satisfy" the needs of a finite game, the game shifts to include the vegetal subjects as participants. In the synercentric encounter, the trees participate by specifically resisting the finite frames being placed on them. Yes, this is facilitated by human methods of stewardship or protection, but we can extrapolate from this example to how any tree may be encountered in a forest without the imposition of narratives. The USDA or ESIA impose strategies to protect or obfuscate the methuselah, while the trees themselves use tactics to do the same work. De Certeau explains that "…tactics [are] a clever *utilization of time*, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power" (1254, original emphasis). What better way to describe the growth of ancient bristlecone pines than tactical, in that the eldest will often remain visually unremarkable and therefore survive? The NPS had to strategize to protect a tree, exerting their power through various methods, while the tree itself had been successfully using tactics to survive in anonymity for thousands of years.

By allowing anonymity and accepting a method of encounter based on infinite play and reciprocity, which are all counterproductive to a discovery narrative, we can

meet the tree halfway. Using Taylor's scenario, we can transform the formulaic outcome of discovery by "wrestl[ing] with the social construction of bodies in particular contexts" (29) and "be there," part of the act of transfer" (32) instead of conquering the vegetal by reducing it to objects.

Even though I knew there was no way of knowing which tree was the oldest, to satisfy the desire to "find" Methuselah, I found myself looking for an alternative tree to attach meaning to. My mother, who joined me as a hiking partner, and I referred to it as "finding your own Methuselah," and each of us, over the course of the hike, found specific trees that we were drawn to. I spend a great deal of time photographing and sitting near two trees—one that was already long dead, and another that was very much still alive, though no where near Methuselah's age.

Figure 63. Spending time with ancient trees

The ambiguity of Methuselah prompted us to rework the discovery scenario. Instead of playing at the scenario to find a specific arboreal object, the same impulse forced us to pay more attention to the trees themselves. It was not just a redirection of the

discovery narrative to a different tree, because by the parameters of the game no other tree can take the place of the Methuselah. The impulse to find was not just redirected, but transformed into an exercise that allowed the tree's own qualities to speak for themselves.

I mentioned earlier that because the Methuselah is "undiscoverable" by the rules of a discovery game, any tree is just as likely to be meaningfully encountered by the visitor. While the Methuselah may be special or important because of the framing narrative humans have surrounded it with, without markers we must look for other cues to attach meaning to. The shape of a branch, the coloration of the bark, the smell of the sap, or the sound of the wind in the needles all play roles in the encounter that might otherwise be overlooked. The lack of a terministic screen allows any tree to be remarkable, and all over the park I saw individual hikers attaching themselves to specific trees.

Much like Kimi Eisele's Standing with Saguaros, the encounters with Bristlecone Pines occurring all over the Shulman Grove rise out of a practice of "being there." Eisele's project draws from performance studies and specifically directs participants to stand with the saguaros for an hour and see what they discover. In the case of the bristlecone pines, "being there" is an unintentional result of the park's efforts to protect the ancient trees. The encounters enter the realm of reciprocity, where the actual bodies of trees are negotiated as participants in the encounter.

Case Study #4: Manifestations of Trees in *Memory Rings*

In this Case Study, I examine Phantom Limb Company's 2016 production of *Memory Rings* as a performance event which creates the possibility for nature to be understood as a participant, by means of a series of performed environmental encounters within a scenario framework (as defined by Diana Taylor). I will unpack the four strategies that PLC combines to manifest trees as ecological subjects, performing environmental participation in a production that by necessity cannot be site specific:

1. Set pieces
2. Video Projections
3. Audio Recording
4. Tree-Beings[93]

These four manifestations loosely correspond to Chapter One's four categories:

1. Trees as scenic devices
2. Trees as integral to the plot
3. Trees as themselves[94]
4. Trees as people/people as trees

I argue that it is a combination of these manifestations which prevents the typical interpretations of tree-as-object, spirit, or resource (recalling the heuristic designed by Herndl and Brown) and makes room for tree-as-participant within a dramatic performance. This can be gauged by the ways in which the four manifestations function

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[93] The term "Tree-Beings" is discussed in depth later in this chapter.

[94] The audio, as will be discussed, is the closest PLC gets to including trees as themselves on stage without transplanting live subjects.

as agents (as defined by Kenneth Burke) within a series of encounter scenarios. I propose that the tree or nature-as-participant model is a unique way of understanding ecological subjects within performance studies, and alters previous heuristics which do not take such embodied understandings of nature into account.

I begin by summarizing both the company and the production, introduce the central theoretical lens (scenario) as applied to the production, then analyse the four manifestations with attention to how they may be understood within the tree continuum, and finally conclude with an analysis of how scenario is transformed through the performance.

"What is *Memory Rings*?"

Summary of Phantom Limb Company's *Memory Rings* Performance Event

In 2001 PLC created the first of an environmental trilogy, *69°S.*

> …inspired by Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1914 Trans-Antarctic Expedition … [and] "aim[ing] to bring the unknown Antarctica along with the subtext of climate change to an audience while reinvigorating the spirit of foregoing individual glory for the sake of collective survival (PLC website, Projects).

In this production, the artists investigated what is known as 'third man syndrome' as documented in Shackleton's *South!* where small expedition parties are noted to have felt a presence of an additional person in extreme circumstances. Phantom Limb Company harnesses this idea and offers the environment as that presence, bearing witness to the trials of the adventurers and humanity overall. Simultaneously, the travellers must bear witness to their effects on the environment given the transformations caused by climate change. With continuing special interest in the relationship between humans and the natural world, the second installment of the trilogy—a mostly wordless dance drama

featuring a blend of marionettes, masks, and actors—*Memory Rings* is inspired by the ~5000-year old bristlecone pine in the White Mountains of Eastern California, often referred to as the Methuselah tree. In this production, it is the Methuselah who bears witness to the ages of man as a record keeper. The third installment of the trilogy has yet to be devised, but is rumored to take as its center the nuclear disaster at Fukushima in 2011,[95] continuing the pattern mutual acts of witnessing between the human and non-human. After all, in any disaster scenario, it is the local flora who are not only affected by the immediate incident, but who have absolutely no means of leaving the site of disaster. Trees that survive will literally internalize the event in their heartwood, standing as living witness and archival record.[96] PLC states:

> The tree is a living record of everything that has transpired during its history as it stands in mute testimony of civilization's encroachment. Our story is told through a series of overlapping scenarios that come together to confront us with one profound choice. The epic tale of Gilgamesh, woodland creatures as storytellers, fairy tales full of enchanted forests, and a new fable- the disintegration of four people in an identity crisis all overlap. Dance, puppetry, mask, installation, music, projections, costume, and the occasional bit of Nietzsche are all judiciously used to tell our otherwise wordless story. (PLC website, Projects).

Memory Rings began to take form in 2013 at Harvard University Center for the Environment, followed by multiple residencies, finally premiering on June 18, 2015 at OZ Arts Nashville (PLC website, Events). I attended the subsequent run of *Memory Rings* from April 8-9, 2016 at UCLA, performed with a cast of eight. Characters included forest animals, Snow White, Seven Dwarfs, Little Red Riding Hood, The Huntsman, and

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[95] According to "Theatre/Puppetry: Phantom Limb Company" review by ArtsNash on the *Memory Rings* world premiere

[96] As discussed in Chapter 3.

Gilgamesh. Most importantly, there were also Tree-Beings, at times serving as set pieces, puppeteers, and characters.

Memory Rings offers a prime example of theatre designed with the intention of addressing the relationship of mutual acts of witnessing between humans and the natural world though representative stories from Methuselah tree's 5000-year life span. The performance locates the Methuselah tree as an econ (as defined by Sean Morey) and as an agent in history, participating in key storylines which define the human-nature relationship and track its increasing division. The content of the play comprises four central storylines (two fairy tales, an epic, and a flood), each portraying a series of (what I call) environmental encounters in which this human-nature relationship is negotiated according to a scenario of discovery. The Methuselah tree bears witness throughout, and we in the audience bear witness to it. In this Case Study I introduce the storylines with their adaptations and then turn to the overall representation of the central tree stage device, and how it uses a multifaceted method of transmission to convey agency with video projection and audio. Finally, I focus on the Tree-Beings as liminal tree characters who can (and do) turn the scenario on its head.

The Methuselah tree is the conceptual center of the production; however, it is the action of the storylines which create the means for encounters. The human and animal characters drive the plot for most of the play while the tree manifests itself in these storylines through set design, video projection, music (both within and surrounding the production), and finally as the Tree-Beings. Given the human-nature disconnect that PLC adamantly exposes, their manifestations of nature/trees are possibly a range of staging

devices for transmitting or enhancing the human/animal centered storylines. However, a close analysis of how trees occur and function within these storylines offers another possibility: that, if considered as combined manifestations, rather than singular independent devices, the tree functions as both agent and participant with an equal influence as its human/animal counterparts.

Summaries of Basic Storylines in *Memory Rings*

The director's note in the program offers that human disconnection with the natural world is more pronounced during environmental disasters, stating:

> As the waves drew back from the coast in advance of the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia, curious tourists walked out toward the water, though many animals had reportedly sought higher ground days earlier. The sensory abilities we once had, the deep connection to our planet's signals, have been lost. (Director's note)

From the most contemporary storyline to the most historically entrenched, the recurring flood myth uncovers an enduring existential crisis. Flood narratives exist in many cultures globally, allowing floods to be a versatile and adaptable metaphor for issues ranging from morality to environmental stewardship. *Memory Rings* includes a flood narrative woven throughout the play, featuring a contemporary nuclear family of four (actors who turn into the main characters for every other storyline) who are living through a natural disaster. The family struggles to figure out what to do during a blackout (by conducting google searches projected onto the stage) and generally display their unease in the face of a flood in uncomfortably familiar ways: one man, for example, interrupts a dance by metatheatrically answering his cell phone. This plot line is described by PLC to be "a new fable – the disintegration of four people in an identity crisis" (PLC website Projects). The flood story is peppered throughout the play, seeping

in between the other storylines as a device, but for the most part does not present itself within those other storylines (except *Gilgamesh*, as will be discussed shortly). Rather it is a device for introducing the disintegration of the human-environmental relationship which then plays out in the drama in different ways.[97]

The epic of *Gilgamesh* is an ancient narrative poem from Mesopotamia, the Standard Version of which was "probably composed sometime in the later second millennium B.C.E." (Cooper). It begins with a flood myth and then follows the actions of Gilgamesh, an oppressive but "semidivine king of the city of Uruk" who builds up his city through forced labor to as a reaction to the global flood, and seeks immortality. The gods send Enkidu to punish Gilgamesh, but instead Gilgamesh and Enkidu become friends. The story goes on to describe "the journey to the Cedar Forest" (perhaps associated with the region of Lebanon) where Gilgamesh and Enkidu, seeking immortality through fame, "slay the monster Huawawa, [a forest guardian,] and their victorious return with precious timber" (Cooper). Because of Gilgamesh's actions, the gods decree that his companion and best friend Enkidu must die, leaving Gilgamesh to come to terms with his mortality (Cooper). This short summary in no way does this epic justice, but it does provide the core story which relates to *Memory Rings*, that is, the flood, the slaying of Huawawa, and deforestation of the Cedar Forest. The play liberally takes from the epic and creates a resonant interpretation where after the flood:

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[97] It is a little odd that a dance drama focusing so heavily on trees would have picked a framing natural disaster that has little direct connection to their focus. Perhaps using the flood as the catalyst for the events of the play is a result of the creative process or staging possibilities, where a more arboreal based natural disaster (such as a fire) would have introduced additional staging complications.

> Gilgamesh, king of Urek, sees dead bodies floating down the Euphrates. He realizes in that moment that he is mortal, and sets off on a quest to achieve eternal renown by slaying the god of the cedar forest (directors note).

In this version, Gilgamesh acts alone as a single marionette dressed in white and manipulated by performers in striped costumes. He interacts with the central tree structure, watches as the great flood carries bodies downstream, and eventually wins an elaborate fight sequence against the cedar forest. Huawawa, the forest guardian in Cooper's citation of the Epic of Gilgamesh, is an entity distinct from the forest itself. In *Memory Rings*, however, it is the cedar forest that is directly under attack with no apparent Huawawa character present. Gilgamesh does not slay the forest guardian; he slays the forest.

A story popularized by the Grimm brothers in 1812, *Little Red Riding Hood* "has generated a dizzying number of variations" (Malarte-Feldman). In *Memory Rings*, the eponymous young girl, played by a marionette, becomes lost in the forest where she discovers a wolf, played by a masked actor. They interact, the little girl petting and climbing on the wolf, and then she follows the wolf into the trees where the audience sees him eat her. The wolf writhes with an enormous belly and lies prostrate on the ground. In this rendition, there is no grandmother, and prior to the devouring of the girl, there is a playful relationship between wolf and girl as she climbs onto the actor's back and pets his nose before the wolf gently leads her away. A second marionette, the huntsman, enters, cuts open the wolf's belly and removes the girl. Before she is led away by the huntsman, the girl reaches toward the (now dead) wolf as though to pet him again. In this encounter, the magical forest that invites human and non-human interaction turns dangerous. It is

important to note that the marionettes are played by puppeteers dressed as trees thus doubling as a forest set, creating and obscuring paths through the woods with their bodies. In this manner, the puppeteers as trees are both (in Paavolainen's terminology) "attached," in that they force characters to move around them, and "detached," in that they move.

The German story of *Snow White* was first included in the Grimm's 1812 collection Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children and Household Tales) before becoming famous by means of Disney's animated film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937 (Isaac). Modern versions are generally sanitized, leaving out details such as the stepmother's (originally Snow White's birth mother's) attempted murder of her daughter, as well as the fate of evil characters "to don burning iron shoes and dance until [they die]" (Isaac). In *Memory Rings*' version, there is no evil mother figure, step or not. Snow White interacts with the woodland animals and is presented with an apple lowered on a cord from the ceiling amongst the central tree's branches—an offering from the tree itself.[98] She then goes into an ecstatic dance sequence, eventually falling still on the ground (in the same position and location on stage as the wolf's earlier collapse). In the darkness behind her, the seven marionette dwarfs enter whistling the theme of Disney's "Heigh-Ho," manned by Tree Being puppeteers. Upon discovering and inspecting Snow White's body, the dwarfs drag her off stage. The dwarfs are equipped with headlamps

[98] See Chapter 1's discussion on the medieval play *The Apple-Tree* for other examples of how apples have been featured heavily in literature, myth, and performance.

and miners clothing, making their occupation unmistakable and their actions towards the body business-like.

The stories of *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Snow White* are easily interpreted as sentimental, being that they are commonly produced children's stories where the endings are usually (now, if not in the original versions) happily ever after. Within the sentimentalization however, exists sentimentality's perverse twin, horror. As much as the story may be idealized and sanitized in its production, the horror of being lost and endangered in a threatening wood is central to both overall plots. Both stories intertwine sentiment and horror to portray the environmental encounter occurring by semiotically burdening nature as culprit. Although the performance calls fault into question because of its complexity, since any other identifiable culprit is absent, the blame falls squarely on the natural econs: the wolf and the apple. In other words, since there is no evil stepmother and since we do not see the wolf behave deviously, the otherwise amoral beings of apple and wolf take on the blame. Of course, neither wolves nor apples are inherently negative, and yet due to their iconic status within popular Western narratives they have taken on negative associations. Wolves have been commonly demonized historically (werewolves, etc.) and continue to be portrayed as monstrous even in contemporary films such as Joe Carnahan's 2011 *The Grey*. Increasingly, there has been a shift towards associating wolves with more environmentalist agendas on the topic of endangerment, extinction, destruction of habitats, and overall misunderstanding, although the overly simplistic demonizing habit remains entrenched.

The example of the apple may be more easily understood as an amoral object transformed into an immoral one. The apple, even if it is poisonous, is not usually demonized for its nature even though it may be just as deadly. The one who offers the poisoned fruit bears this immorality: the step mother, the biblical devil-as-serpent. In the play, there are the additional connotations of consumer culture represented by Apple Inc.; Snow White can be seen using an iPad before she consumes the apple which prompts her ecstatic breakdown. In *Memory Rings*, however, there is no one who directly "offers" the apple besides the central tree from which it hangs. This makes the apple and, indirectly, the tree, dangerous by nature, just like the wolf. By making the econ the enemy within the story—even if the audience recognizes that the culpability logically is shared—the conquest of the natural world is justifiable. Because of the horror the wolf or apple induces within the story world context, the male savior characters (the huntsman, the miner) may conquer the natural space to protect the otherwise endangered women.

In both, the human characters (Little Red and Snow White) encounter woodland animals who offer invitations to join them (in the feast, in the dance) in the forest. In both, a character suffers from consuming something (a child, an apple). In both, a figure lies on its back down stage left (the engorged wolf, Snow White), and is then discovered by a later character who is defined by a resource- based occupation (the Huntsman as a hunter, the dwarfs as miners). Finally, the occupation-driven character (or characters) ends the encounter between human and non-human (the Huntsman 'saves' the girl although she seems unperturbed; the dwarfs drag the unconscious Snow White away) and leads her from the forest into, presumably, his (or their) own world. This is both a

discovery scenario as well as a removal sequence that clearly delineates who is the savior and what circumstances create women in need of saving. In all cases, the forest is defined as dangerous by the occupation driven character.

In Little Red Riding Hood and Snow White, nature as a resource is emphasized due to the savior narrative in which the resource-driven character (the huntsman or the dwarf miners) liberates the woman endangered by nature (the wolf or the apple). In the Flood storyline, Nature is featured as object and as spirit in competing ways. It is identifiable as object in that the human characters seek to understand the events around them by googling and manipulating the items around them. It is identifiable as spirit in the ways in which they seek out and transform into the woodland creatures.

The synercentric addition which includes nature as participant in the act of encounter can be read in the Gilgamesh storyline. Although the story of Gilgamesh and the Cedar Trees may be interpreted as a (forgive the pun) clear cut resource model, the embodied version opens the door for participation. Before we can adequately explore the idea of nature as participant, however, we first must understand how these storylines are functioning within Diana Taylor's scenario model and closely analyze the central object (or subject) of the play: the tree and its various manifestations.

Scenario and its Application to *Memory Rings*

The scenario here is a "basic framework [that] includes particular elements that viewers recognize despite the variations" (Taylor 54). Taylor argues that "the scenario simultaneously constructs a wild object and the viewing subject—producing a "we" and an "our" as it produces a "them"" (54) and that "[a]lthough much has been written about

narratives as structures of communication, there is also an advantage to looking at scenarios that are not reducible to narrative because they demand embodiment" (55). By demanding embodiment, the "body in the scenario…has space to maneuver because it is not scripted" (55) thus offering a dynamic unlike that of narrative. The dynamic offered is instead a structure that privileges the knowledges produced by live performance and embodied encounter. So what is the scenario being reverberated in *Memory Rings*?

In the play, environmental encounters are played out over and over as part of the dominant plot lines. It is their embodiment which is crucial because in their performance they resist or conform to audience expectations in the encounter. Each encounter fits a general framework which I classify as a discovery scenario. The classification is based on how the disconnect between humans and nature is similarly constructed to Taylor's examples of how colonialism reverberates as a discovery scenario throughout the Americas. In Taylor's example "discovery" leads to the invisibilizing of the indigenous inhabitants and the conquest of the Americas. Likewise, in *Memory Rings*, PLC calls attention to how the encounters between human and nature are constructed as a human "discovery," invisibilizing the natural inhabitants and leads to ecological destruction. The aptly named "wild object" is a range of flora and fauna while the viewing human subject must negotiate their relationship to it both as spectators and as performers interpreting nature for the creation of the play.

In addition to the act of discovery that ruptures the human-ecological relationship is the desire to rediscover that severed connection and bridge the border wound (so to speak). But "discovery" in the second statement functions differently. In the first scenario

it is apparent that "discovery" is unilateral—an act being completed by an agent onto a scene—while in the second, the act of "re-discovery" it is attempting reciprocity. Perhaps then discovery could be replaced by recognition, or the desire for recognition. The "discovery," with all its connections and echoes of colonialism, sets the repeatable framework upon which recognition and change might occur. But discovery, even with these parameters, is so often followed by conquest.

The environmental encounters between human (or humanoid puppets) and the representative trees all base themselves on discovery and conquest scenarios. Little Red Riding Hood discovers the wolf in the forest (or, perhaps, the wolf discovers her) which leads to the wolf's death; Snow White discovers an apple hanging from a tree while dancing with woodland animals which leads to her removal by the dwarfs; the humans are continually searching for answers (literally and metaphorically) and to discover their connections to the other stories yet it furthers their disconnection; Gilgamesh seeks out the cedar trees which leads to deforestation. The performed moments are encounters between humans (or human puppets) and nature (trees, animals, etc.) in which the human discovers the natural and the natural suffers as a result. In the final moments of the play, however, this pattern is reversed and culminates in an act in which the tree characters (extensions of the central tree) literally sever the human-nature connection and abandon them. Although very poignant, the fear of such severance is less interesting than the expression of floral agency within the act. It is the floral refusal to remain comfortably within the recurring framework of discovery and conquest which offers an alternative ending to the ecological destruction being indicated throughout.

In keeping with Taylor's six points of scenario (as can be read in detail in the Introduction) the *Memory Rings* performance accomplishes the following in the discovery framework:

1. The *physical location is conjured* by the construction of the central tree, shifting the play from an ambient forest scape to a specific place and particular action defined by that place
2. The audience must *negotiate the embodiment of the social actors* because of the doubling occurring with visible puppeteers, actors playing multiple roles, the donning or removal of masks exposing the actors beneath. The suspension of disbelief is broken as we watch characters become and disappear within the actors, but is not as clearly seen as would be in a scenario that is an act of transfer (we are still within a play world).
3. The formulaic *structure is repeated* throughout the individual narratives, *repeating and transforming* over the course of the production. Additionally, there is evidence from the talk back with the cast and crew that the production is still transforming.
4. The scenario's *transmission reflects the multifaceted systems* at work in the scenario itself as the production uses projections of videos, google, Facebook, a "selfie," as well as an interrupting phone call, and a tablet in place of a "Storybook"

5. The play asks us to *consider ourselves in relationship* to nature as represented by the performance, particularly through the framing events held before and after the performance.
6. The enactments within the play are *not mimetic*, instead evoking a timeless *repetition that might shift with a parody or a reversal* of the existing pattern.

Trees as Scenic Devices: The Memory Tree

At the beginning of the play, dancers with animal heads gather oddly shaped white pieces scattered on the stage and attach them to ropes center stage. The pieces together create a central tree set piece that is visually and aesthetically powerful. It twists in surprisingly delightful ways, semiotically evoking the ancient bristlecone pines in California (and, to a degree, Chen's *Matsukaze*). There is no explicit statement in either the program notes or the performance which designates this tree as Methuselah, but it is implicit throughout. The visual congruence, the program's description of the Methuselah tree, and the framing events all indicate that this centerpiece is iconic, summoning associations with the Methuselah specifically, as well as more intangible ideas of "age" and "preservation." The animal dancers show the audience how they should revere the tree and the surrounding events frame place it as an ancient observer.

Even as it may be read as such, the centerpiece tree is not the Methuselah tree for multiple reasons. First, it is a representation of a tree not the tree itself, made from repurposed newspapers.[99] Secondly, it cannot accurately represent the real tree because

[99] The fact that the Memory tree is papier-mâché from newspapers, which record past events onto pulp is worthy of digression. What better material to construct a representation of a tree which has (according to the production) observed human life since the very first surviving written text (Gilgamesh), than a collection of repurposed newspapers which bear the records human life? Both are archival witnesses to

the Methuselah tree is protected by the National Park Service, and the exact location and appearance of the Methuselah tree remains hidden from the public. In this manner, one may imagine any ancient bristlecone pine in the Methuselah Grove of Inyo National Forest to be the Methuselah tree (a concept that is explored in greater detail in Chapter 4). What is evoked in the *Memory Rings* performance then is the idea of the "Methuselah" tree and the ideological associations the audience has with it. In order to more effectively distinguish between the two, I will refer to the living bristlecone pine as "Methuselah" and the *Memory Rings* tree set piece as the "Memory Tree."

Because the central set piece is not the Methuselah tree itself but a simulation of what it is imagined it to be, we cannot ask of it the same questions as we would a more strictly referential set piece. Rather than illuminating what one of the oldest trees in the world is actually like, what is more effectively exposed are the ideological expectations we place upon it. The name Methuselah refers to the Hebrew biblical figure (grandfather to Noah) who supposedly lived to the age of 969, dying just before the great flood. The name is interpreted to mean 'man of the spear' or 'his death shall bring judgement' therefore foretelling the great flood. The term 'methuselah' is now commonly used in other circumstances to refer to long lived beings. It is unsurprising then that the bristlecone pine dated to have germinated almost 5000 years ago has been colloquially given the same name.

Methuselah occupies the following sections of the continuum:

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human behavior, made from the same material. One can only imagine what might have been witnessed by those trees had they not been cut to made disposable newspapers, archiving 5000 years rather than a week.

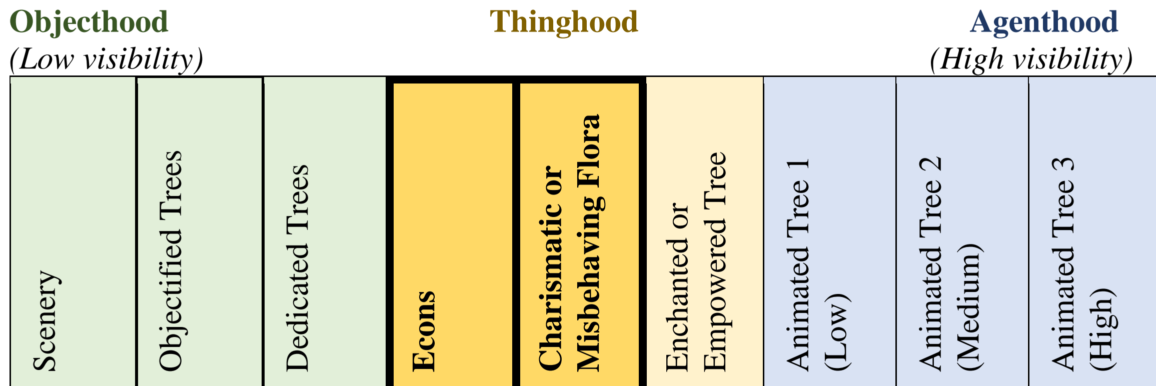

Figure 64. Continuum for Methuselah

The Methuselah fits into the continuum as both an Econ and a Charismatic of Misbehaving Flora, two categories which overlap significantly. On the continuum Econs are part of the Thinghood umbrella, as they claim a life of their own in the cultural and political imaginary while still being trees. Because the Methuselah's physical shape and appearance are kept secret, its role as an econ is even more dynamic; the public façade of the Methuselah is the cultural imaginary of what an ancient tree is or might be. I must assume the Methuselah to also be a Charismatic Flora, like the General Grant Redwood, but without the original referent, the assumption must remain just that. Certainly, the charisma of all ancient bristlecone pines (their shape, their age, their survival) would indicate that the Methuselah, the most aged of all living bristlecone pines, is charismatic. Other ancient bristlecone pines would also be couched under "Objectified Trees" given that they are unusually long lived and often physically distinct, but the Methuselah is personified rather than objectified.

The Memory Tree, while based on the econicity of the Methuselah, is distinct from the living tree and therefore fits into the continuum differently. By itself (without

the accompanying video or audio design, which will be discussed shortly) the Memory Tree's inhabitation of the continuum is as follows:

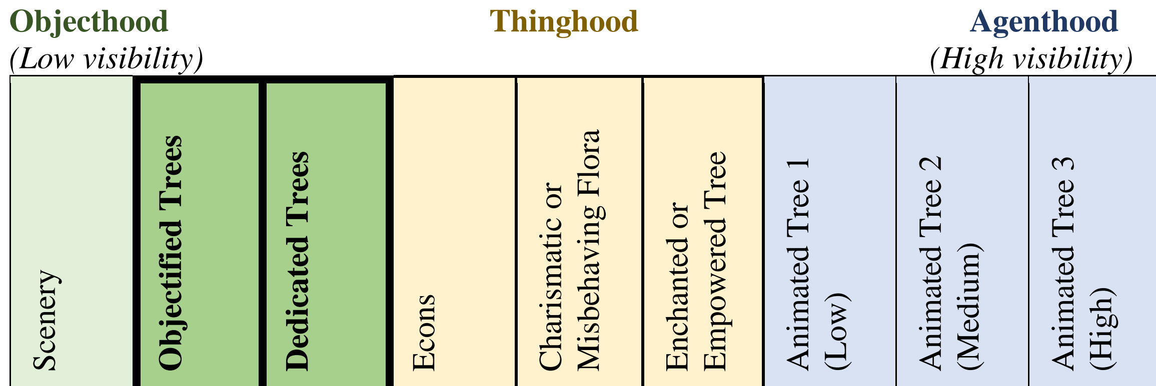

Figure 65. Continuum for the Memory Tree

The Memory Tree would be most logically housed under "Objectified Trees" and "Dedicated Trees" in the Objecthood section of the continuum. Despite the Memory Tree's initial high visibility (it is center stage, informs and contributes to the action), its usage in the performance stays within the realm of scenery. However, it is not overlooked or reduced to a colourful backdrop. Rather, its impressive physical construction objectifies tree and draws attention to it. While Objectified Trees are visible based on physical difference, Dedicated Trees are made visible because of intense curation and framing (archive) or repetitious engagement by a group of people (repertoire). Certainly, the Memory Tree—dedicated to the Methuselah, to human history, and a host of other connotative signifiers—is made significant because of this repetitive framing by the performers in *Memory Rings*.

The Memory Tree evokes similar ideas to the Methuselah in a performance that by necessity cannot be site specific. A site-specific performance would not only be impractical on the narrow mountain paths of the inaccessible Schulman Grove, but also

endanger the lives of the central subject(s). Although the exact location of Methuselah is kept secret from the public, the entire grove is filled with trees who are hundreds to thousands of years old. In the place of the elusive Methuselah, PLC gives the audience an imagined body to evoke a heightened response to the same ideas.

The central prop of the Memory Tree is powerful due to its connotations in the performance. Yet for most of the production it does not function as an agent nor as a participant. Even though in the talkback on April 8, 2016, actors claimed that it influenced their dramatic choices, performance-wise there is limited “expression” that would make this tree distinguishable from a set piece. In the world of the play, it is not even an agent over its own existence, instead being reliant upon animals for its very creation. How then can the Memory Tree participate in the environmental encounters occurring in the production? It has one major obstacle to overcome: its stativity, or “attachedness.”

Courtney Ryan’s essay “Playing with Plants” in *Theatre Journal* (2013) draws from Michael Marder’s philosophical observation that both plants and humans express themselves spatially and are spatialized materiality, however, “modern Western thought has abstracted plants, reducing them to resources and colorful backdrops” (Ryan 337). Ryan goes on to propose that what is needed in the discourse is a “spatial reorientation … where transplantment, the movement of plants across space and “out of place,” becomes crucial” (337). In Ryan’s argument, motion works to construct agents out of otherwise objectified flora. Temporarily putting aside that Ryan overlooks the fact that living plants *do* move of their own accord in the process of growing (albeit often invisibly to the

human eye) it is evident that the lack of movement in the Memory Tree does appear to construct it as an object rather than a subject. Beyond its initial construction, the Memory Tree remains almost completely static; there is no movement in its branches, no acts of "transplantment," no surprising leaves appearing for a second act. The audience may imagine the Memory Tree to observe the action going on around it, and even contribute to the plot by its sheer physical imposition on the stage. Every act performed is informed by the Memory Tree, and yet it does not appear to "do" anything at all.

The Memory Tree must overcome its stativity in order to participate in the performed encounter. While the impressive central structure is static and attached in its physical construction, the Memory Tree extends beyond it. Because the Memory Tree is an imagined reflection of the Methuselah, it is not confined to the objects that make up the branches and trunk but rather all of the components that work together to perform. By the added effects of video projection and audio framing, PLC is able to transcend the Memory Tree's static nature into one that is dynamic and performative. To create a production where the focus is placed on a tree, PLC uses three main techniques to represent treeness to the audience: the papier-mâché tree set piece, video projection, and audio (framing and in the performance). These three human manipulations work together to produce a performative whole.

Trees as Integral to the Plot: Video Projection

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images …
> (Excerpt from T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Director's Note)

As can be inferred from the excerpt from *The Waste Land* in the Director's Note, *Memory Rings* is highly influenced from by the imagist movement, weaving together a "heap of broken images" to convey its story. Video designer Keith Skretch uses this motif heavily in projection, ranging from google search bars to rising moons to ambiguous forest landscapes. His work in *Memory Rings* has been called a "…multimedia fantasia on ecological themes…[producing a] magnificently integrated vision" (by Charles McNutty in the LA Times, Skretch website, Memory Rings page). It is through the video design that the Memory Tree is most brought to life, as the light produces the illusion of moving branches on the structure itself as well as all of the impressions of action elsewhere on the stage. To best explain this process I will focus on one of the most evocative techniques Skretch uses, what he calls "wood grain stratacut animation" initially employed in his *Waves of Grain* film (Skretch website, Memory Rings page). In the video *Waves of Grain*, Skretch

> plane[s] down a block of wood one layer at a time, photographing it at each pass. The painstaking processes reveal[s] a hidden life and motion in the seemingly static grain of the wood, even as the wood itself [is] reduced to a mound of sawdust (Skretch website, Waves of Grain page).

In an interview for the *Huffington Post*, journalist Tyler McCarthy writes:

> While the video is mesmerizing, Skretch believes there's hidden meaning in its creation. "Of course I want viewers to go wherever the piece takes them, but I like the contradiction involved in a process of animation (literally "giving life") that is destructive, especially with organic material," he said. "It's nice when contradictions are beautiful." (McCarthy)

While Skretch records the beautiful movement of the life of (in this case) a pine post, the object being recorded disappears entirely. Kevin Holmes of *The Creators Project* writes: "We can determine the age of a tree by counting its rings, but with *Waves of Grain* we

can actively witness its inner life through gorgeous movement" (Holmes). Because the movement and growth of trees (and other flora) occurs over such long periods of time as to be virtually indistinguishable to the human eye, time lapse techniques offer important insights as to this process. By speeding up the movement of flora it becomes more apparent that, like other organisms, they are agents. In Skretch's rendering, the life of wood is brought into fluid action.

Skretch returns to the stratacut animation technique for *Memory Rings* using it in the projection to illustrate the hidden life of the Memory Tree. As a technique, it is integral to the plots of *Memory Rings* (particularly the Gilgamesh and framing storylines), as its use affects every other component of the production. As can be seen in the following image, the moving rings of the projection dominate the entire stage, casting shadows of movement on the Memory Tree, while actors dressed in striped full body leotards appear to float across the stage as though they too are tree rings in motion. The striped costumes and projections overlap semiotically so that the human body and the tree's "body" become enmeshed, an act which occurs again in the Gilgamesh storyline. In the Gilgamesh story, the puppet Gilgamesh watches as similar shapes drift across the stage. In a moment of recognition, the puppet looks at his own arm then back at the shapes, seeing them to be body parts flowing past. In colour, material, and shape the body parts appear to both be sections of puppets as well as sections of the Memory Tree. With the media and the movement, it is difficult to discern which is which, and indeed, the point is to read them as all simultaneously. Jane Rosenberg writes in a review that:

> More interesting and one of the most successful scenes of the dance-drama was the atmospheric illusion of bodies floating down a river. Dancers, on their backs

> and lying very still, slowly inched themselves across the stage using their heels and the bending and straightening of the legs. Combined with soft and dappled lighting, they evoked logs or human limbs and dead bodies. (Rosenberg, “Phantom Limb Company Performs Memory Rings at Freud”)

The overlapping of bodies and trees creates a disturbing equivalence central to the drama: trees are bodies, bodies are trees.

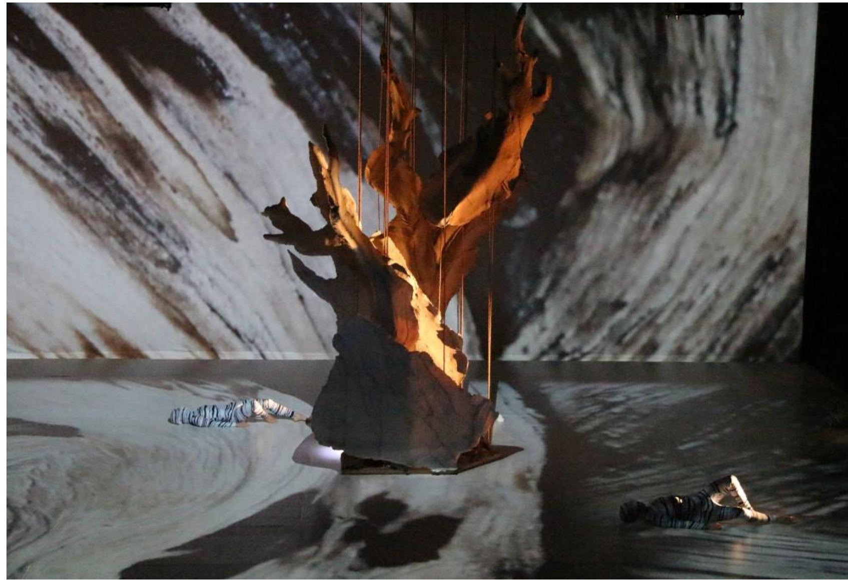

Figure 66. Keith Skretch, Drifting Logs

The video design integrates the various components of set pieces and actors to produce the impression of a living tree—a tree that perhaps appears more “alive” than actual trees where such movement remains unseen. Other projections elsewhere in the performance similarly construct the life of the Memory Tree as well as other ecological themes, but it is the stratacut technique that most immediately evokes the production’s titular rings in motion and trees as moving beings.

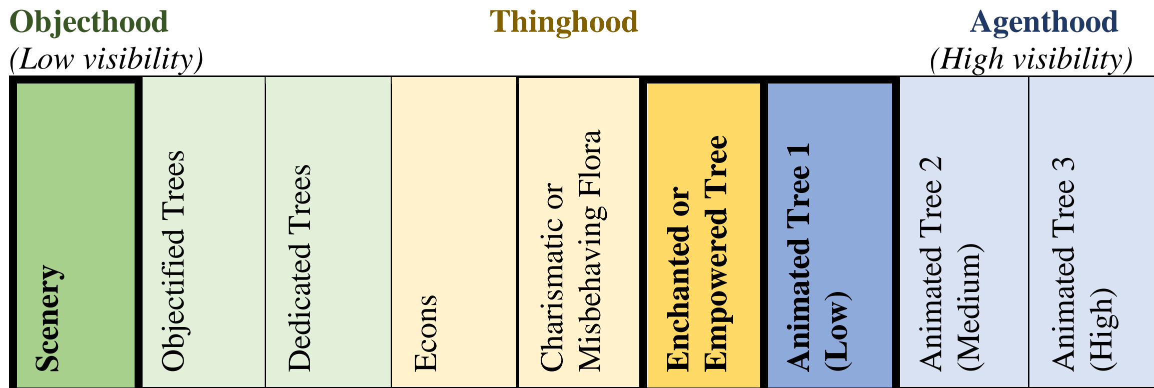

Figure 67. Continuum for Stratacut Technique

Skretch's video design inhabits different silos on the continuum compared to the Memory Tree alone. While the Memory Tree is largely in the realm of Objecthood, the video projection enters into Thinghood and Agenthood as well. Scenically, the video offers a backdrop for the actions of the puppets and dancers. However, given that the video design also carries the capacity for enlivening the central stage object, the Memory Tree, through the use of shadows and visual echoes, the use of video brings the Memory Tree into that of an enchanted or empowered tree or an animated tree (low). The difference between these silos is one of perspective. In a silent dance-drama, it is difficult to attribute whether the Memory Tree's capacity for witnessing or resonance with the storylines is a result of an external or internal source. If it is an external source, then the resulting action would be a tree enchanted or empowered by another entity. If an internal course, then the tree would be animated (albeit minimally). In *Memory Rings* it is left to the audience to decide.

Trees as Themselves: Audio

It would be difficult to argue that trees appear as themselves in the production, given the impossibility of site-specific performance. Through clever techniques however,

human enablement can present opportunities for trees to be brought to life on stage in meaningful ways. PLC uses audio recordings of nature sounds in both the production and the framing events, in a manner which brings the sound of trees as themselves onto the stage. The field recordings themselves do not hinge on nostalgia or sentimentality to move the audience but because they are interspersed with musical tracks that are, a residual association remains. Instead of tuning out such ambience they are more prominent because of the difference. One can consider John Cage's *4'33"* as an example of this process where the framing forces the audience's attention onto sounds that otherwise go unnoticed.

Erik Sanko (composer, PLC co-artistic director) works with Darron L West, an award-winning sound designer, to create a dynamic range of musical effects and soundscapes to portray nature in a black box theatre.

> Throughout MEMORY RINGS composer Erik Sanko will use music to illustrate the tactile world of the forest. The woods will have its own music vocabulary culled from field recordings of Bristlecone Pines and other indigenous flora and fauna of the Methuselah tree's White Mountains. Working with former Kronos Quartet cellist Jeffrey Zeigler, Sanko will weave these sounds into an acoustic tapestry that accompanies the forest sequence. ("An evocative theater work exploring humanity's relationship to ecology from the perspective of the world's oldest living tree." NewMusic USA)

Part of the diegetic sounds include bird song, wind, water trickling, but the most compelling sounds were devised from the sounds that trees or wood makes. The sounds of wooden blocks being tapped, axes chopping, and the crashes of tree felling all make up beat sequences and musical punctuations.

The sounds of 'trees drinking water' was also cited by Sanko and West during the April 8, 2016 talk back, although no additional information appears to be available.

Not only is the audience invited to listen to the sounds of the forest within the performance, but also on their way into the UCLA Freud Playhouse. The framing of *Memory Rings* offered a series of interactive actives in a courtyard outside venue, including a craft table constructing "Wish Birds" (paper birds with hopeful messages inscribed on them) as well as a sound installation of Bartholomäus Traubeck's 2011 musical project, *Years*. It was featured both at the entrance to the courtyard and rigged to play amongst the trees. *Years* is an album of 'songs' produced through a unique record player. Devised by Traubeck to "read" tree rings, the modified turn table interprets data from the tree ring lines from a circular slice of wood just as a record player might read the grooves on a traditional record. The songs are played on piano and are sometimes dissonant or harmonic depending on the tree record. Each song on the album reflects a particular species of tree, including tracks "Picea (Spruce)," "Acer (Maple)," and "Juglans (Walnut)," among others. There are seven tracks in total, each taken from a different species of Austrian tree. "The foundation for the music is certainly found in the defined ruleset of programming and hardware setup, but the data acquired from every tree interprets this ruleset very differently" (Traubeck website, *Years* page). The resulting music then is a combined product of technology and organic material, unique to that particular slice of wood. Different kinds of wood have different properties (the rings are thicker, closer together, textured etc.) thus producing different kinds of music. As audience members arrived in the courtyard, they were invited not only to see the modified turntable that plays Traubeck's tree records, but also to wander amongst the trees where speakers were hanging from branches, playing the various tracks. The

framing of the production primes the audience to listen for the voices of tree all around them. Although the species of tree growing in the courtyard did not correspond to the songs being played, the overall effect was that of trees producing music softly enough that audience members had to approach the tree's trunk and stand silently listening. Many audience members (including myself) wandered from tree to tree, trying to guess which music corresponded to which tree species. Were the lilting tones ash or beech? The slow, somber melody a walnut or an alder?

The tracks themselves each run between five and ten minutes, with no discernible rhythmic or melodic patterns, repetitive motifs, or modes. The rings themselves are translated into an acoustic instrument (a piano) which then, through the software, creates polyphony. The resulting experimental music is minimalist, with the software deciding the pitch, duration, and tempo of each note. Besides having applied the software to the selected rings, Traubeck himself is mostly absent, offering the interpretation that the composer is the tree itself. There is nothing added to what is already existent in the rings themselves, converted by software into a piece of music. The trees are, in fact, producing music now translated into a form we understand.[100]

The tracks on *Years* are the aural (related to the sense of hearing) equivalents of the sped-up animation of Skretch's *Waves of Grain*. Where Skretch's work adds movement to otherwise static interpretations of wood, Traubeck's work gives voice to an otherwise silent subject. If the rings on Traubeck's organic records are read like a

[100] Many questions remain as to how the software is designed to interpret the data from the tree rings. Depending on how imposing the software is, the argument for sonic anthropomorphising could be made. With further research, I intend to delve into this question at a later date.

traditional record from outer edge to the center, an added result would be the passage of time. The audience is listening to the tree regress into the past over the course of the recording, literally going back in time.[101] It is unsurprising then that Traubeck's *Years* was included in the framing of a play called Memory Rings.

Like Skretch's art work, Traubeck's records can only play after the tree itself has been cut down. In both artistic practices, the subject must die in order for the artistic work to take form, undermining the play's thrust. So while the trees are being given a voice, the tree "speaking" is already an echo of the living being rather than the living being itself. While there is an impression of authenticity in this human-nature encounter, it remains unilateral in that the tree is no longer extant by the time the artwork has taken shape. While representations of trees, like the Memory Tree structure, may seem farther removed from actual living tree itself, these representations seek to give movement and voice to their subjects without necessitating their demise.

The audio design occupies similar space on the continuum to video design. The nature sounds function both scenically (setting the stage as a forest) as well as animating the forest (low animation). It is arguable that *Years* enters moderate animation.

Trees as People/People as Trees: Tree-Beings

In addition to the Memory Tree and PLC's audio and visual enhancements are all techniques to conjure and animate PLC's version of the Methuselah, the performance

[101] Dendrochronology, the interpretation of tree rings, identifies the outmost bark as being the "youngest" as it is produced annually. Therefore, reading the rings like a record (from the outer to inner rings) would lead the reader from the most recently developed bark to the heartwood which developed in the tree's earliest growing periods. While the outer bark is the youngest, as in most recent, the heartwood is the oldest and would show growing conditions of the tree's youth.

also includes mobile Tree-Beings. Trees are not often imagined as moving in any significant way (aside from growing over time), and when they are seen to move, frequently it is because of human intervention. This can be seen in the video sequence of logging the redwoods in *Memory Rings*: trees falling because of human action onto a scenic object. The performance's inclusion of puppeteers dressed as Tree-Beings, however, reverses this power dynamic. The Tree-Beings are a forest in action, controlling humans as objects (puppets).

Figure 68. Keith Skretch, The Seven Dwarfs find Snow White

Figure 69. Keith Skretch, The Huntsman Rescues Little Red Riding Hood

The puppeteers in the above images are costumed in branches that entirely obscure the human performer. While the Memory Tree (always present on stage) observes the stories playing out, the Tree-Beings enact them. In each of the central stories, the Tree-Beings play important roles in shaping the action. As featured in the images of Snow White and Little Red Riding Hood, the Tree-Beings are the puppeteers controlling the human characters in the stories. In the contemporary flooding storyline, the Tree-Beings control human puppets that reflect the human actors. In these three central stories, the Tree-Beings can be read as much as devices to obscure the puppeteer's bodies as they can be as Tree-Beings themselves. On the one hand, the tree costuming emphasizes the humanoid puppets. Alternatively, the trees become agents ultimately controlling the puppet's actions. In the Gilgamesh story, however, the Tree-Beings are their own beings *as well as* puppeteers or movable scenery (emphasis mine). In this manner, the characterization of the Tree-Beings cannot be understood as solely a conduit for the other human stories and instead must be analyzed on their own terms.

Figure 70. Keith Skretch, Gilgamesh battles the Cedar Forest

While the Memory Tree, video projection, and sound design all function together, the Tree-Beings in *Memory Rings* both contribute to the same holistic design as well as work independently.

Within a performance where locomotive trees participate in the scenario as agents, what term should be used to best describe them as their own beings? I have been using "Tree-Beings" for lack of a better term to refer to the mobile tree characters in *Memory Rings*. There are no provided names for these characters, although labels sourced from reviews of the show offer a range of options: "cedar forest" (mhdekm); "puppeteers hidden within a camouflage of pine needles," "pine trees," and "moving pine saplings" (Rosenberg); "performers [who] prance around coated in pine needles" (McNulty). As Rosenberg goes on in her review for *Seen and Heard International*, "disguising the puppeteers as pine trees … created an intimacy and a mini-universe around the small-scale marionettes" thereby functioning as puppeteers, scenic devices, and later, performers in and of themselves. The vagueness of the descriptors gestures towards the insecurity of what to call these beings. 'Cedar forest' clearly refers to the Gilgamesh plot in which the deforestation is of cedars, and yet other reviewers clearly identify the costumes as being made up of pine needles not cedar boughs.[102] Either the species of tree is mistaken, or the specificity is irrelevant—thereby indicating that using a species marker in the name is unhelpful. "Saplings" (pine or other) indicate beings in the diminutive, too easily constructed as dismissible or lesser than, and since there is no

[102] Pine trees have needle-like foliage, similar to the costuming of the Tree-Beings, while cedar trees have scale-like foliage that is visually distinct from pines.

particular indicator of age or size, the connotations of sapling would be erroneous. To only refer to them as puppeteers excludes the moments when the Tree-Beings act as their own characters. Other possible signifiers such as Tree People or Tree Spirits all locate the non-treeish attributes as central to the character's make up. A term that emphasizes the tree-ness of the Tree-Beings is needed—one that clearly indicates their distinction from rooted forests but does not remove their central tree-ness in favor of human attributes.

Undoubtedly audience members will have encountered some form of locomotive tree being before, belonging to at least one of the aforementioned categories and therefore will interpret the Tree-Beings as some sort of forest incarnate with anthropomorphic properties. Of course, the Tree-Beings in *Memory Rings* are not actual trees themselves although, as later chapters in this dissertation explain in detail, there are many instances where living trees assert themselves in surprising ways, identified through the subject-object relationship.[103] And yet, because of their liminality, they offer a prime example of how things, like trees, might assert themselves.

In the Gilgamesh storyline, the Tree-Beings are attacked by the puppet in a choreographed dance-fight. The accompanying projection displays pine needles aggressively moving in the background, highlighting the violence of the sequence. It is important to note that the trees do not win any of the fights and are, one by one, felled. This sequence is followed by video projection of redwoods and sequoias being felled

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[103] In the summer of 2016 in the Trinity Bellwoods Park, Toronto, a man was struck dead by a falling tree branch, which prompted a city investigation into the health of the local trees and their potential dangers. Also in 2016 multiple forest fires in Western Canada sparked a national discussion on the threat of Canada's massive boreal forests. In northwestern Ontario, for example, where the forestry industry is central to the regional economy, potential fires has turned a defining feature of the area into an imminent threat.

with the accompanying Brechtian statement "Don't worry, there's thousands of acres saved in parks for your enjoyment" and images of Facebook "likes." The audience is being hailed in multiple ways, acting as witness and being implicated in the act itself.

Generally, the Tree-Beings occupy two distinct categories on the continuum, Scenery and Animated Tree (Medium).

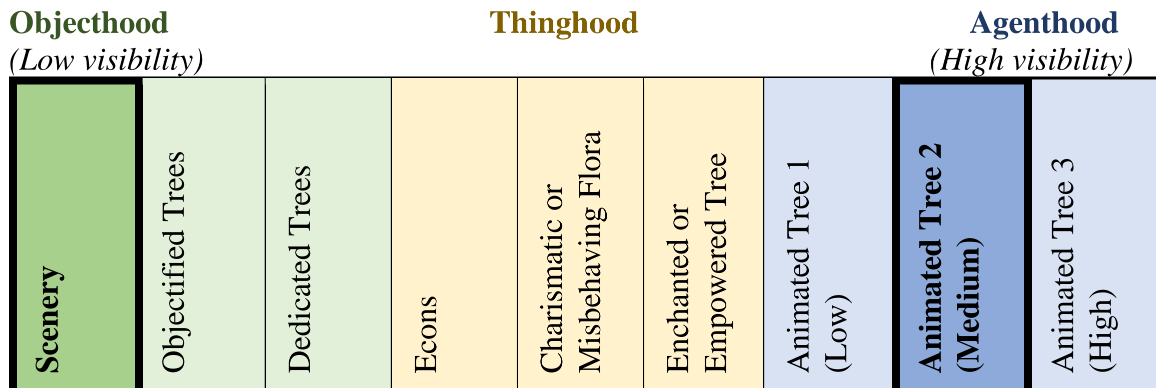

Figure 71. Continuum for Tree-Beings

When the Tree-Beings are working as puppeteers, their physical manifestation is that of scenery. They are the looming backdrop of the deep dark woods for Little Red Riding Hood. Simultaneously, they move and sway in compelling, un-tree-like ways that clearly marks them as being animated. During the battle between Gilgamesh and the Cedar Trees, the entities in question are not simply scenic trees being felled, but living beings being attacked. Throughout the performance these two manifestations are often simultaneous.

The animation of the Tree-Beings makes Gilgamesh's act of deforestation appear more like an act of genocide. Diana Taylor theorizes the idea of scenario as a means of bridging the archive (often text based history) and the repertoire (embodied history). She argues that "the scenario makes visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the

images, the stereotypes" (28) and is useful in "plac[ing] spectators within its frame, implicating us in its ethics and politics" (33). By anthropomorphizing the victim trees within the act of deforestation, the audience is included within the frame and become imaginative participants in the scenario. Yet because there are four manifestations of trees on stage, the anthropomorphizing of the Tree-Beings is not enough to complete the argument. The Memory Tree still stands center stage, the audio of sawing and chopping echoes through the performance space (along with music), the projections of felling trees, and the Tree-Beings all contribute to the idea of tree as nature in this scene. The manifestations are too diverse to be understood solely as spirits, resources, or objects. The conflation of the footage (audio and visual) of the redwoods being felled and the stylized deaths of the Tree-Beings at the foot of the Memory Tree (which could be understood as an abstract headstone at this point) breaks down the three discursive categories by means of live performance. The ghosts of the trees and the echoes of violence are made visible in the scenario, where, for the first time in the production, footage of living trees are presented on stage along with the representations of trees. The combination of footage and imitation, living trees and Tree-Beings, collapses the barriers which divide the object from the subject and bring into question the relationship between the two. And the variety of the things on stage points to their liminality, so that the entities on stage cannot just be understood through poetic discourse (even if resource and science have been removed) because it is their very material thingness which allows them to perform within the encounter. It makes space for the synercentric addition to the heuristic: nature as participant within performance discourse.

As Rival identifies, “trees are dubious candidates as living organisms, and wood is not object-like; both are at once somewhat alive, and somewhat dead” (Rival 27). In this manner, although felling a tree certainly kills it, we do not treat such an act with the same gravity as the cutting down of human beings. For the purposes of a play designed to evoke a moral imagination or a moral community, deforestation must be likened to death or genocide. For trees to become subjects within this framework, felling must be understood unmistakably as killing, with no narrative excuse of resource collection or tree-as-object-not-lifeform to disguise it.

Focusing on the Tree-Beings, which are the most dynamic and human-like manifestations on stage in the combat sequence, the audience must negotiate all earlier ideological assumptions of what the Tree-Beings are (as suggested in the continuum) to assess the severity of Gilgamesh’s violence. By this point in the production, the scenario of the environmental encounter has already repeated multiple times, usually ending poorly for nature based creatures. In the previous storylines (Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White) the audience has not been interpellated in the same manner, merely invited as spectators to observe a familiar story. In this sequence, however, the audience is called out directly through the projections, and therefore are implicated within the scenario framework as participating in the acts of deforestation (either directly or by internet “likes”). Using the most human-like subjects to facilitate this interpellation, by means of their conflation with the other manifestations of nature/trees on stage, creates a conduit by which we can understand living trees as subjects, not just anthropomorphized trees.

Louis Althusser's theory of ideology offers that "…ideology "acts" or "functions" in such a way that it "recruits" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or "transforms" the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation … *interpellation* or hailing" (699). By being hailed as park users or Facebook users, the audience is made aware of the ideology of nature as resource and object through its application of entertainment. If the audience is always within the ideology, this is a reminder of complicity. Similarly, to use Taylor's terms, we are within the parameters of the scenario if we are witness to it. Therefore, Gilgamesh's act of deforestation (and therefore other acts of deforestation layered on to it) is not easily dismissed because the audience is interpellated into the scenario. There is no choice but to read the act as one of violence and, in doing so, interpret the Tree-Beings as character agents. Even if the Tree-Beings remain ambiguous in their construction and application, the ideology in which they are embedded can at least prompt a discussion on what these beings performatively *do* in order to function as agents within the scenario, and ultimately transform the scenario.

Changing the Scenario

The Tree-Beings are infused throughout *Memory Rings*, making appearances in every storyline. During the opening curtain, while the audience is finding their seats, the stage is set to include a heap of (what will turn out to be the Memory Tree) papier-mâché, some pine boughs (dressed actors lying down), and a deer mask (also an actor lying down). Up stage left are four puppets standing upright with their strings and wooden horizontal controls suspended in the air. These puppets are dressed to look like the human

actors that will comprise the meat of the contemporary flooding story and will only reappear at the very end of the play. When the production begins, the Tree-Beings stand, make their way to the puppets, encircle them (obscuring them from the audience) and take over the role of puppeteer. The Tree-Beings then remove them from the stage while the animal performers begin to construct the Memory Tree. At the end of the production, the Tree-Beings return to the stage with the human puppets that mirror the human actors. The actors are kneeling around a pile of disembodied animal masks which they have discarded over the final sequence. Manipulated by the Tree-Beings, each puppet approaches the actor they are made to resemble, gently interacting and mirroring one another with what might be surprise or delight. Then suddenly, to punctuate the final encounter of the performance, the Tree-Beings all simultaneously cut the strings of their puppets, forcing each actor to catch the lifeless body of their puppet as they fall. The Tree-Beings exit, leaving the actors to contemplate their lifeless avatars and close the play.

The dramatic finish is shocking because it disrupts two core assumptions of the play: the suspension of disbelief giving life to the puppets, and, that nature (embodied by trees) is always here for us. The dropping of the puppets abruptly transforms what was previously perceived as a moving complete being into a lifeless body that is therefore disturbing in its sudden inanimacy. Just as the Tree-Being's characterization made the footage of logging more death-like, and therefore the deforestation more violent, the contrapuntal puppet and human actor conflation makes the puppet's inanimacy more

death-like. If the Tree-Beings are defined through their role as puppeteer, what is it that they have become through their rejection of the puppets?

Objecthood (*Low visibility*)			**Thinghood**					**Agenthood** (*High visibility*)
Scenery	Objectified Trees	Dedicated Trees	Econs	Charismatic or Misbehaving Flora	Enchanted or Empowered Tree	Animated Tree 1 (Low)	Animated Tree 2 (Medium)	Animated Tree 3 (High)

Figure 72. Continuum for Tree-Beings, modified

By enacting such a rejection of their role as puppeteer (and therefor their role as scenery) the Tree-Beings reject being pigeonholed as objects. These uncanny beings are unequivocally Agents. While the Memory Tree, the video projection or the sonic design encompasses multiple silos on the continuum, the Tree-Beings at the end of *Memory Rings* occupy Animated Tree 3 (High), as something akin to an Ent or a Spirit.

If the horror of the puppet's deaths or murders (depending on the audience's point of view) is temporarily placed aside, it is possible to read the final moments of the play as completing another sequence. The most basic interpretation of the act (the puppets' death) is that it represents and enacts the divide between humans and nature, including the loss of wonder and magic, or is a pseudo nature-revenge plot. In keeping with Taylor's six points of scenario, we can see the following occurring within this final scene.

1. The *physical presence of the auditorium stage is conjured* because of the break in the suspension of disbelief.

2. The audience *negotiates the embodiment of social actors* as the Tree-Beings "break character" as puppeteers, doing the unimaginable (dropping their puppets)
3. The *formulaic structure* of encounter between human and nature *has been repeated* through different narratives
4. The *transmission of the scenario reflects the systems at work in it* by means of the four manifestations of the tree
5. The *audience is forced to bear witness* to the deforestation-as-genocide and therefore re-evaluate the subject-object relation (as put forward by Bill Brown in thing theory)
6. The *narratives are not mimetic, but evoke a once-againness*, that by the reversal of the existing pattern abruptly ends the production.

The scenario here has repeated with a reversal in the pattern. Instead of the human walking away unscathed from an encounter with an embodied version of nature (Gilgamesh, Little Red Riding Hood, the dwarfs saving Snow White), the Tree-Beings abandon the human actors to their fates. "[T]he scenario simultaneously constructs a wild object and the viewing subject—producing a "we" and an "our" as it produces a "them"" (Taylor 54) and yet in the reversal of the pattern, the wild object can no longer be simplified as such. We have already discussed how thing does not equate to object, and that the manifestations of nature (as trees) in the production are more identifiable as things than objects. Likewise, the construction of trees as agents in *Memory Rings* because of their ability to perform defies the labeling of object. Rather than reversing the dichotomy, then, because it is unlikely any audience will consider themselves as wild

objects (rather than viewing subjects), the dichotomy is dismantled, making room for two viewing subjects to stare at one another.

Laura Rival says the following of James W. Fernandez's chapter "Trees of Knowledge of Self and Other in Culture: On Models for the Moral Imagination" in *The Social Life of Trees*:

> What matters analytically for Fernandez, however, is that social action is motivated by the power, force, and vitality of the verb; and the tree is a potent symbol because of its power to evoke—and hence mobilize—beyond our intuitions about trees in the word, and beyond our scientific knowledge of trees, the social energy out of which moral communities are constituted. (Rival 26)

PLC certainly seeks to accomplish this kind of social action in their environmental trilogy, using the econ of the Methuselah tree as the core of the moral imagination. Fernandez explains:

> …though it is not the kind of political-economic power we mainly have in mind in reasonable social science argument, it is, it might be argued, a mimetic power that lies behind and is crucial to the convictions, or power to convince, wit which these more obvious and reasonable worldly powers operate. (Fernandez 105)

In such a manner, Fernandez explains the utility of the performance: a means to an end by constructing a moral community around such a potent symbol or econ. This kind of dramatic naivety is exposed in Dani Snyder-Young's *Theatre of Good Intentions* where she argues that "Altruism, although coming from a place of 'good intentions', can reinforce existing imbalances of power" (Snyder-Young 27) and that this kind of political theatre seeks to "impact its spectators…using theatre as a method for changing social processes, discourses, and norms" (Snyder-Young 79). Environmental theatre too often fits these descriptions, seeking to be didactically "educational" and while *Memory Rings* may be moving and meaningful, the present theory of change based on moral imaginaries

is limiting if only understood in such lackluster terms as object, resource or spirit. By resisting the heuristic, the performance of tree in this production asks for something else; some alternative definition which opens a channel for understanding these ecological entities in ways that invite reciprocity and participation—even if that participation is ultimately dangerous, or deadly, for humans.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has displayed an overarching interest in the history of tree representation and trees as historical witnesses but in the spirit of looking forward, I turn now to the future of tree participation in theatrical and performative arenas.

After a devastating arson attack in 2009 that destroyed the original Schulman center in Inyo National Forest, the new interpretive center disturbed a large area of earth. During the summer of 2016, park staff discovered around one hundred tiny great basin bristlecone pine saplings had taken root in the soil between the center and the outhouses. The germination and survival rate of the bristlecone pine are incredibly low, and the saplings so small for so many years that the discovery of so many saplings is a notable event. The Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association took advantage of the occasion by offering a fundraiser: for a limited time, visitors could pay to adopt one of the saplings (numbered) and receive a certificate acknowledging the purchase. Each sapling, not even an inch in height after several years of growth, have the potential to live for thousands.

Figure 73. A “baby” bristlecone, less than an inch, possibly three years of age

The adoption of a tree is not so much the adoption of an individual sapling (the majority of the trees will not survive long) but an act of ecological commitment to the future on the part of the visitor. When I arrived, all numbered saplings had been adopted, but I "adopted" the small speck of green in the previous photo in my mother's name anyways.

Certificate of Adoption

This is to certify that Marilyn Grudniski
adopted a Great Basin Bristlecone Tree on SEP 1 9 2016
at Schulman Grove in the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest of California.

Bristlecone pines can live to be 1000's of years old!
Your generous donation towards this adoption benefits The Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest as well as additional programs throughout the Inyo National Forest.

Tree adoption funds go to the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association (ESIA)
ESIA was established in the 1970's to help the Inyo National Forest provide interpretive programs for the public.
Proceeds from these operations support numerous public land management projects and programs.
ESIA cooperates with our public land management partners to operate visitor centers, and provide educational programs, exhibits and publications throughout the Eastern Sierra and White Mountains.

We do all this to create strong emotional and intellectual connections between people and this area and to enable everyone to be effective stewards of these resources.
Visit us at: www.esiaonline.org

Thank You for your Support.

Disclaimer: All trees in the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest are protected by law. This certificate does not constitute ownership nor does it imply permission to remove any plant from the preserve.

Figure 74. Certificate of Adoption

As can be read at the bottom of the certificate:

> "We do all this to create strong emotional and intellectual connections
> between people and this area and to enable everyone
> to be effective stewards of these resources"

Taylor would certainly see the certificate of adoption as the archival stamp of stewardship, and in a discovery scenario, it treads closely towards ownership. However, to protect the trees from literal-minded humans, the ESIA adds a disclaimer stating, "This certificate does not constitute ownership nor does it imply permission to remove any plant from the preserve." What then does adoption imply, if specifically *not* ownership? What exactly did I sign myself (or rather, my mother) up for? Setting aside the fact that

the ESIA adoption fundraiser is in fact a fundraiser, what would it mean to ethically adopt a tree and not just to fabricate an "emotional and intellectual connections" by means of a certificate?

One can adopt a child, an idea, or a position. When it comes to adopting a tree, it is something in between these uses. It would be detrimental to rear a tree as one's own, as trees and humans have foundationally different needs and ideas for rearing. For example, to draw on Wohlleben, for some species of trees to lead long lives their formative growth must be exposed to hardship—quite the opposite of human children. To adopt the idea of a tree, then, might be to adopt those human-centric projections of what we might believe or wish trees to be, or what they stand in for in different cultural contexts. Maybe the goal then is to adopt the position of the tree as witness to our much shorter lives. This could be construed as a call for stewardship, as is implied by the ESIA certificate.

I suggest it's something in between. To borrow Marder's phrasing, perhaps adopting a tree is something like meeting a plant half-way. To recognize the fundamental differences between our species, to resist projecting ourselves onto the trees, and witness without losing sight of the tree itself. To "be there" as part of the act of encounter (Taylor).

In the introduction of this dissertation I quoted Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* to explain how trees and writing can record memory. To compliment this archival observation, I offer another quote from *Cosmos*:

> We humans look rather different from a tree. Without a doubt we perceive the world differently than a tree does. But down deep, at the molecular heart of life, the trees and we are essentially identical. (35)

Sagan goes on to discuss molecular unity in increasingly poetic ways, but I believe his argument for our similarities rather than our differences aid in the processes of encounter. Unity, molecular or moral, can be a powerful means for and result of encounter. We do look different than a tree—in both appearance and how we look at or perceive the world around us. This dissertation has worked towards a method and a language for understanding human and tree/plant encounters, revealing many similarities between such classically divided beings.

Revisiting the dissertation as a whole, it is evident that the chapters adhere to the overall arc of the continuum. Chapter 1: From Nō to Godot emphasizes objecthood with its interest in dramatic performance and tree representations on stage; Chapter 2: Living Trees uses a performance studies lens to investigate thinghood in living rather than representation trees; and Chapter 3: Ancient Trees as Agents moves into agenthood by looking at ancient trees and discovery scenarios. In retrospect, it is interesting for me as a writer to observe that while the continuum and the chapters follow the same arc, there are some fundamental differences between the theory and the practice. In the continuum, for example, the range low to high visibility places objecthood in "low" and agenthood in "high." Yet, the case studies I have employed often feature highly visible stage representations, and almost completely invisible ancient trees that are hidden from public view. To pursue this metanarrative further would produce highly useful information on how visibility and power play into our encounters with trees on and off stage.

The case studies themselves also have yielded interesting results. They have certainly proven that in any discussion of trees one must be open to discussing plants

more generally, and that there are few circumstances when such a variety of vegetal examples have been put together. Theatrical examples of *Into the Woods* and *Little Shop of Horrors* offer ranges between the magical to the monstrous using both fantasy and science fiction genres, while #0001 and Methuselah offer very different accounts on what it means to have living plants in and out of public view. *Memory Rings* bridges the gap between the stage and the field. There is no shortage of planty material from which to build compelling case studies, but the frameworks on which such discussions might grow are in short supply. I hope that what has been presented here will offer a foundation for those who seek to investigate further the plethora of vegetal representations in various contexts.

In future projects building from this dissertation I hope to dig more deeply into the murky spaces between sections on the continuum. While silos are helpful and even necessary to parse out new frameworks, it is in the ambiguity that discussion is most fruitful. Particularly, I would like to investigate more deeply the vegetal role of remembrance and witnessing on and off stage, with examples ranging from Ophelia's mad speech in *Hamlet,* to poppies as symbols of remembering in the commonwealth, to the gifting of Japanese cherry trees to Washington DC. The ways in which we use plants in our acts of witness and remembrance collide with the ways in which we envision plants as witnessing us. I believe that not only would such a continuation of this dissertation deepen the concepts I have already put forth, but may even transform the continuum (as I suggest may be possible) into a circle.

Through its adoption fundraiser the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association recognized the vital role the physical bodies of the saplings played in the building of emotional, intellectual connections and stewardship. These tiny beings participated in the fundraiser, for while the massive ancient pines move visitors to awe through spectacle, these fragile shoots move them to nurturing. This past September, a year after I “adopted” a bristlecone, I planted several dozen white spruce in both Thunder Bay and Guelph, Ontario. Of the trees planted in the Guelph area, only one survived the first few weeks.

Figure 75. White Spruce Sapling

Planted surreptitiously in Guelph’s Preservation Park, this white spruce has survived thus far despite trampling, frost, and wind. I attribute its survival to have been a cooperative effort between myself (having selected the place for it to grow), a nearby white willow which shelters the sapling to a degree, and a deer who happened to select the very same spot to defecate and so fertilize the sapling. There is no archival proof of my “adoption”

in this case, as there is with the bristlecone pine. Indeed, a white spruce in Ontario is no remarkable thing. Grown for lumber, they receive very little mainstream attention, save for during the Christmas tree season when many people will adamantly tell you how they smell like cat pee. The odds are that no one will write a play about a spruce tree in the same way that they might write about Methuselah, and yet, odds are more people will meet a spruce than an ancient bristlecone pine.

The spruce saplings I have planted will grow as one of thousands of trees in the park, a beautiful backdrop for the many locals who use the space daily, with an unwritten dedication by myself, to participate and contribute to encounters that I will not be part of. It will remain anonymous and overlooked, with uncertain survival. I will not tell you its coordinates or how to find it, not because I want it hidden, but because if you don't know where "it" is, perhaps you might notice another spruce, a different spruce. You might encounter those other trees which frame your own life, your actions, your thoughts. Live ones, plastic ones, puppets, paintings. One of those thousands, millions, of trees which participate meaningfully in our encounters and survival.

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