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SOLUBLE PARTS AND THE MEDIATED DEPTHS OF POSTHUMAN PLASMA

<02> #artLAB Publication Series

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I left parts of myself everywhere

Eeva Siivonen
November 25 - December 09
artLAB Gallery

Soluble Parts and the Mediated Depths of Posthuman Plasma

Written by Sasha Opeiko

#artLAB publication series <02>

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*And however solid things are thought to be
Here is proof that you can see they are really porous.
In rocky caverns water oozes through,
The whole place weeping with a stream of drops.*¹

Eeva Siivonen's *I left parts of myself everywhere*² is an experimental exhibition of moving images and dark atmosphere, mediating amalgamated fragments of documentary and found footage together with the hauntings of cognitive associative streams. The exhibition is an experiment in ungrounding and dissolving the habituated subjectivity that breeds correlationism—the tired privileging of self in relation to anything outside of it. The installations are attentively scattered as networks of destabilized vision, producing encounters with uprooted severed parts and tidal sweepings. They are dark experiments in levelling human and nonhuman relations toward a dislocated, fluid posthuman subjectivity.

the watery grave and the screen

The space is deep. The darkness is for the optimal presentation of video work, but also functions to infiltrate the moving images, as if the surface of light is afloat on abysmal depths. There are nonhuman sounds like bird cries hooting in phasing swerves. The central installation *ex vivo* (2021) is a three-part video presented on three screens, spaced apart and arranged in a trapezium configuration that firmly encounters the viewer upon entrance to the gallery. Each of the three videos shows a slow wading through night-time vegetation.

This is not like the POV of a person walking, but of a camera with a light source diving forward into the darkness of plant life—three paths crawling through time at the speed of a dust flake in slow air. “Let’s have more time tunnels of different sizes.”³

Each screen has a large circle, maybe referring to a kind of mechanical oculus, or an opening, centrally superimposed on the backdrop. The videos are double-sided, approachable from any direction. Each circle shows montages that in some instances are hard to distinguish between a found video and one produced as documentary. There are times when the circles are translucent or disappear, or layer moving images together. On occasion below the circles phrases arise. Everything is paced, just enough to glimpse and register a snippet of text, a fragment of an image, with no prescribed way to steer one’s focus other than following the pace of perception. The screens hold the surface tension of a placid ocean, the darkness pushing the image to the surface into vivid manifestations of undead residues of biological existence.

Sentences are broken into parts: “You might get lost here,” “slowly vanish,” “piece by piece,” “from both inside and out,” “before anyone even knew,” “you were here.”⁴ A man in a suit surrounded by animal skeletons. “try to pull them out.”⁵ A camera is pushed through a narrow black tunnel, it rotates above barely visible sparkling debris. “somewhere between,” “the sixth cervical vertebrae,” “and the cause of my dislocation.”⁶ Video microscopy: a writhing wormy organism. A hand with a butterfly. Silhouettes of hooved

1. Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. Ronald Melville (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 13.

2. Eeva Siivonen, *I left parts of myself everywhere*, Artlab Gallery, University of Western Ontario, November 25 – December 9, 2021. Seen on: December 9, 2021.

3. Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 113.

4. Text excerpts from Eeva Siivonen, *ex vivo*, 3-part video installation, 2021.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

animals. Two shadowed elephants. Slow motion hummingbird. A sublayer persists in a ghostly following of grass blades. Someone is walking through a narrow earth tunnel. A white hollow vein like a biomorphic rubbery tube, held with tweezers, filled with water. Handheld camera steps through a deteriorating house full of mess and domestic stuff, then crashing waves, all with wet spots like eye floaters drifting over the image. Ex vivo—outside the organism, inside out, dismembered tissues—“I surround your eyelids,” “I am the outer side of your limbs.”⁷

7. Ibid.

All parts—the montages, the severed phrases—are remains, like “All this has been buried,” “deep under the surface.”⁸ Rosi Braidotti argues that art is “cosmic in its resonance and hence posthuman by structure ... In so far as art stretches the boundaries of representation to the utmost, it reaches the limits of life itself and thus confronts the horizon of death.”⁹ *ex vivo* confronts mortality through the appropriation and capture of past moments through the moving image, and through visual references to unearthing transience and decay. Through associative references to growth, extinction, encounter, loss, location, and disorientation, every part issues from the porous reflection of the screen and gets lost in it again. Each part is an equally real object in flux, layered, sampled, remixed, resuscitated and killed.

8. Ibid.

9. Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 107.

It is interobjective in that, as Timothy Morton observes, “Every event in reality is a kind of inscription in which one object leaves its footprint in another one. Interobjective reality is just the sum total of all these footprints,

crisscrossing everywhere. It’s nonlocal by definition and temporally molten.”¹⁰ The fluid temporality of associative fragments amounts to an immersive encounter with nonhumans filtered through nonhuman media, their structural fragility and finitude suspended in the melting fusion of projected digital chroma, each floating pixel dying into the next. Braidotti argues:

Death is the inhuman conceptual excess: the unrepresentable, the unthinkable, and the unproductive black hole that we all fear. Yet, death is also a creative synthesis of flows, energies and perpetual becoming ... Because humans are mortal, death, or the transience of life, is written at our core: it is the event that structures our time-lines and frames our time-zones, not as a limit, but as a porous threshold.¹¹

it took a long time to get back here (2021) can be interpreted as a porous threshold. The installation is in close proximity to *ex vivo* and consists of three small-format projectors on stands pointed to the floor, producing three puddle-shaped videos of moving water, with plant matter floating by, or snaring the camera in a network of neon blue seaweed. The floor acts like a screen, reflecting what seems like a hyperreal representation of water in motion sparkling like a plasma surface. It appears flat, but at the same time the passage of water ushers a multitude of layers—three irregularly shaped portals like the oculus circles of *ex vivo*. With no rectangular framing, there is no defined orientation, no right side up; the puddles are multiperspectival and swirling within themselves like *ex vivo*’s lamenting

10. Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2013), 71.

11. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 131.

soundtrack of creature calls. The puddles indicate the machinic capture and emission of the moving image, the factual past of some water splashing around someplace, now looped in a portal. In conjunction with *ex vivo*, this manifestation or metaphor of water and aquatic plants is rendered *weird*, in Morton's terms. Referring to dark ecological thought, he describes what he calls "*Weird weirdness*" which "has a twisted, looping form. ... The loop form of beings means we live in a universe of finitude and fragility, a world in which objects are suffused with and surrounded by mysterious hermeneutical clouds of unknowing."¹² The *weird weirdness* of dark ecology resonates with the exhibition's complex entanglement with nature and its human and nonhuman actants. The objects that Morton refers to also include us: creatures trapped in subjectivity who can be *weirded* toward a dark, melancholic disavowal of self-privilege and toward attentiveness to the fragility of all corporeal and incorporeal beings.

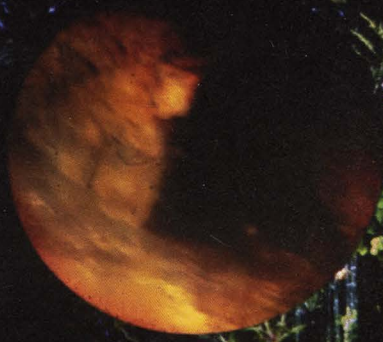
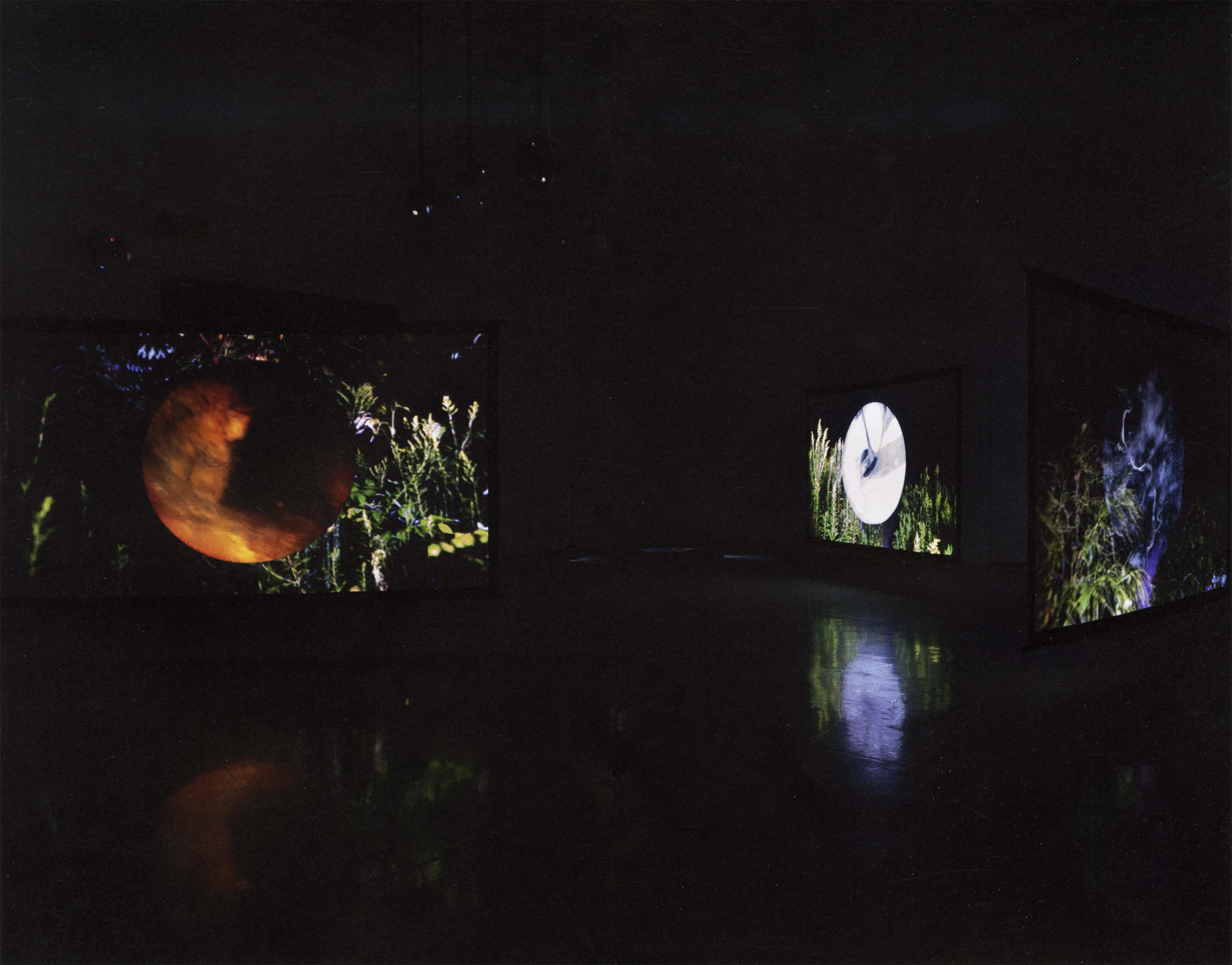
At the back of the gallery, *I was an ocean once* (2021) is another motion experiment of water and aquatic plants. Shot from below the surface of the water, the video is projected onto white rectangular blocks that are leaning together in a balanced heap like a pile of rocks. It seems as if the moving image is itself liquid matter falling on and flowing down and around the geometric forms. The title implies the moving image as something of the past. It is no longer an ocean. The blocks are a resting place for the unrest of the visual manifestation of oceanic forces. In his discussion of the action-image in *Cinema 1*, Gilles Deleuze refers to originary worlds—backgrounds

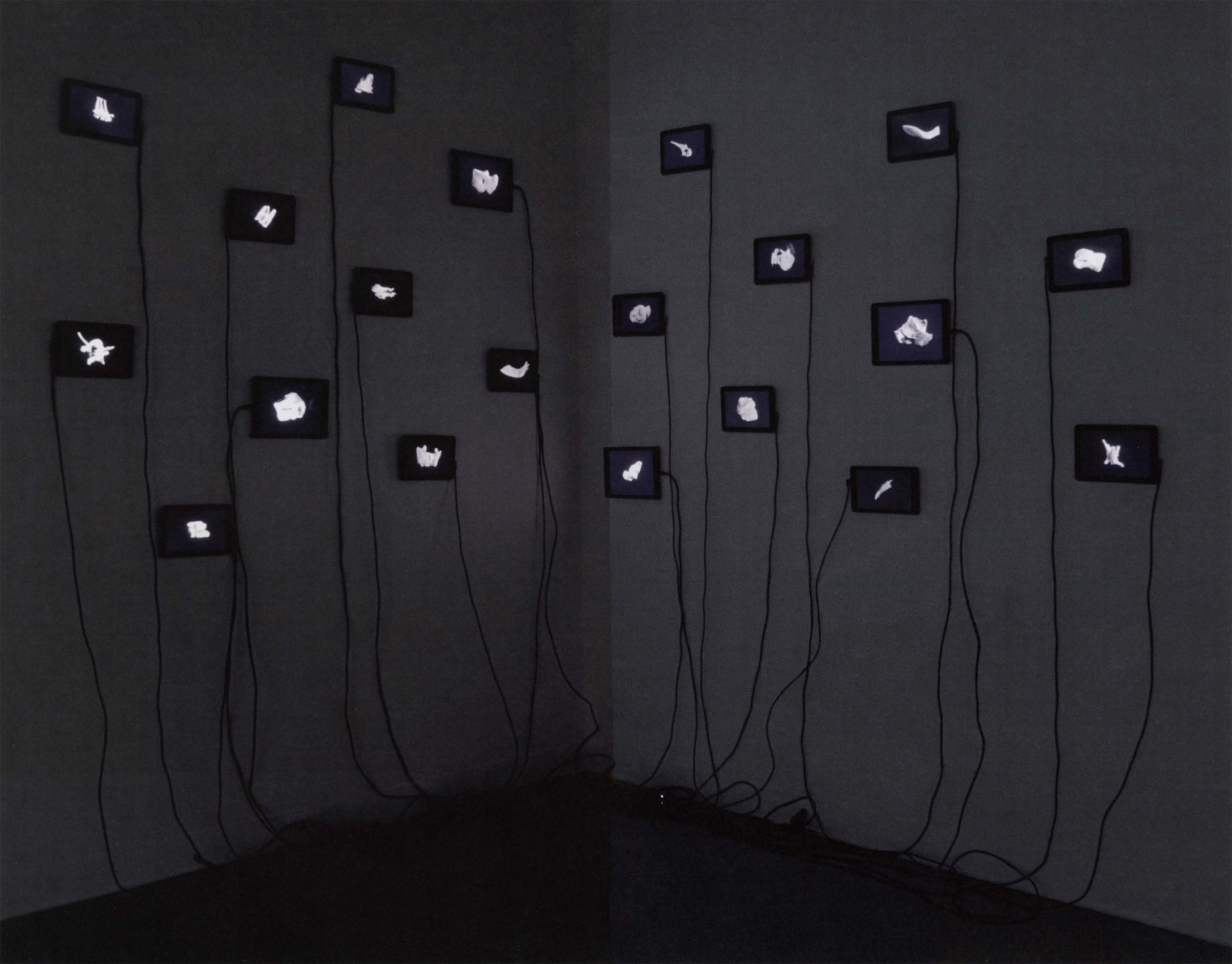
12. Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 6.



disappear







infused with forces—that are “composed of unformed matter, sketches or fragments, crossed by non-formal functions, acts, or energy dynamisms ... And this indeed is the impulse: the energy which seizes fragments in the originary world.”¹³ Insofar as the installation can be interpreted as a kind of scene, or set, Deleuze’s next thought can be bent to this kind of movement-image environment.

it is also the set which unites everything, not in an organization, but making all the parts converge in an immense rubbish-dump or swamp, and all the impulses in a great death-impulse. The originary world is therefore both radical beginning and absolute end; and finally it links the one to the other, it puts the one into the other¹⁴

it took a long time to get back here and I was an ocean once are interobjective collisions washing themselves away at every instant, the dead past of originary watery matter caught in a boiling simultaneity with the present.

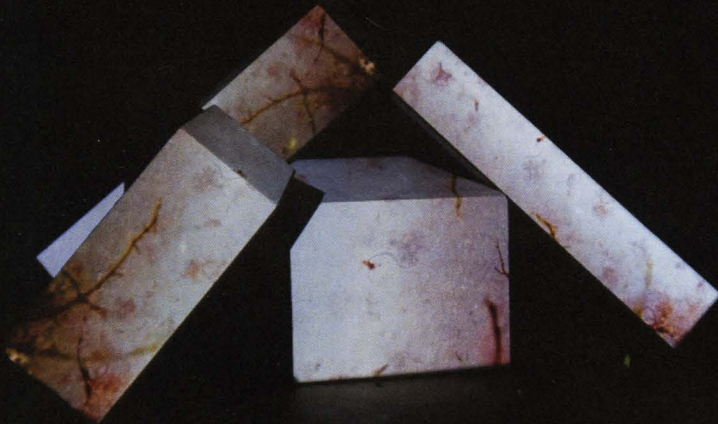
On the far wall—*there is nowhere else to go* (2021). A projected constellation of drops are splashing in darkness and receding back into themselves, like small cosmic explosions erupting and imploding in mysterious time.

the lens of ambling nonhumans

Animals and their remains as mediated images are recurrent here: the found footage of assembled skeletons and bone fragments in *ex vivo*, the bone objects of we belonged to each other, the fossil form in *I knew you 66*

13. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 123–124.

14. *Ibid.*, 124.



million years ago, and the shattering event of coyotes stealing a camera in *I couldn't tell us apart*. Siivonen's relationship to animal life is characteristic of the kind of contemporary turn that Braidotti describes in *The Posthuman*:

Contemporary post-anthropocentric thought produces an anti-Oedipal animality within a fast-changing technoculture that engenders mutations at all levels. In my view the challenge today is how to deterritorialize, nomadize, the human-animal interaction, so as to bypass the metaphysics of substance and its corollary, the dialectics of otherness.¹⁵

15. Braidotti, *Posthuman*, 71.

In *we belonged to each other*, dislocated pieces of bone are deterritorialized and reterritorialized as mediated individual moving images. There are twenty small screens arranged in a scattered formation on two converging walls. As with the other installations, the point of focus is nomadic, undefined. It is a collection of parts. Each screen shows detailed high-resolution close-up films of individual animal bones, disembodied against a black background and rotating at a pace that is only barely noticeable. In the body, bones are the bonds that hold the rest of the organism in place, upright, in movement. Here, the bones are dislodged as if in outer space, but they are wired and charged with digital energy. They are bonds for the mediated image, for the screen, for the cords hanging down to the floor, and the electrical sockets.

The bones are marked by their existence in the world, their skins are deepened by the fossilized impressions of their immersion

in a body, the ground, the weather. Their immaculate luminous detail and porosity on the screen and the slow pace of rotation belong to their manifestations as images. The speed of rotation challenges the human anticipation that wishes for a faster pace for a more immediate reveal. There is a sense that the bone images are looking at the viewer, each bone a kind of dislocated *weirded* eyeball—the gaze of fragments that used to serve in a myriad of passing movements, fragments around which flesh and tissue decomposed.

In *I couldn't tell us apart* (2021) the human-techno-animal assemblage takes on a direct radical fusion of human intent, technology, and a group of coyotes. The piece is shown on a TV placed on the ground, accentuating its presence as a body of translation. At first the image appears as dark static on a screen until a white silhouette appears and the event of coyotes hijacking the camera rapidly unfolds in bright motion blurs with whiskers and glowing eyes, clunks, paws, ears, and tumbles. The animals' direct intrusion upon a device forms an unprecedented assemblage, a kind of melted montage of mediated beings.

perforated aggregates and the weeping world

I knew you 66 million years ago (2021) is an associative transition between the flows of water, sedimentation, and the deep temporality of animal life. A TV is placed vertically leaning in a corner. It is a slow ten-minute video of something like vapour bleakly dissolving in darkness, descending in small waves until it

settles into an image of a fossil or a mollusc shell. The dissolution returns upward like smoke, slowly dispersing the image into blackness, as the blackness of the screen reflects the darkness of the space. In the midst of the video, below the image, words appear one by one as a kind of disembodied voice: “we are never where we appear and we disappear too rapidly we will never find one another.”¹⁶

Like the title of the exhibition, this fragmented phrase implies the shedding and leaving of pieces across unspecified terrain, unrecoverable, producing fissures that will inevitably be filled up with something else. In describing what Reza Negarestani calls “holey space” in his theory-fiction *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, he relates a sort of randomness of porous dispersal, like the floating particulates in *I knew you 66 million years ago*. “The distribution of porosity through the Earth does not follow a rhizomatic structure but goes by way of random clusters with variable densities, similar to the dispersion of suspended dust and moisture in fog.”¹⁷ In tandem the installations distribute the porosity of temporal sedimentation—of matter, habitats, creatures, vegetation, visual fragments, light, darkness—and the flowing forces that disturb it.

There is no difference of reality between the found bones, the found footage in *ex vivo*, things that were never found, the TVs, the projectors, the coyotes, Eeva Siivonen, the hours of intensive video editing, the visitors in the gallery, and their dead ancestors. The associative networks of the installations

pass between timeless mournfulness and the assertion of assemblage-driven vitality. Throughout, I have been referring to mediation, montage, porosity, fragments and fragility. It is important to articulate that these are not discrete qualities of the exhibition, but extend into the world at large, into interobjectivity itself.

Digital media is one kind of mediation among many. Following Levi R. Bryant’s machine-oriented ontology in *Onto-Cartography: an Ontology of Machines and Media*, it is possible to consider all parts of the exhibition as machines—Bryant’s term for objects that places emphasis on transformations, assemblages, and fragility toward a peculiar alloy of posthuman materialist flat ontology. “Every machine is simultaneously a unit and a crowd or herd of cats. Put differently, no machine ever manages to totalize or master its parts.”¹⁸ Machines are never complete objects. They leave parts or actions in other machines and acquire others. They pass through each other when coyotes bite a camera, when analogue film is converted to digital, when an mp4 is read into a projector that issues light that hits a surface, when someone digs through the ground unearthing densities, dead bones or earthworms, or when a cat disrupts the attention of someone writing an essay. This passing through is mediation. Expanding on McLuhan’s theory of a medium being an extension of the human, Bryant includes all nonhuman beings (including things, geological compounds, living organisms, ideas, images etc.). He proposes a “sociology of associations” which is “an investigation of machines functioning as media for other

16. Text excerpt from Eeva Siivonen, *I knew you 66 million years ago*, video installation, 2021.

17. Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (Melbourne: re:press, 2008), 56.

18. Levi R. Bryant, *Onto-Cartography: An Ontology of Machines and Media* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 79.

19. Bryant, *Onto-Cartography*, 192-193.

machines. Our tendency is to think of media as machinic domains related to the five senses such as film, television, radio, the Internet, and print. While these media are without doubt examples of media, this definition is far too restrictive.”¹⁹ *I left parts of myself everywhere* functions through associative networks of machines.

The installations bleed into the dark space as they mediate one another, each machine operating in its own temporality—visually, aurally, materially. Machines are fluid, they form assemblages. All processes leading to the corporeal and incorporeal manifestations of the exhibition form an open assemblage that mires the machine-spectator into a darkened watery web of luminous signs, phrases, organisms and techno-culture. Porosity weeps away your particles, pieces pass away like hybrids of moving images, as associations flood in to fill your mortal, destabilized cognition. Rocks turning to sand in the waves. Air secreting dew drops. Clouds that will fall. Caves mournfully dripping.

Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.

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Siivonen, Eeva. *ex vivo*. 3-part video installation, 2021.

Siivonen Eeva, *I knew you 66 million years ago*, video installation, 2021.

Siivonen, Eeva. *I left parts of myself everywhere*. Artlab Gallery, University of Western Ontario. November 25–December 9, 2021. Seen on: December 9, 2021.