TRANSPARENT ANIMISM:
A FRAMEWORK FOR PARTICIPATING IN
ECOLOGICAL DESIGN AS AGONISM

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THESIS
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Landscape Architecture in Landscape Architecture
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013

Urbana, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

Transparent Animism is a framework for landscape architects to participate in ecological design as agonism. We are experiencing an anthropogenic ecological crisis and are in need of new ways to relate to the rest of the biosphere. Through animism, an ontological order where humans and nonhumans are both seen as subjects, and agonism, a political theory that looks at the role of political conflict in democracy positively, landscape architects can develop a practice that recognizes the importance of ecological struggle itself.

Since the enlightenment, colonialism, and the scientific revolution, the modernist project has defined itself in opposition to animism. Animism counters positivism and anthropogenic free-market ideology and challenges the binary worldview that embraces the categorical distinction between human and nonhuman existence. Once these categories are no longer inherent, and are seen as mediated, they become free for political debate. By using animism as a way to pursue politics through form, landscape architects can use subjectivity as a tool to create alternative frameworks where the boundaries between human and nonhuman existence are open to discussion.

Designs can interrupt passive experience to build broader constituencies that support a more egalitarian practice of ecological design. Landscape architects have the skill set to reconstruct our collective imaginary and to forge new relationships. This thesis offers a set of design criteria: associative, semi-empirical, iterative, and capricious illustrated by four speculative projects that begin to negotiate the boundaries between human and nonhuman existence through contact with site and empathy for the inputs and outputs of our designs.
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Chapter 1: The Ecological Paradox

Multitude of Natures and the Politics of Sandy

Nature, as described by geographer Erik Swyngedouw in Impossible Sustainability and the Postpolitical Condition, cannot be understood as a singular Nature but rather as a “multitude of natures” with many possible socionatural relations (Swyngedouw, 2007). This thesis works to understand contemporary ecological design through this lens by rejecting the binary of human and nonhuman existence. We are in an era marked with ecological struggle and landscape architects must develop a practice that reflects deep respect and concern for nonhumans and our mutual dependencies.

While arguing that there is a paradox within ecological design was not the original aim of this thesis Chantal Mouffe’s The Democratic Paradox challenged me to consider how the complexity of ecology in contemporary Western imaginaries might be negotiated through a more critical practice of ecological design. Mouffe advocates for an agonistic practice of valuing dissent in democracy, a practice I argue is necessary in contemporary ecological design. It will be useful, however, to first foreground why viewing Nature as separate from society is simply insufficient in the present moment.

There are endless examples of complicated relationships between human and nonhuman existence that problematize the notion of a singular Nature. Hurricane Sandy, which devastated portions of the Caribbean, the Mid-Atlantic and Northeastern United States, and Eastern Canada last October, is a unique example that exemplifies the kind of intertwined socio-natural relations this thesis aims to make clear. The “superstorm” became the largest Atlantic hurricane on record, with winds spanning 1,100 miles, estimated losses surpassing fifty billion dollars, and at least 199 people killed in seven countries. Attributing extreme weather events like Sandy to anthropogenic climate change remains in debate, however, many climate scientists do argue that Sandy is a visible manifestation of the anthropocene.

Many factors that have been attributed to climate change amplified Sandy’s coastal flooding. About 15% of the elevated sea surface temperatures feeding Sandy can be attributed to climate change and there has been nearly a foot of sea-level rise over the
past one hundred years. If carbon emissions continue on their current trajectory, it is predicted that coastal flooding events typically occurring once in a hundred years would increase in frequency to once every fifteen to twenty years (Superstorm Sandy and Climate Change, 2013). If we can agree that anthropogenic climate change has contributed to “superstorms” like Sandy then we must also collectively redefine our understanding of a singular Nature as something ‘out there’ and ‘other’ than humanity.

Sandy sparked much political commentary and had major effects on the United States presidential election. Although the sociopolitical implications of Sandy’s effects are noteworthy on their own, the storm serves this thesis in its complication of human relationships with the rest of the biosphere. President Obama took note of the political importance of Sandy in a news conference on the fourteenth of November, 2012, confirming that he is "a firm believer that climate change is real [and] that it is impacted by human behavior and carbon emissions" and that "as a consequence...we've got an obligation to future generations to do something about it" (Obama, 2012). His statements acknowledge not only the reality of the anthropocene but also the ethical obligation to take action.

The president then went on to explain how he is discussing climate change with scientists, engineers, and elected officials to see what can be done in the short-term while recognizing the need for education in the long-term. In part, this thesis aims to expand the constituency that forms the future generations the President speaks of, but I also want to critically speculate on the role of landscape architects within the context of ecological struggle. Our discipline needs to enter these discussions because landscape architects have the skill set needed to reconstruct our collective imaginary.

Activist-journalist Naomi Klein envisions the superstorm as a call to politicize the environment. In her article “Superstorm Sandy-a People's Shock?” Klein suggests that we must re-imagine "the public sphere to not just hold back the next storm but to prevent even worse disruptions in the future" generating a turning point for our cultural imagination. For Klein, "climate change can be a historic moment to usher in the next great wave of progressive change... just as the Great Depression and the Second World War launched populist movements" for social change (Klein, 2012). Sandy becomes an opportunity for a
paradigm shift, from a Nature of which humans are not a part, to a multitude of natures, where cultures are intertwined. Hurricane Sandy exemplifies how humans act on the world and how the world acts on us.

**Accommodating the Wild: A Representational Illusion of Consensus**

Ecology can be understood as the study of relationships between organisms and between organisms and their environment, where equal value is given to entities whose existences are inevitably contingent upon one another. When combined with an understanding of democracy as the social, economic, and cultural conditions that enable the free and equal practice of political self-determination, ecological design becomes an inherently political act. Landscape architects are political citizens; hence landscape architects must embrace ecology.

Mouffe argues that liberal democracy assumes an egalitarian conception of the individual, but accepts, and even promotes, a highly inegalitarian social order (Mouffe, 2000). The ecological movement of the late twentieth-century is based on an assumption that anthropogenic disruptions have caused an ecological crisis, creating a set of conditions that are inherently destructive to all life on Earth. These disruptions are evidence of a human social order that ignores and exploits the existence of nonhumans, as well as many humans. If landscape architects subscribe to this understanding of ecology and democracy, then there is a paradox in contemporary ecological design.

Section one of the *High Line* in New York City, designed by James Corner Field Operations with Diller Scofidio and Renfro, is framed as an ecological urban park that promotes principles of sustainability, urban regeneration, and adaptive reuse. The project description on the American Society for Landscape Architecture’s (ASLA) website mentions some intriguing aspects about the inspiration for the design. Describing “the melancholic ‘found’ beauty of the High Line, where nature had reclaimed a once vital piece of urban infrastructure,” conjures up an image of something strange, mysterious, dark, and beautiful as inspiration. Timothy Morton is well acquainted with ideas of melancholy, ugliness, and horror in ecology, seeing them as important “because they compel our compassionate coexistence to go beyond condescending pity.” For Morton, ecology is
dark and uncertain (Morton, 2010). Melancholy, as inspiration, implies some kind of pensive uncertainty that would allow for a more contingent relationship with nonhuman cultures and has the potential to open up new ways of understanding how contemporary ecological design functions.

Figure 1.1 High Line, Section 1, James Corner Field Operations with Diller Scofidio + Renfro, NY, NY. http://www.fieldoperations.net/.

The High Line design, however, takes a turn away from the contingent possibilities of melancholy and towards a less-than-ecological ambition of becoming an “instrument of leisure” for urban dwellers. The project description goes on to describe how the design changes “the rules of engagement between plant life and pedestrians” with a “strategy of ‘agri-tecture’” that “accommodates the wild, the cultivated, the intimate, and the social.” Taking the politics of ecology seriously, I argue this design actually stunts the growth of a more egalitarian ecological design practice. Landscape architects cannot continue to distinguish between the wild and the domestic, because doing so denies nonhumans their domesticity and agency, while denying humans their wildness.

The notion of “accommodating the wild” also problematizes the possibility of the High Line as a precedent for the ecological design of an urban park. Chantal Mouffe’s argument that “the fetishization of consensus is an act of silencing” renders not only the wild in the design of the High Line mute, but its politics as well. The assumption that the wild can be brought into agreement creates the illusion of consensus between humans and nonhumans, in effect depoliticizing the engagement between plant life and pedestrians, leaving no room for disagreement.
The _High Line_ exists above the noisy, dirty city below, assuming the traditional role taken by urban parks, which is to provide humans with an idealized conception of nature as tranquil and leisurely (see figure 1.1). When it is evaluated for its potential, as ecological design, to change the relationship between humans and the rest of the biosphere, the _High Line_ falls short of being an advocate for timely principles of ecological sustainability. The urban park has been designed to fit users’ notions of how Nature should be, promoting a highly inegalitarian social order, and maintaining a paradox in ecological design. The _High Line_ undermines the potential for design to participate in a paradigm shift towards an ecological practice that recognizes a multitude of natures that may not always agree with one another.
Chapter 2: Animism and Agonism

Socioenvironmental Imaginaries

The concept of animism is central to the development of the kind of ecological design practice advocated for in this thesis. Since the enlightenment, colonialism, and the scientific revolution the modernist project has defined itself as non-animistic. Animism counters positivism and anthropogenic free-market ideology and challenges the binary worldview that embraces the categorical distinction between human and nonhuman existence. Bruno Latour argues, “We have never been modern.” For Latour, the separation of a world of objects and a world of subjects has been an illusion from the beginning (Latour, 1993).

However, recognizing the separation of a world of objects and a world of subjects as illusion also means recognizing new responsibilities. Alf Hornborg asserts that the “problem with objectivism...is the notion of a ‘knowledge’ that is not situated as part of a relation.” Under objectivism knowledge is decontextualized from political aspirations suggesting a “relinquishment of responsibility.” (Hornborg, 2006) Once the categories of subject and object are no longer inherent, and are seen as mediated, they become free for political debate. Animism is relational and presents a set of conditions capable of disrupting the paradox in ecological design, creating new socio-environmental imaginaries.

The early stages of my research were spent tracing how our understanding of the term animism evolved, while simultaneously relating it to notions of ecology. I will provide a quick summary for the purpose of this thesis. The term animism was coined in 1720 by German scientist Georg Ernst Stahl, who, in opposition to theories of materialism at the time, believed that all matter had a vital force that was produced by an immaterial soul. Animism was then redefined in 1819 by English anthropologist Sir Edward Tylor as a “doctrine of souls and other spiritual beings in general,” and was seen as a condition present in “primitive” cultures. Animism was generally understood in the West as a primitive and failed epistemology until 1999, when Nurit Bird-David, in Animism Revisited, revealed that animism, set up to fail in a modernist context, gains contemporary relevance when seen as a relational and social practice.
In 2012, animism received further attention in a series of art exhibitions by Anselm Franke that resisted seeing the term in a colonial context, and instead aimed to approach it from a contemporary perspective. In the catalogue for the exhibition at the Generali Foundation in Antwerp, Belgium entitled *Animism: Modernity through the Looking Glass*, Isabelle Stengers argues in her essay *Reclaiming Animism* that we are only animist in terms of “assemblages that generate metamorphic transformation in our capacity to affect and be affected” (Stengers, 2012).

In this view, animism is an ontological order where humans and nonhumans are both seen as subjects. Ecology (“oekologie”) was coined in 1869 by German biologist Ernst Haeckel in the *Generelle Morphologie* as “the study of the relationship of organisms with their environment.” This resonates with notions of reciprocity of affect between humans and nonhumans alluded to in contemporary understandings of animism. In this way, animism is a form of ecology based on subject-subject relationships that resists the kind of subject-object relationships that are historically created in ecological design.

By understanding animism as a way to practice politics through form, landscape architects can use subjectivity as a tool to create alternative frameworks that challenge the division between human and nonhuman existence. However, animistic ontologies pose a challenge to Western knowledge production and fundamental assumptions of Cartesian science (Hornborg, 2006). Ongoing insecurities about, and desires for, the possibility of subjective, nonhuman entities are visible in western popular culture. The witch trials of the 17th century, Stephen King’s novel *Christine* (featuring a lusty and bloodthirsty 1958 Plymouth Fury), and the emergent neo-pagan movements of the 1960’s are all examples from Western human culture that speak to an evolving socio-environmental imaginary. Animism puts forth an argument for landscape architects to deliberately address subject-subject relationships in order to actively shape our socio-environmental imaginary. However, as with any new approach, there will be a learning curve.

**The Role of Conflict in Ecology**

So, why politicize ecology? Our current inability to politically negotiate between a plurality of social natures reveals the problematic acceptance of a singular Nature that
needs to be sustained. In Impossible “Sustainability” and the Postpolitical Condition, Erik Swyngedouw argues that “an originally fundamentally harmonious Nature” is a fantasy, in part because a harmonious condition would lack a platform for disagreement. The promotion of consensus as an ultimate end puts a small number of humans into the position of telling the whole world that they know best. The world, of course, has a way of acting on our representations of it. In the context of ecological struggle, it is ultimately in our best interest to imagine new ways of socially negotiating with the rest of the biosphere. Animism is one way to do that.

What animism offers is the proposition that nonhumans, as part of a newly recognized constituency, create a new political alliance or set of political obligations for designers. Rather than a partisan or prescriptive form of politics, these alliances allow for permeable boundaries that are up for negotiation. Rather than emphasizing consensus between humans and nonhumans as a goal in this arrangement, what is required is a platform for ecological design that allows for disagreement to take place. Chantal Mouffe’s work on “Radical Democratic Pluralism” provides some insight into the agonistic tradition of valuing dissent in democracy. For landscape architects interested in moving towards a more egalitarian ecological practice this means learning how to oscillate between unity and autonomy.

Taking animism seriously does not mean that we need to switch positions with the once objectified, passive stuff. When every entity matters, including those previously imagined as lacking agency, it becomes difficult to conceive of a designer designing. In Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary, Anne Marie Smith explains how a democratic movement in the political context of “passive revolution” may need to “engage in the short-term maximization of its autonomy to strengthen its constituency” and give a democratic critique more force in the future. Contemporary ecological design is in a political context of “passive revolution,” in that it represents itself as popular and democratic, yet engages with anti-democratic design strategies, neutralizing social relationships through symbolic representations of a harmonious Nature.

There are opponents and constituents in ecological struggle, and what landscape architects need to do is slow down and deliberately practice in a way that builds a more
ecological constituency. We are not currently in a socio-environmental state worth sustaining, and it needs to be made clear that we may never be. Smith goes on to point out that “we are never fully conscious of the ways in which we are always being deployed and positioned, and we must make decisions.” For landscape architects, this means a continuous process of negotiations towards a more egalitarian ecological design practice. If opponents, and even constituents, are more interested in the buzz of sustainability than fundamental political debates, then landscape architects have a responsibility to practice in ways that transform our imaginary to make way for democratization. Animism provides a framework to do so.
Design can interrupt passive experience, building ecological constituency and a more egalitarian practice of ecological design. Landscape architects have the skill set to reconstruct our collective imaginary and to forge new relationships. Negotiating the boundaries between human and nonhuman existence means, “We would treat many more beings as people while deconstructing our ideas about what counts as people.” (Morton, 2010) This paradigm shift, however, will not come out of nowhere; it will evolve over time, and we need to be open to this uncertainty. *Transparent Animism* resembles Timothy Morton’s equation: “ecology equals living minus Nature, plus consciousness.” This will inevitably be easier said than done.

If ecology is anything like what Morton describes, the task of building an ecological constituency will be difficult and will need to be broken down into more easily digestible pieces. The employment of animistic thinking will need to be transparent, aiming to communicate complex and uncommon ideas in affective ways. Direct, perceptual awareness, and self-consciousness in relation to others is the goal and that will be achieved through the development of four design criteria.

The first criterion, and presumably the most fundamental, is that animist designs be associative. Designs that work toward an alliance between humans and nonhumans will be favored under animism. The associative process is understood as more fundamentally ontological than the subjects themselves. Under animism the associative process is what constitutes existence rather than individually defined boundaries of bodies. Animism fundamentally challenges the category of subject. An associative design would interrupt a subject-object relationship in ecological design and would emphasize our capacity to affect and be affected.

The second criterion, what I label semi-empirical, relies on the observations of participants. Mental negotiations, or data, that are produced through observation of an animist design make clear that there are no neutral observations. Semi-empirical data, under animism, signifies that correlations between entities have been found but also indicates that no theory for the mechanism of the connection has been well articulated.
This mode of design allows for ecological contingency and demonstrates how perspective can influence perception.

The third criterion responds to the difficulty of achieving a more egalitarian ecological design practice—knowing it will not be easy—and calls for designs to be iterative. Designs that are iterative will aid us in growing accustomed to practicing animism in steps. Like scales for a musician, these exercises will expand our capacity to create complex compositions in our animist future. Ecological designs that are iterative are always in process, mutating over time.

The fourth criterion is that designs must be capricious, a call for designs that are predisposed to react and change to unpredictable variables. The designs are not only affected by variables, as are all things, but await them. A capricious design would affect and be affected simultaneously through relationships forged between entities. Designs that aim to be capricious have great emotive potentials that can expand on how we understand contemporary ecological design.

The point is not that these terms will infinitely serve the democratization of ecological design, although they may prove useful in other contexts, but it is rather to cultivate an empathetic ecological awareness. In *Kissing Architecture*, Sylvia Lavin describes an architectural surface that would “provoke strong synaesthetic responses in the viewer…to make architecture participate in a culture of interactive receptivity instead of imposed signification.” (Lavin, 101) This is, in short, a call for an ethical and political architecture.

When we aspire for designs to be ecological, we need to be clear about what that means in the context of ecological struggle. *Transparent Animism* provides a framework for understanding the role of conflict in moving towards an egalitarian ecological design practice and recognizes the necessity to build an ecological constituency. The next section of this thesis will discuss four speculative projects that negotiate the boundaries between human and nonhuman existence by emphasizing contact with site and empathy for the inputs and outputs of designs.
Chapter 4: Speculative Projects

Figure 4.1 Our Hearts project logo by author.

Our Hearts

First I will discuss the project Our Hearts. This project complicates the categorical distinction between subjects and objects by visually demonstrating the relationship between a human and a nonhuman constructed creature. The connection between the human and constructed creature, what I call a “Stogie” or a striped pierogi (see figure 4.2), is conceptualized by syncing a human heartbeat with a glowing LED. The project uses Arduino technology, an open source electronics prototyping platform, to sense the heart rate of a human. The live heart rate data is then used to determine the pulse for a glowing LED light embedded in the constructed creature. The prototype for Our Hearts (see figure 4.3) was made using a 3D printer that generated a lightweight translucent material that allowed for the glow of the LED to pass through.

The emphasis in Our Hearts is placed on the connection between the viewer and the constructed creature through an associative process. The process of syncing heartbeats is understood as more fundamentally ontological than the subjects themselves. This understanding can help us think past subject-object relationships in ecological design. As entities participate in this process their observations are semi-empirical. The interaction signifies a connection between a human and nonhuman but allows for a more subjective response to take place.
Figure 4.2 Rendering of “Stogies” installed on a tree by author.

Figure 4.3 Our Hearts prototype and Arduino configuration. Photographed by author.
The relational capacity of animism is visualized in *Our Hearts*. As the relational process is repeated the project becomes *iterative* and the results of one iteration are used as a starting point for the next. Imagine one human and one constructed creature in sync as a socially intimate moment. As humans and nonhumans are added to the scene (see figure 4.4) viewers gain a sense of self-consciousness in relation to others. These constructed creatures are designed to be *capricious* and are ready to affect and be affected. Although not an obvious tool for the democratization of ecology a “Stogie” does represent an empathetic ecological awareness that is necessary for a more egalitarian ecological design practice.

*Figure 4.4* Rendering of multiple constructed creatures by author.
The second project, what I call a *Relational Diagram*, trains us in symmetrically exchanging perspectives. When viewing this construct the organization of the figure-ground relationship is inverted depending on the perspective of the viewer. This interaction creates an event of communication that is nonhierarchical. The construct is composed of layered clear acrylic planes with laser cut holes. The edges of the holes are painted in fuchsia and cyan which, when stacked, create a visual field with a shifting organization of figure-ground (see figure 4.6). The stacked layers of color create visual figures that then disappear as the viewer moves around the construct (see figure 4.7).

It is the act of mediation and the associative process of shifting between figure and ground that is fundamentally ontological in this arrangement. The *Relational Diagram* visualizes an understanding of ontology that is nonhierarchical and gives insight to a more egalitarian conception of ecological design. In this relationship the data produced by viewers is implicitly *semi-empirical*. It is understood that the perception of what is figure and what is ground is contingent to the viewer’s perspective.

When a viewer interacts with this construct an aspect of animism is broken down in a way that can be practiced in an *iterative* fashion. The *Relational Diagram* aids in our capacity to symmetrically switch perspectives, a skill that will help build ecological constituency. The capricious existence of this diagram is designed to change with the shifting perspective of a viewer. An understanding of existence as relational proposes that humans and nonhumans are in a continuous process of negotiation with one another.
Figure 4.6 Relational Diagram rendering by author.

Figure 4.7 Relational Diagram construct by author. Photographed by Nicholas Mann.
Hippo Child

The third project was created after an intensely perceptual experience at the Saint Louis Zoo in St. Louis, Missouri. As I walked through the “River’s Edge” exhibit I was struck by the Anheuser-Busch Hippo Harbor, a tank full of Nile hippos, located in the exhibit’s African Nile section. The transparent and reflective qualities of the glass tank placed hippos and humans on the same visual plane. Adults and children were struck by the experience inspiring me to film the moment on my cell phone. The video clip became the first iteration of Hippo Child. Small fish feasting on manure, hippopotamus gliding through water, and children watching their own reflections superimposed on the surface of the scene spoke to the kind of affect in ecological design this thesis is after.

Footage of Rudbeckia and pioneer plants at the margins of my driveway and a clip of a waving “maneki-neko”, a Japanese cat figurine believed to bring good luck, found on the counter of a Vietnamese restaurant in town were layered into the scene creating a complex composition that visually blurred the bodies of humans and nonhumans (see figures 4.9 and 4.10). A digitally rendered prototype of the film projected onto a glass plane represents how a large-scale immersive projection might materialize in the landscape (see figure 4.11). Viewers of the installation would then be incorporated into the scene adding depth to the layering of entities.

Layers of video in Hippo Child create a composite of moving images that forge an associative experience negotiating the boundaries between humans and
nonhumans. The project is designed to interrupt passive experience in favor of facilitating subjective perceptual awareness. *Semi-empirical* mental negotiations that result will vary allowing new articulations of animism to emerge over time.

**Figure 4.9** Video still from *Hippo Child* by author.

**Figure 4.10** Video still from *Hippo Child* by author.
The project is an *iterative* process that requires participation to successfully expand our socio-environmental imaginary. Viewers become the viewed when they observe the immersive projection. *Hippo Child* is a *capricious* youth who is ready to affect and be affected. Landscape architects can participate in a paradigm shift towards an ecological practice that recognizes a multitude of natures. This project replaces a singular notion of Nature with a plurality of natures composed of hippos, children, manure, fish, flowers, cat figurines, and anyone else that wanders into the scene.

*Figure 4.11* Rendering of *Hippo Child* Installation by author.
The fourth and final project I will discuss is *Bird Call Urbana*. The project negotiates the border between the domestic and the wild by embracing the domesticity and wildness in us all. Bird vocalization is used as a communication tool between members of a flock. Birds also communicate with different animal species including humans. Song learning in some juvenile bird species builds from a basic song and adds details from other birds over time creating dialect variations over generations. Birds raised in isolation still sing but their songs often lack the complexity of social birds. *Bird Call Urbana* calls for humans to get social with the rest of the biosphere.

I began the project by identifying twenty-five species that bird enthusiasts had spotted in Busey Woods located in Urbana, Illinois (see figure 4.13). After carefully listening to recordings of the twenty-five bird calls I began to mimic the calls myself. Although my bird vocalization skills lack the technique of a professional my novice attempt did produce a socially complex sound artifact. The recording was accessible to a limited public on a blog that included instructions on how to participate in the project. Screen printed posters promoting the project were placed in local businesses, university buildings, and public libraries in order to direct more willing participants to the *Bird Call Urbana* blog (see figure 4.14). Participants listened, mimicked, and then submitted their own recordings of the calls through email. Humans mimicked birds and humans mimicked humans who had mimicked birds.
The final iteration of this project will combine these recordings to create a single audio file that participants can download from the *Bird Call Urbana* blog. Once downloaded participants will be encouraged to take a contemplative walk in Busey Woods while listening to the complexity of the socially rich calls. This is one example of how landscape architects can shape the way we perceptually interact with space in order to create an *associative* experience between humans and nonhumans. The generated recordings are a form of *semi-empirical* data. Each mimic is produced through sensory observation; however, the participant is not understood to be neutral. *Bird Call Urbana* welcomes cultural specificity and sees individual variation as integral to the process.
Bird Call Urbana has no clear ending. The project is composed of iterative recordings that are designed to mutate over time. Participants of the project are encouraged to slow down and take a contemplative walk to expand their capacity for animistic thinking. Bird Call Urbana is deliberately capricious. The project is composed of variables and is always in process.

Transparent Animism

Transparent Animism offers a framework for landscape architects to participate in ecological design as agonism. In the context of an anthropogenic ecological crisis our discipline needs to develop a practice that recognizes the importance of ecological struggle itself. Animism and agonism provide landscape architects with a framework to do so.

The design criteria and speculative projects that this thesis puts forth are an
attempt to slow down and deliberately design in a way that builds ecological constituency. These inquiries function as a continuous process of negotiations towards a more egalitarian ecological design practice. Rather than emphasizing consensus between humans and nonhumans as a goal in this arrangement, what is created is a platform for ecological design that allows for disagreement to take place. Landscape architects have the responsibility to practice in ways that transform our socio-environmental imaginary.

This thesis aims to cultivate an empathetic ecological awareness through contact with site and a greater sensitivity to the relational existence of humans and nonhumans. The employment of animistic thinking will need to be transparent, aiming to communicate complex and uncommon ideas in affective ways. *Transparent Animism*, in short, is a call for an ecological design practice that recognizes and embraces the reciprocity of affect between humans and nonhumans.
References


