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*Terra Incognita*

***Terra Incognita***

Degrowth, Community and Performance

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### **Author's Declaration**

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Dedicated to the memory of Gerry Hanson.

**TERRA INCOGNITA**

**by the Terra Incognita Collective:** *Degrowth, Community and Performance*

**Master of Fine Arts 2016**

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**Abstract**

We live in a world in which economic and personal growth is a prerequisite to being human. The alternative lies in what has yet to be explored. Confined by what we are told and know as the “good life”, we must make a choice; will we degrow on our own initiative or will we continue until the biosphere forces us to stop? This paper is written in support of the performance documentary, ***TERRA INCOGNITA*** and the formation/creative process of the **Terra Incognita Collective (TIC)**. It will explore the environmental, social and psychological impacts of a growth-oriented culture through a ***degrowth*** lens. Furthermore, this paper will explore art as an access point to high consumption cultures and artists as important social actors within environmental and social justice movements. *Terra Incognita*, its audiences and artists, explore growth histories through embodiment and collective authorship.

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## INTRODUCTION

With a growing sense of urgency, the environmental and resource distributive implications associated with modern (Western) society—including aspects of production, consumption and ways of life—pose significant challenges and paradoxes to political visions of a societal development that contributes to social equity within planetary boundaries. It is understood that those living with a surplus of goods and finances, typically those within Western society, need to *degrow* in order to “liberate conceptual space for countries (in struggling economic, political and social situations) to find their own trajectories to what they define as the good life.”<sup>1</sup> The focus of this project will be on “high-metabolics”: those within communities whose social practises are of high consumption and waste, who must degrow to discover “the good life.”

Among high-metabolics there is an issue of perception, participation and terminology in regard to environmental action, and degrowth in particular. *Greenwashing*,<sup>2</sup> emerging from the Earth Summit of 1992, placated environmental concerns among high-metabolics resulting in increasing consumer habits and further disguising Western societies’ part in environmental degradation and global inequalities. Degrowth “a so-called missile concept - was put forward to challenge this depoliticization of environmentalism.”<sup>3</sup> As a result, the degrowth movement is not only battling political and economic power structures but social perceptions and habits enforced by years of growth and techno-centred sustainable development ideologies.

The need to go beyond technological efficiency in addressing contemporary lifestyle patterns is being increasingly emphasized in order to radically reduce resource use in high-consuming societies. Still, complex consumption patterns, potentially conflicting

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<sup>1</sup> Georgos Kallis, "Author's Response (The Degrowth Alternative)," accessed July 14, 2016, <http://www.greattransition.org/commentary/author-response-the-degrowth-alternative-georgos-kallis>.

<sup>2</sup> Greenwashing occurs when an organization disseminates disinformation to achieve an environmentally conscious public image.

<sup>3</sup> Kallis, “Author's Response,” Ibid.

environmental values and materialistic structures are nonetheless upheld.<sup>4</sup> The battle between environmentalism and technology continues with the upsurge of media use allowing instant social connections to occur through online platforms and digital archives. While technology can assist with necessary international collaboration for environmental leaders and a broader awareness of global issues in general, it also detracts from the creation of strong, local communities and so brings into question the use of technology for activist purposes within documentary.

Documentary allows change and cohesion to occur between seemingly disparate social entities. With the technological revolution and the consequent influx of media access, artistic, commercial and leisure, there has been a monumental shift within consumer cultures and their receptiveness to traditional documentary methods such as film and photo. As an artist creating work for the pursuit of environmental and social justice, I find myself questioning traditional forms of documentary.

To understand how to appropriately respond with documentary, I think it is important to first take a survey of the current social and political climates present in Western society and question why addressing these concerns and exploring alternative visions such as degrowth will require a reevaluation of art making in general. The performance documentary, *Terra Incognita* created by the **Terra Incognita Collective (TIC)** challenges growth culture including traditional relationships between *consumer and market*, *politician/scientist and civil society*, and *growth and human development*, not only through its content, but through the reconfiguration of traditional relationships between *artists and users* commonly found within theatre and documentary.

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<sup>4</sup> Brigitta Gatersleben, *Consumer Policy Strategies: Sustainable Household Metabolism and Quality of Life: Examining the Perceived Social Sustainability of Environmentally Sustainable Household Consumption Patterns* (Surrey, England: University of Surrey, 2000), 16.



*“How can an artist be an instrument for the collective reimagining of daily environments, given the complexity of our societies?”*

—Jeanne van Heeswijk<sup>5</sup>

What if an artist’s main objective became to establish a power balance within political and artistic structures between themselves and their audience? Could the combination of unrestricted new imaginaries made available by artistic exploration and socially interdependent research, creation and performance practices, enable an uncharacteristic move towards activism among placated citizens of the high-metabolic world? *Terra Incognita* aims to create *authorship* within an user’s experience, encouraging higher levels of political and social participation through various forms of “social acupuncture: innovative artistic interventions as a way to trigger generosity and equity”<sup>6</sup> within local communities, and the collaborative creation process within the collective itself. These collaborations complement degrowth’s various strategies such as a caring economy, conviviality, commonality, self-organization, localisation and *dépense*, the wasteful expenditure of a community’s surplus.

This paper will explain the need for alternative movements such as degrowth, how it’s dimensions relate to principles also found within the collective theatre experience and how I have used the theatre mask to extend the act of creation to my users and engage them in the construction of a new cultural imaginary.

## **Chapter One: An Introduction to Degrowth**

In recent years, I became less and less comfortable with the ease in which I could put food on my plate and transport myself around the city of Toronto (and the world for that matter). Instead, it became a sort of ethical burden in which all environmental and social injustices were inextricably linked. This inspired a reevaluation of my consumption and

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<sup>5</sup> Jeanne Van Heeswijk, "Acts of Political Uncertainty: Towards a Daily Practice of Resistance," Jeannetworks, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://jeannetworks.net/>.

<sup>6</sup> Darren O'Donnell, *Social Acupuncture: A Guide to Suicide, Performance, and Utopia* (Toronto, Canada: Coach House Books, 2006), 25.

lifestyle choices. While my personal habits likely have a lower carbon footprint in comparison to some, I still act and consume in ways that do not reflect the best of my moral integrity. Based on the conversations I was having with my peers, I could tell I was not the only one thinking in this way. Knowledge is not enough to change a “bad” or “destructive” habit (which is what I have come to see our obsession with growth as). The degrowth movement offered me a new understanding of my ability to change personal habits and those of my community.

### 1.1 Histories, Philosophy and Dimensions

Degrowth is an ecological and social movement that challenges growth imaginaries<sup>7</sup> and the commodification of human relationships and the environment. *Decroissance* (French for degrowth) was first used by Andre Gorz in 1972 and formed the question that remains at the centre of the degrowth argument today, “Is the earth’s balance, for which no-growth—or even degrowth—of material production is a necessary condition, compatible with the survival of the capitalist system?”<sup>8</sup> Degrowth’s philosophical roots are in political ecology and bio-economics with several distinct thinkers to their receipt: Dennis Meadows (*The Limits to Growth*, 1972) Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (*Entropy Law and Economic Freedom*, 1971), Andre Amar (*Ecology and Freedom*, 1976) and Serge Latouche (many writings) among others.<sup>9</sup>

Degrowth was largely unacknowledged within political and academic spheres during the 1980s and 90s when the oil boom spearheaded immense growth of the economy and essentially silenced alternative models of development and environmentalism from mainstream debates. In 2002 public awareness of degrowth took off in France with a special issue of *Silence: Bio-economics and the Biosphere* written by Georgescu-Roegen

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<sup>7</sup> Growth imaginary refers the belief that human development and wellbeing, equates to exponential growth in all forms (social, material and economic).

<sup>8</sup> Andre Gorz, 1972: iv Gorz, A. (*M.Bosquet*) (1972) *Nouvel Observateur*, (Paris, 397, 19 June. Proceedings from a public debate organized in Paris by the *Club du Nouvel Observateur*).

<sup>9</sup> Giacomo D’Alisa, Federico Demaria, and Giorgos Kallis, “Introduction,” *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*. (New York, New York: Routledge, 2015). 1-15.

and edited by Bruno Clemetin and Vincent Cheynet, two thinkers who registered “sustainable degrowth” as intellectual property in 2001.<sup>10</sup>

Since 2001 the concept of degrowth has developed a strong presence in European countries and has spread into other parts of the world with international conferences including Paris (2008), Barcelona (2010), Montreal (2011), Venice (2012) and Leipzig (2014). It is an ever-evolving movement that continuously adapts to generational needs, diverse locations and different situational crises on a local and global level. Degrowth has been critiqued for its ambiguity and refusal to lock down a distinct governance policy. However, this is what separates degrowth from strategies such as socialism and communism. Instead, degrowth focuses on self-organization and community governance of shared resources; strategies that translate well to collective creation found within the artistic sphere.

Degrowth is a direct critique of a society’s need to “*grow or die*.” It requires the “downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions and equity on the planet. It calls for a future where societies live within their ecological means, with open, localized economies and resources more equally distributed through new forms of democratic institutions.”<sup>11</sup> It calls for a complete transformation of the way the world views happiness, success and development. To make this change, humanity will have to separate their perception of the good life from materiality, personal accomplishment and ecologically harmful cultural habits.

It is important to know that degrowth has not happened yet as it must be practiced simultaneously on a local and global level. Degrowth advocates and researchers have worked hard to separate their movement from ideas of going back in time, unplugging from the world or economic/social hardship with the slogan “Your recession is not our

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<sup>10</sup> Fedrico Damaria, D'alisa Giacomo, and Georgos Kallis, *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2014), s.v. "Degrowth," 1-15.

<sup>11</sup> Filka Sekulova, "Definition," *Research and Actions to Consume Less and Share More*, accessed July 14, 2015, <http://www.degrowth.org/definition-2>.

degrowth.”<sup>12</sup> To degrow is to explore a third pathway that neither reflects the linear upwards line of growth culture or the social disparity felt during the Great Depression in the 1930s. It is an exploration of an alternative form of happiness found through community, collective experiences and respect for environmental rights. It is comparable to concepts such as *bien vivre*, *the good life*, and *voluntary simplicity*.

Degrowth has various strategies through which it will achieve its ecological and social goals including localization, convivial tools, a caring economy, a steady state economy, basic income for all, work share and stabilizing the public sphere through a higher degree of social services including health care, old age care and child care. These are all important aspects to the movement’s realization and ultimately to its social success. The suggested strategies reveal a focus on social benefits and not monetary gain. However, the strategy that is fundamental to my project is *dépense*, which brings together arts culture and degrowth discourse.

## 1.2 *Dépense*

*Dépense*, the wasteful expenditure of a society’s surplus, will be investigated as a potential access point to recondition high-metabolic culture. When aligned with other degrowth values such as respect for the environment, sharing of materials and labour, a caring economy and consumption limits, *dépense* could be an attractive way for high-metabolics to re-integrate community into everyday life and transition into new cultural and environmentally sustainable practises. In ancient times, *dépense* could be seen in the form of pyramids, festivals and architecture. In growth-oriented societies, extra surplus is put back into the economic system to facilitate more, exponential growth that the ecological limitations of the planet cannot supply.<sup>13</sup>

Researchers of degrowth are in disagreement about including *dépense* as a dimension of the movement. Francoise Schnieder, co-founder of *Research and Degrowth*, remarks that

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<sup>12</sup> Frederico Damaria, "Their Recession Is Not Our Degrowth! - Our World," Our World, accessed May 14, 2015, <http://ourworld.unu.edu/en/their-recession-is-not-our-degrowth>.

<sup>13</sup> Joan Martinez-Alier, (2012) "Environmental Justice and Economic Degrowth: An Alliance between Two Movements," *Capitalism Nature Socialism*. 21(1), 52-73.

society must “learn to actually have fun with each other without material. Creating a community feeling through we have the right to waste our stuff, it’s really poor compared to what is possible.”<sup>14</sup> His main argument against *dépense* is that it can easily be used as an excuse to waste valuable resources.

For *Terra Incognita*, I am viewing a society’s surplus not only in economic and material terms but also as the social and physical energy put towards consumption and growth ideology. A *dépense* that is based in surplus energies put back into community experiences, such as communal labour, music, theatre and other artistic mediums, can call into question growth ideologies that are commonly perceived by high-metabolics as a means to the good life. My project uses the theory of *dépense* to reintegrate community and joy in fields that are typically populated by activists and experts and not the high-metabolics whose alliance in the movement is necessary for its success.

## Chapter Two: Cultural Habits and Habituation

*“If the great transformation is to succeed, then a deeper level of self-reflection will be required. We must see through the mechanism and principles on which our ideals and desires, our ideas and feelings of satisfaction are founded, as these are dictated to a large extent by our mental infrastructures.”*

—Herald Welzer<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "Francoise Schnieder," interview by author, July 29, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Herald Welzer, *Mental Infrastructures How Growth Entered the World and Our Souls* (Berlin: Heinrich Boll Foundation, 2011), 1-38.

## 2.1 A History of Growth

*“It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.”*

—Fredric Jameson

The current ecological crisis goes much deeper than increasing carbon levels and high consumption/waste practices. The survival of our planet and all its inhabitants (both human and non-human), depends upon our ability to imagine a future, a way of living, of governing and of sharing resources that is very unlike our current system. Our inability to do this over the last four decades reveals a crisis of imagination that has since stunted public participation in politics and the dissemination of important information, and continues to exploit the gap between the rich and poor. This is why alternative ideologies such as degrowth need to be explored in contemporary consciousness.

There are many forces, past, present and future, working against the environmental movement. Forces include advertisement, free trade agreements, the available time and understanding of those who have power, the available power of those who are being exploited and our history of GDP growth narratives that continue to subversively influence current Western consciousness and that also influence parts of the world that seek to replicate its model. The forces of growth are subversive and difficult to articulate. In the creation of this project, the TIC has gone back in time to study the historical forces that have influenced and still effect growth ideology as well as their personal development as individuals.

As early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century growth came to be an important part of human success. Francis Bacon, “the forefather of extractivism,”<sup>16</sup> encouraged man to perceive himself as dominant over nature. From Bacon comes James Watt, creator of the steam engine. Humanity could now transcend its collective vulnerability to nature’s unpredictability, allowing the production and transportation of goods to occur year round regardless of

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<sup>16</sup> Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (Canada: Alfred A. Knoff, 2014), 148.

undesirable weather.<sup>17</sup> Simon Kuznets, an economist at the National Bureau of Economic Research, created Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1937 to help society past the great depression. It is still used today as the universal measure of success by the world's governments.<sup>18</sup> The list of contributing agents goes on; the Industrial Revolution, the creation of an environmental market and the technological revolution, which enabled public use of medias including photography and film, radically transforming the way communities interact with one another.<sup>19</sup> It was important for TIC to develop a basic understanding of how these various forces played into the daily lives of Torontonians both on a collective and personal level.

## 2.2 Changing Habits

Viewing a society's obsession with growth as a habit "avoids the free will/determinism binary and allows for an embodied analysis of freedom. How habit operates in our experiences of action and motivation is an open philosophical question."<sup>20</sup> It is well known that habits are hard to change, especially ones as subversive and deeply ingrained as those within growth culture, however, it is equally true that habits can, and have in the past, showed the ability to be changed if the proper forces are put into place. Habits are not mechanical, "we are acted on by the cultures into which we are born and by which we are formed. They act on us but we also act on them. We can't transcend or reverse our upbringing or formation but we can work with it."<sup>21</sup> In this way habituation becomes a locus for change, an important part of understanding my own desire to create an experiential, socially-engaged ephemeral documentary.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Green, "What the Social Progress Index Can Reveal about Your Country," Michael Green, October 1, 2014, accessed July 15, 2016, [http://www.ted.com/talks/michael\\_green\\_what\\_the\\_social\\_progress\\_index\\_can\\_reveal\\_about\\_your\\_country](http://www.ted.com/talks/michael_green_what_the_social_progress_index_can_reveal_about_your_country).

<sup>19</sup> Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 140-163.

<sup>20</sup> "Forces of Habit," interview, CBC Ideas from the Trenches (audio blog), 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Habituation, defined as the “diminishing of a physiological or emotional response to a frequently repeated stimulus,”<sup>22</sup> can work both ways. In growth cultures, stimulus comes from advertisements, educational facilities and increased access to consumer spaces creating what degrowth defines as “the consumer imaginary dimension” which drives the need “to buy/produce more than our basic needs require”<sup>23</sup> and also reinforces habits of political passivity. The goal of the ephemeral documentary, *Terra Incognita*, and the creation process within TIC, is to explore stimuli that have the potential to counter that found within growth societies. TIC offers experiences of community and co-authorship allowing participants (including the collective members and our audiences) embodied experiences of a new social ecology. If consumer societies embrace a degrowth inspired *dépense* as an integral part of their day to day lives, it can become a form of habituation and a stimulus to incite alternative models of happiness, governance and cultural imaginary.

### **2.3 Media’s Atrophic Affectivity in Image Saturated Cultures**

This project specifically addresses (but is not limited to) the needs of those who are amidst a mass image culture and therefore experience media content on a superficial level due to immense saturation. Susan Sontag has coined this phenomenon as *compassion fatigue*. “People can turn off not just because of a steady diet of images of violence has them indifferent but because they are afraid. If everyone feels that there is nothing we can do then one starts to get bored, cynical, and pathetic.”<sup>24</sup> There is no shortage of information out there for those living in wealthy nations with open access networks. The abundance of online databases means the viewer develops an understanding of a sort of virtual world, without much understanding of how this transforms his or her connection to actual reality, the natural environment and human and non-human forms that inhabit the earth.

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<sup>22</sup> Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York, New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 122.

<sup>23</sup> Francoise Schnieder, "Consumer Imaginary," *Research and Actions to Consume Less and Share More*, August 2011, accessed May 14, 2016, <http://www.degrowth.org/consumer-imaginary>.

<sup>24</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 79.



While the human lens has in many ways converged with virtual realities, the fact of the matter remains that humans are not made of wires and databases and our inability to fully understand the systematic workings of our devices limits our complete comprehension of the events and persons they depict. What is lacking in contemporary culture is the development of communities to support well-meaning acts of engagement. Naomi Klein remarks that social struggles are “far less obvious in the densely populated cities where so many of us live and work: where our reliance on nature is well hidden by highways, pipes, electrical lines and overstocked supermarkets. It is only when something in this elaborately insulated system cracks or comes under threat that we catch glimpses of how dependent and vulnerable we really are.”<sup>25</sup>

Modern societies are experiencing a “failing capacity to imagine interdependent relationships with people spatially and temporally that we do not know.”<sup>26</sup> *Terra Incognita* fights the atrophic physical and psychological impact of documentary within image saturated and techno-centric cultures through its ephemerality.

### **Chapter Three: Research from Can Decreix**

#### **3.1 Can Decreix: Home of Degrowth**

July 2015 I went to Barcelona, Spain, to attend the *School for Degrowth and Environmental Justice* at ICTA, one of the most reputable environmental research institutes in Europe, followed by a two-week residency at Can Decreix. Located in the South West border of France, Can Decreix is a place for practising and learning about degrowth. While there, I attended a series of lectures that addressed various debates and strategies within degrowth, interviewed key members of the movement and documented examples/experiences of voluntary simplicity through audio recordings, photography and a personal journal. I learned how to irrigate trees, make cosmetics from ash water and chestnut oil and that soaking oats overnight would save energy to cook them in the

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<sup>25</sup> Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 444-448.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Sennett, "The Public Realm Quant," RichardSennett.com, 2015, accessed May 14, 2015, <https://www.richardsennett.com/site/senn/templates/general2.aspx?pageid=16>.

morning. During my stay at Can Decreix, I found myself reflecting on many social norms within urbanity as illustrated in my journal entry below:

*“They have a humour about the human body, about the nature of the human that is, well, I think it allows them to do what they do; to live communally, to not wear bras. They just kind of sink into the bodies in a way city folk don’t. We’re always trying to shove ourselves in suits and belts and shoes and other things that don’t make sense.”*

—July 10, 2015. Day 1 at Can Decreix.

It was definitely inspirational and though I’d like to say lifestyle changing, I cannot. My experience at Can Decreix opened my eyes to the paradoxes I create and live within. Coming home to Toronto I felt inspired to change habits for ecologically inspired practices but the rhythm of the city, my need to keep up with emails, friends and work pushed me back to a lifestyle that is not as eco-friendly as I had hoped it would be. I realized that individual change is extraordinarily difficult without the support of one’s community and the appropriate structural changes to reinforce certain ideas and experiences.

*“It’s kind of nice not being around mirrors. I’m not thinking about my body as much. I’m just being. It’s freeing. I also haven’t thought about shopping. (In a city) you’re just so surrounded by advertisements and stores. It’s hard not to.”*

—July 12, 2015. Day 3 at Can Decreix.

While in the degrowth community, I began to believe that real change is possible. I was surrounded by a group of well-educated, enthusiastic academics and activists who had the knowledge, gumption and perhaps most importantly, support from a community, to imagine a world where growth is a possible affect but not an objective. This is why the research for this project could not end with my findings from Can Decreix. They continued with the development of my own kind of “degrowth community” within Toronto through the formation of a physical theatre collective called the Terra Incognita Collective.

## Chapter Four: Terra Incognita Collective

### 4.1 Forming the Terra Incognita Collective

**TERRA INCOGNITA:** *unknown territory: an unexplored country or field of knowledge*<sup>27</sup>

My decisions to facilitate a collectively created documentary opened the door to many other questions: How do I decide on whom to bring into the collective? How many collective members do I want? What communities should I reach out to? What kind of dynamic do I set up? How much commitment can I expect from my members seeing as the project is nonpaying and long-term (Oct 2015-June 2016)? Working with a collective could potentially take away my power as an artist to ensure the project would be a “success,” so how do I become comfortable with an ambiguous end result? Working in this way also challenged my need for artistic achievement much like degrowth challenges growth.

I decided that as much as I could, I would let the dimensions and principles of degrowth lead me through all undertakings within the project. I created a *Call for Submissions* that described the project and the questions we would be asking. I was very careful not to frame it as an audition (though in many ways it was) and instead framed it as a meeting. It was my hope that a different term would prescribe a different power dynamic between the applicants and myself when we finally met. Much of this process has involved me fighting the various conventions of theatre; an actor auditions for a role which is watched by one, or two, or more people who are in charge and eventually they will *sometimes* let the actor know if they have been accepted or not based on their look, talent and appropriateness for the role. Having no roles in mind at the start of the project allowed

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<sup>27</sup> "TERRA INCOGNITA Definition," *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster. Web. 08 May 2016.

me to avoid this kind of exclusivity. My project could be open to anyone of any race, age, gender and size.

I made an effort to see everyone who showed interest in the project regardless of his or her experience in the arts. I asked the applicants to provide me with two things: their resume and most importantly, a letter stating their interest in the project. Degrowth cannot be achieved by forcing people into a superficial realization and involvement. The movement instead aims to inspire by example, and thus leaves the decision up to the individual and the community to make necessary lifestyle changes. This was also true for the creation of the collective. I wanted those who were questioning their complicity in growth culture, had an interest in mask exploration and wanted to work within a collective for an extended period of time. They didn't have to be accomplished artistically or within the environmental movement, they just had to be curious.

I made an effort to reach out to different communities for potential collective members but quickly recognized my limitations as a relatively privileged individual within an artistic bubble. There were some resources that would attract the usual faces such as the Toronto Alliance for the Performance Arts blog, cross promotion with other theatre companies, and various facebook groups. I made efforts to post with theatre groups who represented minorities or marginalized communities within Toronto such as Native Earth Performing Arts, Obsidian Theatre and FuGEN Theatre Company. I also reached out to Toronto 350.org and Greenpeace to help advertise the project. Two collective members, Chris Whidden and Nicholas Porteous, came from personal discussions and a general interest in the project, which is perhaps the most *degrowth-like* of all my outreach efforts.

In the end, my collaborators were not as diverse (in terms of ethnicity and societal roles) as I had hoped. This is reflective of a whiteness that prevails within the Toronto theatre community. However, in regards to the collective members all unanimously having an interest in the arts, this could be considered reflective of how degrowth envisions potential localized, self-governed communities. Degrowth recognizes that not every individual is going to be a good fit for every community. Some may be more oriented

towards music and thus, will form a musician commune. Some may be more engaged with sports and will cocoon with those who share that interest. Some may not want to live in a communal setting at all, and that's okay too. Degrowth embraces difference as much as it does the universality of man.

After the meetings I accepted eight members. By the end of the first phase (Oct – Dec 2015), we were six including myself. Two members left due to busy work schedules, and one I had to ask to leave because he was not committing to the project as the others were. The remaining five members work together extremely well. I am continually impressed by how strongly the internal relationships have developed. It was really important for me to provide a space for artistic exploration and discussion, and for it to be mutually beneficial both for the artists involved and for myself as a documentarian. This meant offering the collective learning opportunities that surpassed the needs of the project itself (though still very connected). I brought in various guest artists including Perry Schneidermann from Ryerson Theatre School for character masks, Ardyth Johnson from the University of Winnipeg for neutral mask, and Ishai Buchbinder of Outside the March for site specific and collective creation.

The first three months the collective focused on developing mask technique, a common artistic language and general knowledge of growth culture, our complicity within it and the degrowth alternative. The discussions were rich and at times personal. The collective members were encouraged to relate their own experiences as inhabitants of a consumer culture to the work. For example, one exercise we did was a *Personal Growth Timeline*. In this exercise, we mapped out the memorable moments in our lives that we feel shaped who we are as individuals. After this, we shared and analyzed the various events and how they relate or oppose growth idealism.

I see TIC, a name that resulted from an article we read and collectively agreed upon, as a microcosm for society. We are not without our own social complexities, sensitivities and differences. Part of the documentary is mapping this experience for ourselves. Discussions and physical explorations were followed by journaling which we have used

in the documentary itself in three different ways: 1) to provide a deeper connection between the artist and the material by allowing intrapersonal reflection in an otherwise extroverted collective experience, 2) to further the documentary narrative (appearing in characters and thematic explorations), and 3) as video installations to offer the audience insight to the creation process.

#### 4.2 Performance and Temporality

*“One might subsume the eliminated element in the term ‘aura’ and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art.”*

—Walter Benjamin<sup>28</sup>

Our production of *Terra Incognita*, which is not separate from the process of creating it, is an ephemeral documentary and has an immediate connection to the temporal sphere. The work is confined to a specific time and place. It is what Walter Benjamin would classify as a “*unique object*” (though it does not exist as an object itself) since a mechanical reproduction of the event would indeed strip it of the qualities that categorize it as such.<sup>29</sup> The ephemeral documentary does not exist once it has been recorded. For example, a documentary performance cannot be recorded and then claimed to be an ephemeral doc. The very act of recording creates a new art object that exhibits temporal stagnation.

Once an ephemeral documentary has transitioned into a state of materiality (i.e. film or photo), it has been removed from its purely social existence and placed within a technological existence. This transition implies that the relationship goes from *human and human*, to *human and machine*. An audience while watching a film or viewing a photo will indeed develop a relationship with the material’s form and subsequently the subject and artist, and so it could be argued that strong anthropological relationships can

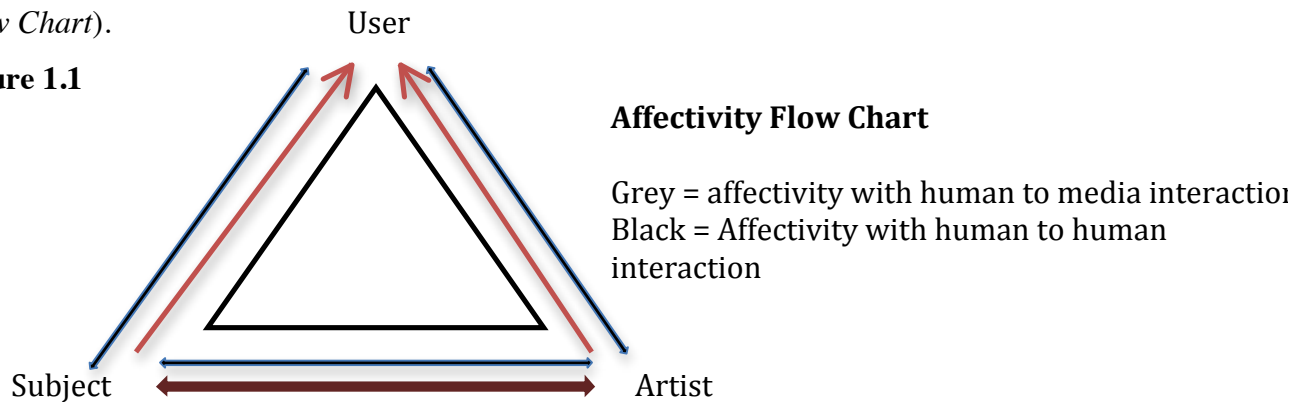
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<sup>28</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 245.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

form while watching a mechanical reproduction of real events or any film/photo-based documentary. However, this relationship has a one-sided affectivity that does not categorize the ephemeral doc. While the audience's impression of the work may alter, the change happens in only one vertex of the relationship triangle. The audience can change but the documentary's form and artists lack adaptive abilities (see figure 1.1, *Affectivity Flow Chart*).

**Figure 1.1**



As the chart illustrates above, in the case of *human and media* (film/photo) relations, only the user will alter during the showing of the work. In the case of *human and human* interactions the audience, artist and subject can alter.

In order to achieve the reciprocal flow of affectivity, the ephemeral documentary must be unique to the players present and events experienced. It is in the inability to reproduce the ephemeral documentary that meaning is created for those involved. While this makes the form extremely vulnerable to external forces it also allows new reactions and decisions to be made that reflect the immediate circumstances and thus its players, their relationship to one another and the form. This immediate social affectivity is what *Terra Incognita* aims to explore. During the performance the actors have the ability to react and adapt to their immediate circumstances, as do the audience members.

Temporal specificity imposes other conditions that rely heavily on the dialogical processes of social interdependence as illustrated above. First, we must understand what is meant when we speak of social interdependence. No doubt the specifics of the definition will differ from case to case. However, one condition will remain the same: the

ephemeral documentary is one whose form, relationship and players exists in a purely social sphere (even when technology is present) and therefore must involve human-to-human contact.

The users of documentary are the exteriority that the interiority (the work itself including artist and subject) cannot live without. Shannon Jackson suggests we perceive users of documentaries “not as the extraneous context that surrounds it but as the material of performance itself.”<sup>30</sup> The ephemeral documentary involves its perceived users as co-subjects and co-creators. They are not only the ears that receive the narrative but are also participants within the dialogical processes of creation. The ownership of art making is taken from the artist and placed in the public sphere.

This dialogical process can also be found in history as the fundamental formula for social change around the world including the women’s movement, LGBTQ and more contemporary examples such as Blockadia<sup>31</sup> and *Po Demos*.<sup>32</sup> In times of “heightened threats to collective safety these old ideas are reasserting themselves- cross-pollinating hybridizing and finding applications in new context.”<sup>33</sup> What is exciting about the ephemeral documentary is that it can encourage this kind of collaboration in places where the danger is more subversive and not as obvious as an open mine, oil spill or human right violation.<sup>34</sup> In this case it is subversive dangers such as growth culture and high metabolic lifestyles that *Terra Incognita* seeks to address and change.

### **4.3 Collective Creation, Mask and Performance**

It wasn’t until my third year of the Performance Acting Program at Ryerson Theatre School that I truly began to understand the transformative power of art, in particular performance. It was during a theatre clown course (different from magic or hospital

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<sup>30</sup> Shannon Jackson, *Social Works Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011) 19.

<sup>31</sup> Blockadia is a transnationally organized movement that protests extractive industries particularly related to mining, fracking or tar sands oil pipelines.

<sup>32</sup> *Po Demos* is a left wing political party in Spain that seeks to address the problems of inequality, unemployment and economic hardship subsequent to the European Debt Crisis.

<sup>33</sup> Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 444-448.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



clowns) with local artist, teacher and École Lecoq graduate Leah Cherniak, that I experienced my first mask. It was a tiny red nose that allowed whoever underneath it to revisit their inner child and also their “raison d’être” as it were. This little red nose, the tiniest mask of all, allowed me to think, move, and speak things that I hadn’t explored since I was small, or that had been abandoned in the darkest parts of my psyche. It was a transformative experience and has greatly informed the development of TIC.

#### 4.4 Jacques Lecoq: Masks of Society

Jacques Lecoq is a world-renowned physical theatre teacher who in 1956 founded École Lecoq in Paris. The school’s objective is the “realization of new creative theatre that transcends the barriers of language through physical play of the actor.”<sup>35</sup> His innovative techniques have informed many contemporary mask practitioners, and his book *The Moving Body* has been a source of inspiration for the development process within TIC. Lecoq’s course begins with *Identification with the Natural World*, through which actors physically embody the four elements (earth, wind, water and fire), and various animals. These explorations develop what Lecoq calls *The Universal Poetic Sense*, which, as he says, “can be found in all of us.”<sup>36</sup> In addition, through the humanization of these non-human forms comes a development of “traces that remain inscribed in each actor. The actor can then speak from full physical awareness.”<sup>37</sup>

The process of Identification is of particular interest to TIC for three dominant reasons: 1) it is an art form that inspires a full physical awareness which is contrary to other documentary forms that typically encourage sedentary participants; 2) it calls for humans to develop an intimate relationship with the natural environment, an affect that is important when addressing issues of the environment and that have a vast temporal existence surpassing human’s ability to comprehend empathetically; and 3) through the

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<sup>35</sup> “École Internationale De Théâtre Jacques Lecoq.” *Ecole Internationale De Théâtre Jacques Lecoq, école Théâtre De Création Paris*. Web. 20 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.ecole-jacqueslecoq.com/>>.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Lecoq, Jean-Gabriel Carasso, and Jean-Claude Lallias, *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2001), 55.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-47.

development of a *Universal Poetic Sense*<sup>38</sup> the interconnectivity of all humans becomes illuminated. Lecoq's exercises allow humans to identify with *nature* (including human nature and the biosphere), as our first and most universal communicative language.

Through Identification Lecoq claims that "our bodies remember!"<sup>39</sup> This declaration implies an innate connection between body and mind, and the subjective perceptions that emerge as a result. TIC capitalizes on this connection especially when compared to common stimuli within consumer culture such as advertisements. In my introduction I discuss an atrophic social affectivity when dealing with social and environmental justice within consumer cultures. The lack of positive change in regards to destructive lifestyle habits, despite the immense amount of medias available, begs the question of whether or not we can rely on digital images to inspire change within the status quo. For example, we are used to seeing images of dug up forests and oil spills, but we are not used to discussing these issues in diverse social situations. Furthermore, we are not used to discussing these issues in diverse social situations through our bodies. Lecoq's methods allow aspects of degrowth, in particular convivial learning and community, to be experienced physically giving the participants a point of reference that is experientially learned.

So much of the information we take in is visual and intellectual. Phones and computers dictate our learning capacities and limit our experiences of community and nature. TIC uses Lecoq's Identification method to examine documents and thus expands the social affectivity of documentary practice.

#### **4.5 Clown, *Bouffon* and Mask**

Lecoq is perhaps best known for the Clown, the *Bouffon*, and the Mask. These three techniques, which for me share a sort of artistic homeostasis, are said to represent different facets of human nature.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 45-47.

The clown is a figure that comes to life by playing with the people who are looking at him and whose weaknesses are his best strengths. This unique relationship, though not without its own limitations, develops a sense of equality between the audience and the artist. Perhaps the most important discovery during my clown course in theatre school, and also the one that has most relevance to TIC, is the unveiling of a new kind of audience-performer relationship. My experience as an artist performing the mask was as enjoyable and implicated as my experience as an audience member. The interaction demanded reciprocation from both parties and offered a platform for socially interdependent experiences to occur. The interest in this kind of work went beyond the ability to discuss taboo subjects with humour, it also offered a platform in which otherness could disappear. I see this as great form to work within for documentary, which has always been implicated with the ethical responsibilities of speaking for, to and about the other.

*Bouffons*, described as swamp people who believe in nothing and make fun of everything, “deal with the social dimension of human relations, showing up its absurdities.”<sup>40</sup>

*Bouffons* encourage extreme hierarchies and highlight the joy of war. In all sense, they invite and honor the ugly side of human existence and inspire the audience to laugh in spite of themselves. Laughter is an important element within my documentary. It is used to first break down personal and societal barriers within the audience and encourages self-reflection. Laughter has occurred naturally among the collective members and has resulted in an internal bonding process. It is used as a more formal element within the documentary itself.

*Bouffon* also involves an extreme physical transformation such as stuffing the actor’s body with various materials. The collective uses this deformation of the body to represent the underbelly of the growth world we are exploring. For example, the character Charlie, created and performed by collective member Kevin Wong, is an effeminate transgendered individual. The transformation of self through various externalities including costume (skirt and scarf) and mask, allowed Wong to radically transform

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 100.

himself and his individual centre for the creation of this new character. What's more through the physical transformation the collective members can dare "to do things they would never have achieved in their own bodies. In this way, their whole physique becomes a mask."<sup>41</sup> They can transcend whatever gender, status, ideology or ethnic restrictions implicate them prior to entering the rehearsal room.

*"There are three masks: the one we think we are, the one we really are, and the one we have in common."*

—Jacques Lecoq<sup>42</sup>

The collective's use of Mask is more than a symbolic reference to the masks we wear within society. Masks, similar to the *Bouffon* and the Clown, give the artists as described by mask teacher Perry Schneiderman the "license to kill."<sup>43</sup> In respect to exploring various perspectives of the growth-degrowth debate, this allows the actor to become something totally different from which he or she is, or associates with. This is a freeing and informative process for the actor to undertake but also serves as an important tool in developing a complex documentary narrative. As in all documentaries, it is important for TIC to show counter arguments to our subject, degrowth. By doing so, the audience can then navigate their experience of the work and of growth culture in general.

Secondly, the mask's ability to live in a slightly heightened reality allows the audience to live there too. This creates a realm of possibilities not only in regard to the physical worlds we choose to create, but also encourages the audience to take on roles within the performance that they may be either too timid or restricted to do in reality. Through mask we use an audience's "language and their reality in order to transport them into another."<sup>44</sup> This heightened reality also invites a greater exchange between audience and artist. Natasha Tsakos is an internationally known theatre artist, who when reflecting

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>43</sup> Perry Schneiderman, "Perry Schneiderman" During the character mask workshop, 15 Nov. 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Natasha Tsakos, "Natasha Tsakos: A Multimedia Theatrical Adventure," *TED Talks*. TED, Feb. 2009. Web. 21 Mar. 2016.

<[https://www.ted.com/talks/natasha\\_tsakos\\_multimedia\\_theatrical\\_adventure?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/natasha_tsakos_multimedia_theatrical_adventure?language=en)>.

upon her street performer identity *Zero*, remarked that the gender fluid being “can touch so many more people than I possibly could” and that “if you are a bit extraordinary, if you are not exactly of human appearance than people will feel inclined to participate and to *feel* out loud. It’s as though you made something resonate within them. It’s as though the mystery of the person they’re interacting with and connecting, allows them to be themselves just a little bit more. Because through your mask, they let theirs go.”<sup>45</sup>

#### 4.6 Mask Creation

I created two sets of masks to represent the growth and degrowth worlds. There are eight growth masks discernable by the green, yellowish hue and slightly monstrous features. The bright colors and exaggerated features represent excess and obsession with image. The face structures were inspired by traditional *commedia dell’arte* masks, which offer standard archetypes; the King, the Carer, the Trickster, the Fool, the Hero and the Innocent. I wanted the growth masks to represent the complexity of growth idealism so I used features from two archetypes for each mask. This means the actor is not beholden to any single role within the piece just as we are not within society. We are not solely consumers; we are also friends, mothers, and philanthropists.

I tested out various methods to make the masks but settled on a technique offered from David Knezz, a mask maker in Illinois. His method uses paper bags and wood glue. I often used LCBO bags and other salvage from recycling and garbage bins to be as environmentally responsible as I could.<sup>46</sup>

The Degrowth World has five masks. They are copies of the growth world but with different coloring. Perhaps the most significant difference between the two sets is that the growth masks allow the actor’s eyes to be fully visible where the degrowth masks have tiny circles the size of a nickel that limit vision. The purpose of this is that it requires the actor to be more physically aware, which enforces a greater connection to the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> "David Knezz Mask Maker," David Knezz Maskmaker, accessed September 14, 2015, <http://www.mask-maker.com/>.

surrounding environment, the other bodies in the room, and to him or herself as a product of nature and not technology.

The degrowth characters also speak in verbatim from interviews I took at Can Decreix. The smaller eyeholes and calmer colors offer the actor less information than the growth masks do. This is so that the actor can be more influenced by the research, and as the artist, speaking the words therefore crafting their value and connecting with the audience members.

## **Chapter Five: Documentary Relevance Within Terra Incognita**

### **5.1 Socially Interdependent Documentary**

*“A photograph is neither taken or seized by force. It offers itself up. It is the photo that takes you. One must not take photos.”*

—Henri Cartier-Bresson

The idea of documentary entering a dialogical process as explored in *Terra Incognita* is perhaps a frightening proposition considering the ethical and theoretical debates that have plagued the form for decades. Cartier Bresson valued decisive moment photography, where the events recorded are unperturbed by the artist himself. Embracing unknowns into documentary through continued social engagement processes contradicts many of the truth claims documentary has struggled to make known and raises questions such as: Can we trust a form that makes the hand of creation so malleable? Is it still considered documentary if “facts” can be shifted depending on who is present? Who maintains authorship in collaborative processes? And therefore, who is responsible if a fact is skewed or poorly presented?

*Terra incognita*, in part because of its temporality, asks users to grab the hand of creation and move it around to where they see fit. The same fears that surrounded Duchamp in the 1920s when he hung a toilet on the wall and claimed, “Anything can be art” become

aroused.<sup>47</sup> It is well known that a completely objective documentary point of view is extraordinarily difficult if not impossible to achieve. Perhaps the greatest ode to truth lies in the admittance of its intrinsic subjectivity. John Grierson defines documentary as the “creative treatment of reality.”<sup>48</sup> The connection to reality for documentary is then reliant upon the validity of the documents themselves.

## 5.2 Documents: Incorporeal and Corporeal

*“The value of the document is predicated on a realist epistemology, but the experience of documentary is dependent on phenomenological engagement.”*

—Janelle Reinelt<sup>49</sup>

A documentary must be situated in reality. The value of the reference comes from the strength of the original documents themselves and how they are then incorporated into the piece. In this section I will discuss my use of incorporeal and corporeal documents within *Terra Incognita*.

Within documentary, corporeal documents are regarded as text, photos and objects themselves while incorporeal documents are testimonies as declared by the subject recalled by memory, and social and cultural imaginaries that are then weighed by experts. An example of an incorporeal document could be the manifestation of growth culture. While it has an intangible presence, degrowth researchers and activists acknowledge its incredible force upon contemporary mental infrastructures. The historical reality that a document can signify is neither true nor false in and of itself. The accuracy of a document mutates as individuals in various contexts interpret it. As a result, it is an incorporeal understanding that provides the validity of corporeal documents. Culturally we put much

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<sup>47</sup> Pierre Cabanne and Marcel Duchamp, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York, New York: Viking Press, 1971).

<sup>48</sup> Grierson, *The First Principles of Documentary*, 147.

<sup>49</sup> Janelle Reinelt, “The Promise of Documentary,” in *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*, ed. Alison Forsyth and Christopher Megson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/theatre\\_s/research/jnu/resources/proffspromise\\_of\\_docchapter\\_1\\_-\\_janelle\\_reinelt.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/theatre_s/research/jnu/resources/proffspromise_of_docchapter_1_-_janelle_reinelt.pdf).

trust in physical objects for historical truths. However, since its value is always understood through a human lens, even the most validated documents experience a similar intangibility as incorporeal documents.

It is the intangibility of the human understanding that *Terra Incognita* uses to achieve a high social affectivity within consumer cultures and which justifies it as a documentary. *Terra Incognita* takes into account the incorporeal subjectivity that is attached to all documents. In this way, I as a creator am able to incorporate the symbolic significance my users place upon certain documents as well as the continued fluid social interactions present during the research, creation and the presentation of the documentary.

### 5.3 Verbatim Texts

*Terra Incognita* uses the transcribed interviews from Can Decreix verbatim within the degrowth world. The transcribed interviews not only have a significant indexical bond to the original subjects, the activists and researchers from who the words were first spoke, but because of the applied creative treatment, take on an important incorporeal meaning for the audience and artists. The collective's performance of the interviews are a result of a three step process involving an exploration of their assigned degrowth masks, a study and editing of the transcribed text, and auditory research by listening to the interviews and incorporating specific speech patterns when building a character. The culmination of these three explorations (embodied, auditory and linguistic), results in a new fantasmic creation,<sup>50</sup> that pays tribute to both temporal spheres; past (the interviews) and present, (the bodies in space).

"The practice of speaking for others is often born of a desire for mastery, to privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another's situation, or as one who can champion a just and thus achieve glory and praise".<sup>51</sup> Because we did not aim to master a physical replication of the original subject, but instead chose to explore a

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<sup>50</sup> Bill Nichols, "Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (2008): 859-883, doi:10.1086/595629.

<sup>51</sup> Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique*, no. 20 (1991): 5-32, doi:10.2307/1354221.



union between past and present, we were able to communicate complex ideas of community and the creation process itself, while still preserving a connection to the original subject and foregoing issues of individual ego. It is my belief that our method offered an even greater tribute to the referent through the form of its delivery. Degrowth values community, self-organisation and co-authorship, all three attributes were present in the creation of the degrowth characters and then again when being shared with the audience. Had the actors regurgitated the text the way it was originally recorded, they would not have had such an embodied learning experience, nor would they have been able to respond to the changing dynamics during the performance.

## **Chapter Six: Collaborative Creation**

### **6.1 Two Worlds**

The two worlds represented in *Terra Incognita*, the Growth World and the Degrowth World, also differ in their use of source material, narrative structures, and audience participation.

The Growth World has been created by a process of reading and reflecting on various source materials that speak to growth idealism and consumer culture. The collective discusses the materials and then a small group of the members will begin an improvisation. We continue in this way, discussing and improvising, drawing connections through the various sources and crafting a world that is best described as the “the creative treatment of reality.”<sup>52</sup> For example, one scenario in the Growth world performed by Elizabeth Staples and Chris Whidden is the *Geo Engineers*. Due to limited resources Whidden and Staples’ characters decide what parts of the world get rain and which do not. This is reflective of the surge in popularity for geo-engineering as a possible solution to a changing climate. The inherent problem with this solution is that there are definite winners and losers. The winners of course, are those in charge of the engineering and the creators of the pollution in the first place. The losers are those who have lost historically and will continue to if we go forth with such technologies.

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<sup>52</sup> Grierson. *The First Principles of Documentary*, 147.

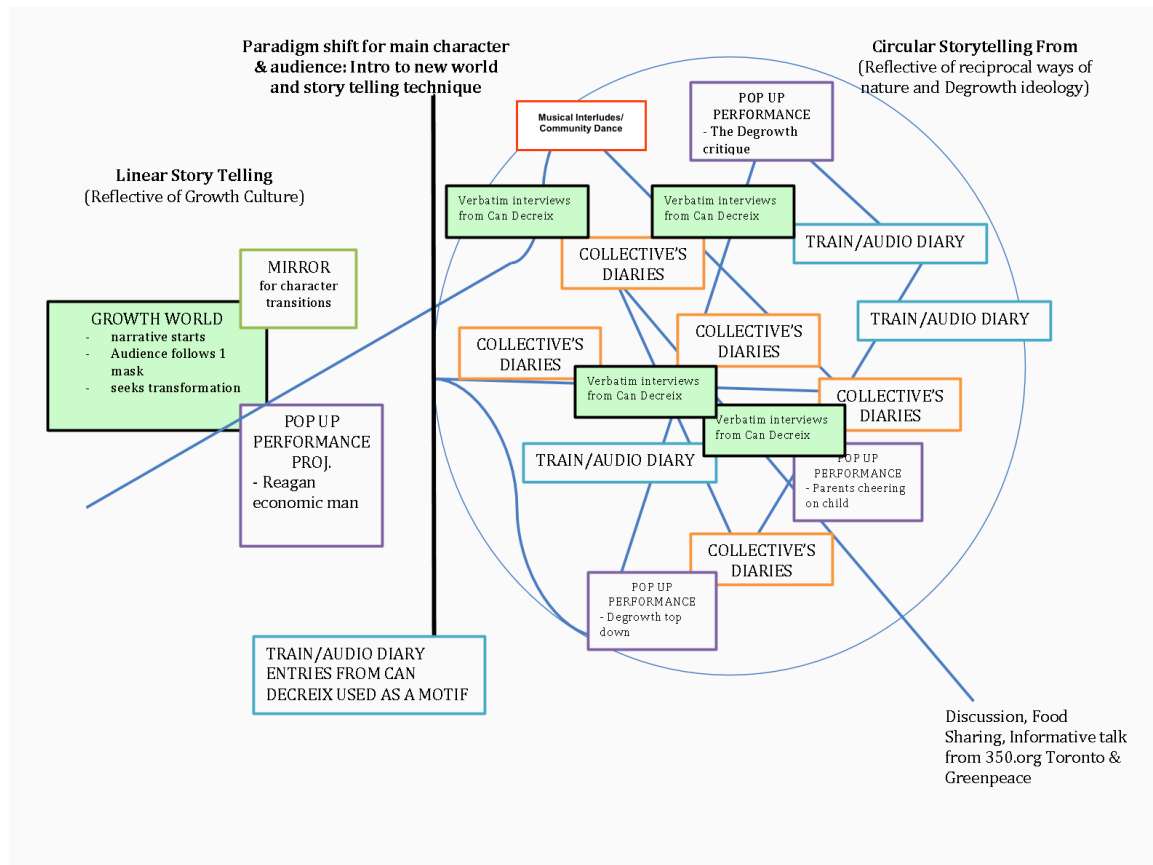
The Degrowth World is less familiar to the collective and therefore requires a different approach. It has been created using the interviews I took at Can Decreix. We have selected four people to inhabit this world: Can Decreix co-founders and degrowth researchers Filka Sekulova and Francoise Schneider, ecological economist Joan Martinez-Alier and environmental activist and nomad Fulvia Sempringiro. They all hold prominent roles within the degrowth movement and are exploring different pathways to discover the alternative. The process to bring this particular world to life involves using the interviews verbatim and setting up different activities within the space that were performed while I was at Can Decreix.

These activities create opportunities for audience involvement and independent choice. For example, while speaking to the audience, Francoise begins to do laundry. This involves a bucket, a broomstick with a plunger at the end of it and soap made from coal. He passes the broom handle to an audience member while he takes a break. Meanwhile, two other degrowth characters are cleaning the space in preparation for the community celebration. The audience can choose which character they wish to follow and what story they get to hear.

Overall narrative structure will also change once audiences engage with the Degrowth World. In the Growth World the audience experiences a linear story structure, reflective of ideas within consumer cultures in which success is represented by a unilateral inclining line. Rachel, a character created by collective member Morgan Johnson, helps the audience navigate through the Growth World and into a place of transition in which the audience will then enter the Degrowth World. Once here, the narrative is harder to discern and is more frequently interrupted by the collective's diaries.

The circular story-telling form used in the Degrowth world represents the complexity of social change, the degrowth movement itself and mimics the cycles within the natural world. (See figure 2.1)

**Figure 2.1**



## 6.2 Video Diaries

Initially I asked the collective members to document the creation process with their personal electronic devices. It was my hope that through collective recording we would achieve a power balance between myself as the documentarian, and the collective members as participants and artists. However, cameras in the rehearsal room became a distraction from the work itself and the reflections that were recorded were not as honest and insightful as when written individually on a piece of paper. It seemed the presence of a camera inspired a level of performativity that was inauthentic. We decided to continue with hand-written diary entries, which would be used in a different format for the final piece. After our discussions and improvisations, I would ask the members to write a journal entry. At different intervals in the process, I asked each member to select a couple entries and a location in Toronto that they felt strongly about. I met with each member individually in their perspective locations and recorded them doing a similar series of

movements. The journals provided the audio, which was recorded separately and layered over top the video in postproduction.

Each member has a series of three videos. The video with an audio overlay has the artist staring directly into the camera. The simplicity of the image is to *encourage* voyeurism and to allow the audience to listen carefully to each journal entry. This, in contrast with the interactivity of the live masked performers during *Terra Incognita*, means the communal experience within the performance space becomes highlighted.

The videos of the performers serve different purposes. Sometimes they act as interruptions within the degrowth world, reminding artists and audiences of the current inescapability and complexity of our inherent connection to growth. At other times, the videos serve as an insight to the creation process itself. For example, in collective member Kevin Wong's third video played alongside others during the transition scene, I am telling him to turn around in half steps so I can get shots of his profiles and the back of his head. I sped up the video and what is left is a slightly distorted audio. This reveals myself as a facilitator and the underlining power dynamic that existed despite efforts made for equality within the collective. This question of power resonates within the degrowth movement: Is it possible to achieve true equality within any given community?

### **6.3 Media in Performance**

The introduction of video serves another important purpose within the piece. "In the context of increasing European and North American integration, global markets, and transnational media industries, theater production as an art form now appears not contemporary but anachronistic".<sup>53</sup> Theatre has typically been slow to respond to various cultural and political changes. Theatre relies greatly on its historical traditions for commercial success, and is limited by production requirements (tech, rehearsals and location requirements). The addition of projection reveals the collective's true identity as well as their experience creating the piece in real-time. Through the projection the

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<sup>53</sup> Johannes H. Birringer, *Media & Performance along the Border* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1998), 6.

audience can see how they themselves, are subjects within *Terra Incognita*. The five collective members act as a microcosm for contemporary society within Toronto. Their video diaries serve as a gateway between the audience and the shock reactions<sup>54</sup> they may confront while experiencing the work.

#### **6.4 Community Collaborations**

The creation of *Terra Incognita* involved collaboration between two different environmental groups, Toronto 350.org and Greenpeace. I wanted to explore how documentary could mobilize comfortable cultures and a great place to start was with organizations already working in this way. Our collaborations consisted of three main points of contact: 1) popup performances at their campaigns; 2) a sharing of information and outreach; and 3) access to the Greenpeace Warehouse as a performance and rehearsal space.

#### **6.5 Popup Performances**

The popup performances allowed us to animate community events and rallies of Greenpeace and Toronto 350.org. TIC's first performance was at Toronto 350.org's "To Paris With Love" event at the Centre For Social Innovation in which representatives attending COP21 were skyped in. This first performance was an accumulation of material from our first three months of exploration. As much as the performances provide us the opportunity to connect with the community and the community with us, they also serve as a valuable development tool. They create a research feedback loop allowing the collective to improve audience immersive, site specific and mask performance techniques.

In the New Year we focused on popup performances that would be recorded and used within *Terra Incognita*. There were two types of performances: 1) the first involved historical speeches from politicians and public figures and 2) the second used improvisations as a form of "Social Acupuncture... small interventions at key junctures

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<sup>54</sup> Shock reactions are the action one takes when confronted with a truth, usually revealing a significant injustice about the world they inhabit.

that affect larger organs, in turn contributing to feedback loops that can amplify and affect the distribution of energy resources.”<sup>55</sup> One such example is our improvisation of the *Growth Family* performed at the Eaton Centre. Two masks paraded around a baby carriage whispering words of encouragement to their infant. This was to illustrate expectations of success within the family unit of consumer cultures.

The speeches and text from past politicians and public figures were to make visible the ways in which the complex histories of growth culture influence contemporary perspectives. I selected passages that have contributed to modern growth idealism such as Simon Kuznets’ report *National Income, 1929-1930*<sup>56</sup> and Ronald Reagan’s *Remarks Announcing America’s Economic Bill of Rights*.<sup>57</sup> Both types of performances are recorded and used as video installations within the final piece. They serve as either media coverage within the two worlds or as a glimpse in the memory of a specific character.

## **6.6 Site Specific Performance**

Our partnership with Greenpeace allowed us access to the Greenpeace Warehouse from January 2016 till our performance in June. This gave us six months to create a work designed specifically for and within the warehouse. We were able to utilize past campaigning materials currently in storage and it is a site for constant interaction and strategy development for the organization itself allowing us to be in communication with Greenpeace staff.

Site specificity is integral to the overall audience experience and contributes to the experiment of performance art as a community mobilizer. The collective has used the space so that there is not one single performance stage. The audience is led through the warehouse and will enter a fully realized world. The masked characters make use of the items and structures already within the warehouse. As a result, the audience is

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<sup>55</sup> Darren O’Donnell. *Social Acupuncture: A Guide to Suicide, Performance, and Utopia*, 46.

<sup>56</sup> National Income, 1929-32,” United States Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. A copy of Kuznets’ report.

<sup>57</sup> *Remarks Announcing America's Economic Bill of Rights* (1987) (testimony of Ronald Reagan).

encouraged to be involved with the story through their own physical exploration of the space made available by the characters themselves.

### **Concluding Remarks**

I view the experience of creating *Terra Incognita* which includes formation of the collective, development of mask technique, learning about degrowth together, community partnerships and final performance, as equal and fundamental aspects of the documentary itself. In that respect, the duration of the documentary is nine months and not simply a fifty-minute show.

In receiving the audience feedback forms sent out immediately after the performance, I realize the entirety of the beast that confronts *Terra Incognita*, its content and form. Cultural values not only shape the way we consume and market *ourselves*, but also the way we accept and lend ourselves to artistic experiences. The goal of this work was to overcome both the ideals of capitalism and the expectations between artist and audience in hopes that by confronting one, we would inevitably challenge and change the other. In many ways I think we were successful in doing so, in other ways the work becomes a contradiction to itself. Reactions to the work were mixed, (theatre people were excited and open to the form, the media artists seemed at times a little taken aback, and those with less artistic involvement were more open to the experimentation, not knowing what formalities to expect from a documentary theatre piece categorized as audience immersive. I was able watch people contemplate space, participation, growth ideals and their various relationships to the other audience members and the artists of *Terra Incognita*.

The benefit of doing multiple performances (five in total) meant the collective and myself had the opportunity to change how we interacted with the audience and therefore, how they interpreted the performance. We noticed audience members were afraid to venture into the other side of the space, and so in the introductory scene of the second show the audience was led through the back end of the space to encourage exploration. These

subtle but important alterations should be viewed as experiments in audience and artist relationships. Because the work was performed live, we were able to explore different approaches as explained in the Affectivity Flow Chart (**Figure 1.1**).

The audience surveys varied due to the many factors I believe to be present. Firstly, we must recognize each audience member as an individual within the collective. Their prior experience with art, particularly documentary and theatre both together and as separate genres, may be different than their neighbor's. Secondly, their prior knowledge of environmentalism or the discourse they choose to follow may be different from degrowth and therefore affect their experience of the work. Those who had less knowledge about environmental issues recorded feelings of guilt during the performance, but were inspired. Those who were more informed felt inspired and connected to their fellow audience members. Though there is still much to be explored in regard to immersive documentary for TIC, people were able to find the beginnings of interpersonal connections between artists and audience, audience and audience, and audience and subject.

I am very proud of what TIC has created. We started discussions about degrowth within an otherwise growth obsessed community, we converged art and activism and have been asked by Greenpeace to become their partners for future actions.

The anxiety that prompted me to begin this project, the one in which my privilege makes me feel like ineffective gear in a complex machine that is difficult to grasp and even harder change; it's still there. It still creeps up every time I complain about the heat, or see someone take a plastic bag to carry home one head of lettuce. I am comforted however, by this experience of a sort-of microscopic degrowth community in Toronto, Ontario. We discussed, we had revelations, and we repurposed materials. Most importantly we laughed, played, supported one another and in the words of Françoise



Schneider, “made special times with people”<sup>58</sup> many times, over many nights, without wasting material objects or energy.

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<sup>58</sup> Schnieder, Francois. "Francois and Degrowth." Personal interview. 29 July 2015.

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