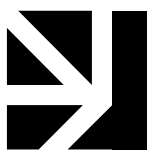


# Drawing as more-than-human

On Hanna Saarikoski's video work *C*

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This article focuses on Hanna Saarikoski's video artwork *C* and specifically on the handcrafted suit made of artists' charcoal that Saarikoski wears in the video. The title of the artwork, *C*, can be seen as a reference to both artists' charcoal and carbon, as in the carbon footprint of humans in the age of climate emergency. I discuss the video work *C* from the perspective of ecocritical art that aims to raise awareness of human impact on the environment, relating to much-criticized anthropocentrism ('human centeredness'). To explore how *C* works as ecocritical art and how it can challenge anthropocentrism both in artmaking and in the context of climate emergency, I will engage with the production process of the handcrafted suit and then examine how the artist and the charcoal suit co-draw in the video work *C*.

In this inquiry, I foreground the notion of process autonomy that highlights the complex involvement of multiple human and non-human forces and fragments in the production process of an artwork. This kind of complex setting is always somewhat unpredictable, and hence what the work of art cannot be completely controlled by the artist alone; instead, the work of art will gain its own momentum. I propose that, in *C*, the performing artist and the charcoal suit become a more-than-human drawing agency.

**Key words:** *ecocritical art; video art; process autonomy; anthropocentrism; more-than-human.*





**Image 1.** Hanna Saarikoski, *C*, 2019. Single channel video work, 6:16 min., charcoal suit: 180 × 75 × 40 cm. Image: Hanna Saarikoski, all rights reserved.

The starting point of this article is a charcoal suit that consists of more than one-thousand charred willow sticks and is thus composed of one of the oldest media of artmaking, namely artists' charcoal. The suit, which is now in the collection of the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art (Finnish National Gallery), was produced by the artist Hanna Saarikoski and worn in a video work titled *C* (2019).<sup>1</sup> The title, *C*, indicates 'Carbon' in the periodic table of chemical elements, and in my understanding refers to both the artists' charcoal made of carbonized willow sticks and the human carbon footprint in the age of climate emergency. This article focuses on the production process of the charcoal suit, and the video work in which a 'more than human' drawing agency, composed of the artist

and the suit, draws a round form on the surface of white paper.

In the video work *C*, a black charcoal-covered being stands on white paper, and the contrast between whiteness and blackness immediately captures the attention.<sup>2</sup> (Image 1.) The suit-wearing body at first moves slowly, and the charcoal pieces scrape and leave traces on the ground; they 'draw'. These mark-making movements produce a distinct scratching sound. While the performer walks in a circular path, a round drawing starts to appear on the white paper. The charcoal sticks attached to the suit collide with each other as the pace of the performer increases, and thus some of the sticks break and fall to the ground. It is my starting

1 Before the video work was produced, the artist gave a performance wearing the same suit at the New Performance Turku Festival in Finland (2018). I will publish another article that focuses on this performance.

2 The full version of the video can be watched by completing a free of charge registration on the website of AV-arkki, the Centre for Finnish Media Art. Please see: <https://www.av-arkki.fi/works/c/>

point, that these gestures, sounds, and traces of the performing body relate to the human carbon footprint on the Earth and its connection to anthropocentrism, which refers to human supremacy or human exceptionalism over non-human beings, including animals, plants, minerals, and so on.<sup>3</sup>

In this article, I investigate *C* from the perspective of ecocritical art which has emerged as an umbrella term that addresses anthropocentrism and its dire ecological consequences.<sup>4</sup> Ecocritical art is often described as a set of artistic practices and approaches that aim to raise acute awareness of environmental issues.<sup>5</sup> Drawing inspiration from posthumanist theories, perspectives of the environmental humanities and material-oriented thinking, such as new materialism, ecocritical art challenges anthropocentrism by enabling the involved material agencies to become active and visible in artmaking.<sup>6</sup> However, less attention has been paid to how exactly the material agencies involved in the production process of

an artwork can challenge anthropocentrism. In this regard, this article seeks to explore the specific ways in which material agencies involved in the formation process of the charcoal suit and the performance of drawing in the video work *C* contribute to contesting anthropocentrism, both in artmaking and in relation to the environment.

The human-centered worldview, as posthumanist philosopher Rosi Braidotti suggests, is at the heart of the Anthropocene, and it is embedded in the European humanist ideal of 'Man' that finds its classical representation in Leonardo da Vinci's 'Vitruvian Man'.<sup>7</sup> Art historian Linda Nochlin draws a parallel line in her book, *The Body in Pieces*, where she examines the gradual fragmentation stages of this allegedly universal and ideal 'human' starting from the French Revolution.<sup>8</sup> Nochlin further describes this progressive fragmentation process as "a loss of wholeness, a shattering of connection, a destruction or disintegration of permanent value that is so universally felt" throughout the history of modern art.<sup>9</sup>

In the context of contemporary critical theory, the idea of the fragmented human may resonate with the idea of 'distributed agency' that acknowledges the contribution of non-human elements in almost every act. For example, feminist-political thinker Jane Bennett proposes the notion of the 'agency of assemblages' to distribute agency among diverse forces and elements including human and non-human.<sup>10</sup> In this way, an act of agency can be conceived as a collective movement of an assemblage in which many kinds of forces and fragments are active simultaneously. In the context of art studies, the agency

3 Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2002); see also Sarah E. Boslaugh, "Anthropocentrism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, read 30.3.2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/anthropocentrism>. Related to anthropocentrism, the term Anthropocene was coined by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer to frame an epoch when humans have been making profound and irreversible impacts on the Earth. They suggest that the starting point for the Anthropocene era was the Industrial Revolution (the mid-18th century), when the amount of greenhouse gases rose significantly, and thus the human interfered with the ecosystem on a global scale. See Paul J. Crutzen & Eugene Stoermer, "The 'Anthropocene,'" *Global Change Newsletter*, IGBP 41, (May 2000): 17–18.

4 Alan C. Braddock, "Ecocritical Art History," *American Art* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2009).

5 Alan C. Braddock, *Implication: An Ecocritical Dictionary for Art History* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2023).

6 Heather Davis & Etienne Turpin, eds. *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015); Andrew Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

7 Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 13.

8 Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 8.

9 Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces*, 23.

10 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (London: Duke University Press, 2010), 20.

of assemblage can be seen at work, for example, in the production process of artworks that often incorporates various agencies, forces, and components.<sup>11</sup> An artwork, then, can be understood as a joint expression of all the agencies involved in the production process.

To explore this in the case of *C*, I will concentrate on the production process of the charcoal suit to understand how the human and non-human agencies participate in its emergence. I draw on Brian Massumi and Erin Manning's theorizations on the autonomy of process that emphasize how an artwork, or any event, is always a complex co-composition of multiple material, perceptual, social, and semiotic elements, and hence has a level of autonomy.<sup>12</sup> In this regard, I will examine how Saarikoski's charcoal suit co-emerges and co-operates in dynamic, relational, and undetermined connections to multiple nonhuman elements, and as such questions the anthropocentric forms of knowledge and experience.

In this article, I apply a collaborative research method to observe the active environment in which many forces, fragments, beings, and components are involved in the emergence of the charcoal suit. I elaborate on the method developed by art historian Katve-Kaisa Kontturi to study contemporary art by observing how an artwork emerges, for example, at an artist's studio. This methodology of 'following' encompasses looking, listening, sensing, producing, discussing, and in general entering the flow of

the artist's interaction with the emergence of the given artwork.<sup>13</sup> In this regard, collaboration with the artist can enable one to grasp an artwork in the dynamic environment where it emerges.

Relying on this methodology, my collaboration with Saarikoski consisted of exchanging emails, online meetings, discussions in an art gallery where she had an exhibition, and visiting the artist's studio.<sup>14</sup> The collaboration occurred during the period from November 2019 to March 2022. Shortly after the initial contact, I learned that Saarikoski had plans to produce charcoal materials with the same method that she had used when making the charcoal suit for the video work *C*. The artist generously invited me to attend the production process of charcoal pieces and also explained to me the assembling stages of the suit. This provided me with an excellent opportunity to 'follow' how the production process of the suit evolved, and how multiple agencies (human and non-human) were involved in its emergence.

In what follows, I will first concentrate on explaining the concept of process autonomy central to my analysis, and discuss how it relates to human and nonhuman agencies, or 'more-than-human' agencies as I will call them. In the second section, I will focus on the production process of the charcoal suit, specifically engaging with the ways in which 'more than human' agencies

11 Katve-Kaisa Kontturi & Milla Tiainen, "New Materialisms and (the Study of) Art: A Mapping of Co-emergence," in *Methods and Genealogies of New Materialisms*, eds. Iris van der Tuin & Felicity Colman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).

12 Brian Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect," in *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 23-45; Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Katve-Kaisa Kontturi, *Ways of Following: Art, Materiality, Collaboration* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2018).

13 Kontturi, *Ways of Following*, 10.

14 The online meeting was on Zoom (March 19, 2021). When we met at the Forum Box gallery in Helsinki, Finland (October 1, 2021), Saarikoski had a solo exhibition titled 'Suddenly it's Evening'. And then, I visited her studio in Somerniemi, Finland (November 5, 2021).

participated in the emergence of the suit.<sup>15</sup> In the final section, I will analyze the video work *C*, in which the artist and the charcoal suit co-draw.

## Approaching the production process through process autonomy

One of the recent developments in the study of art is to support the visual analysis of artworks by focusing on their production process. This development has its roots in related fields of study, such as anthropology, archaeology, and artistic research – these disciplines often emphasize the process of materialization of objects, artifacts, and artworks rather than addressing them merely as finalized entities.<sup>16</sup> For example, anthropologist Tim Ingold, in his book *Making: Anthropology, Art, and Architecture*, understands material making as a process of *growth* by analogy to a growing organism and suggests concentrating on this growing process to grasp materials in terms of the flows through which they take shape.<sup>17</sup> This way of understanding facilitates an approach to materials from the vantage point of their emergence.

15 This investigation does not engage in the analysis of similar contemporary suits, such as Nick Cave's *Soundsuit* (2010), or Liz McGovan's *The spirit wraps around me* (2022), because the focus of this article is on the specific production process of Saarikoski's charcoal suit. However, in my further research, I plan to bring the charcoal suit into conversation with other contemporary suits in order to examine the role of costume agencies in the exploration of environmental issues in contemporary art.

16 Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); Daniel Miller ed. *Materiality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Carl Knappett & Lambros Malafouris (eds.), *Material Agency: Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Approach* (Springer: New York, 2008). Estelle Barrett & Barbara Bolt, eds., *Material Inventions: Applying Creative Arts Research* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

17 Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Art, and Architecture* (London & New York: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 21–22.

In this article, focus on the production process of an artwork is significant because it enables making visible the involvement of non-human agencies that are not often noticeable in the final work. I claim that this visibility can contribute to contesting anthropocentrism in artmaking as the involvement of each fragmented agent is recognized. I also suggest that grasping *C* in terms of its emergence is crucial because the production process is inseparable from the sensations and meanings that the work involves and enables (see the final section).<sup>18</sup> To embrace this, I will examine *C* in and through the dynamic environment in which the work emerges by focusing on interactions between the artist, materials, and ideas that occur during the production process.<sup>19</sup>

This emergent dimension of artworks is where I apply the notion of process autonomy to the study of art. Process autonomy is a notion coined by Brian Massumi and further elaborated by Erin Manning and Katve-Kaisa Kontturi in relation to contemporary art. Process autonomy refers to the contingent involvement of the multiple components, fragments, and forces (human and non-human) that partake in the emergence process of any artworks or other events.<sup>20</sup> In the context of artmaking, process autonomy emphasizes its open-ended nature, as Manning describes: “[the artmaking] process has its own momentum, its own art of time, and this art of time, excised as it is from the limits of subject-centered volition, collaborates to create its own way”.<sup>21</sup> Thus, this contingency can enable a work of art to find its own rhythm and enact its own agency at the intersection of many forces. Manning

18 Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004); Manning, *The Minor Gesture*; Kontturi, *Ways of Following*.

19 Manning, *The Minor Gesture*; Kontturi, *Ways of Following*.

20 Massumi, “Autonomy of Affect,” 23–45; Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, 46–63; Kontturi, *Ways of Following*, 82–97.

21 Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, 59.



further describes the relationship between the process autonomy and the involvement of beyond the human agencies:

When a work [of art] runs itself, or when a process activates its most sensitive fold, where it is still rife with intuition. This modality is beyond the human. Certainly, it cuts through, merges with, captures, and dances with the human, but it is also and always more-than human, active in an ecology of resonances.<sup>22</sup>

This is not to say that the artist's intention or conscious plan would not be involved in the process of artmaking as Manning also points out. What is emphasized instead is the openness of the process through which the work of art emerges with the involvement of both human and non-human agencies. These forces actively contribute to the formation of the artwork which ultimately becomes a joint expression of these multiple agencies. I suggest that the emerged artwork could be understood as a more-than-human agency. Jane Bennett's concept of 'agency of assemblage' refers to the same phenomenon as introduced in the beginning of this article.<sup>23</sup>

Here, the emergence of an artwork does not only refer to the selection and production of the materials used in the artwork, but also relates to the entire environment of art's emergence including chemical, material, symbolic, social, and conceptual components.<sup>24</sup> These multiple fragmentary forces are determinately and indeterminately involved in the production process. What the work of art will become cannot be completely controlled in this active, constantly changing, co-fluent environment. Therefore, the production process of the artwork can be considered relatively autonomous as the process has an open-ended nature in which the artist, mate-

rials, and many other components contingently interact and affect one another.

In the following, I will focus on the production process of the suit that Saarikoski activates by wearing it in the video work *C*. I will describe the dynamic, contingent environment where *C*'s main material, the artists' charcoal, was produced, and explain how the artist, materials, and many other components affected each other during this process. The description of the active environment of the production process was compiled from my collaboration with Hanna Saarikoski. The materializing process of the artists' charcoal, which I attended, took place on 5 November 2021 at the artist's studio and residence in Somerniemi, Finland.<sup>25</sup> However, prior to gathering at her studio, we had already communicated in multiple ways and discussed the work and its production process.<sup>26</sup> In addition to these discussions, some details coming from the artist's own documentation of the production process of the suit are included in the following section.

## Production process of the charcoal suit

Saarikoski's way of producing art often incorporates an intimate relationship with the involved materials. She researches the emerging topic of an artwork through close material engagement and points out that these two processes are interconnected in her practice.<sup>27</sup> In the case of *C*, the emerging topic was making the negative influence of humans on the environment more visible, and an exploration of this issue developed through her interaction with the main ma-

22 Ibid, 59.

23 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 24.

24 Kontturi, *Ways of Following*, 95.

25 Hanna Saarikoski, interview by Murat M. Türkmen, November 5, 2021, audio and video recording at the artist's studio, Somero, Finland. Recording in possession of the author.

26 See footnote 15.

27 Saarikoski, interview, November 5, 2021.

terial of the suit, willow branches.<sup>28</sup> She further explains:

I am interested in producing the materials that I use in my works because observing, testing, failing, composing, recomposing... These are all different ways of engaging with the materials and naturally with the subject [matter at hand].<sup>29</sup>

The artist engages with the material in multiple ways, such as picking, peeling, cutting, drying, charring the willow branches herself, and then attaching the charred branches to a secondhand jumpsuit that will become the charcoal suit. These material engagements are the contingent interactions that participate in the exploration of the subject matter at hand, and that are crucial for the emergence of the work in question.

The production process began with picking willow branches from Saarikoski's own garden. There are several reasons for her to use this specific plant. First, willow trees grow quickly in moist soil and cold weather, so Finland is one of its natural habitats.<sup>30</sup> Second, the willow is an important plant for many different purposes, it can be used, for example, in medicine, basketry, art, and so on. Particularly in the history of European art, willow has played a very significant role; it has been historically preferred in the making of artists' charcoal because willow charcoal leaves

traces that are easy to erase from a surface.<sup>31</sup> This feature made willow charcoal one of the favorite tools for artists, especially for drawing sketches. However, the aim of Saarikoski was quite the opposite: she wanted to create an artwork to show how the traces of people on the ecosystem, unlike willow-based charcoal, are not at all easy to erase.<sup>32</sup>

For this purpose, Saarikoski wanted to make the artists' charcoal herself, and the first step in the process was to collect willow branches. When we went to Saarikoski's garden to harvest branches from the trees, the artist immediately started to look for appropriate ones and explained her relationship with the material as follows:

The willows are kind of materials that I am familiar with since my childhood. We made arrows or small whistling instruments with it... Although the willows are abundant here, I choose ones that needed to be pruned. I think this is something that we learned when we were kids. My parents would be very angry if we cut any branch of a growing plant... It is okay to

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid; Hanna Saarikoski, interview by Murat M. Türkmen. March 19, 2021, video recording on Zoom. Recording in possession of the author.

30 The willows comprise one of the biggest plant families on Earth: It has 60 genera and 800 species. Finland has two genera, genus *Salix* and genus *Populus*, with 26 different species. In Finnish nature, the willow plays an important role "in maintaining the biodiversity of forest ecosystems as it provides a home for many species of animals, fungi, and plants". For more information, see <https://luontoportti.com/en/t/923/willow-family-salicaceae>

31 Charcoal has been used as a drawing medium since the dawn of human history, such as in the cave art approximately 30.000 years ago. In the course of world art history, drawing charcoal has been made from different materials, for example vine and willow branches as well as bones. See, Peter J. F. Harris, "On Charcoal," *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 24, no. 4 (1999): 301–306. In the context of European art history, Cennino Cennini's *The Book of Art* is one of the earlier sources that describes how to make drawing charcoal crayons out of willow branches. This book was first published in 1859 in Italian and translated into English by Christiana J. Herringham in 1899. However, it is believed that the book was originally written at the turn 15th century. See, Cennino Cennini, *The Book of The Art of Cennino Cennini: A Contemporary Practical Treatise on Quattrocento Painting*, translated by Christiana J. Herringham (New York; Routledge Taylor and Francis, 2018), 27.

32 Saarikoski, interview, November 5, 2021.



**Image 2.** Production process of artists' charcoal: peeling and cutting stages of willow branches, 5 November 2021. Image: Murat M. Türkmen, license CC BY 4.0.

take [willows] but [you must do it] respectfully, in a way by asking permission from them.<sup>33</sup>

In the passage above, the artist describes her intimate, playful, and caring relationship with the willow trees that is derived from her childhood experiences of learning to treat willows with respect. Saarikoski's interaction with the willow trees includes a way of communication that is not constructed verbally but rather sensorially through touching, smelling and feeling. The artist further elaborates on her interaction with the willows:

When you touch them, you can feel their softness, texture, liveliness, and so on. When I am working with the willows, I also realize how practical they are. [For example], while I am dealing with a question that is hard to formu-

33 Ibid.

late [verbally], it is easy to work with this kind of material as it leads you to find your way.<sup>34</sup>

This quote from Saarikoski demonstrates that her familiarity with the willows also affected the way she interacts with the branches as a material for artmaking. I suggest that this way of interaction extends to the process of assembling the charcoal suit. As we shall see in the next section, the suit and the artist become an intermeshed drawing agency, and one of the starting points of this process of (co)becoming is predicated upon her intimate relationship with the willows.

Once Saarikoski had collected an adequate number of branches for a one-time charring, we returned to the studio. The next step was to remove the skin of the willow branches. The peeling process varies according to when the materials are collected. The artist often collects

34 Ibid.





**Image 3.** Production process of artists' charcoal: charring stages of willow branches, 5 November 2021. Image: Murat M. Türkmen, license CC BY 4.0.

willow branches during the springtime because they can be easily peeled by hand in spring. As the branches were picked in November this time, they were already dry and thus she needed to use a tool to remove the bark. (Image 2.) In this regard, the season when the willow is collected affects the ways in which the artist and the materials interact.

The next stage was cutting the branches into the size of artists' charcoal which is approximately 10–14 cm in length and 1 cm in thickness, and then leaving them to dry before heating (see image 2). She proceeded to position the branches vertically in a clean metal bucket and then added a small amount of sand over them. After turning the bucket upside down, she placed it in the middle of a fire where it remained for a couple of hours. The sand works here to prevent oxygen from entering the bucket during the heating, permitting a particular chemical process to take place: the willow rods lose the oxygen in

them, and what remains is the carbonized wood, namely artists' charcoal.<sup>35</sup> (Image 3.)

Once the production process of the artists' charcoal pieces was complete, it was time to assemble the charcoal suit. The artist wanted to design the suit in a way that would produce sound when the charcoal sticks collide with each other. She initially planned to pierce a hole in each willow stick before charring and then tying them with a thread to a dress that would become a suit. However, she realized that the pierced charcoal sticks break faster in this method when they collide with each other. Subsequently, she developed another technique to create the expected sound without the charcoal sticks being so easily damaged.

Saarikoski, first, glued each charcoal stick to a piece of black elastic textile (approximately 1–3 cm) using a premade adhesive and then sewed them onto a black secondhand hooded jumpsuit

35 The successful outcome of each charring process is about 70 percent. The artist uses the improperly charred pieces of willow to help root the other plants in her garden. Hence, none of the charcoal pieces were wasted.



**Image 4.** Assembling process of the charcoal suit: gluing stage, 5 November 2021. Image: Murat M. Türkmen, license CC BY 4.0.

with a prefabricated sewing thread. (Images 4–5.) This way, the charcoal sticks were able to move freely, create sounds, and were not damaged as easily as when using the first method.<sup>36</sup> Finally, the artist was able to sew the carbonized willow sticks to the jumpsuit one by one, starting from the trousers.<sup>37</sup> In the sewing process, an ordinary jumpsuit gradually became rich with charcoal sticks, and eventually turned into a charcoal suit. The production process of the suit was now completed, through the indispensable participation of different components, fragments as well as forces, including willow branches, oxygen, sand, fire, and so on.

To summarize, the production process of the charcoal suit evolved in a relatively autonomous way in the sense that the process and the involvement of multiple forces were not fully controlled

and determined by the artist. For example, as described above, during the process Saarikoski relived parts of her personal history, while the symbolic and practical use of willow wood in (the history of) art was also present. The artist was forced to develop alternative techniques for peeling the willow branches and attaching the charcoal sticks to the jumpsuit in the process, because the unique properties of the materials she worked with ‘demanded’ it. Thus, all the forces described contributed to the emergence of the charcoal suit.

In this sense, the processes of peeling, cutting, sensing, drying, charring the willows, and then sewing them onto a jumpsuit brought different participatory forces into the emergence of the suit. In other words, the charcoal suit was assembled through the collaboration of human and non-human agencies in this active environment. In the following section, I will analyze how the artist and the charcoal suit – this newly assembled more-than-human agency – contest anthropocentrism.

36 Saarikoski, interview, November 5, 2021; Saarikoski, interview, March 19, 2021.

37 Saarikoski, interview, March 19, 2021.



**Image 5.** Charcoal pieces tied onto a jumpsuit, detail from the suit. Image: Hanna Saarikoski, all rights reserved.

## A critical confrontation with Anthropocentrism

In 2019, Saarikoski produced a single channel video work that presents the artist herself co-drawing with this hand-crafted charcoal suit.<sup>38</sup> In the video, the black charcoal sticks form a rough and wavy texture on the suit, and the performing agency appears against a white background and stands on white paper. (Image 6.) This emphasizes the contrast between whiteness and blackness that can readily capture the viewer's eye – as happened in my experience. The human agent, the artist Hanna Saarikoski, is visually disguised, hidden, as her body is almost completely covered with the charcoal suit; only the tips of her toes reveal a human body. This

concealment is likely to turn the viewer's attention away from the human, directing the focus rather to the *act* of tracing/drawing that occurs when the artist-suit moves across the surface of the paper leaving traces.

In the beginning of the video, this newly assembled agency (the artist and the charcoal suit) walks reluctantly, as if it does not know how to walk, or is just about to learn how to move. The performing body slowly follows a circular path and the charcoal sticks attached to the suit scrape irregularly against the ground. Some marks appear soft, faint, and indistinct; others thick, bold and expressive, depending on the pace of the agency. As this more-than-human agent continues to circle, a round drawing gradually emerges on the white paper ground. The scraping and colliding charcoal pieces make scratchy, raspy sounds that might give an impression of the agent struggling with the drawing.

38 The work was exhibited in Galerie Anhava Underground, 2019, Helsinki, Finland, and Frederikshavn Art Museum, 2021, Frederikshavn, Denmark.





**Image 6.** Hanna Saarikoski, *C*, 2019. Single channel video work, 6:16 min., charcoal suit: 180 × 75 × 40 cm. Image: Hanna Saarikoski, all rights reserved.

As the video continues, the movements of the agent, contrary to the ones in the beginning, become more decisive, energetic, and confident. The motion even seems to become joyous, as if to imply that when the agent learns how to move and mark, it enjoys its own actions. The clanking sounds that the charcoal pieces make accompany the vigorous motions of the body; they now resonate rhythmically. Close to the end of the video, the screen darkens for a while, but the sound persists. When the performance reappears on the screen again, we can observe that the pace of the more-than-human agent is slowly decreasing, as if the moving body is getting tired, or becoming aware of the fact that it is just encircling itself. This time, the body's movements seem joyless and melancholic, or perhaps thoughtful through reflecting on its own actions.

I would like to suggest that the video artwork *C*, first and foremost, raises criticism about the human (carbon) footprint on the Earth. It could even be claimed that the charcoal body-suit embodies the Anthropocene and its neg-

ative impact on the environment. The actions of the body-suit can be interpreted to enhance this inference: the figure leaves its traces on a white paper, soils this immaculate surface, and also generates scratchy, irritating sounds so poignantly. Although the ground is white in the video, it might still be understood as referring to the Earth. Thus, the black charcoal traces on the white surface might suggest how human actions shape the Earth, and how the human footprint has gradually increased on the planet (see image 6). This sensation becomes more tangible when the charcoal pieces collide with each other, and some of them break and fall. The broken, left-behind charcoal sticks on the ground emphasize the heavy, burdening imprint that humans have made on the Earth, and the colliding charcoal sticks intensify this sensation by making raspy, scratchy sounds.

What is more significant here is that the artist also addresses the human footprint by facilitating the conditions for this 'more-than-human drawing agency'. The artist assembles the char-

coal suit with the involvement of multiple forces as described in the previous section, and then wears it and performs with it. This process is crucial because one of the efficient approaches to challenge anthropocentrism is to make more-than-human agencies more visible. Since humans have become, in feminist posthumanist thinker Karen Barad's words, "the center around which the world turns. [They have become] the sun, the nucleus, the fulcrum, signifying force, the glue that holds it all together".<sup>39</sup> In this sense, making more-than-human agencies visible, *visualizing* them, could indeed decenter "the allegedly universal measure of all things", namely, the European humanist ideal of 'Man'.<sup>40</sup>

One of the ways to embrace more-than-human agencies is to understand them through the concept of 'the agency of assemblages'. Jane Bennett proposes this notion to describe an activity that depends on the interaction of multiple fragments, beings, and forces, and the ways these multiple beings contribute to the activity relative to one another.<sup>41</sup> She further explains: "Assemblages are not governed by any central head: no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group".<sup>42</sup> In the context of contemporary art and its study, the agency of assemblages occurs when human and non-human agents collaborate in the processes of art's emergence as well as its performance.<sup>43</sup>

For example, in *C* the charcoal suit envelops the body of the artist so that they intermesh as one

agency to create and draw the work. The charcoal pieces are thus vital collaborators of this drawing process: They are the orator, singer or leading vocalist in this work while the artist is silent. The artist's body is both present and absent, but that is not to say that the artist's agency is not there; what this indicates is that the charcoal pieces are intrinsic and constitutional in this artmaking. The material here is not a property that is owned, moved, or guided by the human artist; rather the artist and the charcoal suit make markings together, they co-draw.

It should be also mentioned here that the act of drawing (always) already consists of more-than-human agencies because visual mark making as such can be understood as an outcome of the joint agency of the artist and the materials in use. Marsha Meskimmon and Phil Sawdon, in their book *Drawing Difference*, underline the dual nature of drawing; it is both a noun and a verb, and explain how subject and object are intertwined in a drawing act:

The drawing subject (agent) is also always the drawing's subject (object) – noun and verb are inseparable for both drawing and subjectivity [- -]. Drawing describes both objects and processes as interdependent; it's both/and is more than the activity of a clever wordsmith, it is an essential element of its emergent production of meaning [- -]. Drawing provides a compelling instance of agency in practice that operates beyond the stultifying logic of binary dualism.<sup>44</sup>

To summarize, the emerging drawing of *C* cannot be solely the result of a rational human act, neither is it an irrational co-act of non-human materials. Rather it is the joint expression of the artist and the charcoal suit. In this drawing, one can no longer make a clear distinction between the subject and the object, or the human and

39 Karen M. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 134.

40 Rosi Braidotti, "Posthuman Critical Theory," in *Posthuman Glossary*, eds. Rosi Braidotti & Maria Hlavajova (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 339.

41 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 20–21.

42 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 24.

43 Kontturi & Tiainen, "New Materialisms and (the Study of) Art".

44 Marsha Meskimmon & Phil Sawdon, *Drawing Difference: Connections Between Gender and Drawing* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 34–54.



the non-human: their co-becoming dissolves the distinct agencies of the artist, the charcoal suit and the resulting work in the activity of drawing. It is my suggestion that this assembled more-than-human drawing agency can challenge anthropocentrism by jointly creating sensations.

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to analyze Hanna Saarikoski's video work *C*, and especially the role of the charcoal suit in it. 'Following' the production process of the suit proved that the suit emerged in and through the involvement of multiple human and non-human forces, fragments and agencies. Relatedly, I proposed that the assembling process of the suit was autonomous to the degree that it was not completely controlled by the human/artist. This feature contributed to assembling a more-than-human drawing agency that performed to challenge anthropocentrism in artmaking. Additionally, I examined how the traces, gestures, and scratchy sounds of this more-than-human mark-making agency addressed the human carbon footprint on the Earth. Therefore, I have explicated that the video work *C* confronts first, the anthropocentric understanding of artmaking by co-drawing with the more-than-human charcoal suit, and second, anthropocentrism in the ecological context by addressing its environmental impact, namely, the human carbon footprint. Future research might explore a variety of further ways in which more-than-human agencies tackle anthropocentrism in artmaking and beyond, for example, by taking into consideration the ethical implications of the involved artistic materials.<sup>45</sup>

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